



# Shepherd's Voice.®

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M A G A Z I N E



In this issue...

Righteousness and Unleavened Bread

Marriage: An Opportunity for Growth

Have We Lost Our "Dear Abby" Minds?

Children of God, Part 6-Empowering Teenagers

Signs in the Heavens: Cosmic Coincidence or Divine Decree?

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# Shepherd's Voice<sup>®</sup>

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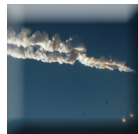
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## *Greetings!*

By the time you receive this issue of Shepherd's Voice Magazine, the Passover Season will be on upon us. The Holy Days as given by the Lord God are intended to provide direction and vision for His servants. When first given to the Israelites, they could not observe them unless they were deemed clean by offerings that were prescribed as acceptable by the Lord. With the New Covenant, the true believer is already clean by the atonement and intercession of Jesus Christ. The Feast Days now take on a greater significance to the believer, not to attain salvation, but to use them as a guide by repeated observance.

In this sense, all Bible truths are practical, not theoretical. If we are growing in knowledge, we should also be growing in grace. Grace is divine empowerment, given for the purposes of doing His will, that He may be glorified by the fruits of righteousness in His servants. These feasts therefore are to be kept in their seasons for confirmation and instruction. In our feature article Righteousness and Unleavened Bread, we hope that the reader will tap into this very fact, where Jim Peterson discusses the symbolism that is intended by the Lord, and where they have practical value.

The only righteousness God will accept is His Own, and it is this righteousness of God that is revealed over a lifetime of faith (Romans 1:17), and we are justified by this faith. All that is good apart from faith is just that, only good, but cannot be accepted by God. The Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread speak to this status of righteousness by our re-affirmation of faith in God. Justification and righteousness are inseparable.

The Children of God series continues with Part 6, Empowering Teenagers. The series segment on the teen years will be in two parts, the first being empowerment and the second dealing with realistic solutions to the problems encountered during the teen-age years. I hope you will look forward to it in the spring issue of *SVM*. The teen years are the age of transition from child to adult; they form their world-view from a circle of people much larger than their parents and family. Every Christian needs to understand teens and be an example and teacher of Christian living to them.

Finally, we have an article on signs in the heavens. During these next few years, there will certainly be many secular and religious articles on this "hot topic". We need to remember the first and foremost thing that Christ said about the sign of His coming and the end of the age:

*Take heed that no one deceives you (Matthew 24:4).*

In Christ's Service  
Jim Patterson

# Righteousness and Unleavened Bread

An interesting statement about the word righteousness is found in 2 Peter 2:21. For most the term simply means obedience to law, godly behavior or a manner of acting. The term “righteousness” is magnified in reality by the work of Jesus as the Messiah. Peter refers to it as “the way” a walk or a practice of some kind;

*For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them (2 Peter 2:21).*

It is clearly an important part and step in how God works with mankind, as fumbling this “way” means disaster of a great magnitude. It is something that is part of an agreement, for if one gives it up, one’s latter end is worse than the beginning. But it is something that is given even unto those who have the commandments of God as seen in Matthew 19:20.

Understanding the symbolism of Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread is a vital step in sorting out this term which is so vital in how God works with mankind. It is in this first celebration that we find symbolism that speaks directly about Jesus and His work. This work speaks in turn to the subject of righteousness.

What is revealed out of this festival symbolism is shown in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians.

*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians. 5:7).*

In this passage we read of two important facts, first, Jesus Christ is our Passover, and secondly, God’s people are unleavened. Passover pictures the eradication of our debt of sin, and the days of Unleavened Bread would speak to our status of righteousness established by the process. All of these gifts are afforded to us by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Paul, in Corinthians, is calling for a continued vigilance on the part of the Corinthian Christian to maintain this state of purity awarded at baptism. God had sanctified them in their position, but they were falling short in their calling as saints. To understand the subject deeper we must explore it in a practical example.

## THE GOOD AND THE SINNER

In an Old Testament story about David this state of righteousness is clearly demonstrated. David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22) and in his younger days God was with him, and favored him. David was a godly man who possessed the Spirit of God (1 Samuel 16:13). Even in his younger years his heart was toward the God of Israel in deep faith and belief. In 1 Samuel 17:36 we see this faith of David as he declares God to be the great living God. It could have been said of David that he was a good and godly man by his faith.

But David made a great mistake in the matter concerning Bathsheba, whom he had gazed upon while she took a bath and he gave in to his desire to have her. In order to hide the matter he arranged the death of her husband, Uriah. David had sinned, and come short of the glory of God. This sin was addressed by God through Nathan the prophet and David repented in

sackcloth and ashes. God accepted David’s repentance and he was spared the loss of his position as King of Israel, and he was forgiven the penalty of the sin.

What is often not seen in this story is how deeply this sin affected those around David. When David assembled his cabinet after Saul was disposed, he chose faithful and highly skilled individuals. Among those chosen was a man named Ahithophel, (1 Chronicles 27:33) who had great skill in counseling (2 Samuel 16:23). There is no doubt that this man, along with many others who chose David over Saul, would have laid his life down for David. They would have done that because they obviously deemed David to be a good man, and Saul a sinner.

## THE RIGHTEOUS, THE GOOD AND THE SINNER

*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:7-8).*

This passage of scripture is quite revealing in making a distinction between the three categories of people scripture speaks of, the righteous, the good and the sinner. And it is in the story of David and Ahithophel that we can see it playing out.

Ahithophel had a son (2 Samuel 23:34) called Eliam who had a daughter called Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:3). This translates into Bathsheba being Ahithophel’s granddaughter. One only has to put oneself into Ahithophel’s shoes to feel his sudden reluctance to lay down his life for David. It is difficult to assess a man’s state of righteousness from our earthly position since it is a status given upon true repentance by the higher court of heaven. At this earthly level it can only be determined by the changed walk of the individual; no wonder the scripture says

*For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die (Romans 5:7).*



David's repentance was genuine and deep, verified by God's commendation of him as "a man after God's own heart". True genuine repentance acceptable before God, is to seek to be like God, to think as He thinks; to feel as He feels and to love as He loves. This is a lifetime of learning experience.

### SYMBOLIC MEANING OF PASSOVER AND UNLEAVENED BREAD

The Passover and the days of Unleavened Bread speak to this status of righteousness. The very word cannot be separated from the term justification. The sacrifice of Jesus takes the individual from the state of sinner to that of righteous. Even a good man is not righteous until he is declared so in the high court of heaven. The term righteous also speaks to the right and proper judgment of the judge, for God is not an unrighteous judge (Psalm 50:6). (See N.T. Wright in his commentary on Romans in the New Interpreters' Bible where he provides one of the better insights into the subject of righteousness as he unravels Paul's difficult discourse).

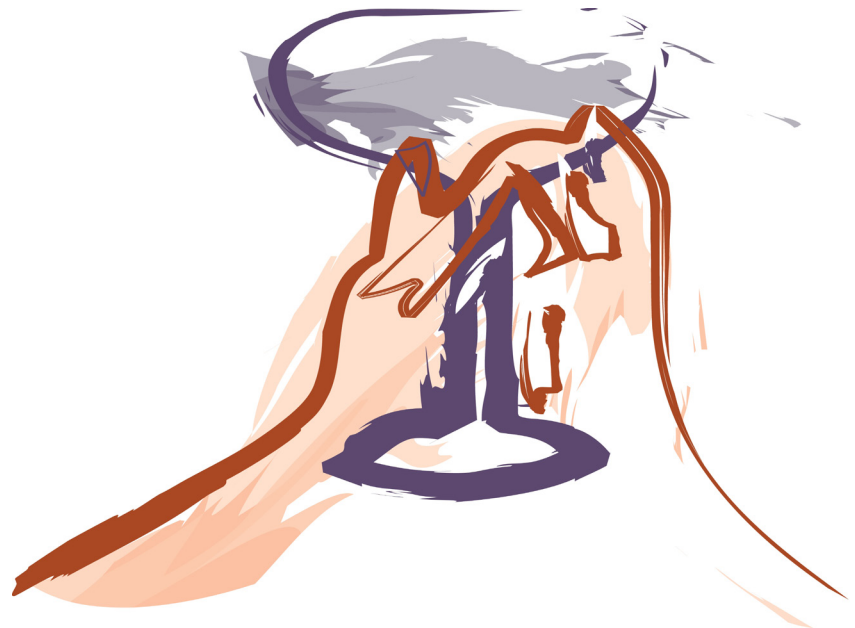
The Unleavened Bread speaks to this status, both of the individual forgiven and to the judge. For those who pursue the way of righteousness it remains as stated—a continual lifetime walk. Throughout the year one must examine ones' walk, and repent of any of those things that may not be as God would have them to be. This is symbolically a throwing out of the leaven (sin) in ones' life through repentance (making a change). Sin, along with its penalty, is removed at the Passover and the individual inherits the status of righteousness. This is why Paul told the Corinthians to throw out the old leaven as they were already unleavened!

*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7).*

A continual repentance and purging of one's life is necessary, and a keeping of the Passover is needed to confirm the status of righteousness. It is therefore

as we saw, worse for those who have come to the way of righteousness to depart from it, for the latter end is worse than the first. How could God trust such a person to faithfully engage in the process again? Failure in the process of salvation is when the individual gives up on God, not when God gives up on the individual. The way of righteousness is described in this process, it is not as some suppose, a way of living ones' life in accordance

Jesus and His death, it is the Feast of Unleavened Bread that is also reflective of Him and speaks about His state of purity. It is He that is represented here as the 'bread of affliction' spoken of in Deuteronomy 16:3 and other OT passages. It was to be a reminder of how one comes out of sin (Egypt). What is also important in this first festival layout is the resurrection of Jesus and His presentation to the Father as the King of Kings and High Priest forever.



with some rigid practice of do's and don'ts. The Apostle John says and we read:

*All unrighteousness is [not justified] sin, and there is sin not leading to death [mistakes on the part of the righteous] We know that whoever is born of God [righteous] does not sin; but he who has been born of God [righteous] keeps himself [maintains the process, abides in Him], and the wicked one does not touch him (1 John 5:17-18).*

The Passover speaks also to the great sacrifice of God the Father and of Jesus in providing for all of mankind this way of righteousness. It is at this point we must take pause and consider the layout of this first festival and how it speaks in its symbolic language. While the Passover is speaking about

This was marked out by a ceremony in which a careful selection of barley was cut off and taken (on the second Sabbath after the first) and presented before God the following day as a wave sheaf offering. A ceremony of the days of Unleavened Bread that is missed by most but is as important as the Passover which speaks to His death—for in His death we have forgiveness of sin and in His resurrection we have life (1 Corinthians 15:13-14).

### INTENSELY EMOTIONAL EVENTS

These two events of this festival are not commanded assemblies as in a Kodesh Miqra (Hebrew) where all Israel was called to mandatory assembly. When we look at the tenor of these two events we see that they contain what would be the most intense emotional times for God the Father and for His

son, Jesus Christ. No human being can truly appreciate those great emotional moments in time where the Father and Jesus willingly engaged in personal sacrifice, and also the moment when life was restored once again. In a small way we experience this in the death of our loved ones and looking forward to their resurrection. Paul speaks to these great times when he mentions “*each man in his own order*”, a commentary on the order of resurrection, Jesus and His firstfruits followed by the rest of the world. An order Paul did not invent but rather observed from the layout of the three festivals of God in Exodus 23. And so it seems that God has set the Passover and the wave sheaf offering day apart simply as a ceremony, a more private event into which only the privileged can share.

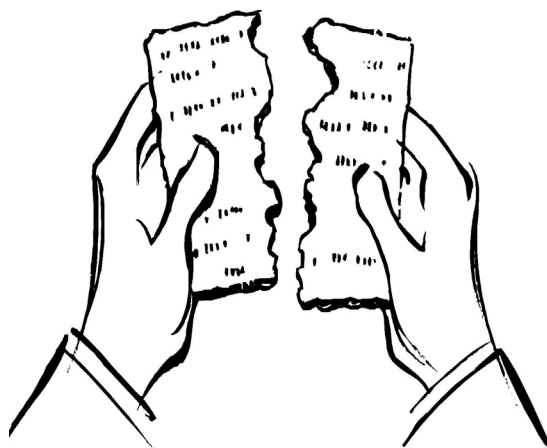
### THE REAL AGONY AND THE REAL ECSTASY

That great emotional event of the death of Jesus was something that was planned before the creation of mankind. Jesus knew ahead of time pretty much all of what was to happen, and so it was that Satan tempted Him in various ways in an effort to cause Him to depart from God’s will (Luke 4). To us, this may not seem to be much of a temptation, but for Jesus they were being presented as a way out, or an easier way, rather than facing the more difficult task and final agony that awaited Him. But Jesus chose step by step to see the agreed upon plan through to its excruciating end, all for the sake of redeeming sinners. As humans we cannot know how great this risk may have been for the Fathers’ potential loss of the Son; in any case it was certainly a risk for all of mankind. The object lesson for us as those called to be the bride of Christ is that we, too, must not bail out of the trial ridden walk we take on. Jesus did not fail the Father or mankind, and as the potential bride we must not fail them either.

The deep emotion of the resurrection is shown by Jesus in His prayer to the Father just before His death where He yearned for the glory He had with Him in the beginning (John 17:1-26). He knew that He would be in the grave dead for three days and three nights.

This was not some Jewish idiom for parts of days and night such as “in three days” or “after three days” it was a specified time that Jesus himself confirms in His appeal to the historic case of Jonah where Jonah was specifically three days and three nights (72 hours) in the grave. This story was covered in *SVM*, 2012 (fall issue) in detail. It was a specified time that would speak to confirmation of death, and reject the idea that Jesus simply was comatose. He was dead for three days and three nights, but not longer, in order to fulfill the prophecy (Psalm 16:10) that His body would not see corruption as Lazarus did after four days (John 11:39).

It was also the reason that He declared to His accusers on the second Sabbath after the first that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. This special day, as we have



seen, was symbolic of the cutting off from the earth the very first and choice sample of the first food crop harvest of the year, the barley. This symbolic cutting of the barley was followed by a wave offering of the same milled and threshed out barley on the following day. This wave offering, as all wave offerings show, was a presentation before the Father for the purpose of acceptance into a former or new status of the one being represented by it. In this case, it was Jesus being reinstated to His former position with the Father and to be given the title of King of Kings, Lord of lords, and the high priest after the order of Melchizedek. We can only try to appreciate that great scene on that special day when Jesus came once again into the presence of the Father having

been gone for an earthly thirty-some years.

### CUSTOMARY PRACTICE OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

The first festival speaks to the process of salvation as it is provided for by Jesus, and also speaks to Jesus Himself through the symbols presented therein. It is not conceivable that the early Christians would have abandoned this highly symbolic festive gathering in favor of a new set of observances. The idea that the first century Christian church quickly took on new observances such as the Easter/Sunday practices that we find today is simply not based upon scriptural fact. Paul’s defense before Felix and also King Agrippa is a testimony to the customary festival practice that he would have taught to the Corinthian Church. Two basic charges were laid against Paul. In Acts 24:1 the high priest and the elders inform the governor, via Tertullus, about Paul’s sedition (insurrection) and profaning of the Temple. Verse 14 exposes the core of the charges as Paul forms his defense. Paul challenges the allegations that would potentially have him condemned by Roman law by appealing to His continuation in the customary worship practices and his belief in the ancient documents of the Jew (Acts 24:14-15; 26:3-7, 22). Of concern to the Roman government would be some proof to satisfy the Imperial cult ruling for the rite to practice an ancient religion, of concern to the Jew would be the proper manner of temple worship and belief in the law and the Prophets.

Paul continued the religious practices of the Jews, instructing even Gentiles to hear Moses in the Synagogues (Acts 15:17-21). He continued to observe the Feasts (Acts 18:21; 20:6,16; 27:9; Romans 3:25; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; 16:7-9). Paul stood before Felix, a Roman governor whose wife Drusilla was a Jewess. After hearing Paul’s defense against the insurrection charges, he came again with his wife, Drusilla to hear what he had to say about the issues



of faith. This meeting, because Paul spoke of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, left Felix a bit shaken by its logic (Acts 24:24-25). The status of righteousness would not have been something Felix would have misunderstood as many do today, and coupled with the understanding of a higher court judgment to come would be the inner tension that stretched his nerves to the trembling point, now realizing that this Jesus may well be the promised Messiah that brings justification to Israel. The same results were later enjoyed by Paul in his defense before King Agrippa (an expert in the ways of the Jews, Acts 25:3) where his defense nearly convinces the King to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah (Acts 26:28).

### DEATH FOR SINS, LIFE FOR JUSTIFICATION

No one can lay a claim that there was a change in religious practice for the Christian at this point in time, for so closely was their practice to that of the Jew that neither of these two astute men could bring a charge against Paul either in matters of Jewish belief or of starting some new religious observance. What Paul had to say to the Corinthians about the symbolism of Unleavened Bread and Passover may well have been included in his defense before these two authorities. In Paul's letter to the Romans he lays it out fairly clearly.

The words *'it was credited to Him,'* were written not for His sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our Justification (enabling status of righteousness granted) (Romans 4:23-25 NIV).

### NEEDFUL OBSERVANCE

The inherent symbolism of the three celebrations of God help give instruction and guidance to the people of God. If one were to abandon their practice all of the many nuances of detailed instruction and guidance would be gone and man would be left to his own devices, and in this age of deception, continuance in the observance of God's three celebrations

becomes a vital guide. This is one of the reasons Israel, before they received the instructions on the festivals, made the mistake of choosing to adopt a golden calf and their own special day of worship to honor God. It is also the reason that a pseudo-Christian church arose with new practices when faced with persecutions of the first few centuries of the Christian era. As the end time closes in on mankind there arises a clear separation between those who are truly of God and those who are not. This is manifest in such prophecies as Revelation 18:1-18 where we see a great religious system that has risen as a counterfeit to the true religion God has ordained. Paul, Felix and Agrippa would have no difficulty in recognizing its falseness in light of the Law and Prophets that they knew so well. The man John who saw the vision and wrote about it was without doubt on the same foundational page as Paul, and though he may not have known exactly what he saw then, we can say that he certainly would have recognized it for what it was worth if he were to observe its fulfillment. The question for today is, would we? To be keeping the prescribed festivals that God ordained now becomes a more serious matter. One cannot exchange the things God

has set in place with things of human invention. Stories, symbols, metaphors and symbolic gestures are set in place by God for divine reasons not to be replaced or altered by man. Symbols changed are meanings lost. Understanding the difference between the good, the sinner and the righteous is explained and confirmed by understanding the symbols of the Passover and days of Unleavened Bread.

Those who accept the sacrifice of Jesus through this agreement with God are obligated to continue in the process. It is a very special calling at this stage in God's plan, and to accept the call is a sacrifice of one's life learning to be in the world without being a part of it. It is a way of maintenance and progress in life, a walk of redemption ending in the granting of eternal life. To give up and abandon the way is as described by Peter.

*But is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog has turned to his vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter. 2:22).*



Dear Abby

## Have We Lost Our “Dear Abby” Minds?

first published in [www.theworldtomorrow.ca](http://www.theworldtomorrow.ca)

I opened the newspaper today and read about the death of Pauline Phillips a.k.a. Abigail Van Buren of “Dear Abby” fame. While I was growing up the “Dear Abby” syndicated column was as much of interest to me as the thoughts expressed on the editorial page, and sometimes it was even more interesting than the front page for that matter.

But I doubt that today the views of “Dear Abby” or of her sister in advice-giving “Ann Landers” would be picked up as content suitable for publication by today’s mass media empires. You see, the Abby and Ann type of advice with its emphasis on moral absolutism—stuff like adultery, promiscuous sex, and lying always being wrong—is no longer fashionable among the “politically correct,” the elite gatekeepers of society who exercise considerable control over what is perceived as acceptable or not today.

You see for the power elite setting society’s agenda these days the advice of poor Abby and Ann are just too 1950ish. They are seen as being too judgmental. Why, they had the brazen nerve to write that pleasure and “doing your own thing” ARE NOT the final arbiters in determining what is right or wrong. Abby and Ann thought personal integrity and sexual responsibility actually counted for something. How foolish and naïve of them!

The *passé* commonsense preached by those Jewish ladies is perceived as being stuck in a time when actual biblical values were still taught in the churches and synagogues; and the Holy Scriptures were actually read even in the public schools—and portrayed in

the movies and on television. Horrors! How antediluvian! How backwards!

But now in 2013 society has “progressed” or at least, moved on. Consider this sample of the post-modern enlightened social values being fostered at one of Canada’s most influential universities:

The University of Toronto, you will be edified to know, is “kicking off its annual Sexual Awareness Week” next Monday at a downtown Toronto club, the Oasis Aqua Lounge, where swingers are welcome. Facilitating the adventure is the university’s Sexual Education Centre (SEC), which arranged for students to pay only \$5 a person instead of the \$40 per person Oasis usually charges.

An exuberant Reddit user posted the information in a University of Waterloo forum thus: “U of T is holding an orgy, and you’re invited! You just need your student ID....”

As I said of Yale’s sex week, this tarted-up promotion of voyeurism “strikes me as nothing more than a forum conceived to proselytize the student body on the cultural virtue of dumbing deviancy down, and to shame students who adhere to traditional moral standards of reasonable restraints on sexual gratification.” <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2013/01/16/barbara-kay-university-of-torontos-pimps-r-us-program-offers-discounts-to-sex-party/>

The Sexual Education Centre at the University of Toronto “is an affiliated levy group of the University of Toronto

Students Union. Undergraduate students pay 25 cents a term for the services, and can opt out if they choose.”

The group’s mission is to foster a sex-positive attitude in the greater U of T area, by offering information, programming, safer-sex supplies, and peer counselling in a welcoming environment. Their sexual awareness week includes a discussion on sex positivity, an interactive sex toy demonstration and an afternoon of pornography. The first event is the party at Oasis [Aqua Lounge]: the organization rented the club and lowered the price to \$5 a person. <http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/article/1315033--university-of-toronto-student-group-hosts-epic-sex-club-adventure>

It would seem that a great many of us have lost, indeed, our “Dear Abby” minds. Our society hasn’t progressed. It’s merely degenerated down to the level of pagan Rome and its infamous orgies under the modern deceitful word-disguise of practicing a “sex-positive attitude” and having a healthy “sexual awareness.”

*I’ve got something to say. Is anybody listening? I’ve a warning to post. Will anyone notice? It’s hopeless! Their ears are stuffed with wax—deaf as a post, blind as a bat. It’s hopeless! They’ve tuned out God. They don’t want to hear from me. But I’m bursting with the wrath of God. I can’t hold it in much longer. “So dump it on the children in the streets. Let it loose*



*on the gangs of youth. For no one's exempt: Husbands and wives will be taken, the old and those ready to die; their homes will be given away—all they own, even their loved ones—When I give the signal against all who live in this country.” God's Decree. “Everyone's after the dishonest dollar; little people and big people alike. Prophets and priests and everyone in between twist words and doctor truth. My people are broken—shattered!—and they put on Band-Aids, saying, ‘It's not so bad. You'll be just fine.’ But things are not ‘just fine’! Do you suppose they are embarrassed over this outrage? No, they have no shame. They don't even know how to blush. There's no hope for them. They've hit bottom and there's no getting up. As far as I'm concerned, they're finished.” God has spoken. God's Message yet again: “Go stand at the crossroads and look around. Ask for directions to the old road, the tried-and-true road. Then take it. Discover the right route for your souls. But they said, “Nothing doing” (Jeremiah 6:10-16, The Message).*

Isn't it funny that a message written almost 2,600 years ago is just as relevant today as it was to the people to whom it was first delivered? Human nature hasn't changed much.


The people who scoff at the moral, ethical values taught by the Judeo-Christian Scriptures are creating their own future black hole of despair into which they are being sucked. Sex can be extremely pleasurable, which is why the earth's human population has tended to grow rather than shrink over the millenia. But such pleasure without morality is just plain old-fashioned lust—not love!

Lust is a sinful behaviour, spiritually speaking, according to the Judeo-Christian perspective. And in the end, those who become slaves to sin—yes, sin is addictive—lose all chance at finding the intimate happiness that flows from being with one's true love, one's soul mate. And, as it is written, anyone who becomes such a slave to lust also loses out on any chance of God's gift of living eternally in His Kingdom of truth and light, because the wages of sin is death. Death is not living in an ever-burning hell (God is not a bondage freak), but rather death is the complete termination of consciousness and being, the end of all life (Romans 6:23).

Your average person is reluctant to consider his or her convictions, prejudices, and even superstitions. It is the rare person who has the curiosity and courage to look through the so-

called “progressive” attitudes popular in this present society and turn away from them. In the Scriptures this is called repentance. Anyone who has been caught up in the sin of lust must repent of it to become part of God's family and to take up what He offers to those who obey Him (Luke 8:21).

While the example of the University of Toronto student association that I cited here is an extreme—variations on, or echoes of that theme can be found reverberating throughout our society and its forms of entertainment. What starts on university campuses today becomes social mainstream behavior tomorrow. This degeneration of sexual morals is the future of this society, a future that will be dark and violent due to nation-wide moral bankruptcy.

As a whole, human beings are reluctant to admit error and so most embrace willful blindness to avoid doing so. But like the prophet Jeremiah, I would encourage you to take to the tried-and-true road of personal integrity and sexual responsibility as taught by the Scriptures. If you do this, you will keep both your “Dear Abby” mind and your happiness while others will lose whatever they think they have. 

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## Marriage: An Opportunity for Growth

***Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*** (Ephesians 5:22-24).

Over the years husbands and wives have not thoroughly understood the depth of Paul's statement. The Apostle Paul says wives are to love their husbands like he was Jesus Christ. The husband is to love his wife like Christ loves the church. That is a tall order!—and neither is capable of delivering...we cannot even direct our steps so how can we love like the scripture tells us? What is Paul saying here? One directive is to wives—one directive is to husbands. We need to fulfill the role that God gave to each of us. Listen to Christ's instruction.

***Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me"*** (Luke 9:23).

Wives, try to see Christ in the man you live with, even though he may be acting in a less than Christ-like way. These verses are certainly the ideal that most men and women in the church strive for with God's help. Yet some must go home and live quite another reality. Unhappy and unfulfilling marriages result if only one partner is working on building the marriage. There are legitimate reasons for separation and divorce, but "not knowing how to get along with each other" should not be one of them. So, what if things are not going your way? What if your mate is not everything you desire? It's so easy to convince yourself you are doing everything possible—that you're easy to get along with, but are you really? Sometimes we need to look deeply within ourselves and ask God for help to uncover our self-deception.

It's easy to walk away from your marriage if one is not mature, nor willing to work, and work hard on the marriage relationship regardless of the other person. What, you say!—just me doing all the giving—what about my spouse? That is a natural reaction and that's where commitment to your spouse plays an important part.

Anyone who has been married knows it has its downsides, its obstacles, its challenges. Getting along with others is not in our nature—remember our brothers and sisters when growing up. Sometimes we didn't like each other much, but we had to live together. So why did we expect anything different from marriage?

We need to see marriage in a different light. It is not a vehicle that automatically provides happiness. Rather, it is a vehicle providing us opportunities to grow.

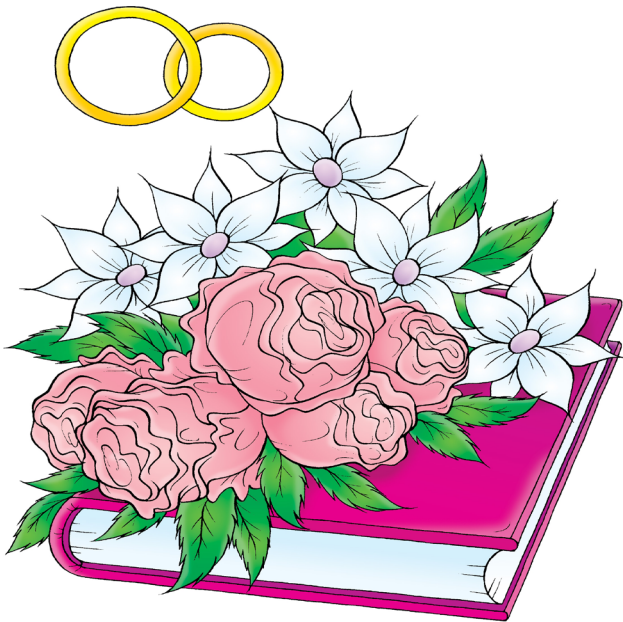
We need to see marriage in a different light. It is not a vehicle that automatically provides happiness. Rather, it is a vehicle providing us opportunities to grow and mature in righteousness and character and love. It takes time...sometimes a lifetime. It takes hard work! It takes commitment! It takes God's Spirit! We are proving to God that His Word is important to us—that our efforts are worthwhile. Our mate is not perfect and neither are we, so what can we expect? Rough patches are inevitable in marriage as with any other relationship.

Sometimes we believe in the fairy tale ending of "happily ever after" but being a Christian does not guarantee a great marriage. You get married...you are pronounced husband and wife... yet it will now take you a lifetime to actually become 'one,' if at all, and then only through God's mercy, grace, and power.

On our own we have no idea what it takes to be a wife or a husband, nor the tools to make it work. Just look at divorce statistics, they tell a sad tale of many broken relationships. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule, however, most of the human family is young and immature when embarking on the marriage journey, extremely self-absorbed, and influenced by the negative pulls of society and Satan. It takes a lifetime of prayer, practice, and humility to unlearn our selfish and self-centered ways so we may learn how to communicate effectively to understand the needs of our spouse—in other words—how to love this stranger in our bed, someone we don't even like on occasion.

Sometimes we need practical help in understanding how to go about improving our relationship. Dr. Emerson Eggerichs's book, *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004) explains the importance of two vital aspects. "Without love, she reacts without respect; and without respect, he reacts without love" ... and round and round they go (5). As Eggerichs explains, "Angry exchanges are caused when the husband appears careless, depriving his wife of love, and when the wife reacts with criticism and complaints that are vehement, depriving the husband of respect." Let's look at the word "respect" and how it can change a relationship. "Respect is both a verb and a noun, an action and an





attitude, so begin today to respect your husband in thought, word, and deed. He will be more willing and able to give you the love and affection you need if he is respected and admired. When I began to respect my husband, he was skeptical at first. However as he saw that I was committed to my attitude adjustment, he began to treat me differently—lovingly.” *Respect Your Husband (Even if You Don’t Think He “Deserves” It)* Nancy C. Anderson. It is never too late in a marriage to start applying these principles and making the changes that come as a result of a new understanding and a renewed commitment to loving and respecting your spouse.

Sometimes we kid ourselves into thinking that the difficulties we face are all the “other’s fault,” but only rarely is this true. It seems so easy to see and point out someone else’s faults, yet so difficult to see our own. Why is it that we would rather point out faults than see the positive aspects of our mate? Jesus spoke of this human tendency when he gave the instructions to, pull the beam out of our own eye before we attempt to remove the speck from our spouse’s eye. We need much help and strength just to see our own faults, to see how we have been disrespectful or unloving, so that we can begin the process of changing bad habits for good. One of the major keys to marital success is that while we are working to

change ourselves, we are also kind, courteous and helpful to our ‘other.’

There is a point at which Eggerichs sees the need to shift the focus away from the earthly benefits that may result from applying love and respect, to look more closely at the heavenly reality. As Eggerichs puts it, “Ultimately, all husbands and wives should be practicing Love and Respect principles first and foremost out of obedience toward Christ....In the ultimate sense, your marriage has nothing to do with your spouse. It has everything to do with your relationship to Jesus Christ” (272,279). This Rewarded Cycle elevates marriage beyond itself to the very courts of heaven where it finds its source. Understanding the lasting importance of faithful obedience to Christ in honoring one’s spouse is particularly helpful for a person struggling in a difficult marriage. People often find it easier to love or respect their spouse out of obedience to Jesus than because the spouse is acting in lovable or respectable ways. Eggerichs reassures the reader, “In marriage, everything you do counts, even if your spouse ignores you!” (271). Even if a wife’s best efforts to respect her husband or a husband’s best efforts to love his wife result in no discernible change, God promises to reward their faithfulness. Eggerichs encourages spouses “to develop the

ability to give [one another] what he or she needs most as you bring your faith in Christ directly into your acts of Love and Respect. You will learn how a husband’s unconditional love mirrors Christ’s love for the church and how a wife’s unconditional respect is like the church’s reverence for Christ” (262-63).

**“In marriage, everything you do counts, even if your spouse ignores you!”**  
- Eggerichs

God knew what He was doing in creating the marriage union. The role of husband and wife is a complex one and learned over a lifetime of living together — learning to unselfishly love another, learning to forgive, learning to show kindness, gentleness, goodness, humility. It is only by much prayer, time, commitment, with God at the center of our relationship that unity and oneness in marriage is possible. And we know that with God all things are possible, so that the husband and wife who are dedicated, willing to communicate and grow, will work out the crinkles in their relationship while keeping God at the center.

Both husband and wife must strive to communicate their differences and each partner must try to be more objective, more gentle and kind and loyal in their assessment of their spouse. We have to take into consideration that most are trying their very best to please the other. But if we are honest, we all seem to be working from some deficit: lack of good role models, environment, genetics, childhood issues, past undesirable experiences, lack of God’s Spirit; these all contribute to our difficulties in marriage. Many of us need a lifetime to overcome the childhood traumas that may haunt us...the hang-ups — the diverse complexities that we drag with us into marriage. We also need to realize many working within these parameters have a difficult time coping with everyday life, difficulty putting

up with themselves, let alone being the perfectly agreeable mate for us. So, what do we do if our life's partner does not measure up to our definition of perfection, or isn't even trying? If we think we have it all together, then we should set the example by being what we want our mate to be. We can do these things through Christ, for it is His Spirit, His mind and attitude that gives us strength.

We can be our spouse's best friend, their needs answered. The Japanese have a term, *kenzoku*, which translated literally means "family." The connotation suggests a bond between people who've made a similar commitment and who possibly therefore share a similar destiny. It implies the presence of the deepest connection of friendship, of lives lived as comrades from the distant past. (*What Makes a Good Friend?* -Alex Lickerman MD.) Let's examine Jonathan and David's friendship as an extraordinary example of the type of love that we need on this marital journey with our mate, the love that ties us together in a common destiny.

*After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathan loved David (1 Samuel 18:1 NLT).*

*Jonathan became a close friend to David, and Jonathan loved him as himself (ISV).*

*When he had ended speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (Darby Trans).*

Jonathan's truly heroic character is shown in this generous love of David, and admiration of his great deeds. (Barnes Notes). We should note that Jonathan really had nothing to gain by his love for David. It is Jonathan who shows outgoing concern for David's well-being. David always seems to be on the receiving end. He needed a friend like Jonathan. God provided that friend. "Jonathan loved him as his own soul." It seems they had a friendship which could not be affected by changes or chances, and which exemplified

all that the ancients have said on the subject; Aristotle defined friendship as a "single soul, dwelling in two bodies" — similar to the expression the biblical author uses, which is literally, "The soul of Jonathan was bonded to the soul of David." That sounds familiar.... That's the kind of bond God wants between husband and wife. We should pray for this kind of friendship with our mate.

**"Friendship produces an entire sameness; it is one soul in two bodies: a friend is another self."**

**Clark's Commentary**

"The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David" 'Knit' describes a relationship that is tied or linked firmly or closely together. It also refers to growing together as when a fractured bone is knit and grows together. We all know this is the ideal, the goal to strive for within marriage, to grow together and be firmly and closely tied to one another. With God's help this is possible. True friendship is more than friendly words, more than fun, more than affinity. It is giving. "Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt" (1 Samuel 18:2-4). Note that this great love seems one-sided—by Jonathan for David. This is something Jonathan chose to do. Jonathan was not benefiting financially, physically or emotionally from this relationship, yet he was willing to give of himself with no hope of any reward. In fact, he was giving up his inheritance, his kingship for David.

Even if the relationship seems one-sided, it's still worthwhile. God loved His children and the world He created hoping for reciprocation, but He still loves us whether we love Him in return or not. God gave His ultimate gift to us while we were still cut off from Him, in the hopes that one day we would accept His gift, the life of His Son and the forgiveness that came with that

sacrifice. He asks us to live with our spouses in this same hope that our giving, our self-less love will eventually have its positive outcome and produce a change of heart in our spouse. This mindset helps us to keep our eye on the finish line and the purpose of our journey and why we are here. We need to grow and develop this kind of unselfish love, this humility that God wants in us. Marriage is the perfect arena for growth and development. This is something we choose to do regardless of what our mate chooses to do. This is what God expects from us.

We can hear that in Paul's message when he pleads with his congregation saying "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" - Romans 12:1-3. This is another aspect that Paul describes as our reasonable service...if we are married then this applies to marriage—to be a living sacrifice to our spouse. As friendship grows, which can be possible within marriage, friends give themselves away. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than that he lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Booker T. Washington who became a great educator and a magnificent American, learned this lesson early. He says in his biography, *Up From Slavery* that "he began learning that those who are happiest are those who do the most for others" (71). We can apply that principle in marriage and build our happiness on a foundation which God says works—giving—for God is love.

If we practice some of these principles our marriages will be enhanced and we will be happier. It is worth the effort. Jonathan had the right attitude when he said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you" (20:2-4). Can you imagine how our relationships would improve if we said that! As someone has said, "A friend lives to make life less difficult for another." This is the least we can do for our spouse whether we think they deserve it or not. This is our obligation as a Christian...to love one another, and to put their needs and happiness above our own. Friendship is giving with no strings attached. The spiritual element of relationship makes



that dimension possible. God's love frees us from inordinate need to be loved in return: "We love because He first loved us," says John (1 John 4:19). Everyone needs love — it's not good to be alone — but knowing that we're deeply loved by God frees us from cursing others with our demands. We don't have to be needy in marriage—God will supply all our need.

**Commitment ...is the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause, or activity. It is also known as a pledge or an undertaking (Wikipedia).**



There is one final meeting between Jonathan and David that shows us one more aspect of this relationship that we should emulate. David was in exile, hiding in the Desert of Ziph, where "he learned that Saul had come out to take his life." Jonathan went to Horesh and "helped [David] find strength in God. 'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.' The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh" (1 Samuel 23:15-18). Jonathan was willing to play second fiddle which is really extraordinary. David never saw Jonathan alive again

The significance of this scene lies in this: "Jonathan helped David find strength in God," or, more literally, He helped him strengthen his grip on God. This is the essence of Christian friendship. Beyond common interests, beyond affection, beyond wit and laughter is the ultimate aim of sowing in others the words of eternal life, leaving them with reminders of God's wisdom, refreshing their spirit with words of His love, and strengthening their grip on God. "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly" (Proverbs 18:24). A friend is not someone who befriends me, but someone whom I befriend. The way to make a friend is to be one.

We who did not know how to love—we

who were and are imperfect sinners, can learn from the biblical examples of God's love towards us. We can start to apply these acts of love toward our mate. David shows us this side of God, His unfailing love.

*The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He does not punish us for all our sins; He does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For His unfailing love toward those who fear Him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth (Psalms 103:8,10,11 NLT).*

*Where is another God like you, who pardons the guilt of the remnant, overlooking the sins of His special people? You will not stay angry with your people forever, because You delight in showing unfailing love. Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under Your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean! You will show us Your faithfulness and unfailing love as You promised to our ancestors Abraham and Jacob long ago (Micah 7:18-20).*

We all face marital challenges, but sometimes our brethren lacking love and empathy add to our burden. The reality is that marriage is not always a smooth road and brethren need to be supportive, not judgmental of others experiencing a rough patch. Gayle Erwin in his book *The Jesus Style* relates yet another problem men and women find in some Christian fellowships. He states:

"Sadly, some Christian groups are taught that we must smile through the deepest of hurts. They even deny that these hurts exist, thinking that Christians must always and only be positive, joyful and smiling. How often couples who are going through difficulties journey to church unsmiling, not speaking, until just outside the door when they put on "the smile?" When the official greeter asks how they are doing, the standard smiling response comes, "Just fine, thank you."

He continues to say "If there is one place where we ought to be able to come with our sins and feelings exposed and find help and healing, it is the church. But more and more it has become the one place where we must be the most careful to hide our true feelings and instead support the appearance of consistent gleeful victory," p77.

Hopefully, men and women can get the loving and patient help they need, the encouragement, and the sound scriptural guidance, from their brethren and the church family in this most important journey. When life gets rough we have to remember that God knew exactly what we needed in a mate. It is through this vehicle of marriage that He brings us to the point of perfection... a child in whom He is well pleased. And we should look at marriage as a vehicle bringing us into that ultimate perfection preparing us for eternity. We should thank God for His great patience with each and every one of us during this journey, as well as the gift of His Spirit making this all possible. Praises be to our heavenly Father.





# Ask Norm!



Questions? [asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](mailto:asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org)

February 12, 2013

Greetings,

*I read with interest your paper on a [a new church group's] Doctrinal Position? It was excellent.*

*I wanted to get a copy of the April 7, 1997 [new group's publication]. I was very much interested by the statements of [a new group minister], "Not everyone is aware that our fundamental beliefs came directly from the fundamentals of belief drafted by [the parent church group's leader]. We took our fundamental beliefs directly from those approved by [the parent group's leader] for a very specific reason".*

*If I understand correctly, many of the teachings of the [new church group] are really old teachings of [the parent group's leader]. Am I correct?*

*If possible; can you email mail these statements from [the new group's minister]? I have had those tell me that our teachings are not from [the parent group's minister], of course I knew better. That's one reason they broke off from the [the parent group] after [its leader's] death.*

*Can you help me with my request?*

*Thanks,  
James*

Dear James,

Yes, I can help you but maybe not in the way that you were hoping. I have studied and tried to live by the scriptures for quite a

while since I wrote that paper. I am going to explain why I don't believe you need to know what was said in that old publication.

Jesus Christ is the active, living head of His body, the Church (Ephesians 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). He is quite able to teach all believers wherever they are through the power of His Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 2:27). A church group should not be concerned about which human teacher its teachings came through.

*For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? (1 Corinthians 3:4-5).*

*Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1: 12-13).*

Do not feel bad about asking these questions, they have been asked thousands of times by people in a great variety of church groups that have had doctrinal differences, splits, mergers, etc. Realize that most of the letters of the New Testament contain correction for congregations and individuals, but in only a few places are people declared unbelievers for their errors. Even the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 point out serious errors in most of them while still calling them His churches. The message is never to leave the church in error, but for

individuals to repent:

*"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place— unless you repent.... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:5-7).*

Christ's message to most of the churches is similar: There are general problems in the church and individuals are to repent of the problems and overcome them to receive a reward. There is never a message to leave a troubled church to go to a better one. We can stay in a troubled congregation to help make it better. Indeed Christ was frequently challenged for associating with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. The apostle Paul clearly stated that a spiritual believer is one who can help someone overtaken in a fault without being tempted, not one who avoids everyone with faults:

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Galatians 6:1).*

To specifically answer your question, we do not need to know the path of human leaders whereby doctrines entered an organization or even worry about which human leaders are teaching them now. We need study the Scriptures, listen to what human teachers say and pray for our Father to teach us what is true. We can

remain in a congregation even though it may teach some errors. Sometimes we can stay there and influence them for the good; other times it is clear that we cannot fellowship with them and we must look for a new congregation or begin one ourselves.

It is much easier to point out error in others, than it is to do what is right in spite of opposition—but that is what the Christian life is about. May our Father bless and strengthen you in your present situation.

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February 4, 2013

**Hi Norm,**

***I am very interested in knowing how I know if I have the gift of knowledge from the Lord. I receive words and feel I want to share them. I have received some and shown them to someone at church and she says they are not always for now. You may need to wait on some of them. I need to talk to someone or get some advice, I would never want to misuse anything from the Lord. I love Him.***

***I am a Christian and love the Lord with all my heart. Any advice?***

**God Bless,  
Roberta**

Dear Roberta,

Thank you very much for writing this letter. I would much rather read letters about doing our Father's work and using His gifts than dealing with church problems—though that is often necessary, too.

Spiritual gifts are an important part of the work Christ is doing in His Body, the Church (Col 1:18). These gifts are discussed specifically in five different passages (1Cor 12, 14; Eph 4:11-15; Rom 12:6-8; 1Pet 4:8-11) and found in principle many other places. While some church groups believe in them and encourage them, most never officially recognize them and some deny that Christ still gives them. In most congregations, the people give of their wealth (which is a spiritual gift), then a person who has been to seminary receives a salary and does nearly all the spiritual work. Sometimes these paid people are

gifted by God—sometimes they are not. It seems that you may have a gift, but to me, it appears to be a gift of prophecy rather than knowledge. The gift of knowledge is mentioned in this verse:

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8)

The Greek word for "knowledge" here is *gnosis*, which means knowing facts. It generally refers to knowledge attained through the normal human senses, not something a person receives divinely. We can see this explained in Paul's writing:

*How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) (Ephesians 3:3-4).*

Notice the sequence: Paul received a revelation which made known a mystery. A "revelation" is a large-scale prophecy—the book of Revelation calls itself a prophecy (Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 18, 19). Then Paul wrote it down for the Ephesians to read. When they read it, they understood it as knowledge (Greek *gnosis*). It was not supernaturally "revealed" to them, but taught to them.

Some people attach divine inspiration to the phrases "word of wisdom" or "word of knowledge" in 1 Corinthians 12:8, but the Greek for "word" is *logos*. It is used 316 times in the New Testament and often translated "speech" or "saying". It is used for bad words as well as good ones: "Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words [logos] unsettling your souls..." (Acts 15:24). Paul is simply saying that some people have the ability to speak knowledge—to explain true principles, and to speak wisdom—the application of knowledge to life situations.

If you have been divinely given messages about the present or future, this is prophecy. Sometimes prophecy comes by dreams or visions, sometimes by angels speaking, sometimes by people hearing a voice—be it directly from the Father and Son or through the Holy Spirit. For example, "Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot'" (Acts 8:29).

Everywhere in the New Testament, where

we have the actual message of a prophecy, it is something that was revealed by God—either about the present or the future. When your friend says that your messages are "not always for now", it indeed sounds prophetic. Prophecies, such as those interpreted by Joseph or Daniel, or the book of Revelation, often are symbolic and need interpretation; knowledge does not.

How can you know if a prophecy is from God? The Bible often warns about false prophets! Paul gives a simple means: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge" (1 Corinthians 14:29). The other members of your congregation can use the Scriptures or their own prayer to determine if your prophetic messages are from God and if they apply to now or a future time. Even Old Testament prophets had to sometimes pray for understanding of their prophecies, and were occasionally told that they were not going to get it in their lifetime: "And he said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end'" (Daniel 12:9).

When one receives prophetic messages, it is very important to separate the prophecy from one's opinions of its interpretation. Biblical prophets were always careful to accurately state or write exactly what they saw or heard, and then separately give their understanding (or lack of understanding) about the prophecy's meaning. This writer is aware of people who presently receive prophecies and do the same thing.

One also needs to be aware of the scope of prophecies. Prophets in the Old Testament were sometimes told to take their message to the leaders or to all the people. Other prophetic messages, like Joseph's warning to flee to Egypt with Jesus, are just for a few people (Matthew 2:13). If you have received a message about others, but were not told to take it to them, it would certainly be wise to pray again to know if you should take it to them. The Bible does teach the telling of prophecies in local congregations so that the other believers may judge them (1 Corinthians 14:29).

It is perfectly normal that you and your friends would have some trouble knowing what to do. Many biblical prophets find their messages difficult to understand and some were punished for delivering them. Yet, as the condition of our world worsens, I believe that it is largely through local prophecy, as in Acts 11:28-29, that God's people will be able to continue to do His work.

If you would like to more specifically describe some of the messages you have received, we would be glad to try to help you and our readers understand how to deal with them.

June 15, 2012

Dear Norman,

*Here is my response to your response of my first letter [about a family that did not want to fellowship with her anymore after they found difficulties with a book written by their church leader]*

*I wouldn't be thrilled with being published. I don't want to hurt feelings and cause trouble, but our friends no longer call or respond since I told them we didn't like the book, so apparently they are hurt, offended, etc. I am sure that God does everything according to the appointed time, but Acts 1:7 says its not for us to know and verse 11 says the same way they saw him go is the same way we'll see him come again.*

Dear M & J C

We are publishing your letter anyway because it is so important that our brethren understand it. We will leave out the name of the prophetic book and obscure other details so it is not clear who you are or where you are from. Everyone needs to understand why people who have very similar beliefs become so offended at other believers over one point of doctrinal or prophetic difference. This scenario occurs in church groups over and over again.

It is easy to have friends whose doctrinal beliefs are considerably different than ours. We do not feel threatened by their practices at all. For example, if they observe Easter, Halloween and Christmas, and we observe Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, we

can be confident that we are observing days observed in the Scriptures. This is true no matter how often or seldom we have discussed the subject with them. We will not wake up in the middle of the night wondering if they are right and we are wrong.

But when someone else believes nearly all of the same Scriptural teachings we believe, but differs on a very few points, it can be unsettling. The thought that they might be right and we might be wrong crosses our mind. But on the other hand, we want to believe that ourselves or our groups are following the scriptures to the best of our knowledge. If some other group or individual has more truth than we do, should we be in their group?

And because of this disconcerting feeling that comes about from someone we believe to be good, but has a few plausible but different beliefs than ours, there is a great tendency to stay away. Indeed, many church organizations command their members to stay away from such people—because they do not want to have to defend their teachings or risk losing members to such apparently good but differing people. This writer is aware of a religious college that accepted qualified students of any religious belief in the world—except students from church groups recently split off from theirs. Those students might have been able to effectively and legitimately question their teachings and practices, so they made an exception to their otherwise tolerant approach and said “no” just to them.

The solution to this problem is found in this scripture: “For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous” (Romans 2:13, NIV). Belonging to the group with the most truth, or simply believing the most truth is not what makes us righteous. It is based on what we do. There are many commands in the Bible to avoid sins, but there are also many proactive commands to help others, both economically and spiritually. We cannot discuss them all in this short response, but here is one: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him” (Leviticus 19:17).

Yes, when others are sinning when we could help them, it is a sin not to help.

Christ and the apostles were marvelous examples of obeying this simple command. Paul describes the condition of the spiritually mature here: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1) The spiritual believer is not one who avoids the most sinners, but the one who can be among sinners, correct them, and yet not be tempted to sin himself. Christ promises a judgment for every believer (Romans 14:10; Corinthians 5:10), which will not be based just on what we knew, but on what we did. Matthew 25 explains judgment in much more detail.

When we understand that our spiritual future is based upon what we, by the power of God, do with our lives, rather than a detailed doctrinal or prophetic understanding, then we do not have to be worried about whether someone has slightly or vastly different doctrines than we do. We can trust that Christ will judge righteously (Isaiah 11:1-4). If they edify us and provide good fellowship in many areas of life, we can be their friend.

*Page [number/name omitted] of the book says basically that Jesus will be coming like a second sun in the sky for over a year—people won't know what it is and will get used to it, but suddenly it will suddenly come right over Jerusalem and turn into a sea of glass and people will think it's aliens. That just sounds crazy. We're just wondering if we're the only ones that think so.*

*Whether something sounds crazy or not often has little to do with whether or not it is true. It sounds crazy for mankind to rebel against their own Creator and kill his Son, but it happened. When someone prophesies or interprets Bible prophecy, we must ask: “Is their inspiration from God, Satan or man?” Only the first is of any lasting value. Don't look for someone who sounds logical in their interpretation, look for someone who has always been right about what they said in the past.*

*Also, when he says “Job is the epitome of hardhearted carnality, human stupidity and vanity against God.” How can he know so much, yet make such a statement? We are concerned because the New Testament epistles warn*



*again and again of false teachers. The Shepherd's Voice has a book review section. You guys should read and review this book. We would be interested to see that. A proper review may help a lot of people see that this goes beyond the scriptures. We can loan you our copy if you'd like.*

Yes, the statement about Job is rather amazing compared to Ezekiel 14:14: "Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord GOD." Would I, you, or the author of this book be delivered by our righteousness? I don't know. I do believe that the author of this book has also written some good books. We would rather review one of those and encourage people to read it. I believe that our Father tests Bible teachers to see if they will surround themselves with good and honest helpers rather than men who will always say "yes" to their leader. When they allow others to appeal to their vanity, then they begin to write things that are not good, and there is nobody to correct them.

Your suggestion of a local ministry of some kind is something that I have thought about and pray to God about and will earnestly talk to God about some more. My husband is older than I am. He is a talented man [many details deleted about his technical skill but lesser abilities in writing and teaching the Bible]. I just want you to understand our situation. We read and study our bibles and are in complete agreement on God's word. We don't want to financially support fake teaching. [personal financial details deleted]. So we don't have a lot of money. We're not concerned about it. God has always taken care of us. Our treasure is in heaven, but the fact is we are very limited financially.

Acts 8:4 says: "Therefore those who were

scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). This was not a high budget operation—they were refugees. I encourage you to pray for the Eternal to show you what you can do. It might be helping with someone else's ministry to the poor, it might be inviting people to your home to read the Bible and answer questions. You mentioned your husband's skill with cars and technical things. You might offer free auto maintenance to the poor (the people buy the parts) where people come and listen to a Bible study while they wait. Even if your husband cannot fix a given problem, an honest, competent opinion of the difficulty will help them greatly and is often not available free. In the process of asking questions to find out if they are poor enough to qualify for the service, you would find out about a lot of issues that you could offer to pray about or to teach biblical solutions. Congregations frequently grow up around ministries when they are successful. I don't know what kind of congregation or ministry would be best for you, but God does. Pray. God is very interested in answering these kinds of prayers.

*On another subject, i.e.: "Would Jesus Eat a Cheeseburger?" from SVM Spring/Summer 2011. We always thought exodus 23:19 meant not to sacrifice a baby cow, sheep or goat, before the 8th day (Leviticus 22:27, Exodus 22:30, 1 Samuel 7:9).*

*I was raised on a farm and usually after about a week the babies are nibbling on wisps of hay, grass or grain from mom's grain bucket as well as nursing. Veal is strictly milk fed meat and is disgusting in my opinion. The dairy farmers used to separate the calves after the first week, some even less and then continue to feed milk as well as solid food. You get more milk from the cow that way. Most*

*sacrifices were boiled it appears. So, you weren't to seethe it i.e.: sacrifice it until at least the 8th day. I think it applies to more than just the firstborn. What do you think? (God's sacrifices were seethed in water). So what's milk got to do with it? A kid in its mother's milk was less than 8 days old I think.*

*Love,  
M & J C*

I had not put these Scriptures together before, but I think you are right. Our family had goats for a few years. We used the services of other's Billy goats, so when we had our first baby male goats, we did not want to raise them. Our goat-mentor friends suggested they taste very good when they are young, but one of them told us about the scriptures of letting them stay with their mother for eight days. We have since read some physiological reasons why it is good for the mother and baby to be together for at least that long. Psychologically, it gives them time to establish a separate existence. Obviously, God would not want the Priests to violate the Scriptures you mention when sacrificing animals.

By contrast, I have read that Satanists (and probably other false religions) sacrifice babies as soon as they can get them. It has been my understanding that false religions had a practice of boiling a kid in its mother's milk to assure economic prosperity. The three scriptures forbidding this practice all show Godly means of obtaining prosperity (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). I think these verses are forbidding the pagan practices of the day and are indeed in harmony with the verses you mention.



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## *Scribe's Square*

# *Jesus Heals the Crippled Woman on the Sabbath!*

After forming the universe and its array in six days, the Creator Yahweh rested from His work on the seventh day, thereby creating and setting aside a unique day of rest and honor to Him day called the sabbath day (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11). When we rest on God's sabbath day, we not only honor what He did at creation, but we look forward to a rest He will one day give us from our battle to overcome this sinful world (Isaiah 57:1-2; John 16:13; Hebrews 4:9-11). The weekly sabbath, along with God's annual holy days are also given as a sign between Yahweh and His people (Ezekiel 20:12). In fact, one of the reasons the ancient Israelites were conquered and taken into captivity is their failure to observe the sabbath (Leviticus 26:23-24, 32-35, 43; II Chronicles 36:14-21; and Ezekiel 20:21-26).

After restoration of the Southern Israelite nation of Judah following captivity, the Jewish people, led by the governor Nehemiah, were determined as a nation to never again break the sabbath. Nehemiah forbid wholesale merchants from coming into Jerusalem to interrupt the sabbath day and even placed guards at the gate shortly before sunset on the sixth day of the week (Nehemiah 13:15-22). By the time of the Roman Empire, sabbath keeping was firmly entrenched into Jewish culture. The Roman army excused Jewish soldiers from military service because they were virtually useless on the sabbath, and Roman philosopher, statesman,

and dramatist Seneca even accused the Jews of laziness for spending one day a week in idleness.

But during the four centuries between the completion of the Old Testament scriptures and the birth of Christ, political and religious leaders added extra restrictions to the sabbath day. They created a supplemental body of law, later known as the Talmud, which identified thirty-nine new categories of activity prohibited on the sabbath and which attempted to clarify questions surrounding sabbath regulations already found in scripture (Mishna, Shabbat 7:2). For example, Jewish rabbis prohibited writing and erasing on the sabbath (Mishneh Torah, Shabbos 11:9-17, 23:12-19), (So much for taking notes during a sermon or Bible study.). They also banned salting or preserving food to keep it from spoiling (Chayei Adam, Shabbos 32-33). They even went so far as to ban marital relations between husband and wife on the sabbath (Herbert E. Saunders, *The Sabbath: Symbol of Creation and Redemption*, 1970).

It is into this backdrop that Jesus began his ministry. The gospels contains several confrontations between Jesus and the ruling religious factions of that era concerning their man-made sabbath restrictions. One such instance was when our Lord healed a crippled woman in a synagogue on the sabbath.

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue one sabbath when he met a woman who had suffered for eighteen years from an evil spirit which physically crippled her. She was bent over and could not stand straight. But Jesus

noticed her and called out to her, saying, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." He laid his hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight and glorified God, (Luke 13:10-13). Not everyone was happy about this. The ruler of the synagogue was annoyed at Jesus' healing of the woman on the sabbath. He exclaimed to the crowd that there were six days that people ought to do their work and that they should use one of them to come and be healed rather than the sabbath day (Luke 13:14).

But Jesus answered the man, saying, "Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" Upon hearing this, the ruler of the synagogue along with the rest of Jesus' opponents were put to shame; the crowd rejoiced over the wonderful things Jesus did (Luke 13:15-17).

The ruler of the synagogue was single-minded in his protest of the healing of this woman on the sabbath. The fact that she had been afflicted for eighteen years with a sickness that made her crippled apparently did not matter to this ruler. Moreover, the ruler scolded the members of the synagogue, advising them to seek healing on a day other than the sabbath day.

This synagogue ruler's callous response to the woman's healing demonstrates that he had little regard for the needs of the members of his congregation, and his stern and sarcastic rebuke of the people suggests that he may have been a domineering leader.

This is not the type of leadership that God's people need nor is it the type that He requires of His elders. God's elders are supposed to tend to the flock of God, exercising oversight, not as though they were forced to, but willingly; not from a base love of gain, but with a ready spirit. Not lording it over God's flock, but being examples for them (1 Peter 5:1-4; Ezekiel 34).

In healing the woman on the sabbath and reprimanding the synagogue leaders, Jesus was not abolishing the sabbath as so many people erroneously believe (Matthew 5:17-18), but he was upholding the proposition that God's commandment to cease from work on the sabbath is not a prohibition against healing the sick and other acts of mercy. Our Lord was also exposing the hypocrisy of



photo: <http://www.globalrecordings.net/>

religious leaders who viewed loosing a stymied ox or donkey as an exigency justifying work on the sabbath but refused to make such an exception to loose a woman stymied by Satan with sickness for eighteen years.

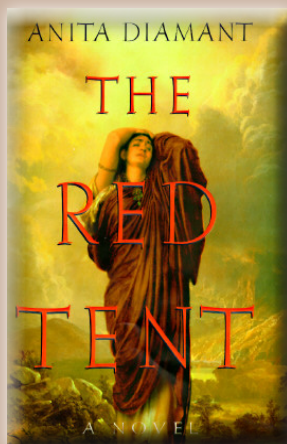
On another occasion in which Jesus' fidelity to the sabbath was challenged, he rhetorically asked if it were lawful to do good or evil on the sabbath (Mark 3:4) And on yet another occasion, he declared that the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath and that he, the Son of Man, was Lord of the sabbath (Mark 2:27-28). As Lord of the sabbath, Jesus was not about to

be bound by man-made traditions attached to the sabbath nor allow His Father's true sabbath command to be perverted into a ban against doing good.

In this transaction and occurrence, our Savior loosened several bonds. He loosened the crippled woman from the bonds of sickness, and he loosened his people from the bonds of rulers who had turned the sabbath day into an intolerable burden with their man-made restrictions.



### The Red Tent Anita Diamant, 1997



The author, Anita Diamant is an award winning journalist and author of five books about contemporary Jewish life. Her latest, *The Red Tent* is a historical fiction. She writes her book, *The Red Tent* in Dinah's voice, bringing to life the traditions and turmoil of ancient womanhood. Dinah is the last child of Leah and Jacob and their only daughter. Diamant begins the story with Dinah's mothers - Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah—the wives of Jacob—pulling us into the biblical story and making it come to real life. It begins with the entrance of Jacob into the sister's lives. I have read the familiar story many times in Genesis, but never did I appreciate and understand it as fully until I read Diamant's book. It gave me a new, fresh, additional view of biblical women's society and the mysteries of the menstrual hut, called the red tent. I highly recommend this book and feel much richer for her insight and great, passionate story telling.

Reviewed by Jean Jantzen



## Children of God Part 6 — Empowering Teenagers

This writer has often said, “Of the many things I have done, I was the least prepared for raising teenagers!” Read this article to the end, and you will be better prepared!

Raising teenagers is all about ceding control to them as they are ready—empowering them to make decisions for themselves, praying and hoping they will make good ones, but realizing that we made mistakes at that age and they will make them as well. The goal of the good parent is to turn over control to teens in an orderly, controlled manner so that their mistakes are not too destructive. Mistakes can be a great teaching tool, but we do not want our children spending the rest of their lives recovering from them.

Non-parents need to read this article to understand the incredible influence they may have on teens. As young people mature and rightly want to become independent from their parents, they often seek the opinions of others. This writer has seen teenagers who were upset with their parent(s) for a moment make critical decisions, such as whether to keep living at home or not, based upon the advice of just one or two others. If that person was you, what kind of advice would you give

Raising teenagers is a three to seven-year project with a definite outcome. All our state laws remove a parent’s legal jurisdiction over their children at age 18. In some cases, it can be as young as 16. It sounds scary, but some parents have ages 13, 14 and 15 years to work with their teens, and then they leave home. Fortunately, most have several more years. The basic results of teen-raising are these:



1. Parents cede control to their teens and they move out with their blessing, or remain home, autonomous, but in a cooperative attitude
2. Teens take control of their lives from their parents, either by rebelling or by moving out before their parents think they are ready.
3. Teens remain at home dependant or damaged, unable to function by themselves.”

Children who had good teaching—who had been taught to follow the “golden rule”, to work hard, to be honest and to control their emotions—will certainly have an advantage over children who had little parental guidance. Children who have grown up seeing the example of two righteous parents have a huge advantage. Children who have been corrected in love will be

miles ahead of those who were either corrected in anger or not corrected at all. Good preparation before the teen years makes everything better for both teens and parents.

But whatever a child’s upbringing, the process of becoming a separate, independent adult utterly requires young people to learn to make choices for themselves—to learn to think and act like responsible adults. **Unfortunately, many parents do not understand this.** It is all too common to see parents try to continue to make decisions for their teens as they did when they were children. The “good parents” often have more trouble than parents who sort of always “let their children go” on their own. Parents of “good children” often cannot figure out why their children appear to be frustrated with them—or are utterly shocked when their child goes to college and becomes involved in immorality, drinking, drugs, and other

trouble that was never permitted at home.

The key for everyone to understand is that children are made in the “image of God” (Genesis 1:26-27), not in the image of their parents. Just as Adam and Eve had to learn to choose good over evil (Genesis 3), so also all of their children for all generations must choose God and His righteousness over evil (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Romans 2:6-9). We can want our children to live righteous, happy and trouble-free lives, but we cannot command them into righteousness any more than God can command us into righteousness. God gave us free will. We have to give it to our children. We have to want His righteousness through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22), and our children have to want it, too—parents wanting it for their children will not get the job done.

### God, the Master Parent

Understanding God as the Master Parent is one of the best ways for us to transition from the “teach, train, correct and protect mode,” to the “teach, empower and see-what they do mode.” The quick judgments and consequences of childhood must be replaced with slower responses and the hope that the child can see the fruit of his or her own actions. God accurately tells mankind what is good and what is evil. He tells us the general consequences of each, and then He says that we might have to suffer the results of evil—one or more times—before we understand its danger (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28).

Too often, parents tell their young people that if they sin, swift destruction will come upon them. Parents need to acknowledge that many people actually “enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25). The consequences of sin are often delayed, so people continue to sin without realizing the magnitude of it (Ecclesiastes 8:11). When mankind refuses to obey God, He does not physically stop them from sinning, but He lets them sin for years so that they will learn the consequences of it.

Rather than paint a picture of sudden disaster that will befall a young

person for the things that they might choose to do, it is better to provide a realistic approach. Children begin ignoring parents when they make dogmatic statements trying to help their children, but these statements are overblown and sometimes more false than true. For example: “If you drive after drinking alcohol, you’re going to have an accident or get arrested.” Yet the young people know many friends who have driven under the influence and never had such an incident. Another example, “If you have sex, you’re going to get pregnant or get an STD” (sexually transmissible disease). Again, they know many people who have had sex without those complications.

Are parents right to try to protect their children from sins that will lead them to misery and heartache! Yes! Should they tell them that their first sin is going to get them arrested, injured, pregnant, etc? No! Often, it does not. We are dealing with thinking young adults who can see that at least in the short term, sin appears to be fun with few consequences. It is much better to show them that most people who get the substance abuse habit eventually have accidents, arrests, divorces or job-loss due to their drinking. Similarly, most people who participate in unmarried sex for several years have at least one STD and a high percentage become unable to have children. One of the best things parents can do is let their children hear the stories of young people whose lives were ruined by these things. There are books, videos, internet sites or meetings for recovering people where these stories can be witnessed. Young people need to be taught that it is up to them whether they will turn out like these recovering people, or if they will have a happy and successful life.

Young people who think they know better than their parents, and who are courageous enough to act on their ideas don’t need to be just told “No, no, no” during their later teen years. They need to be asked, “What is your plan?” They need to be challenged to do their own research, determine the consequences of various lifestyles, and to explain how their way of life is going to work any better than those

who have lived it before. They need to realize that God—not their parents—defines sin, the punishments for sin, and the rewards for good. They can move away from or ignore their parents, they might escape being caught by teachers and law enforcement, but they cannot escape God or ignore Him if He decides to get their attention. **Parents must teach young people that when they have left home, they are fully accountable to God for what they do, for learning and doing what is right, for both today and the rest of their lives.**

Another mistake parents frequently make is minimizing the importance of their own example to their children. God and Christ are perfect examples to us, but how are we to our children? If a parent’s life is not an example of the fruit of godliness, then why should their children want to follow God? Parents usually don’t realize that their own marital squabbling, materialism, anger, hypocrisy, selfishness, gluttony, lust, substance abuse (even “legal” drugs), laziness or other character flaws are speaking more loudly to their children than all the lectures that they give them. It is not only the presence of the problems, but what parents are doing about them that is important. Do they admit their difficulties? Or do they hide them and lie about them?

Are parents actively seeking God and the help of fellow believers to overcome these problems? Do the parents want God to reach down from heaven and stop their sins—like they try to stop their children’s sins? If parents are seeking God to overcome their sins, their children are often motivated to overcome theirs. When parents are content with their own shortcomings, their children are usually content with theirs.

### The Good Stuff We Need to Talk About a Lot

In their efforts to tell or force children to avoid the sins of youth, many parents do not take the time to make a plan to positively turn over some of the good aspects of life to their young people. This is where a plan to raise teenagers should begin. Young people need to be filled with the message: “You are growing up, you are able to make more



decisions on your own, and you can do a good job with them. I want to give you authority in various areas and if you do a reasonable (it will never be perfect) job I will never take it back.” It is much better for parents to give authority to their teenagers than it is for them simply to take it.

Indeed, the major failing of many parents is that they simply give up. They become busy with their own interests and primarily interact with their children when they want money or get into some kind of big trouble. These parents need to curtail some of their own interests, make time for their children, plan out the good things in the chart, below, with them and finish the job they began years ago as parents. **Most parents who are not spending enough time with their children know it—or at least the mothers do.** They simply need a prayer and a plan: ask God for the strength to do it, make a plan to do it, and do it.

Each child is different. The **rebellious child** wants to do things his/her own way in opposition to their parents—and may well sneak around them or leave home to do it. The opposite is the **obedient but repressed child**, who wants to honor their parents, or maybe feels forced into it with no way out. Both of these types of young people would probably benefit from being given more responsibility as soon as it can be explained to them. The rebellious child would benefit by clearly being told that they are being allowed to do things with which their parents do not agree, so that they will realize they are responsible for the consequences when things go wrong. The obedient but repressed child will benefit by feeling that they have their own life and that their obedience over the years has paid off. Their parents telling them “we trust you to do what is right before God” will strengthen their resolve to go forward with

diligence, and to do what is right.

There are many other children in the middle of these two extremes: they have disagreements with the parents, but are not threatening to leave home or cut off their relationship. They may have some belief in God, but not enough to steer a sound course through the world’s evils if left on their own. Many of these children are not yet ready to be responsible for making most of their own decisions. They may complain about the parent’s rules and restrictions, but they have not yet fully



understood the magnitude of personal responsibility they need to acquire. Now is a good time to talk to them about how they will need to grow to live on their own, and talk about milestones or dates in the future when these things will be turned over to them.

In any case, it is **better for parents to turn over authority to children in positive circumstances**, rather than negative ones. For example, suppose a young person wants to invite a group of friends—maybe overnight. There is a tendency for the parent to say, “no, you are too young”, “no, you will

leave the house in a mess” or all sorts of other arguments—and they may all be somewhat true—maybe completely true. Ask the teen for some positive results, and then follow through with allowing them to do what they reasonably ask. For example, ask them to clean their room, the bath room and other rooms that will be used when the friends come—with the understanding that they will do a similar cleaning job after the friends have left. Parents may also want to obtain promises about what the activities will be and when they will sleep. If things do not go as planned or promised, it is time to have a conversation about how it can be done better next time. But parents cannot give up—their children will eventually be on their own. This is all so much better than a parent just saying “no” until they finally give up and say “yes” It is also better than finding out that the child had friends over when the parent was gone.

When parents put expectations on their children, they must always be reasonable. They cannot, for example, expect the children to clean the house better than the parents do. If a parent struggles with being on time to appointments, they should not be the one to object to a child

being somewhere two minutes late. A parent may reply, “But I want my children to turn out better than I am.” A parent will just stir up animosity if trying to command his or her children to be better. They have to decide to be better themselves. If a parent wants them to be better, he or she is best to inspire the children by overcoming their own problems now.

Here are some most-important issues all parents must deal with. Talk about these things often. Make a plan to turn over responsibility to teenagers.



Issue	How to Turn it Over to Young People Without a Big Struggle.
<i>Relationship with God</i>	If a young person claims to have outgrown the need for the time that their parents spend praying and studying with them, the parents should make them responsible for doing it themselves. The emphasis must be on their pleasing God who knows everything that they do, rather than just pleasing the parents. In order to pass this responsibility onward, the parents might first outline a transition period—asking that the young person pray with them for a certain period of time or that they read certain books of the Bible and tell what they learned. If they do a reasonable job, then the parent can leave the responsibility for regular prayer and study to them.
<i>Making Good Friends</i>	Rather than complaining about “bad” friends or wondering what young people are doing when away from home, it is far better for parents to encourage their children to make good friends. This can be brought about both by conversation and by offering to fund activities or parties with good friends. Making friends of children’s friends is fairly easy: take an interest in them and talk to them with the same respect one would have for other adults (even though one may not agree with what they are saying). Remember that there are no “perfect” friends and that it is the parents’ mission to find out what their children’s friends are like, not to correct them all. In an effort to try to ensure that their teens have “perfect” friends, many parents avoid getting to know any of them. If a young person has trouble making friends, parents really need to help in whatever ways that will be accepted. Parents who think that their teen’s friendships are unimportant run the risk of raising a misfit or a runaway.
<i>Keeping Themselves Pure</i>	With the world’s emphasis on casual sex for fun, parents must continually teach the spiritual purpose of sex is to understand the loving and faithful relationship that Christ has with His believers. (Hebrews 13:4; Ephesians 5:25-33; Revelation 19:7-9) As He is faithful to us, we need to be faithful to our spouse, reserving our sexual relationship for them. Another obvious purpose of sex is producing children, who benefit most when they are born into a faithful, loving relationship. As soon as children learn about sex, they need to be taught that they need to remain pure, because God commands it. Secondly, it makes a much happier life and makes them desirable to someone else who has also remained pure. As young people reach their middle teens, school, work and social arrangements make it difficult to physically prevent them from being in situations where they could have sex. When this time comes, it is good for the parents to formally turn over the responsibility of remaining pure to their teens. This is sometimes done by signing an agreement, or by giving them a ring or some other physical memento that the young person will return to their parents on their wedding day—telling them they have kept their promise.



<p><i>Planning to Be a Parent Themselves</i></p>	<p>Talking to young people about the future when they will be a parent is one of the most positive things that can be done for them. It helps them to look beyond their immediate problems and <b>gives them a reason to acquire adult characteristics</b> that their parents are desperately trying to teach them. Most young people will acknowledge that they are glad that their parents brought them into the world. If their parents were able to confine their sexual experience only to their marriage, they are also glad to know that. (If the young people claim not to care, ask if they would want their mom or dad to have an affair now, and they will virtually always say “no”.) Parents who do not have a pure background need to acknowledge it and teach their children that, through the power of God, they can do better.</p>
<p><i>Finding a Life-long Mate</i></p>	<p>It is not enough for parents to concentrate on keeping their children sexually pure. <b>They must also make a significant effort to show their children that they are helping them find a life-long partner.</b> The rebellious child needs to realize that “sex just for fun” will drive them further away from the lifelong marriage and family that they probably want. On the other hand, this writer knows quite a few obedient, but repressed children who were continually warned against the evils of teen-age romances and premarital sex by diligent Christian parents. The parents did little to teach their children about the positive side of marriage. Their reward for this over-parenting was no grandchildren. Many of those repressed children either married too late in life to have children, or never married at all. Some are now in their 50’s and never had any serious relationship with anyone of the opposite sex. These “good kids” are not about to start something with a person who had even one characteristic of which their parents would not approve. Good parents must make an ongoing effort to introduce their children to as many other suitable young people as practical—giving them opportunity to find who they like and who they do not. This does not have to be done in some tense formal manner, but is better done in family, church and other group settings—especially when there is <b>work</b> for the young people to do together—not just entertainment.</p> <p>Parents who use the excuse “I am relying on God to find them a mate” and who take little direct action themselves are making a big mistake. Of course, one should pray about these things. But when a parent needs a house, job or health treatment, they almost always pray as well as take positive action to find what they need. If parents spend many hours searching for house decoration, hobby tools, clothes, etc, but spend almost no hours looking for a mate for their children, what does that say to the children about their importance? Yes, it is probably more difficult to find a good mate than a good job, house, or hobby item—that is why <b>diligent effort should be combined with prayer.</b> That is what Abraham and his servant did when looking for a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24).</p>
<p><i>Work Skills</i></p>	<p>Teaching young people to enjoy working hard is probably the next most important thing that parents can do. The best way for parents to do that, is to enjoy working hard themselves. Even if their young people do not imitate their style at home, they will probably do so in years to come. Finding <b>useful</b> work that the young person likes is very important. Walkathons or other sponsorship events, and sales of over-priced products to relatives are not work. Young people will learn more if they obtain their spending money through work, either at home or away, than if they are simply given it via an allowance.</p>
<p><i>Home Skills</i></p>	<p>Learning to do basic cleaning, cooking, laundry and home maintenance are things that all young people should be taught <b>because they will have their own place soon.</b> Learning to check the fluids in the auto or install and remove software from the computer are also skills that they can learn while looking forward to running their own household. Does the young person claim that they already know how to do them? The parent can then offer to pay them if they will indeed do the job as well as the parent. But if they cannot yet do it as well, then they need to continue to do the job with the parent because they are still learning and need the practice.</p>
<p><i>Business Skills</i></p>	<p>Most financial institutions and advertisements are cleverly designed to take money away from unsuspecting people. Parents can be their children’s friends by helping them sift through this maze. If they are not skilled in these areas, then they should find someone who is skilled to help their young people. Over-general sayings such as “Don’t buy anything from the Internet”, or “don’t use a credit card” are not going to satisfy a young person who has friends who do these things successfully. Helping young people means understanding what they want to buy (their choices will not be like their parents), and helping them do it successfully. Take the time to go through scam ads with them and show them that they are scams. Show them a letter from a “get rich quick” scheme and then find an Internet or magazine article exposing the fraud.</p>
<p><i>People Skills</i></p>	<p>Our western nations have a great tendency to want to avoid confronting others. If somebody treats us wrongly, we want an agency to report them to, a government to pass a law against them or we want to avoid them. We certainly want to protect our children from such situations—“going to bat” for them if we can. But the Bible does not teach avoidance, but loving confrontation when somebody wrongs us (Leviticus 19:17; Proverbs 27:5-6; Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1). We need to show examples to our children of kindly confronting school, government, neighbors or business people who are doing wrong to ourselves and others). This is a vital skill for evangelism, running one’s own business or raising a family.</p>

Parents must realize that their young person will probably not perform the above tasks as well as they could. Unfortunately, some parents, in their quest to make their children the best they can be appear to be unsatisfied with their children unless they do an almost perfect job. Parents must encourage their children to do the best that they can do while also realizing that they had their faults when they were young.

Parents should give themselves an annual checkup to see how they are progressing in the above points—the ones below, too. If parents they are going to start at age 13 and be finished when a child is age 19, they have six years. When a child is 15, are they a third complete? When the child is 16, are they half done? If the child is 17 and they have not even started in some areas, they need to quickly alter their plans.

**The Less-Important Things We Should Not Argue About**

As it is, neither the mistakes in the table above nor the good things in the table below make up the bulk of the dialog between Christian parents and their young people. Usually, young people try to hide or downplay their mistakes from their parents. Parents, in an effort to correct the bad, often forget to emphasize the good things. But many of the following issues are obvious to all, and hence constitute the bulk of arguments between parents and young people

The general solution is to restrict young people from the few things that are really dangerous, but then to avoid extensive argument about things that are personal opinion or things that simply vary from one generation to the next. Parents should make sure that their young people understand their view, but they must realize when children become teens, they no longer necessarily accept their parent’s view as their view. The mission is to encourage teens to desire God’s view.


Issue	Real Dangers to Avoid	Arguments to Avoid	Teaching Them to Grow
<p><i>Sleeping Enough</i></p>	<p>Driving long distances, operating heavy machinery or other life-critical functions should not be attempted by a person severely lacking in sleep. Parents need to stop their children from doing these dangerous things.</p>	<p>Many parents spend hundreds of hours arguing about “bed times” with their young people when the emphasis should be on getting up and performing in the morning. Do not punish for going to bed too late, but for not getting up and tending to morning duties. This writer knows of young people who were forced to go to bed at a certain time throughout high school, but who then failed in college because they could not discipline themselves to sleep enough.</p>	<p>This is one of the best places to teach young people the results of not planning for the future. Losing sleep, then having to go to school or work tired, quickly produces an awful feeling with an undisputed cause. When a young person is clearly responsible for their decisions of when to go to sleep, they learn what happens when they do not plan correctly. If a young person utterly fails to wake up for needed school or work, then parents can resort to a specific bed-time punishment for a few weeks.</p>
<p><i>Choice of Music</i></p> <p><i>Every generation has new music that the young people seem to like and that adults seem to dislike. Part of this is the natural tendency to learn and like the music of one’s youth. The other side is evil business people advocating sin to make a profit.</i></p>	<p>Lyrics of some popular music openly promote sin or criminal activity. In general, this has more influence on young people than they think, but probably less influence than the parents think. Ask young people what the words are and if they think they are good. They are often embarrassed to admit it and will sometimes agree to avoid these most evil songs.</p>	<p>Do not say that their music is “too repetitive” or just noise—those are judgmental arguments that every generation makes about the next generation’s music. Don’t tell young people they will lose their hearing because they have the volume higher than you would like it. Headphones turned up very loud or powerful home/auto systems can cause hearing loss if they exceed 95 decibels for long periods of time. Buying or borrowing a sound level meter is much better than arguing.</p>	<p>Parents can provide access to live Christian music and CDs. This is not to say that all “Christian Music” is good, but most of it has biblical themes and lacks the evils of secular music. Parents should ask young people about what songs they think are bad and why. Once they agree that they would rather not listen to some songs because of their content, they are on their way to making their own good choices. A parent can give their child complete freedom for a while, then if their children make bad choices, he/she can clean house and remove the bad music.</p>
<p><i>Clothing</i></p> <p><i>Every generation has new styles of clothes—promoted to us by advertisers. If parents like wearing clothes that are trendy for people their age, they should not fault their young people for doing the same thing.</i></p>	<p>There is some statistical evidence showing that people wearing gang-style or sexually provocative clothing are more likely to be the victim of a crime. Also, some few clothing styles are physiologically dangerous: too tight, too short, etc. Parents who cannot convince their young people of the reality of these dangers need to find real examples of people who suffered from them and present them to their children. A lot of threats will not do as much good as showing them one article about a young person mistakenly shot because he or she was wearing clothing attributed to a gang.</p>	<p>Saying, “I never wore anything like that”, just engenders strife. Nearly everyone wears something different from what their parents wore when they were young.</p> <p>Avoid labeling a certain style of clothing as inherently “righteous” or “sinful”. For example, women began wearing high-heels and nylons a couple of generations ago because fashion designers borrowed them from prostitutes. Today, some parents may not consider their daughter properly dressed for church unless she is wearing high heels and nylons.</p> <p>If a young person generally dresses on the moderate side of how their peers look, there is probably little to argue about.</p>	<p>Parents who buy expensive, stylish clothes should be prepared to do the same for their children. If parents buy inexpensive clothes for themselves, they can ask their young people to earn the extra money needed to buy stylish clothes. They will soon learn the cost of staying with the trends.</p> <p>Parents should encourage moderation. For example, if a young lady insists that she has to wear skimpy shorts because they are the style, ask if she is wearing the longest shorts acceptable to her peers, or if she is making the mistake of attracting attention with revealing clothes. Ask if she is trying to meet guys who really like her, or ones who are temporarily interested in her body.</p>



Issue	Real Dangers to Avoid	Arguments to Avoid	Teaching Them to Grow
<p><b>Personal Grooming</b></p> <p><i>This includes makeup, haircuts, hair dying, frequency of bathing, body piercing, tattooing and other similar things.</i></p>	<p>Like clothing, people who go in for extreme and outlandish hair styles and piercing tend to suffer somewhat more crime. Also, there are some dangers of infection and tears from body piercing and allergic reaction from hair dyes. Nevertheless, most people are not plagued by these things.</p>	<p>It is often very difficult for parents, who raised their child from a baby, to see them do something to look substantially different—or weird. But it is the child’s body, so a parent should let their young people know what they think peacefully, rather than angrily. Parents must realize that makeup washes off and hair grows anew—no lasting damage here. Even piercings and tattoos can be undone.</p>	<p>Rather than refusing permission to let young people do any of these things until they do it behind one’s back or leave home, it is better to turn these decisions over to them a little at a time. The Bible teaches against cuttings and tattoos (Leviticus 19:28), but speaks favorably of pierced jewelry (Ezekiel 16:12). First give teens control of things that are easily undone (makeup and haircuts) and lastly give them control over more permanent things.</p>
<p><b>Getting Good Grades In School</b></p>	<p>A person who fails to pass high school is statistically much more likely to have difficulty in life.</p> <p>Anyone desiring to go to college will be much more likely to get into good schools or receive scholarships if they have better grades.</p>	<p>Parents should be concerned about their young person’s progress in school, but they should not try to go to school for them. A parent who keeps track of every assignment and test for their student is making a mistake.</p> <p>God has given people different abilities. Parents should not compare their young people to other students who may be more gifted in some areas. Students should be expected to work to their ability, which may be all “A”s for some students but not for others.</p>	<p>Motivating young people to want to do well in school is the best method. When a student does not care about school, it is time to ask them what they want to do with their life and ask them how that can be done without a basic education. If they do not have a good answer, they are not grown up enough to make their own decisions. If they talk about wanting to be an athlete or a model or some other job where they do not think they need school, take them to a place that hires such people and ask them if they prefer people with good high school grades. This extra trip will go a lot further than hours of “why aren’t you doing your assignment” arguments.</p>
<p><b>Keeping Their Own Room Clean</b></p> <p><i>This is not about making a work of art, but simply making a place for everything and then putting things away when one is done using them—rather than leaving everything piled up and then searching for it when it is needed.</i></p>	<p>Young people frequently do not realize that desirable roommates and even spouses may pass them up when they see that they keep a messy room. In worst cases, a filthy apartment can cause its renter(s) to be evicted. Mice, rats and disease frequent poorly cleaned rooms.</p>	<p>A parent should never force a child to keep a room neater than their own room or their own areas of the house. If parents’ quarters are a mess, they need to clean them up. Otherwise, the best they can hope for is to apologize to their children and explain that they hope their offspring will learn to keep things in better order.</p>	<p>Parents may enforce cleanup when their children are younger, then gradually turn it over to their children, letting them do whatever they want as they get older. Requiring young people to have their room clean before friends come over might be a good intermediate step. The best time to teach someone the value of cleaning their room is when something important to them is lost in their mess somewhere. They can see the benefit of order then!”</p>
<p><b>Doing “Crazy” Things</b></p> <p><i>This could be anything from dressing up in bizarre costumes and going to the mall, to strange contests, to “TP-ing” someone’s house.</i></p>	<p>Some of these things can be completely harmless, while others could give the young person a criminal record or do them permanent injury. The key is teaching young people to know the difference and to communicate with parents.</p>	<p>Parents need to remember some of the crazy things they did, being tolerant of the harmless things and standing resolute against the dangerous ones. Yes, we might be embarrassed to know that our child was wandering around the mall dressed like a movie character, but it is better to keep lines of communication open than to shut them and not learn about the dangerous ones.</p>	<p>Obviously, there are very few people who attribute their success in life to doing “crazy” things. A focus on using one’s life to do worthwhile things in service for God is the best way to end this kind of thing. There are times, when everyone needs a good laugh and young people are better at providing it than their no-nonsense, set-in-their ways parents.</p>

Issue	Real Dangers to Avoid	Arguments to Avoid	Teaching Them to Grow
<p><b><i>Good Driving Habits</i></b></p>	<p>Dangerous driving ranks high on the list of things that young people need protection from. Young people who drive recklessly or too fast, or who cannot keep their attention on the road need to have their driving privileges revoked.</p>	<p>Some young people are excellent drivers, but may drive a little more aggressively than their parent(s). If they understand the skills of defensive driving and do not create dangerous road situations, they should not be forced to drive in the exact same manner as their parents.</p>	<p>If one of your children's or family's friends is injured or killed in an auto crash, visit them in the hospital or go to the funeral. This is one of the best ways of teaching the reality of auto accidents. Do not try to shelter them from real situations that they might someday face.</p>
<p><b><i>Being With Parents in Social Situations</i></b></p> <p><i>When children are young, they are often their parents' pride and joy when they visit other people. They look nice and they answer pleasantly. When they get older, they often do not want to visit their parents' friends, or they do not want to talk, or they are not nice if they do talk.</i></p>	<p>The main danger in this is danger to the parent-young person relationship. Parents need to realize that their children are separate individuals, not just extensions of the parent.</p>	<p>Parents need to realize that just as they are not interested in all of the conversations between their children and their children's friends, so young people may not be interested in conversations between their parents and parents' friends. While it would probably be best for the family if all had more interest in each other, it is a mistake for one to try to convince the other that they must be interested. As teens mature, it is good to limit the number of times their presence is requested, and then ask them, rather than demand of them.</p>	<p>It is often difficult for parents to come to a realization that their children have lives of their own, but this is the case. When a parent wants to take their older teen with them on a family outing or to visit relatives and friends, and the young person does not want to go, "What will you do instead?" is a good question. If their life is full of other things to do, the parent should let them tend to them. If there is nothing worthwhile, then the parent may insist that they go. When a child is nearly ready to leave home, they should manage their own responsibilities and social engagements.</p>
<p><b><i>"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).</i></b></p>	<p>A young person who dishonors his father and mother certainly runs the risk of not living a long life. Honoring means more than just doing what is required. It means being thankful and showing appreciation. However, it does not mean that young people let parents live their lives for them (Genesis 2:24) or let them command things contrary to God (Ephesians 6:1).</p>	<p>Some Christian parents command many things upon their children, invoking "honor your father and mother" as the sole reason. If the parents are a fine Christian example, their commands are reasonable and their young people are content to do them, it probably will go well for all involved. But when Christian parents give excessive or unreasonable commands that burden their children (Ephesians 6:4), they are likely to drive them <b>away</b> from God and the Bible.</p>	<p>Parents who clearly deal with their children's best interests at heart, rather than their own interests, will be honored when their children are older (Proverbs 22:6). Parents should teach children all of the Ten Commandments, including the fifth one, but not use it as a club to put God's blessing on everything they command their children.</p> <p>A parent must also ask, "how does my child see me honor their grandparents? Can I expect anything better?"</p>

By God's grace, this article has imparted understanding on how to work with teenagers, both to parents and to those who encounter teens in their daily activities. The common Christian principles of prayer, fasting and Bible study should never be forgotten in this process. Even with the best of intentions and practices, serious problems still arise among the children of Christian parents. Beyond that, many Christians find themselves raising children in less than ideal situations: single-parent families, raising grand children or raising stepchildren or foster children. Difficulties will arise. But it is a wonderful thing for Christians to stand in the gap in these situations. We need to have mercy on them, just as our Father in heaven has mercy on us.

In Part 7 of this series we will deal realistically with many of the serious problems challenging young people today. If there are questions that are not covered in these issues, we certainly welcome your letters and e-mails to [asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org](mailto:asknorm@shepherdsvoicemagazine.org). May our Father in heaven bless your parenting, and your interaction with young people everywhere. 




Norman Edwards



**Signs in the Heavens:  
Coincidence or Divine Decree?**






Mid-February 2013 has been a busy place in the heavens above our earth. Astronomy shows us we can expect more signs for several years to come. These unusual events are in plain sight for millions of people to watch. The Bible certainly talks about “signs in the heavens”. Are the signs we are seeing related to the Bible? If so, how? This article will study both the signs and the Bible, and show you what you need to know.

We start with the events of a little more than one day:



## Signs in the Heavens: Cosmic Coincidence or Divine Decree?

Date & Time	Event
14 <sup>th</sup> , 8:00 P.M. Cienfuegos, central Cuba	Cuba's state television and other national media gave eye-witness accounts of people who saw a bright fireball in the sky which disappeared in a loud explosion. Houses were shaken, but no damage was reported. However, three purported photos of this event all proved false—they all had more sunlight than Cuba has at 8:00 P.M., and one was clearly a copy of a Russian meteor photo, below. (It is sad that people will falsify information about something this important—see the subtitle "Repent", below.)
14 <sup>th</sup> , 10:20 P.M. Chelyabinsk, Siberia (a city of one million people)	<p>This rock, about 55 feet in diameter, weighed 10 to 20 tons and came zooming into the atmosphere between 30,000 to 46,000 miles per hour. It was captured by numerous cameras in cars and buildings. At times, it was much brighter than the sun, causing cameras—not designed for these conditions—to go completely white. It produced a sonic boom that blew out many thousands of windows and damaged some buildings. Over 1200 people were treated for injuries, but at this writing, there were no deaths. Most of the meteor was apparently vaporized in the air, with the remains crashing through the ice of a small lake.</p> <p>This is the largest meteor to strike our planet since the Tunguska, Siberia, meteor in June or July of 1908. Although the Tunguska meteor appeared to explode in air, rather than hitting the ground, the force of its explosion flattened 830 square miles of trees and had the explosive force of a 30 megaton bomb. Had it come down over a city, destruction would have been similar to a nuclear attack.</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> , 2:24 P.M. 2 Earth-widths away from us	<p>An asteroid know as <i>2012 DA14</i> passed only 17,000 miles away from our Earth! As space distances go, this is very close! It missed us by a distance of about twice the Earth's diameter—closer to the Earth than the communications satellites that we use so much. 2012 DA14 was discovered Feb 23, 2012—and its close encounter was correctly calculated back then. Existing technology would have allowed us to send a spacecraft to meet it. But since it is going 17,000mph in a direction that we do not want to go—the expense is not worth the value.</p> <p>This asteroid 2012 DA14 is estimated to measure 100 to 200 feet across and weigh between 40,000 and 100,000 tons. Even so, it was not visible from the earth without the aid of a telescope. For its size, it has come closer to earth than any other asteroid, and neither it nor any other known similar sized asteroid is expected to come as close to earth again for the next 100 years. That appears fortunate, as this size of asteroid would have the destructive power of the Tunguska meteor—able to devastate one of the states of the U.S.A. or an entire small country.</p> <p>However, there is no guarantee. 2012 DA14 was discovered by amateur astronomers in Spain who happened to be looking in the right place at the right time. There certainly could be same-sized or bigger asteroids headed our way that we have not yet been able to find. Life in space can also be complicated. Its close encounter with Earth greatly changed DA14's orbit—from 366 days (almost like earth) to 317 days. It is difficult enough to look for asteroids with orbits that might be on a collision course with Earth's orbit, but it is unreasonable to expect even a massive government agency to be able to calculate the interaction of every asteroid with every planet and other asteroid to see if a near encounter might alter an orbit somewhere and send a formerly harmless piece of rock careening toward earth.</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> , 7:30 P.M. Florida east coast	Thousands of eastward-looking people in Florida were treated to a flashing sporadic meteor show. As the meteor entered the atmosphere, it alternated between bright and dim. This is a rare event that some people "might see once or twice in their life". Amanda Meyer happened to have a video camera on and in the right direction—kindly posting it to YouTube. This meteor was in no way dangerous, but it attracted the attention of many in an already meteor-intense day.
15 <sup>th</sup> , 10:45 P.M. West coast of California	Thousands more saw a bright streaking meteor off the west coast of California—with reports as far north as Seattle. This was another harmless meteor that disintegrated in the atmosphere, but took long enough that several viewers were able to aim their video recorders and post its dying day on YouTube.
All times are in Eastern Standard Time. Numerous Internet sources were used—first-hand accounts when possible.	



### Scale Diagram of Our Earth and Our Busy Nearby Space

The EARTH is 8,000 miles in diameter and has an additional 300 miles of atmosphere. The atmosphere causes the smaller meteors to burn up long before they strike our surface. But the bigger they come, the further they fall. Ten-ton meteors like the one that fell at Chelyabinsk, Russia, January 15, 2013, can create considerable damage.

To put the moon on this diagram to scale, it must be 5 feet away from the Earth. To put the sun on this diagram, it must go 2000 feet away--2/5 mile!

This is the path of the asteroid 2012 DA14 which came within 17,000 miles of earth on February 15, 2013. The 150-foot, 143,000-ton rock would be too small to see on this diagram, yet it would pack the force of a big hydrogen bomb.

This is the orbit distance from the Earth for our communications satellites. This distance makes geosynchronous orbits--a satellite will orbit the Earth once per day, causing it to hover over the same place.

### What Do These Meteors Mean?

What are the chances of a once-in-a-life-time meteor striking the earth on the same day as known history's closest asteroid fly-by, along with three other prominent meteors as well? While there is no precise way to calculate it, the answer is "extremely low," maybe odds of less than 1 in a trillion.

Our initial reaction might be "Earth is passing through a meteor field," but this writer could not find any scientists that agree with that. Indeed, the Siberian Meteor and 2012 DA14 were headed opposite directions. The U.S.A. east- and west-coast meteors were of different types. A website that accepts public meteor sighting reports from all over the world, <http://thelatestworldwidemeteorreports.blogspot.com/>, recorded only 29, 25, 53, 25 and 54 meteors for February 13 through 16. The average number of meteors reported is 25 per day, so the values above are between normal and twice normal. During "meteor showers," the site reports hundreds of meteors per day.

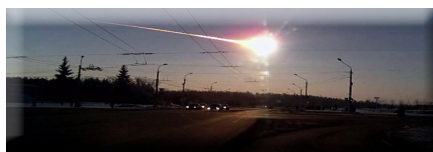
The bottom line is this: A lot of very improbable things happened on the same day for no apparent scientific or mathematical cause.

This is the same situation we have with life itself: When a person needs a new cell phone, they do not look around outside just to see if one has evolved somewhere. We all know that complex things do not occur by themselves, but must be intelligently created. But we could look around outside and find 20 million unique living species, all more complicated than a cell phone and all composed of fully functioning systems. The probability of these living things coming into existence on their own, even over the space of billions of years, is much lower than finding a cell phone that evolved itself into existence.

When we find unexplained highly improbable events, the answer is almost always "purpose"—the purpose of someone with the power to bring the improbable event. The only rational explanation for life and meteors is that the Creator God has the power to bring about these unlikely events as He

wishes. It is not cosmic coincidence, it is His divine decree.

Some people will say, "I agree that life is so complex that a God must have created it, but there is really no way we can know who that God is or what He expects of us. The answer to this question is amazingly simple. If God was smart enough to make 20 million unique species, and bring powerful meteors to earth to get everyone's attention without killing anybody, would not He be smart enough to make sure His information was the most available on the planet? With over six billion copies in print, far more than any other book, we can rest assured that the Bible is His book for mankind. Which Bible translation? Not a significant problem. This writer would be happy to teach God's basic truth from **any** serious Bible translation.



### What Does the Bible Say about Signs in the Heavens?

The very first chapter of the Bible shows us one of God's stated purposes for making heavenly bodies was for signs to mankind.

*And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons [note: appointed times] and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars (Genesis 1:14-6, ESV).*

The Hebrew for "signs" here is used frequently throughout the Bible for both miraculous signs and some humanly created signs. It is something that people are to take note of and take action upon. The word for "seasons" is the same word for the annual biblical Feast days, found in Leviticus 23 and elsewhere. Of course, it is the regular,

predictable motion of the earth and moon that gives us days, years, and months. And it is the unusual events of these bodies (eclipses, solar flares, etc.) that are for signs. The stars were also for signs. The Hebrew "meaning" of "stars" includes planets, comets and meteors—it was not easy to tell the difference between these things before the invention of the telescope

The Bible gives many examples of "signs" in the heavens: The rainbow was given as a sign that the earth would never again be destroyed by water. (Genesis 9:13-15). Many of the plagues God brought upon Egypt through Moses came out of the heavens (Exodus 9 – 10), but God also gave the Israelites manna from heaven (Exodus 16:4). The sun and moon stood still for about a whole day so Joshua could finish his war (Joshua 10:12-13). The sun went backward 10 degrees on Hezekiah's sundial (2 Kings 20:9-11), which was known to the heads of state in educated Babylon (2 Chronicles 32:31). Finally, notice the statement about heavenly signs that was sent to the known world by Darius the Great, King of Persia:

*Then King Darius wrote: To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions? (Daniel 6:25-27).*

Daniel is certainly an important figure in regard to biblical prophecy. He was given some of the most detailed prophecies about kingdoms with lots of signs, days, weeks, years, beasts and other symbols that prophecy students analyze and process. But was it his knowledge of those things that delivered him from death? No! It was his faith in God. This is a most vital key to understanding heavenly signs and prophecy in



general. We will see it over and over:

**It is not an understanding of the signs and when events will come to pass that produces deliverance; it is faith in God and revelation from God that produces deliverance!**

Daniel worked as a ruler (Daniel 6:2) in a corrupt government—much like we have today. However, when he was told by the government that he could not pray, upon penalty of death, he was not afraid of them. He could have gone through his dreams and visions, interpreted words and symbols, found something that added up to the number of years he had lived in Babylon and interpret that as a divine message to leave Babylon. But God was not telling him to leave and he knew it. Daniel openly prayed to God in spite of the new government laws—so they threw him into the lion’s den. Daniel was trusting in the “delivery and rescue” aspects of God at that moment, not his “signs and wonders”.

Christ, our Savior, told us there would be signs in heaven before His return:

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31).*

The signs discussed here may well be eclipses of the sun and moon, which naturally causes them to be darkened, and meteors and comets striking the earth—again the Greek word for “star” would include all of the other lights in the sky—they were not able to make a technical distinction between stars, planets, comets, etc at that time. They could also be fulfilled by supernatural events—we just don’t know. But we do know that whenever those signs come,

whatever they are, “the tribes of the earth” will mourn, but “His elect” will be glad to see him. We need to have faith that God will rescue each person, often individually, just like Daniel was rescued individually. Numerous verses teach us we will not know when He returns, but the end of Matthew 24 and all of Matthew 25 are lessons about what we need to be doing to be ready for Christ when he returns. Briefly:

*“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods” (Matthew 24:45-47).*

If we expect to reign with Christ and help him teach the world at his return, we need to be using whatever limited power we have to teach His truth to the world now. We may be persecuted for doing it—even before the heavenly signs come:

*“And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist” (Luke 21:11-15).*

These verses show believers will be persecuted before heavenly signs come, but says there is no reason to worry about it. We can trust God to give us what we need when we need it. When the signs come, we will be ready. This is what the Apostles did.

*“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. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved” (Acts 2:17-21, citing Joel 2:30-31).*

We will note here that Matthew states “the moon will not give her light” and Luke says “the moon [turns] into blood”. A lunar eclipse will always greatly diminish the light of the moon, but often will cause it to turn “blood red”—caused by the refraction of longer wave length red light (the same basic reason the sky is red at dawn and dusk). “Blood and fire and vapor of smoke” would certainly fit meteors. Something else could cause these signs as well.

The apostles saw the heavenly signs as a warning of Christ’s coming, but they knew they would be saved by “calling upon the name of the Lord” and doing those things He taught (1 John 2:3-4). They also understood that some believers have the ability to prophecy about present events so they would know how to save themselves. For example, the prophecy of Agabus saved Judea from a famine (Acts 11:28-29). “Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues” (Acts 14:39). There are numerous other New Testament verses where people were guided by prophecy, dreams or the speaking of the Holy Spirit. God has not forgotten how to do this, we just need to ask and ask for His benefit, not for ours (James 4:2-3; 1 John 5:14).

Lastly, in the book of revelation, we see similar mentions of heavenly signs:

*I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood (Revelation 6:12).*

*Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night (Revelation 8:12).*

There is much more that we could say about these heavenly signs and the events surrounding them, but we will continue our much more important message.

### Repent and Trust God!

In our desire to obtain understanding about the second coming of Christ, we can learn a lot from the one who prepared the way for the first coming of Christ: John the Baptist. Christ said *“among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John”* (Luke 7:28). John was the son of Zacharias, the priest (Luke 1:5-13). He would have learned the Scriptures since he was a child. *When asked who he was, “He said: ‘I am “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the LORD,’”’* as the prophet Isaiah said” (John 1:23 citing Isaiah 40:3).

What did John teach in preparation for the Messiah to return? Did he explain the “seventy weeks” prophecy of Daniel 9, showing that Christ appeared at the right time to be the Messiah? Did he expound the timeframe of Jesus’ ministry, and the earthquakes and heavenly signs that would surround the end of it? If he did, the Bible does not record it. The scribes, the Bible teachers of the day, said that the Messiah could not come because Elijah had to come first (Matthew 17:10; Mark 9:11). Did John counter their teaching by explaining that he was the prophesied Elijah? No, he did not know he fulfilled the Elijah ministry (John 1:21), but Christ did (Matthew 17:12-13). Finally, it was not by interpreting prophecy that John understood when Christ would begin His ministry, but by a direct revelation of the Holy Spirit (John 1:29-34). Look at John’s message

Then he [John] said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, *“Brood of vipers! Who warned you*

*to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin 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 to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Luke 3:7-9).

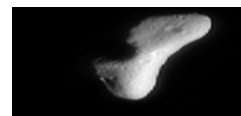
Repentance was the theme of his message. He told them that their ancestry, no matter how good, would not save them. Today, an individual’s church affiliation will not save him. It is bearing fruit that counts. What are some of those fruits?

*So the people asked Him, saying, “What shall we do then?” He answered and said to them, “He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.” Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And He said to them, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you.” Likewise the soldiers asked Him, saying, “And what shall we do?” So He said to them, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.... And with many other exhortations He preached to the people (Luke 3:10-14, 18).*

He teaches them to help the poor—people who really don’t have a tunic. (This is different than giving to a charity business that might keep most of the money or give it to con artists who are experts in asking for tunics—we need to be involved.) John does not tell people working for the possibly corrupt governments and military to quit their jobs, but to do them honestly. Indeed, some governments, both then and now, do not pay certain law enforcement people enough for a good living because they expect them to get money on the side from dishonest enforcement. John said that it should not be so. Today, there are many believers who work in governments and businesses that do corrupt and sinful things. What should we do?

Did John the Baptist live by what he preached? Yes. He must have helped the poor with anything extra he had—his clothes and food were very basic (Matthew 3:4). When it came to telling the truth, John declared the sins of the rulers and their wives, which eventually landed him in prison and later caused him to be beheaded (Luke 3:19-20; Mark 6:16-29).

Today, we need to live by what we preach. Are we using our resources to help the poor and preach the gospel? Or are we consumed with materialism like the rest of the world? Are we preaching the peace of God in the millennium, but not living in peace with our families, church and friends now? Do we pray when we have struggles, or do we turn to pills, alcohol or food? Are our family relationships pure and holy or do we fall pray to pornography and soap-operas? Do our church groups picture the just and peaceful millennial rule of Christ, or are they filled with leaders contending for money, power and secret sins? Do they answer matters without hearing both sides, in a way that is politically expedient? When tribulation and heavenly signs arrive, is the Body of Christ ready to preach the Gospel and show unbelievers God’s way in spite of the suffering that is upon the world? Or will we have our prophecy charts out and be trying to escape the troubles just like everyone else?



The church needs to be ready. When the meteors roared through Russia, some people thought it was the end of the world. They were scared. They were remorseful. They were, at least for a short time, ready for a round of repentance. Of course, secular leaders were quick to assure them that this is simply a “cosmic coincidence”—nothing to do with any sort of God. So what is the church doing today? Many people are stocking food, water and other supplies for tough times ahead. Is anyone stocking Bibles or Gospel tracts?

It is not over. There are more signs and more to learn.

Are More Signs in the Heavens Coming?

The short answer is “yes.” We read about the meteors above, but there are solar storms, comets and eclipses on the way—significant ones. Here are some that this writer and his friend, Jeffrey Caldwell have found from various sources:

Date	Sign in the Heavens
Now	As this issues goes to press a very large sunspot has formed on our sun—about six “earth widths” across. (see photo) This is as large as they normally get. This type of spot often ejects huge solar flares, which expel lots of charged particles producing beautiful Northern lights. They can also knock out satellites and power grids. There is usually only a brief warning with these—we must trust God and wait and see. More info: <a href="http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/sdo/news/fastgrowing-sunspot.html">http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/sdo/news/fastgrowing-sunspot.html</a>
Mar - April 2013	The Comet PANSTARRS is already in the sights of telescopes and will probably become visible with the unaided eye when it is close to the sun. It will be best seen in the northern hemisphere, a little after sunset. PANSTARRS may never have been in our solar system before and is not likely to be back for at least another 100,000 years. More info: <a href="http://earthsky.org/space/comet-panstarrs-possibly-visible-to-eye-in-march-2013">http://earthsky.org/space/comet-panstarrs-possibly-visible-to-eye-in-march-2013</a>
Nov – Dec 2013	Comet Ison is named after Russia’s International Scientific Optical Network’s 40cm telescope that discovered it. Because it will pass so close to the sun, it may become the brightest comet of the century—even brighter than the moon. On the other hand, the heating and gravitational effects may cause it to break apart, diminishing its brilliance. But if it holds together, it will brighten the night sky near sunrise/sunset and even be visible during the day time—especially if one uses a device to block out the sun. More info: <a href="http://www.cinemablend.com/pop/Comet-ISON-May-Visible-Daylight-2013-50858.html">http://www.cinemablend.com/pop/Comet-ISON-May-Visible-Daylight-2013-50858.html</a>
Apr 15, 2014	A total <u>lunar</u> eclipse on the <b>First Day of Unleavened Bread</b> . This causes the moon to be blood red—from light rays refracted around the earth. The same principle that causes red skies at sunrise and sunset. More info for the rest of the entries in this table: <a href="http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/lunar.html">http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/lunar.html</a> <a href="http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/solar.html">http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/solar.html</a>
Oct 8, 2014	A total <u>lunar</u> eclipse on the <b>First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles</b> , complete with blood red moon, as above.
Mar 20, 2015	A total <u>solar</u> eclipse on the <b>First Day of the biblical year</b> (or the last day of the previous year according to some calendar reckonings). The sun will be completely darkened by the moon passing in front of it. At least part of the eclipse will be seen from northern Africa, Europe, northern Asia, Iceland and Greenland. It will be visible from the Nation of Israel.
Apr 4, 2015	A total <u>lunar</u> eclipse on the <b>First Day of Unleavened Bread</b> , a second year in a row with a blood red moon. This one will only last about five minutes, compared to the hour length of the other three. But if the skies are clear, it will be visible.
Sept 28, 2015	A total <u>lunar</u> eclipse on the <b>First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles</b> , again with a blood-red moon.
Mar 9, 2016	An annular <u>solar</u> eclipse on the <b>First Day of the biblical year</b> . One can still see the sun around the edges of the moon. This eclipse will be at least partly seen from southeast Asia, Australia and the Pacific (including Hawaii).
Sept 1, 2016	An annular <u>solar</u> eclipse—on the <b>Feast of Trumpets</b> by some observations of the biblical calendar. This eclipse will be at least partly visible from Africa and the Indian Ocean. The country of Israel is on the edge of its visibility.

From this writer’s study of the NASA eclipse data, there has never been such a concentration of eclipses on biblical Feast Days since the time of Christ. Even after reading about all of these forecasts of science, we must realize that our Father is capable and willing to change them, as He did with the 48-hour day in Joshua’s time and the turning back the shadow on Hezekiah’s sun dial 10 degrees. If He does choose to alter the known orbits of heavenly bodies, it will certainly grab the attention of the scientific world! But who can know what God will do? These signs could be simply small precursor signs to great miraculous signs yet unknown.



All of these will fulfill the purpose of heavenly signs. They are things that people cannot ignore. We all see the heavenly bodies, and we know that they are beyond mankind's total control. Sure, there are plans to change the course of big asteroids that might collide with earth, but if God wants to bring one here, it will come in spite of what mankind does. And when the sun gets dark, or the moon goes red, these are signs that no-one can ignore.

### Not a Package Tour

This article was written in the hope that everyone will not fear the heavenly signs or the future, but start now to repent of their own sins, live a righteous life, and confidently trust God to take care of them. A secondary purpose is helping people avoid the snares of the thousands of prophecy teachings, books and videos available today. Many of them go into great detail, representing thousands of hours of work on the part of their authors. They relate hundreds of scriptures to past and future world events, including heavenly signs. Most seem very well thought out, very logical. They are all different. Only one, but probably none, of them can be right

There is generally quite a bit of pressure, from others as well as ourselves, to either accept the whole prophetic package as "inspired" or "not". Indeed, being a member of some churches requires that one accept their particular prophetic scenario.

These prophetic packages might remind one of **package tours** available from travel agents: A customer reviews the package, and if it is agreeable, pays the single price and goes wherever the tour goes, accepting the travel, lodging, food, sightseeing and entertainment that comes along. Sometimes, the actual tour is very much like what was promised, but other times, it is very different—and disappointing. How does one find out before one goes? By talking with people who have taken the same travel agents package tours in the past!

When we study someone's prophetic package, do we rely on how good it looks and sounds, or do we look to see

how accurate the prophetic interpreter has been in the past? This writer has done some research on prophetic teachers and talked with many others who have done the same. He does not know of anyone's 20-year-old prophecy book or video that one can obtain and find all of the author's prophetic interpretations have come to pass. Writers of prophetic packages seem to all either have a bad track record or no track record.

Indeed, the teaching of the New Testament and the purpose of God is not to put forth hundreds of prophetic packages and see which believers find the "right one" so that they can know what is happening and go to all the "good places" during the troubled times. If such a thing were available, Satan, his demons and their human followers would have the information as well. Rather, the teaching of the New Testament is each believer is being prepared to reign with Christ and needs to personally develop the faith to trust God in times of trial. Indeed, we might think about whether there is a completed prophecy package detailing the return of Christ available in heaven right now as this is one of the very few secrets that the Father has kept from the Son:

*"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"* (Mark 13:32).

*And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority"* (Acts 1:7).

The truth of the matter is that all prophecy is fulfilled based upon whether or not people repent. God will still fulfill His prophecies, but He may choose to do it in different ways, based upon what billions of people may or may not decide to do. We realize this could get very complicated, but that is why He is God and we are not: Notice the principle, an example of penalties delayed, and an example of past penalties delivered:

*"The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to*

*destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it"* (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

*"See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house"* (1 Kings 21:29).

*"That on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation"* (Matthew 23:35-36).

Yes, God has a lot of flexibility in prophecy. He can fulfill it in a literal number of days, or a day for a year, or some other way. The Bible prophesies blood-red moons to come. But what will that represent? Will it be the blood of mankind about to be spilled as nations go to war? Or will it be multitudes of people accepting the blood of Christ for their sins? We could ask the same questions about many other symbols.

We can know for sure that the signs in the heavens are not a cosmic coincidence, but the divine decrees of our Father in heaven. We do not need to know exactly what they mean in advance, but we do need to be ready in the way that the Bible instructs:

1. Do not be afraid of the signs.
2. Repent of our personal sins and ask Christ to make us clean.
3. Help those less fortunate than ourselves.
4. Trust God to speak directly to us for deliverance from tribulation
5. Teach others all of the above.

May our Father in heaven bless your future! May you be encouraged by and ready for His signs along the way!



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