

PROVIDENCE IN THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST • APPOINTMENT IN THE COLD • GROUND ZERO

FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2001
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Celebrating the Joy
of the Season

Empowered Witnesses Conference

*But ye shall receive power . . .
unto the uttermost part of the earth.
(Acts 1:8)*

Revival Power to the Ends of the Earth

Over and over in the Book of Acts we read that God's people were filled with the Spirit and then spake the Word of God with boldness. We read of divine magnetism drawing multitudes to hear the Word of God. We read of people being saved daily. With great blessing, at times came great persecution, but Acts 1:8 was being fulfilled. Amazingly, much of this blessing occurred in pagan territory where there was not a Christian background. How did this take place?

Jesus, the Head of the church, sent His Spirit as the Lord of the harvest, calling out a people for His name. The early church experienced the power of the Almighty because they were rightly related to Jesus Christ and they were rightly related to the Holy Spirit. The promise of the Spirit and the promise of the harvest hold fast today. We are still in the church age. We are still in the age of the Spirit, which is the age of power—Book of Acts level power!

Join us in the Empowered Witnesses Conference as we seek the Lord to reveal our unbelief, which has so enfeebled the modern church, and look unto Jesus that He, through His Spirit, might cultivate faith in our hearts. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth." May the Spirit open our eyes to all that He means by this promise. May we depend on it, to know revival power to the ends of the earth!

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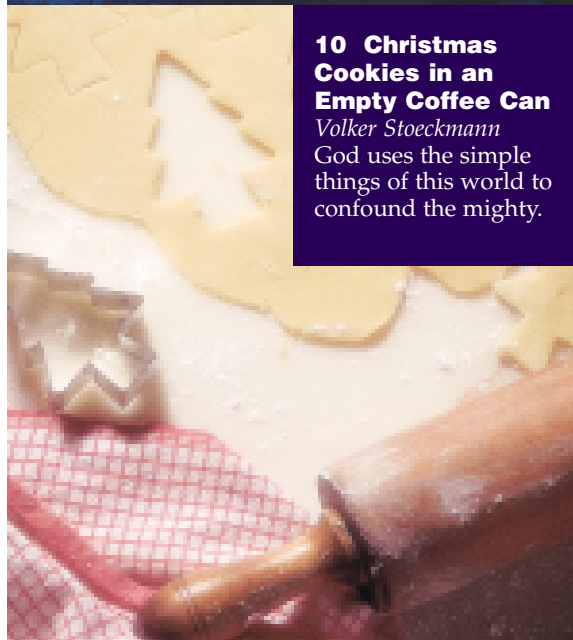
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Mail Bag

Thank you for putting out a first-class magazine. The magazine subscription was a Christmas present from my fiancé (now wife), and it has turned out to be quite a good gift, which I enjoy reading from cover to cover. I'll pray that the Lord will continue to bless.

*David Pittman
Champaign, IL*

We so appreciate your magazine and the helpful and timely articles. They have been a great asset to my ministry. Please keep up the good work.

*Pastor Lloyd Penberthy
Hallstead, PA*

We are looking at various types of items to include in a Ministry Resource Center that we are planning to open in November. It looks like the time of the September/October issue might be a good time to start.

*Ted Graham
Parma, OH*

I have recently joined a Missionary Baptist church and acquired the November/December 1998 issue of *Frontline* magazine. I read your editorial [Behind the Lines]. . . I am sorry to say that I was truly deeply offended by it. . . As I read the Word of God, it does appear to imply that the pope is the antichrist, but it does not say specifically that. . . It appears to me that there is lots of room for the antichrist himself to

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You may request that your letter not be published or that your name be withheld, but anonymous letters will not be accepted.

repent and turn to God. . . It appears to me that you need to repent.

*Barbara D. Schultz
Burlington, Ontario
CANADA*

Thank you for the excellent work and articles FBFi publishes in *Frontline*.

*David Trepanier
Rochester Hills, MI*

I went to the FBFi web site today, wanting to read some articles or sermons on Fundamentalism, but really couldn't find any. . . I recommend that the FBF web site post some clearly labeled articles or sermons explaining what a Christian Fundamentalist really is. . . After all, this web site has the word "fundamental" as part of its address, but where are the articles describing the meaning of the term?

*Pastor John Leonard
Yuma, AZ*

Thanks so much for the fine work that you are doing. May God bless you as you continue to try to present educational, thought-provoking, edifying articles to fundamental Baptists around the world.

*Dr. John Brock
Watertown, WI*

We look forward to receiving each issue of the magazine and appreciate all the work that you do.

*Beverly Dowdy
Olathe, KS*

We really enjoy *Frontline* magazine. Mr. & Mrs. E. W. Ellenwood
Rochester, IN

We greatly appreciate this excellent magazine and hope that you can continue to publish it.

*Mark E. Batory
Greenville, SC*

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King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Is the Lord Jesus Christ who He claims to be or is He an imposter? Does He have the crown rights to the royal throne? Let's examine the chronicles of time to see what has been recorded concerning Him.

The history of the world records mighty empires that have risen and vanished, leaving nothing but ruins. Kings, emperors, and rulers have appeared, wise yet wicked, dynamic yet destructive, and have passed from the earthly scene, leaving for the future nothing except a tarnished name. There is a King who has come, who is the perfection of all true kingly virtues. A few kings of the earth have been righteous, noble and kind, but the Word of God speaks of One who outshines them all. The earthly reign of kings is short and controlled by circumstances. The reign of God's King is universal and eternal.

The kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ is clearly seen in the study of Christology of the Bible. His kingship is attested to by prophets and apostles. Many modernists and skeptics deny the direct prophecies of Christ as King; however, those who love and obey Him have no difficulty accepting Him as the earth's sovereign King who has the royal rights to rule in righteousness.

The essence of Messianic belief was the coming of a personal Deliverer who would unite in Himself the Old Testament office of Prophet, Priest, and King. In all three offices, Christ is manifested to perfection, and all spring from His person and His work. He is the Prophet who reveals, the Priest who offers and intercedes, and the King who rules. In His person all three offices are

co-mingled. He rules by His sacrifice and His teaching. He reveals by His kingship and life.

Abraham was singled out as the father of the race from which the divine King should come (Gen. 12:1-3). His dominion was prophesied by Jacob, that the scepter should not depart until Shiloh come (Gen. 49:8-10). To the prophet the Babe to be born of a virgin was to be the Prince of Peace, the King who would reign in righteousness, whose kingdom would be forever (Isa. 9:6-9; 11:1-10; 2:1-4). Micah foretold the coming of Jesus out of Bethlehem with strength and majesty. He would not only be a present Savior from sin, but the King of Israel whose going forth had been from eternity past (Mic. 5:2-4).

The Old Testament provides us with a prophetic portrait of the kingship of Christ. The New Testament presents us with His personal history as the King. The outline in Old Testament prophecy is complete in New Testament history. His kingship is woven into the texture of the New Testament. Matthew names Christ as King some 14 times; Mark, six times; Luke, five times; John, 14 times. Confirming Old Testament Scriptures referring to Christ's coming as King and His kingdom as everlasting, Gabriel announced to Mary that of her Son's reign "there should be no end" (Luke 1:26-33).

Christ was born a King. His kingship was recognized by the wise men who in their offerings represented the firstfruits of the Gentile world. The Lord Jesus Christ was born King, seeing He was King

before His birth at Bethlehem. He came as "The King Eternal" (1 Tim. 1:17). He died as "The King of the Jews" (John 19:3, 12, 21). Pilate asked, "Art thou a king then?" Jesus did not say, "No," but "Thou sayest I am a king. To this end was I born" (John 18:37). He died in agony amidst the taunts of the godless crowd who failed to see in this blood-spattered man "The King!"

In His resurrection, Christ claims His kingship. He overcame Satan and death, hell and the grave, and He is alive forevermore, sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on High. The predominant aspects of Christ in the book of Revelation is that of His kingship. He is supreme in every realm and reigns without a rival. He is proclaimed as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

He has never abdicated the throne; He has never relinquished His royal rights! He has every right today to claim the absolute kingship over His subjects. Our loyalty is to Christ the King first of all. Every other loyalty is secondary, and if there is any conflict between loyalty to Christ and loyalty to any earthly king or edict, we are to ignore that human loyalty and give our loyalty fully, unreservedly, and absolutely to Jesus Christ. He has every claim and right

to be the sole Head and King of our life, our home, and the church. Where is He that is King of the Jews in our lives today? Is He king or has some enemy usurped His authority and His rightful place on the throne of our heart?



DR. ROD BELL

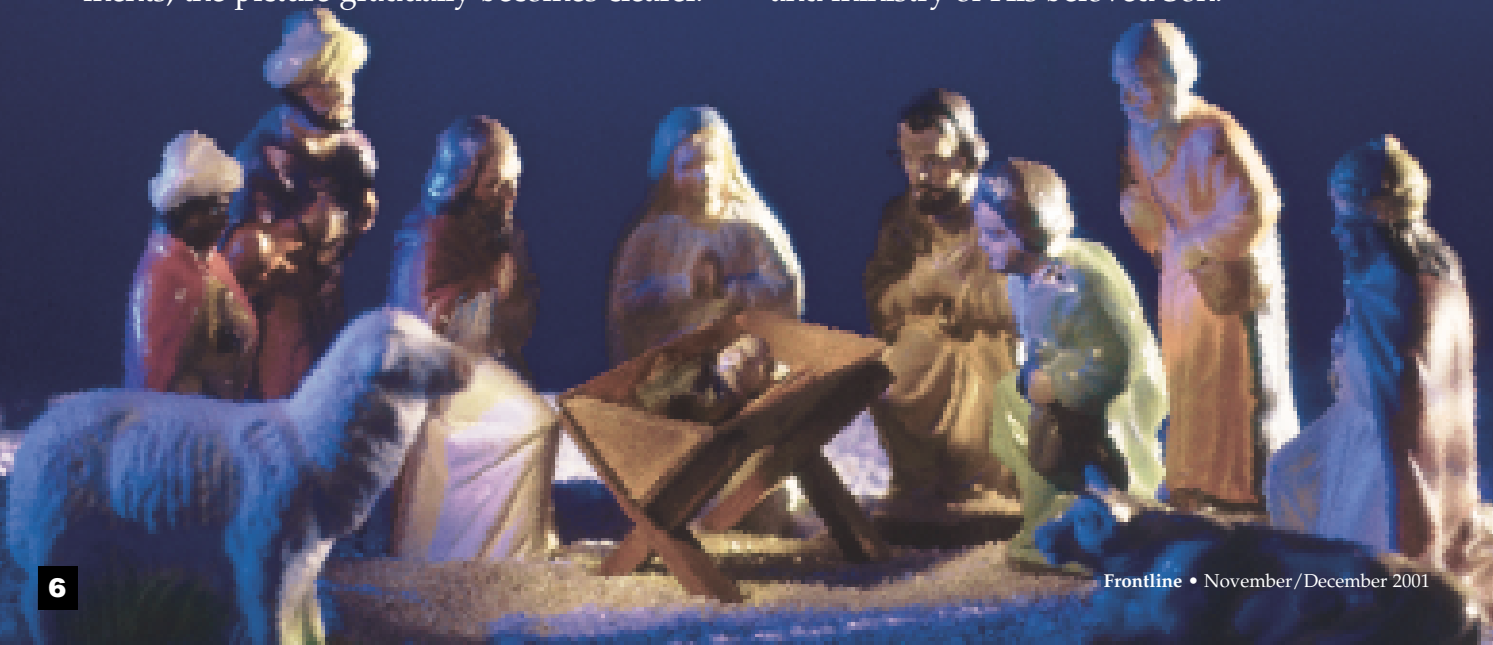
Providence in the Incarnation of Christ

Layton Talbert

The following is an excerpt from a newly published book, *Not by Chance: Learning to Trust a Sovereign God* (Greenville, S.C.: BJU Press, 2001).

Pieces of a jigsaw puzzle make little sense by themselves. Each by itself is unfinished, incomplete. Each raises questions that can be answered only as it is fitted into its proper connection to the other pieces. As you begin interlocking the many individual fragments, the picture gradually becomes clearer.

Because God is God and we are finite, some pieces to the puzzle He has purposely withheld, retaining their secrets in His hand. But He has granted enough of the puzzle for us to form very definite and clear ideas about the nature and working of His providence. You can see many different parts to this puzzle pieced together in the events and lives recorded in the Bible. But God saved the crowning works of His providence for the incarnation and ministry of His beloved Son.



God providentially “set the stage” for the entrance of His Son into the world. Nothing was overlooked, no expense was spared. But the preparation for this grand drama was not the work of a few weeks or months or years. God’s preparation for the “fulness of time” (Gal. 4:4) was literally centuries (and in the broader sense, millennia) in the making. This divine casting and staging encompassed social, political, religious, and even philosophical elements; it ranged from individual to international preparations; and it included both broadly circumstantial and intimately personal issues. Some of these details are explicitly outlined in Scripture. Others are discovered only as we look at the textbook of history.

What Does History Reveal?

History is the illustrated encyclopedia of God’s providence. Upon its pages the observant eye can trace the outline of the invisible hand of God. “To the believer the ‘amazing coincidences’ of history are but manifestations of God’s intervention for His omniscient, benevolent purposes.”¹

Providence in Politics

The groundwork for the dominance of a single, amalgamating political influence had been laid with each successive world empire over the centuries: Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman. By and large, each empire extended the borders of the previous one and expanded the number of provinces and peoples brought under its influence. The unprecedented size of the Roman Empire was, therefore, centuries in the making, and God clearly had an eye to this end throughout the millennium preceding the birth of Christ. Rome at peace (*Pax Romana*, the period during which Christ was born) provided ideal circumstances for the spread of the message of God’s coming into the world.

Providence in Commerce

In order to transport troops and transfer information more efficiently, the Roman Empire devised an unprecedented system of communication and transportation. That is the human side. The divine side is that God (through the free choices of men ignorant of Him and His purposes) directed the building of this system in order to facilitate the movement of His armies and ambassadors for the communication of His message.² The Romans constructed a brilliantly engineered network of roads, some of which survive to this day, which made accessible the farthest reaches of the known and conquered world. The Romans also put into place an efficient postal system, which eventually expedited the spread of God’s correspondence to man through the revelation of the New Testament.

Providence in Language

A single universal language throughout the empire was the enduring legacy of Alexander the Great’s conquest

three centuries before the birth of Christ. The introduction and establishment of Greek as the common language throughout the known world likewise enormously facilitated the widespread and rapid communication of the gospel. But providence also made use of that linguistic unity in another respect.

God’s Old Testament revelation was given in Hebrew—a language essentially limited to one important but very small nation. With the introduction and establishment of Greek as the *lingua franca* came another vital preparatory work on the part of God—the translation of God’s Hebrew Old Testament revelation into a universally accessible language: Greek. This translation (called the Septuagint), produced over a period of about a century (250–150 B.C.), introduced the self-revelation of God to the world at large. It became the Bible of Christ and the apostles, the Bible of the writers of the New Testament, and the Old Testament of the early church.

Why was this significant? “The Septuagint had, in the providence of God, a great and honorable part to play in preparing the world for the Gospel.”³ It is not too much to say that “Greek Judaism, with the Septuagint, ploughed the furrows for the gospel seed in the Western world.”⁴ Because of its ubiquitous presence throughout the known world, the Septuagint “paved the way for later Christian missions” as “the Christian missionaries were able to discover a ready point of contact wherever there had already spread a

knowledge of the Old Testament.”⁵

What Does the Bible Say?

We’ve taken a brief survey of what the history books have to say about God’s providence in preparing the world for His Son. Let’s now turn our attention to evidences more directly mentioned in the Scriptural accounts of the Incarnation. Notice the implications of providence at work in the narration of the crucial events leading up to the birth of Messiah.

The Timing of Zacharias’s Lot (Luke 1:9)

The burning of the incense was an unusual honor that few priests enjoyed since their duties were assigned by lot. In fact, “the offering of incense was considered the highest duty and could be exercised only once in a lifetime.”⁶ Zacharias might have been selected by lot early in his life and never again have had opportunity to perform for that ministry. But by the choice of Providence, “for the first, and for the last time in life the lot had marked him for incensing” at *this* particular time.⁷ As we learn from the study of Esther, God providentially governs the “chances” of lots and their timing. The timing and location of the angelic announcement to Zacharias at the temple guaranteed a public announcement and widespread anticipation of the coming of Messiah’s forerunner and, hence, of the coming of Messiah.

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illustrated
encyclopedia
of God’s
providence.”

The Conception and Birth of John (Luke 1:5–7, 24–25, 57–66)

How long before the angel's temple appearance to Zacharias do you suppose this godly old couple had given up praying for a child? Not only had Elisabeth been barren all her life, but also "they both were now well stricken in years" (Luke 1:7). They obviously had long since ceased praying for a child. Did their prayers fail or, more importantly, had God failed to answer their prayer? Absolutely not. The answer, however, did not come in the timing they had hoped or in the way they had anticipated, but far beyond all their expectation. It is a happy "coincidence" that Zacharias means "the LORD remembers." Even his name was providentially appropriate. Zacharias may have forgotten the prayers he had offered in his early manhood, but God did not.

The Conception of Jesus (Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38)

The timing of this event was crucial. It came *after* the betrothal so that it would not disqualify her for betrothal, but *before* the marriage so that the Child was clearly not Joseph's (Matt. 1:18). Has it ever occurred to you that God could have forewarned Joseph (by angel or dream), just as He had informed Mary ahead of time, that the birth of this child was coming? Instead, God permitted Joseph to discover Mary's pregnancy on his own before explaining it to him. Think of the pain to Joseph, who had no reasonable alternative but to suspect a devastating immoral betrayal. But think also of the pain to poor, pure Mary, who was naturally suspected, by the very one whom she would never betray, of having done something she would never do.

Why did God do it this way? Why could He not have told Mary *and* Joseph ahead of time? This arrangement was essential in order to providentially preserve the validity of the event and the unclouded identity of the Child. The announcement to Mary was obviously necessary to prepare her for what was about to happen to her, and why and how. At the same time, it was essential for Joseph to have no previous knowledge of Mary's pregnancy whatsoever. Imagine the suspicion that would have been easily aroused if both Mary *and* Joseph had prior knowledge of this. ("So, you *both* had a dream that God was sending this child? Right. How convenient.") Moreover, it was necessary for Joseph to decide to keep the matter quiet rather than drawing the attention of a public accusation and shame beyond all repair of the event's credibility.

The Ordering of the Census (Luke 2:1–6)

God used a pagan emperor's issuing of a census that inconvenienced a massive population in order to bring one special couple to a birthplace prophesied seven centuries earlier (Micah 5:2). Why did God not simply direct Joseph to take Mary down to Bethlehem for the birth, along with all the other revelation and direction He gave through dreams and angels? Why did God instead employ

the free act of Caesar Augustus's census to relocate them?

The census decree magnifies God's providence in human affairs and decisions. Dreams and angelic appearances can be fabricated. Again, think of the suspicions that would naturally arise were Joseph to have claimed that God told him to go to Bethlehem for the birth of this child that was supposed to be the prophesied Messiah. ("Another dream, eh? To go to Bethlehem? My, my, wasn't that a coincidence.") The key events of the Incarnation were supernaturally revealed and guided, but the Scripture-fulfilling details of its outworking were left to divine providence working mysteriously through the free acts of men, in order to preserve the integrity of the event.

That way, no one could accuse Joseph of fabricating a "messiah" by simply moving to Bethlehem for the birth and alleging its fulfillment of Micah 5:2. The providential means employed to accomplish these events transcended human contrivance. "A mere Galilean peasant travels to Bethlehem ostensibly at the decree of the Roman emperor. Actually, it is in fulfillment of the divine King's plan."⁸

The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:6–7)

God's providences come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they take the form of God's extra touches—exquisite but ultimately "unnecessary" brushstrokes to the overall canvas that give pleasure to the sovereign Artisan and evoke in the careful observer a deepened admiration for His skill. Because there was no room in the inn, Mary was compelled to lay the Bread of Life in a feeding trough in a town named "House of Bread" (Bethlehem).

The Shepherds (Luke 2:8–20)

The divinely ordained presence of shepherds at the birth of the Lamb of God (John 1:29) who would Himself become God's Good Shepherd (John 10) over His people Israel (Ezek. 34:22–25; 37:24; Isa. 40:11) is not without significance. Indeed, these "shepherds watched the flocks destined for sacrificial services" in the temple nearby⁹—the very sacrifices that Christ came to fulfill. They became the first evangelists to spread abroad the good news relayed to them about the birth and identity of the long-awaited Messiah.

Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25–38)

Often the presence of providence is wrapped in the subtlest details of the sacred text. God promised Simeon that he would see the promised Messiah before he died and then providentially led him "by the Spirit" into the temple at the very moment of the Child's dedication. Likewise, the subtly described arrival of godly Anna, "coming in that instant," was also providentially timed.

The Magi (Matt. 2:1–12)

Elements of providence connected with the Magi include a number of factors: the providential preservation of the knowledge of God's prophecy in their distant

"Because there was no room in the inn, Mary was compelled to lay the Bread of Life in a feeding trough in a town named 'House of Bread' (Bethlehem)."

Gentile society; the appearance of the star at the appropriate place and time to bring the Magi to the Christ-child; the fact that the star did not lead them directly to Bethlehem but allowed them to go first to Jerusalem, which resulted in a public announcement of the event and the citation of the prophecy of Micah in the court of Herod; the dream warning them not to return to Herod so as to gain time and protection for the Child.

Herod's Massacre of the Infants (Matt. 2:13–23)

Sometimes what does *not* happen is as providentially significant as what *does* happen. Since Herod was so bent on destroying the Child, why did he *not* send spies after the Magi to report His location, rather than trusting the Magi to return? Providence. Not only did the sad and gruesome massacre of the infants in Bethlehem fulfill prophecy, but it also led to the holy family's flight into and return from Egypt in providential fulfillment of another prophecy. And note the eloquent statement of providential control over the wrath of man: Herod *put to death* all the male children (Matt. 2:16), but when *Herod was dead*, an angel of the Lord instructed Joseph to return, "for they are dead that sought the young child's life" (Matt. 2:19–20).

Drawing Conclusions

What ramifications does God's providential rule over nations and empires have for modern national and international circumstances? If God superintended all the affairs of politics and commerce, culture and philosophy in preparation for His Son's first coming into the world, we can be sure He is overseeing the preparation for His Son's second coming into the world. What personal lessons and applications can you draw from such examples of God's providence over the broadest aspects of "secular" society?

Embedded in the incarnation narrative is an astounding assertion. Luke 1:37 is immortalized in the words: "For with God nothing shall be impossible." But the verse more literally reads, "For with God every saying is not impossible"—or as we would say, "with God no saying is impossible." Luke 1:37, then, is not so much a general assertion of God's omnipotence (that He can do anything). It is more

specific than that. It is an assurance that He is fully able to and intent on performing every "saying"—every prophecy and promise He has ever uttered. If God has said it, He can and will do it—no matter how improbable it may seem or how impossible it may sound. Remember the context—the biological impossibility of the virgin birth! This angelic testimony to God's trustworthiness is timeless because God's character is unchanging. The assurance of Luke 1:37 is just as applicable today to His "sayings" to you in the Bible.

Dr. Layton Talbert is a Frontline Contributing Editor and a member of the faculty at Bob Jones Memorial Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina.

Endnotes

- ¹ Edward Panosian, *The Providence of God in History* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1996), p. 13.
- ² "God worked out the framework of the Roman Empire so that it was a prepared world for a prepared revelation. . . . The apex of human achievement since the Flood was the century of Rome's transition from republic to empire. Under Rome there was one world, one language, one road system, one rule, one citizenship. It was an empire of cities. Do you know that after the fall of Rome there was not to be a Europe of cities for some eleven centuries? What is the significance of cities? Rapid communication of new ideas among great numbers of people. Great numbers heard a new message—the gospel of Jesus Christ—at one time. The preparation of the Roman world for the coming of Christ involved natural circumstances through which God was working out His omnipotent will" (Panosian, pp. 14–15).
- ³ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), p. 162.
- ⁴ Adolf Deissmann, *New Light on the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908), p. 95.
- ⁵ Alfred Rahlfs, "History of the Septuagint Text" in *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart, 1979), LVII.
- ⁶ J. W. Shephard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), p. i.
- ⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 137.
- ⁸ Walter L. Liefeld, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary vol. 8* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 843.
- ⁹ Edersheim, p. 187.



Trusted Voices on Translations

If you are searching for help on the translation issue, a sampling of testimonies from some trusted voices of the past is available in this insightful 12-page pamphlet. In it you will find chronologically arranged testimonials from the translators of the King James Version to the 1995 resolution of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International. Included are quotes from C.H. Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, G. Campbell Morgan, F. B. Meyer, Alexander Maclaren, C. I. Scofield, and more than 20 others.

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Christmas Cookies in an Empty Coffee Can

I sat listening intently as a middle-aged widow, the mother of four, taught us Bible stories in her broken English. She made the Bible come to life for my impressionable young mind as she pulled figures of Moses, Daniel, Ruth, John the Baptist, and the Christ-child out from the pages of her Bible and placed them on the flannel board. Her ministry in the basement of the little red brick church was invaluable to me. It was more than just a flannel-graph lesson that I was able to observe; it was the life of a godly woman earnestly serving the Lord through less-than-ideal circumstances. Raising preschool- and primary-aged daughters along with two sons in their early teens was not any easy life, but I never remember having a substitute teacher in the "Sunbeam Club" as she called it—she was always there. Week after week she would sing choruses with us, help us memorize verses, and tell us about Christ. She molded our hearts while others offered uninterrupted prayer in the auditorium above us at the midweek prayer service.

As I grew older her impact on my life began to take a different form. Her English hadn't changed much, and she was still working in the children's ministries, but I now watched her life as a mother of preacher boys in Bible college. Her faith in the provisions of God for her family became as visible to me as those flannelgraph stories she used to pull from her Bible. Year after year until all of them graduated, her children enrolled in an institution

that was preparing them to live and serve the Lord. In her example of trusting God, I have had what I like to think of as my own widow of Zarephath. Oh, I'm sure in those years of Wednesday evening "Sunbeam Club" she taught me of Zarephath's widow, but once again it was now more than just a lesson—it was her life that was "bringing the lesson home." I was soon to head off to Bible college myself, and I had no reason to question that God would provide for my needs after what I had watched this widow go through.

It was during my own years in Bible college and for nearly a decade and a half since my graduation that this modern-day widow of Zarephath was and continues to be a source of tremendous blessing during the Christmas season. Every year my family (along with dozens of other individuals and families) receives a foil-wrapped coffee can filled with a delicious assortment of homemade cookies. These gifts have made their way into the homes of church and school staff, large families where needs might be more pressing, single mothers whose time constraints might keep them from baking, and also the often overlooked population of our land—those in nursing homes.

The labor of love I have watched over these many years is unfathomable for our fast-paced, selfish society. Today I sit astounded as I contemplate the details I've learned from a friend concerning this widow's baking marathon. She begins long before the Thanksgiving holiday as she kneads, rolls, and cuts hundreds of cookies. Some years the process starts as early as late September with the actual baking efforts (not to mention the months

prior to this when her purchasing begins). Her work doesn't take place in a spacious kitchen with long counters, a center island, and fast-baking ovens. I've been in her home and remember it well—it's a bungalow built back in the late '30s when the kitchens were barely large enough to turn around in. But what's more meaningful to me is how much she represents the widow of Zarephath's faith. She's now on a senior's fixed income, and yet the cookie mill hasn't stopped. It's as if the barrel of meal in her kitchen "wastes not" and the cruse of oil on her counter "never fails." Each Christmas season she uses over 100 lbs. of flour, 50 lbs. each of butter and sugar, 5 lbs. of baking chocolate, 25–30 bags of chocolate chips, 25 lbs. of nuts, 4 lbs. of honey, and 6 lbs. of shortening to bake those delicious morsels we all enjoy.

Now two of my own children are of the age that I was when she was my teacher. I caught myself wishing they could have her as a teacher . . . and then stopped to realize that they do. Although she's not teaching them with Bible stories and flannelgraphs, she is teaching them with each foil-wrapped coffee can that makes its way to our home. The lessons about faith, sacrifice, and service are taught with every cookie they sample. Learning also that God takes the simple things of this world (like a widow and her coffee cans full of cookies) to confound the mighty. Do you think my widow of Zarephath realizes how far-reaching her "come to life" Bible lessons have been?

Volker Stoeckmann is pastor of Airport Road Baptist Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

The Tradition Continues...



*Jesus Christ, the ultimate Servant, made Himself of no reputation.
Kneeling as a slave before house guests,
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and began to wash the disciples' feet,
and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded" (John 13:5).*

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Appointment in the Cold

fiction by Adam Blumer

Shortly after we reached the cabin, clouds rolled in, just as the Weather Channel had predicted, and wet snow begun to parachute to the earth below, causing havoc with the roads and power lines. When Tami's parents had given us the weekend stay at the cabin as an anniversary present, I had wanted to cash in the gift sometime in the spring after our annual missions conference. But Tami and the kids had other plans.

"We'll have Christmas there—just the four of us." Tami's eyes had danced like a little girl's. "Oh, Mark, it'll be so much fun. We'll unplug the phone and

watch *White Christmas* on the VCR. Won't it be nice just to cuddle in front of the fire?"

Thanks to the lake-effect snow, it was obvious we would be spending more than a weekend here. And by most standards, we were in the wilderness. How long would it be before the snow plows ventured to dig us out?

"I hope they never come!" Mandie, my seven-year-old daughter, piped up. She and I peered out the window at the fairy-tale world that was looking more menacing by the moment. "Then we can stay here forever," added Brady, my ten-year-old son, "and make snowmen with Daddy."

After the power went out, we huddled around the wood-burning stove and ate steaming hotdogs and beans, our faces illumined by kerosene lanterns. Enthralled by the novelty of our predicament and not forgetting that it was Christmas Eve, Brady and Mandie fell into a camping mood and insisted that we roast marshmallows over the glowing coals. Tami and I had just kissed the kids goodnight and tucked them into their beds in the immense cedar loft when we heard the ear-splitting crash that would alter our Christmas getaway.

"I think it came from the road." Tami pulled on her housecoat, as if that would be sufficient cover to brave the cold.

"No, you just stay here. Maybe the wind knocked a tree over. I'll check it out."

Leaving the porch, I sank thigh-deep in snow, my legs straining for every foot. Gripping a flashlight in one gloved hand, I came across a small would-be Christmas tree buried up to its topmost branches and worked my way around it. I tried to figure out where I was, but every familiar landmark had vanished. The driveway had disappeared long ago, obscured by the drifts that shifted and rolled at the whim of the wind. The trees appeared to be fine, but I feared a car



may have crashed into one of them, though it seemed unlikely that a motorist would be out in these conditions. Then again, a lot of city slickers like us went to cabins during the wintertime.

I almost didn't see the car. It lay half-buried in a snowdrift, its headlights creating two bright glows only inches beneath the snow—like a UFO about to rise eerily from the deep. Where the front passenger side of the car should have been stood a tree, the crushed body hugging it in an expensive embrace. I didn't see any little green men, just two little boys in the backseat, their frightened eyes staring back at me. Then I noticed the glow of a flashlight off to my right and watched a man emerge from the drifts. He wore a thick ski suit, black gloves, and a Cubs baseball cap pulled down almost to his nose.

The man grimly surveyed at the damage. "Hit a deer. Tried to miss it but hit the deer and a tree too."

"Our cabin is back there a ways." I pointed vaguely toward the trees, assured of my bearings now that I had found the road. "You can call a tow truck. While you're waiting, we could fix up some hot cocoa. How does that sound?"

"Name's Matt Tyler." Matt shook my hand. "I guess we have no other choice." In spite of the snowdrift, he managed to open one of the rear doors, and the boys tumbled out. "These are my two sons, Tommy and Teddy."

Wearing only light jackets, the boys looked positively numb. No wonder they were shivering. I gestured toward the woods. "Follow me." Moments later, I realized the snow was too deep for the boys. Matt hoisted one on his back, and I followed suit with the other. Relief washed over me at the sight of the cabin lights.

Desperate for warmth, we scrambled onto the porch and into the great room. Within minutes we were thawing around the wood-burning stove and silently sipping hot cocoa. Only then did I remember that the telephone, like everything else, was dead. There would be no tow truck tonight. In fact, Matt and his boys would certainly be spending Christmas with us—maybe even a few days after that.

Matt awkwardly thanked us for taking them in. I told him that it was no trouble, that we had plenty of food and wood and were happy to offer a warm, safe place for them to stay. But the whole time I was thinking to myself, *I came up here to be alone with my family, Lord. Couldn't we just celebrate Christmas in peace?*

We learned that Matt, a divorced Ford factory worker from Chicago, was an aspiring classical guitarist who had had visions of cutting a record someday. "But some dreams never come true," he said gloomily. "When I married Cindy, I never dreamed we'd be separated eight years later. It was true love, know what I mean?" He shrugged and mussed Tommy's hair. "Now, I guess we just live one day to the next. Right boys?"

The tow-headed brothers nodded and tentatively sipped the marshmallows out of their steaming mugs.

"I guess God just doesn't like us very much," Matt continued. "You'd think He'd give us a break once in a while. Know what I mean?"

Unable to stay silent, I told Matt about God's grace through Jesus Christ, but I felt too tired to preach. I just let the words run out of me like salt out of a saltshaker until I realized I had been talking too long. Matt had grown silent, his head bowed. The room was so quiet; only the wood crackled.

Matt abruptly stood up and grabbed his coat. "You got a gun?" he asked me. "I guess I better make sure that deer is put out of its misery. Wouldn't want it to be suffering out there in the cold."

I stood up, amazed at how expertly Matt had shifted our focus. "Yeah, I'll get it."

Back in the blowing snow, we discovered that our previous path had already disappeared. But Matt seemed to know the way, so I let him blaze the trail and did my best to keep up. Not ten feet from the car, we found the doe half buried in a snowdrift, her torso and spindly front legs exposed to the cold. Matt shined his flashlight in her face. Her gentle eyes, as shiny as brown marbles, studied us with mild interest, but I sensed no distress. We exchanged puzzled looks. Her neck didn't seem to be broken, but her lower half lay concealed beneath the snow.

Matt whistled. "Must be her back. I'm surprised she's still alive." He asked for the gun, which I gladly handed over, having never killed an animal in my life.

When Matt cocked the rifle, I saw something I will never forget. The doe began thrashing in the snow. Spindly legs working, she struggled shakily to her feet like a newborn colt. There wasn't a wound to be seen. Her brown eyes swept over us one last time before she leaped over a drift, her bouncing white tail cutting a path through the dark.

Mesmerized, we stared after the doe's flight, both searching for the hidden meaning. "Whoa! I know I hit her," Matt cried breathlessly. "You don't see something like that every day."

As we started back to the cabin, I was struck by the relevance of Matt's words. It isn't every day we see God working so obviously in our lives, but He had meticulously arranged my appointment with Matt down to the smallest detail. He had sent the deer to cause the accident, the snow to down the phone and power lines, and our cabin to provide the rendezvous. Surely we'd be snowed in for several days. *Poor Matt, I thought. He might as well just surrender now.*

When we reached the cabin, Matt held the door open for me. "In a minute," I said. Standing in the blowing snow, only hours from Christmas, I lingered in the comforting assurance of God's control. Long ago a Bethlehem innkeeper had granted a weary couple a place to stay for the night. So many in this life are stranded with no place to stay. In many ways, we are all innkeepers.

Adam Blumer works in the publications department at Northland Baptist Bible College in Dunbar, Wisconsin.

The Falashas

Stephen Caesar

One of the most astounding examples of a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is the return of Ethiopia's Falasha Jews to Israel in the late 20th century. More than 2,500 years ago the prophet Zephaniah, referring to the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, wrote: "From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering" (Zeph. 3:10). The fulfillment of this prediction is a spectacular example of God's faithfulness as well as of the reliability of Old Testament prophecy.

If you head down the Nile River from its delta in northern Egypt, one of its tributaries will lead you to Lake Tana in northern Ethiopia. Near this large lake is the city of Gondar. The region around Gondar is inhabited by a unique tribe of black Jews who call themselves *Beth Israel*, meaning "House of Israel"; Ethiopian Gentiles call them *Falasha*, meaning "immigrants" or "strangers." In the words of the *New York Times*, "they are part of one of the oldest of Jewish groups and have an unusual history."¹ Numbering around 30,000 individuals, the Falashas were completely unknown to the outside world—Jewish or Gentile—until the late 19th century. Living "beyond the rivers of Ethiopia," these African Jews have been faithfully keeping the Law of Moses for untold centuries. Despite the fact that the outside world never even knew about them until comparatively recently, Zephaniah was aware of them and foresaw that they would one day return to Israel.

Beginning around 1960, a small number of these Ethiopian Jews started immigrating to Israel, totaling about 8,000 by 1984. In that year, the floodgates opened, and Falashas began pouring into the Holy Land. The rush was sparked by the horrendous famine that struck Ethiopia during its nightmare years under Communist rule. From January to November 1984, 2,000 Falashas were flown out of Ethiopia either in Israeli aircraft or in foreign aircraft with Israeli pilots. Named "Operation Moses"

(it should have been called "Operation Zephaniah"!), the project continued at such a pace that by early December 1984, 3,000 more Falashas were airlifted from the country.²

Falasha Jews have also been airlifted from Sudan, the nation straddling the Nile River just to the west of Ethiopia. During the famine that ravaged their nation, hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians fled to Sudan in the early 1980s. Mingled among them were thousands of Falashas. Israeli aircraft, as part of Operation Moses, secretly flew into the part of Sudan where the refugees were being housed and rescued between 3,000 and 7,000 of them before the Sudanese government got wind of it.³

Sudan, being an Arab nation, became intensely hostile to the idea of Israeli aircraft in or over its territory, so it promptly banned all further rescue activity. However, after an international outcry led by the United States, Sudanese President Gaafar Nimeiri decided to allow non-Israeli airplanes to land and collect the Falasha refugees, thus keeping Israel out of the process.⁴ Under the new policy, the Falashas continued to leave Sudan, eventually finding their way to Israel. Zephaniah had correctly foretold the future—from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, the Jews had come home.

Stephen Caesar holds his master's thesis in anthropology/archaeology from Harvard University. He is the author of the e-book *The Bible Encounters Modern Science*, available at www.1stbooks.com.

¹ "Airlift to Israel Is Reported Taking Thousands of Jews From Ethiopia," *New York Times*, 11 December 1984, p. A1.

² *Ibid.*

³ William R. Doerner, "Threatened with Disaster," *Time*, 4 February 1985, p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

A Serpent's Tooth

Betty C. Mitchell



"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" (Shakespeare, King Lear).

The old king had tried to be a good father. He had given his daughters everything, and asked only their love. Now the time had come to retire and leave everything to them. He hoped to retain only his dignity and his faithful servants. Everything else he put into their hands, including his own care. But his ungrateful daughters could think only of themselves. The old man was a millstone around their necks, reminding them of their duty and hampering their freedom. So they dismissed his servants, robbing him of his kingly status, his dignity, and his independence. Denying in deed the love they had professed in word, they broke the old man's heart, causing him to cry out in anguish, "Turn all her mother's pains and benefits / To laughter and contempt, that she may feel / How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is / To have a thankless child" (Act I, Scene 4).

Such is the dramatic picture Shakespeare paints of filial ingratitude in his great tragedy *King Lear*. The picture is so poignant that one wonders whether Shakespeare had himself felt the sting of the serpent's tooth. If not, he certainly must have encountered a Lear or two among his acquaintances, for the sin of ingratitude is ageless and universal.

Sadly, Lear's experience is not confined to kings or pagans. Mark how many children of Christian parents respond with indifference or rebellion to their parents' sacrificial love. Similarly, the heart of God must often grieve over the way we, His children, respond to His gifts.

Human nature devises all kinds of substitutes for gratitude.

It's my right.

In a culture where demanding one's "rights" is continually and strongly advocated in all forms of the media,

taught in public education, trumpeted in the popular music and literature, and even preached from many pulpits, is it any wonder that our children see every advantage they receive not as a privilege but as their due?

As Americans, we have taken for granted our forefathers' gift of freedom to the extent that we are in danger of losing it. Often we Christians take for granted God's gift of salvation, forgetting that we deserve only His wrath. Do our children take for granted their Christian heritage, godly parents, Christian education, Bible-teaching churches, even God's love?

Thanks, but is that all?

Picture the small child on Christmas morning, the floor under the Christmas tree laden with toys and other gifts, looking up at his parents and demanding, "Is that all?" We have too many "things." Ads tell us to buy certain products and receive a lot of "stuff." Our children want everything they see advertised or everything their friends have, because from the cradle to teen years they have been bombarded with worthless "stuff." Instead of being grateful for what they have, they quickly learn to expect more and are dissatisfied if they don't get it.

God harshly judged the Israelites on their wilderness journey when they fell prey to this sinful attitude. In spite of God's faithful daily provision of manna, they were not satisfied. They lusted after flesh to eat: "But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Num. 11:6). God answered their complaint, inundating them with fresh quail meat, but "while the flesh was yet between their teeth . . . the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague" (Num. 11:33). As the Psalmist put it, "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And he gave them

their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:13–15). Do we also murmur and complain when God withholds something we think we should have, forgetting the showers of His blessings we have already received?

What do they want from me?

On the other hand, there are those who cannot receive anything gracefully. To them, it is easier to give than to receive, not because they have a giving spirit, but because they don't want to be indebted to the giver. I know a young man who has a real problem in this area. Generosity on the part of others, especially his parents, creates in him a sense of burdensome indebtedness rather than gratitude. Consequently, the more lavish the gift, the more burdened he becomes, responding with suspicious cynicism rather than with gratitude. For people with this problem, the only way out of their dilemma is to out-give the giver. This attitude is nothing more than another form of pride. Samuel Johnson (1709–84), English author and lexicographer, wrote, "There are minds so impatient of inferiority that their gratitude is a species of revenge, and they return benefits, not because recompense is a pleasure, but because obligation is a pain."

From the beginning, God's gift of creation was received by sinful mankind with unbelief rather than with gratitude, "because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21). They knew that recognition of God as the Giver of these gifts came with an obligation to serve Him, and they wanted to serve only themselves. The same attitude causes many today to refuse salvation as a free gift. People devise all kinds of substitutes in an attempt to earn their way to heaven, not realizing that the price has already been paid. Recognizing that every good and perfect gift comes from God should cause us to realize that these benefits *do* come with an obligation—not an obligation of repayment—but simply one of thankfulness. Psalm 100 tells us to "enter into his gates with *thanksgiving*." George Herbert prayed, "Thou hast given so much to me. . . . Give one thing more—a grateful heart."

How can we teach our children to have a grateful heart? We must first set the example. Do they hear us giving a perfunctory "Bless this food" in a hurried monotone before each meal, or do they experience a time of true gratitude to God for His many blessings? Do they see us amassing every new gadget that comes on the market, overspending on Christmas gifts, going into debt to buy expensive clothes, cars, or houses? How can we teach them to deny themselves

if we never do, or if we give them everything they want even before they want it? Do we set the example of generosity by giving to others in need? And most important of all, do we establish an atmosphere of gratitude at home in our daily conversation, devotions, and interaction with each other? Do we help our children to understand the great price that was paid for their salvation and the debt of gratitude that they owe?

Paul tells the Thessalonian believers, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18). If we are truly grateful for all God has given us, we will communicate this gratitude to our children. Then we will never feel the sting of the "serpent's tooth."

Betty Mitchell is a retired teacher and freelance writer living in Greer, South Carolina.

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READING THE BIBLE THROUGH IN ONE YEAR



Warren N. Stuber

On December 31, I completed my yearly reading through the Bible. The next day I began again for the New Year. Dr. Harry Ironside read the Bible through for each year of his life, which was more than 70 times. I am not near to a record like that, but I have read the Bible through dozens of times at tremendous profit.

It all began one December in the 1940s when our Sunday school superintendent challenged us to read the Bible through the next year. To those who did this he promised a new \$1 bill. To a poor, ten-year-old boy at that time in history, a \$1 bill was a mighty big item. It would buy lots of things, such as ten double-dip ice cream cones, 20 bottles of soft drink, or 200 pieces of candy.

His proposal to carry out this challenge was to read three chapters a day and five chapters on Sunday, which allowed for a few days to spare. I took up the challenge and diligently read every word even though I did not understand all of them.

At the end of the year I was one of those who completed the reading and received the new \$1 bill rolled up and tied with a red ribbon. That dollar bill was the incentive.

What should my incentive to read the Bible through be now? What should your incentive be? The Bible is not just another book. It is God's Book. It is God's complete revelation to man. It tells us all we know about God, heaven, and hell. It tells us how to live here and how to prepare for hereafter. It is God's love letter to man with spiritual and eternal value. Years ago when I would receive love letters from my sweetheart I would smell them, open them, and read them—completely, repeatedly, and with great anticipation. The contents were savored; my reading was concluded with great satisfaction. I could hardly wait to receive the next one. Should we not approach the reading of the Bible in a similar fashion?

As Baptists we consider the Bible to be our only rule of faith and practice, yet we give the daily newspaper a better reading. If I did not read the Bible through there are some portions of Scripture I would never read. In the process of reading the Bible through I have learned many interesting facts. (For example, Og, king of Bashan, needed a bed six feet wide and 13 1/2 feet long. Quite a large

fellow, wouldn't you say?) I read for the benefit of my own soul as well as for the benefit of others who need my help. I have found many important verses. They are marked and mentally recorded for future use. I meet them again and again as old friends. The focus of the overall picture of Scripture becomes clearer and clearer the more I read.

Phrases and words I have read elsewhere are recalled, and I begin to see how Scripture fits together (for example, Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1), how Scripture explains Scripture, and how prophecy is given and then fulfilled. Repeat phrases get my attention so I want to see what God is emphasizing. I

am often delighted with the discovery of new things I did not see before, new insight into the character of the author, or new applications for truth. On a recent morning, as I walked out the door to go to work, my thoughts were dwelling on Psalm 40:17. What an encouragement! During my lifetime I have reaped huge dividends from the original, small investment.

The original plan I used to read the Bible through will work today. Reading a portion of the Old Testament in the morning and a portion of the New Testament in the evening is another way to do it. I have done my reading in various translations and in a Chronological Bible. I have read completely through the New Testament and then completely through the Old Testament. Once I moved a little slower and took two years to do it.

The plan I have come to like and use is one where readings are done from the Old Testament and the New Testament every day. This schedule is available from the BJU Press. The readings begin and end at logical thought breaks, and the Old Testament is approximately in chronological order. Many of the folks at our church use this same plan, which is collectively helpful. You may, as I did, develop your own plan, as long as the objective is reached. And you may start at any time, even now.

Bible reading is best when it is done alone, in absolute quiet, unhurried so you can absorb the spiritual blessings and plunge into the spiritual depths, and morning and evening so you can begin the day with God and end the day with God, or at least in a block of time that is set aside daily for that purpose. In order to grow we must make

Bible reading a daily, yearly, lifelong practice.

Woodrow Wilson, 28th President of the United States, said, "I am sorry for the men who do not read the Bible every day; I wonder why they deprive themselves of the strength and of the pleasure. It is one of the most singular books in the world, for every time you open it, some old text that you have read a score of times suddenly beams with a new meaning. There is no other book that I know that yields its meaning so personally, that seems to fit itself so intimately to the very spirit that is seeking its guidance." Revelation 1:3 says: "Blessed is he that readeth."

Read The Bible Through

I supposed I knew my Bible
Reading piece-meal, hit or miss.
Now a bit of John or Matthew,
Now a snatch of Genesis,
Certain Psalms . . . the
twenty-third,
Twelfth of Romans, first of
Proverbs,
Yes, I thought I knew the Word.
But I found a thorough reading
Was a different thing to do,
And the way was unfamiliar
When I read the Bible through.
You who treat the Crown of
Writings

As you treat no other book
Just a paragraph disjointed,
Just a crude, impatient look
Try a worthier procedure,
Try a broad and steady view;
You will kneel in very rapture
When you read the Bible through .

—Amos R. Wells

Warren N. Stuber serves as a deacon, Sunday school teacher, and president of the Seasoned Saints at Faith Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

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Bob Whitmore, Managing Editor

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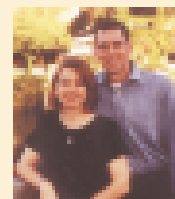
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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

Let a Commentary Be Your Guide

Gabriel Harris's streetfront shop was a popular, heavily trafficked Gloucester bookstore in 1735. But in the summer of that same year the small room above its first floor also became a seminary for just one. There, beginning with first light around 5 a.m., a 20-year-old Pembroke College, Oxford, student knelt for the first of his many hours every day with an open English Bible and its companion two-volume Greek New Testament. "I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees," he wrote in his diary, "laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed, and drink indeed to my soul."

The student's name was George Whitefield. Within two years his preaching would startle the nation. But in May 1735, Whitefield was newly converted, sick, and penniless. It was Gabriel Harris who kindly took him in and provided the quiet retreat above his shop. And it was Harris who provided the eager young believer with his first real Bible teacher, Matthew Henry.

Henry had, of course, been dead for more than 20 years, but his Commentary could be had for £7. This was an immense sum, however, roughly equivalent to four months' wages for a common laborer. So the generous Harris provided Whitefield with the set upon the understanding that he would pay for it as he was able. Now the young Christian had a seasoned pastor-preacher to guide his studies. His diary reveals his use of Henry every morning from five until six, sometimes again later in the morning or afternoon, and almost always for an hour or two in the evening. "For many

months have I been almost always upon my knees, to study and pray over these books," he wrote.

George Whitefield, though young, had made a mature discovery—the value of a great commentator for a teacher. Last issue's column began to answer the question of what attributes characterize such a great commentator. This issue's column will continue and conclude that discussion.

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits"
(2 Tim. 2:6)

Contextual Analysis

If you were to ask the average congregation which chapter of the New Testament gives the most help on the relationship between wives and husbands, chances are that a fair number of them would get it right. But if you asked them, further, why that chapter is the *fifth* of that book, coming near its conclusion rather than its beginning, or why that fifth chapter is in *Ephesians* rather than, say, one of the Gospels, it's safe to say that few if any would know. Some commentators appear to betray the same ignorance, or perhaps intentional disregard, of contextual issues.

Contextual analysis is one of the issues least discussed by commentators. Few are really good at it. Many seem almost to ignore it altogether. But superior commentaries don't merely comment verse by verse. They comment, first of all, section by section. They furthermore explain each section in relation to the particular book's distinctive message. There are two great benefits of this approach.

The first is *logical continuity*. The second, and even more important, is *theological consistency*. Analyzing section by section before doing so verse by verse (or word by word) forces the commentator to connect his dots in logical lines. Relating sections to the book's distinctive message tends to keep those logical lines confined within the Biblical author's own theological grid.

To give an example, take the chapter of qualifications

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for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. It is grammatically independent of both the chapter preceding it as well as the one following. Theoretically, therefore, it could have been positioned at nearly any place within the book. Yet it nevertheless has a *context* within both the book and the section of the New Testament we call the “pastorals.” A superior commentary will explore those issues in an introductory fashion before it begins its word-by-word analysis of the qualifications, even though the chapter stands alone grammatically.

As a general rule, today’s newer commentators pay far more attention to this aspect of interpretation than the older ones did. In fact, the welcome trend is to precede verse-by-verse comments (typically called “exegesis” or “exposition”) with major sections of contextual discussion which are helpfully labeled “structural analysis” or “form and structure.”

For instance, Patrick Fairbairn’s standard work of 1874 introduces the chapter in just one paragraph. The older ICC commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (1924) by Walter Lock does so in two. By contrast, I. Howard Marshall’s new addition (1999) to that same ICC series

Acts, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Galatians, and James are also very helpful in this regard.

In the case of Old Testament books I like the IVP *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* series under the general editorship of D. J. Wiseman. The volumes in that series by Derek Kidner are particularly valuable. Or take a look at the BMH series entitled *Everyman’s Bible Commentary*, which has some outstanding surveys of both Old and New Testament books. A similar series is IVP’s *The Bible Speaks Today*.

Historical Analysis

This aspect of commenting requires careful consideration of everything within Biblical texts that is *dated*. This includes places, people, times, and circumstances that are chronologically specific and can therefore be located and analyzed within *history*.

The old threat to doing this accurately was the allegorical commentator. The new threat is the highly applicational commentator. The first distorted the historical elements. The second deliberately dismisses them. In both cases the justification is “relevance.”

Without question, a dry-as-dust recital of bare historical data falls far short of opening up a text for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. But a cavalier spirit toward the actual, historical facts is creeping into the writing, preaching, and teaching of many evangelicals. For instance, one well-known homiletician writes of Christians once they leave the church building,

On the outside, people lose jobs, worry about their children, and find crabgrass invading their lawns. Seldom do normal people lose sleep over the Jebusites, the Canaanites, or the Perizzites, or even about what Abraham, Moses, or Paul has said or done. They lie awake wondering about grocery prices, crop failures, quarrels with a girlfriend, diagnosis of a malignancy. . . . If the sermon does not make sense in that world, they wonder if it makes any difference at all.

While agreeing with the conclusion, I feel a degree of alarm at the argument by which this author arrives there. The fact is, the Bible is first of all a book about God, not us. It is the true account of His sovereign superintendence of men and events within the actual history of the earth that is His story. For this reason alone the names of the nations and the words and activities of the individuals upon whom He has acted are significant, whether we feel that they touch any of our felt needs or not, or in fact, even if they never do. The historical facts are relevant, if for no other reason than that they are about Him. Our place, therefore, is not to turn away our heads but to take off our shoes.

But in addition, whatever contemporary relevance there is to a passage, it is inextricably bound up in the accurate definition of the historical details. The selection and arrangement of these is one means by which

A cavalier spirit toward the actual, historical facts is creeping into the writing, preaching, and teaching of many evangelicals.

begins the chapter with two full pages of introduction.

Two other highly respected but older commentators, William Hendriksen (1957) and Homer Kent (1958) give only one paragraph each to introducing the chapter. But William Mounce’s recent contribution (2000) to the *Word Biblical Commentary* begins this same chapter with 15 pages (!) of introduction, including an extremely helpful two-and-a-half-page table in four columns comparing and contrasting the qualifications for an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 with those of a deacon in 1 Timothy 3 and then, in the fourth column, the descriptions of false teachers found throughout the pastorals.

This is not to make the point that the older works are less valuable. Their strength, however, typically lies in other areas, particularly unquestioned orthodoxy and spiritual sensitivity. But it is to say that we have long needed commentaries that introduce Scripture contextually section by section, and that it would be a great benefit to have on our shelves not only several exegetically detailed commentaries on every book of the Bible, but also at least one which is given over almost entirely to section-by-section analysis.

Herman Hoyt’s little work on Romans, *The First Christian Theology*, is an example of what I have in mind here. So is Robert Gromacki’s *Called to be Saints* (on 1 Corinthians). Homer Kent’s small paperbacks on John,

the Biblical writers communicated their message. Nothing is irrelevant. All is instructional. But this purpose will be left unachieved if the historical facts are quickly discarded rather than reverently considered.

For more than 20 years I've taught Bible to college students fresh out of America's finest Christian high schools. I'm tempted at this point to gloss over the true state of their Bible knowledge lest I offend, but the fact is, few of them know the names of more than half a dozen or so Hebrew kings or fellow laborers with the apostle Paul. They are clueless as to Biblical dates. They know next to nothing of the cycle of the Hebrews' sacred feasts.

They can name but one or two of the major sacrifices. They cannot tell whether Acts recounts three or four or six or eight Pauline missionary journeys. Onesiphorus is the same to them as Epaphroditus. Caiaphas may have been one of Paul's first converts, Luke one of the apostles.

As a result, these young people simply do not have the Biblical facts to serve as an inerrant grid through which to sieve their thinking. They cannot think in Biblical terms because they do not know the Bible.

Much of the blame for this falls at our feet for thinking we know better than God. We know what is relevant. We know what will help. We know what parts of His word to discard for the sake of making a point. This is folly, and something far, far more.

Therefore, let our commentators tell us the historical facts. I want a commentary that tells them to me in details, not generalities. Generalities are nearly worthless. The best timeless applications spring from details. That's one reason God fills His Word with them. That's why, to use one illustration, Goliath's specific measurements are not irrelevant. The really comforting applications for people facing impossible odds come not from hearing that Goliath was big but that he was nine-and-a-half feet big! The height of the average household ceiling is only eight feet. His coat was not just heavy, it weighed over 125 pounds. Young David himself would have weighed little more. Goliath's spear head weighed in at about 15 pounds; David's stones, eight ounces or so at most. These are facts to memorize and carry about in one's head for retrieval in a critical moment. They're useful for slinging at fears before soul-winning visitation or for calming the nerves before major pastoral confrontations.

Grammatical Analysis

This is the commenting that answers our questions as to what the text actually says. For instance, does what God breathed out actually say, "thou wilt not leave my soul in hell?" (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27). If it does, then exegetical honesty compels me to grapple with the almost unthinkable theological implications of the Messiah's going to hell, but before I commit myself to trying to defend that position to my people, I want to know if the Hebrew text of Psalm 16 actually says this.

Here, then, is a sample of the kind of commenting I find valuable.

He does not say "leave in" but "to", i.e. abandon to, give up to the dominion or possession of another. The same Hebrew phrase occurs, with the same sense, in Lev. xix.10, Job xxxix. 14, and in Ps. xlix. 11 (10) below.—"Hell" is here to be taken in its wide old English sense, as corresponding to the Hebrew "Sheol" and the Greek "Hades," the invisible world or state of the dead (Joseph Addison Alexander).

I like the way he distinguishes things from one another. I like his resort to the original Hebrew and Greek terms. I especially like the cross-references. This is an example of a commentator's helpfully clarifying the meaning of words.

But in the New Testament, especially, getting an answer as to what the text actually says requires a commentator who discusses the inspired connections between those words. That is, he discusses *syntax*, or *grammar* if you will. Please don't be offended at what

Whatever contemporary relevance there is to a passage, it is inextricably bound up in the accurate definition of the historical details. Nothing is irrelevant. All is instructional.

I'm about to say, but it must be pressed upon those of us who handle the sacred text. *No one can be completely accurate in his interpretation if he does not inform himself on the grammatical issues in the text.*

It's hard enough to be accurate, even after the most painstaking grammatical analysis. In many things we offend all. But the preacher who takes no trouble whatsoever on this point is unwittingly inaccurate. At the very least, he perpetuates generalities that obscure the precision with which the text speaks. At the very worst he does the kind of thing a student once did with that great text of Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation." His homiletics professor asked, "How did you treat that text?"

The student replied, "I took the two obvious points. First, the greatness of our salvation. Second, a little advice on how to escape if we neglect it."

What I find myself needing in a commentator is the careful analysis of all the grammatical possibilities. For instance, when our Lord commanded "Abide in me and I in you" (John 15:4), what is the connection between the two clauses? There is only one verb, *abide*, for both of them, but it seems nonsensical to us for the Lord to command, "abide . . . I in you." A good commentator, such as D. A. Carson, will discuss the three grammatical possibilities too involved to repeat here.

Some of my favorite New Testament commentators who have given us this kind of analysis on more than one book are R. C. H. Lenski (whose Lutheran bias shines but whose grammatical discussions are often unexcelled), William Hendriksen, John Eadie (Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians), B. F. Westcott (John, Hebrews, and the Johannine epistles; G. Campbell Morgan said he would rather have Westcott's work on John than a whole shelf full of devotional works on the same book), Frederic Louis Godet (Luke, Romans, and the Corinthians), Charles Hodge (Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians), John Brown of Edinburgh (*Discourses and Sayings of our Lord*, John 17, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, 1 Peter; of Brown Spurgeon said, "Everything he has left us is massive gold."), and, more recently, D. Edmond Hiebert (Mark, Thessalonians, James, the Petrine epistles, and Jude).

No one can be completely accurate in his interpretation if he does not inform himself on the grammatical issues in the text. . . . At the very least, he perpetuates generalities that obscure the precision with which the text speaks.

Furthermore, in addition to the word-by-word exegesis, the best commentators continue by relating *individual* phrases and words back to their *sections'* primary themes. Commentators who fail to do this may hand us the fruit of a cluster but not a cluster of fruit. There's an immense difference.

For instance, compare the opening sentences of these three commentaries on 1 Peter 3:5 and then 3:6—"For after this manner in the old time the holy women also" (vs. 5) . . . "Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord" (vs. 6).

v. 5 The words signify the women who pre-eminently represented the holiness of Israel's calling, i.e. its "saints," cf. Matt. xxvii. 52. . .

v. 6 The mother par excellence of the Hebrew race as a chosen people, cf. Is. li.2, which is perhaps our author's immediate source. The occasion alluded to here is that described in Gen. xviii. 1-15, when Abraham told her that they were to have a

child despite her age (Edward Gordon Selwyn).

v. 5 The appeal for proper adornment is undergirded by the example of godly women in the past. . . v. 6 From among those holy women Peter singled out one example (D. Edmond Hiebert).

v. 5 The second motive presented by the apostle to Christian wives to stimulate and encourage them in the performance of their conjugal duties is, that in doing so they would follow the example of holy women in former ages. . . v. 6 Sarah is particularly noticed as having obeyed Abraham, and as having shown her respect for him by calling him lord (John Brown).


In this example, Selwyn's opening statements offer no explanation of the connections between either verses 5 and 6, or the unit of verses 5-6 and the verses preceding them. Hiebert's first lines, however, succinctly explain both. Brown does so as well, and perhaps even better, by enumerating (second motive) the relationship of these verses to the entire thrust of the passage (wives performing their conjugal duties) rather than to only the preceding two verses (as Hiebert does).

This kind of help requires more pages from the commentator and thus more expense of the purchaser. Brown's commentary, for instance, fills three volumes averaging some 450 pages apiece. But just as carpenters have a better chance of doing top quality work if they own the best tools, so preachers put themselves in a better position to clearly explain God's Word when they put out the money to purchase and the time to read the best books.

To Conclude

What is it, then, that we are looking for in a commentary? We need a commentary that answers our questions about the text. We want it to answer those questions literally, contextually, historically, and grammatically. And if, in addition, it goes the extra mile and tells us what the text *means* (applicationally) by what it says, that volume would be one in a hundred and, as Spurgeon once said of some books, "worth selling your coat to buy."

One other mark of a great commentator is his thorough acquaintance with others who have written before him. J. C. Ryle, for instance, gave 12 years to his *Expository Thoughts on John*. They included, as he himself writes, "a patient study of about seventy Commentators, both ancient and modern, of almost every Church and theological school in Christendom." It shows. And as I've mentioned Ryle, let me conclude with his wise observation.

The conclusion I arrive at, after a diligent examination of many Commentators, is always one and the same. I trust none of them unreservedly, and I expect nowhere to find perfection. All must be read with caution. They are good helps, but they are not infallible. They are useful assistants, but they are not the pillar of cloud and fire. . . . Use commentaries; but be a slave to none. Call no man master. 



Dr. Mark Minnick is the pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, where he has served on the pastoral staff since 1980. He speaks frequently in churches and at conferences across the nation and ministers regularly on mission fields around the world.

Bring . . . the Books

Five English Reformers

by J.C. Ryle

Motivated by the conviction that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, Bishop J. C. Ryle set pen to paper to recount the martyrdom of five great English Protestant reformers. His work was first published in 1890 under the title *Light from Old Times*. Retitled *Five English Reformers*, the latest of several reprints was done by Banner of Truth in 1999.

In Ryle's day a movement was afoot in the Church of England to re-assimilate much of what the Roman Catholic Church practiced. There was a growing acceptance of those things for which the Reformers died for resisting three centuries earlier. Under the reign of Bloody Mary, 288 men, women, and even children were executed by fire. Ryle does not want us to forget why.

It is fashionable in some quarters to deny that there is any such thing as certainty about religious truth, or any opinions for which it is worthwhile to be burned. Yet, 300 years ago, there were men who were certain they had found out truth, and were content to die for their opinions. . . . Last but not least, it is thought very bad taste in many quarters to say anything which throws discredit on the Church of Rome. Yet it is as certain that the Romish Church burned our English Reformers as it is that William the Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings. . . . It is a broad fact that these 288 sufferers were not put to death for any offence against property or person. They were not rebels against the Queen's authority, caught red-handed in arms. They were not thieves, or murderers, or drunkards, or unbelievers, or men and women of immoral lives. On the contrary, they were, with barely an exception, some of the holiest, purest, and best Christians in England, and several of them the most learned men of their day. . . . The principal reason why they were burned was because they refused one of the peculiar doctrines of the Romish Church. On that doctrine, in almost every case, hinged their life or death. . . . The doctrine in question was the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. . . . If they did not believe and admit this, they were burned (5–8, 23).

After concisely outlining the theological ramifications of this doctrine that "strikes at the very root of the Gospel" (26–27), Ryle recounts the stories of five Reformers martyred under Mary's reign. John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester, was appointed to his parish during the reign of Edward VI and had a sterling reputation for personal holiness, pastoral care, and diligent preaching. On the morning of February 9, 1555, more than


7000 people gathered to witness his death. As he knelt to pray, authorities placed a box before him containing a full pardon from the queen if he would but recant. His answer was, "Away with it; if you love my soul, away with it!" He went boldly and joyfully to his death.

Rowland Taylor, rector of Hadleigh in Suffolk, had articulated a strong argument against papist doctrine. On the day of his burning he said to his grieving parishioners who had come to the execution, "I have preached to you God's Word and truth, and am come this day to seal it with my own blood."

The well-known Protestant preachers Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley stood for truth together, were imprisoned together, and were martyred together bound to the same stake. Chained with Ridley, Latimer cried out, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day, by God's grace, light such a candle in England as I trust shall never be put out."

After faithful service at Cambridge, John Bradford was ordained to the ministry by Nicholas Ridley in 1550 and was soon appointed by Edward VI as one of six royal chaplains. His popularity and reputation for holiness made him an object of intense interest during his imprisonment. Many attempts were made to turn him from his beliefs and pervert him back to Rome. All efforts failed, and on January 31, 1555, he was burned at the stake at Smithfield.

One cannot help being deeply moved upon reading the account of the last words of these worthy men and the faith they exhibited in their suffering. Their courage and willingness to stand for truth in their day and against Rome is sorely needed in our day as some modern evangelical leaders attempt to undo the very thing for which these men died. One wonders what these martyrs would say about the document known as "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." Ryle's words to the Church of England in his day are worth repeating to evangelical leaders in our day.

Take away the Gospel from a Church and that Church is not worth preserving. . . . [T]here is nothing so useless as a Church without the Gospel. And this is the very question that stares us in the face. . . . Without it . . . Ichabod will soon be written on our walls. The ark of God will not be with us. Surely something ought to be done (32). 

*"... when
thou comest,
bring with thee
... the books"
(2 Tim. 4:13)*

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Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

The words “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” have traditionally been interpreted as expressing Paul’s preference for celibacy over marriage. As a result, this verse was often used in the early church (e.g., Jerome) and later by the Roman Catholic Church to argue that celibacy is a more holy state. Protestant commentators, on the other hand, have struggled to diminish the force of these words, which seem to put marriage in a less favorable position. For example, Charles Hodge lists six reasons that Paul cannot be deprecating marriage. It is commonly concluded that although Paul says celibacy is good, marriage is not necessarily bad.

Let’s take a closer look at the phrase “to touch a woman.” Beyond our passage, it is used seven times in Greek literature from the fourth century B.C. to the second century A.D., and in every case it is a euphemism for sexual relations. We can note an example from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. God told Abimelech in Genesis 20:6 (LXX), “I knew that you did this with a pure heart, and I spared you, so that you should not sin against me, therefore I did not allow you to touch her.” From the grammatical evidence, Paul would seem to be saying, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But if this is Paul’s meaning in 1 Corinthians 7:1, he argues just the opposite in vv. 3–5. In vv. 3–5, Paul seems to demand what he earlier discourages in v. 1.


In order to solve this dilemma, commentators have understood vv. 1–7 to be addressing the question of whether one should marry. Paul, according to v. 1, feels that the celibate state is best. So v. 1 really means, “It is good for a man not to marry” (cf. NIV). But even though the celibate state is preferable to marriage, Paul reluctantly concedes in v. 2 that marriage is necessary because of sexual immorality: “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.”

A more preferable solution to this seeming low view of marriage is to understand the latter part of v. 1 (“It is good for a man not to touch a woman”) as a quotation of the Corinthians’ own words. It is clear that in chapter 7 Paul begins to address various subjects that the Corinthians had written about in their letter to him: “Now concerning the things

whereof ye wrote unto me.” And so in the remainder of v. 1, it is quite possible that the apostle is simply quoting what some of the Corinthians were saying.

Commentators now recognize that in responding to the Corinthians, Paul sometimes quotes a Corinthian position (e.g., 6:12, 13). The latter part of 7:1 is most likely another instance of this phenomenon. This would mean that some of the Corinthians were arguing that they should abstain from sexual relations within marriage. But in v. 2 Paul emphatically rejects their advocacy of marital celibacy. A more literal rendering of v. 2 might read: “But because of fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” The words “to have his own wife” or “her own husband” are an idiom meaning to “continue in full sexual relations.” Thus, Paul argues that married couples should continue in full sexual relations with their own partners. However, Paul makes it clear that these sexual relations are to be only with one’s own husband or wife.

So Paul is not saying that fornication is the reason for marriage. “But,” on the contrary, because fornication is a real possibility if a couple were to attempt to maintain celibacy within marriage, married couples are to continue in full sexual relations. In fact, Paul goes on in vv. 3 and 4 to argue that sexual relations are a marital duty, and there must be full mutuality in this matter. In v. 5 the apostle clearly prohibits sexual abstinence within marriage—“Defraud ye not one the other”—since this can lead to extramarital sexual activity. Sexual abstinence within marriage is abnormal, although it may be allowed on a temporary basis by mutual consent (v. 5). Verse 6 adds that such abstinence is not necessarily to be desired, it is only a concession. Paul recognizes that when there is a breakdown in normal sexual relations between husband and wife, Satan may be able to tempt one of the partners to immorality.

Thus, the first part of chapter 7 is not concerned with the question of whether to marry and Paul’s preference for the unmarried state, as has been traditionally held, but with Paul’s rejection of the idea of marital celibacy and the resulting responsibilities of Christians within marriage. Paul does not advocate celibacy as a higher or holier state for the Christian. Celibacy is to be preferred only if someone has the gift of self-control like Paul (v. 7). But for those who are already married, Paul is emphatic: sexual abstinence is not to be practiced. 

**“Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15)**

On Tuesday morning, September 11, I was driving the short distance from the parsonage to the church to teach in our Christian school. As I listened to the radio, the tone of the newscast indicated that something was dreadfully wrong. Soon I learned that a large jet had slammed into the World Trade Center in Manhattan. In the time it took me to make the two-minute trip up the street, a second jet collided with the second tower of the World Trade Center. I was numb as I sat in my car. Then my mind raced to the fact that souls at that moment were perishing, perhaps by the thousands, and that *saints* were no doubt suffering as well. The next day I would also learn that my youth pastor, under whose ministry I was called to preach, had lost his battle with a pancreatic tumor, leaving behind a godly wife, two teenagers, and a grieving church.

The Bible teaches that there is an element of the Christian experience that every believer must face if he will live a life pleasing to the Lord. Every child of God must be willing to *suffer*. Yet, when trials come and the believer faithfully endures the suffering, there is a special crown awaiting him in glory. For His *own glory*, the Lord Jesus wants to give the "crown of life" to saints who have suffered.

Unlike the other crowns mentioned in Scripture, this crown is actually defined in two different passages in our New Testament. Both passages are important for a complete understanding of this reward. James 1:12 states, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation. . . ." That raises the first question in relation to the "crown of life."

What is the "Temptation" in James 1:12?

Because the same Greek word for "temptation" is used throughout the chapter, we must rely on the context for our answer. Verses 2 and 3 tell us, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." Christians are blessed (v. 12) and should consider it great joy that "temptation" is working to build patient endurance into their lives.

However, the temptation in verses 2 and 3 and the temptation in verses 13 to 15 are different. The testing in the early part of the chapter is to be *endured*; the tempting in the middle part of the chapter is to be *avoided*! Avoiding temptation qualifies a man or woman for the other crowns, but enduring the trials of life that test our faith qualifies them for the "crown of life."

The second passage in which this crown is mentioned is Revelation 2:10: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast

some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." This text confirms the kind of "temptation" that James is talking about (i.e., testing that could even lead to death).

In Revelation 2:8–11, our Lord is speaking to the church at Smyrna. Smyrna is the Greek word for "myrrh." There was a plant in the area of Smyrna that when crushed, produced a gum that gave off a sweet odor. It was sold throughout the ancient world and was considered very valuable (e.g., the gift to the Christ-child, Matthew 2:11).

The church at Smyrna is being warned that she is about to suffer. The suffering consisted of the devil casting some of the believers in Smyrna into prison (v.10). When the Romans sent a person to prison there were only two results—execution or banishment. This is why Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:6, "I am now ready to be offered." If you were imprisoned, especially for the offense of being a Christian, you either died or, like the apostle John, you were banished (Rev. 1:9).

So the "temptation" these writers are talking about is the severe testing that comes with living the Christian life. Though some have said that the "crown of life" is only for those who are martyred, James does not mention "death." Establishing the meaning of "temptation" in James 1:12 leads to a second, more searching question.

Why Does God Send Testing Into the Lives of His Children?

Testing is to be expected. Second Timothy 3:12 forewarns us, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Still, the above question must be answered. If it is not, the child of God will be tempted not to endure testing and will forfeit the "crown of life." There are at least three reasons why the believer must be tested.

First, *Christians who suffer have a stronger testimony*. The Lord told Ananias to go to the new convert, Saul of Tarsus, and to encourage him in the faith. Knowing of Saul's reputation, Ananias protested! But the Lord told him that He would show Saul "how great things he must suffer for [His] name's sake" (Acts 9:16). Indeed, the more Paul suffered, the brighter his light for Christ shined.

Pastor John Harper's light was also made brighter

"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"

Charles Spurgeon

through suffering. Four years after the sinking of the Titanic, a young Scotsman stood during a testimony service in Hamilton, Canada, and related this account of his life:

I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar on that awful night, the tide brought Mr. John Harper of Glasgow, also on a piece of the wreck, near me. "Man," he said, "are you saved?" "No," I said, "I am not." He replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The waves bore him away, but strange to say, brought him back a little later, and he said, "Are you saved now?" "No," I said, "I cannot honestly say that I am." He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Shortly after that he went down, and there, alone in the night, with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper's last convert (Sword Scrapbook II, Murfreesboro: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1975, p. 209).

These days of national calamity will bring unparalleled opportunity to give the gospel to our countrymen who are fearful, suffering, and dying. The opportunity will be heightened if Christians who are also suffering will "count it all joy."

Second, *Christians who suffer learn to trust Christ*. "Suffering is...represented in Scripture as teaching the child of God what could otherwise remain unlearned" (John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, p. 63). What is it that the child of God needs to learn? Suffering teaches the believer not to *fear* what is happening but to *trust* in the Lord. Fear is the enemy of trust. This is why in Revelation 2:10 our Savior admonished the Smyrna Church, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer."

The rest of the verse reminded them why they didn't need to fear. Three times in verse 10 the word "shall" appears. Not only did the Lord Jesus know that they were about to suffer, but He also knew (1) the type of suffering (prison, death), (2) the treasure of their suffering (to try or purify), and (3) the timing of their suffering (ten days). Then He says, "Be faithful unto death." Here is where the trial often becomes a temptation. When fear comes we can be tempted to quit, compromise, get angry, or question the Lord's plan. Instead, God says, "I know what you are facing; don't fear, be faithful, and let Me grow you." Take a moment to meditate on Romans 5:3-5 and see how testing strengthens our dependence on the Lord.

Of course, Jesus Christ set the example of the necessity of suffering in the learning process of Christians. Hebrews 5:8 says, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." There are certain things that the Christian can only learn by obedience, and at times that requires obedience to suffering. Jesus has not asked us to do anything He hasn't


already done—even unto death!

Third, *the Lord also wants to give Christians who are faithful in suffering the "crown of life."* Revelation 2:10 concludes, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." In light of James 1:12, the Savior is saying, "Prove yourself submissive and true in suffering, to the extent that you are willing to die for My sake, and I'll give you the *stephanos* of life." The Christian life requires suffering. The cross always comes before the crown. And the Lord Jesus has chosen to give a special reward to those who are faithful in the suffering that is part of the Christian experience. Those who endure tribulation will receive a special reward from the very hands of Him who went to the cross for them!

Conclusion

Jim and Veronica (Roni) Bowers, along with their two children, Cory (7) and Charity (7 months), were A.B.W.E. missionaries serving along the Amazon in Peru, South America. From their 55-foot houseboat, they would take the gospel, food, and medicine up and down a 200-mile stretch of the Amazon. Both *Time* magazine and *Newsweek* reported that on the morning of April 20, 2001, a U.S. "AWACS" plane working with the Peruvian government to find drug traffickers, picked up a suspicious plane on the radar screen. Another U.S. plane moved in for a closer look and determined that the pontoon aircraft was not a drug plane. What they did not know is that the plane carried all four of the Bowers, who were coming back from the city after applying for little Charity's visa. Suddenly a Peruvian fighter jet swung in behind the little plane. When the Bower's pilot, Kevin Donaldson, saw the jet, he began to radio and identify who they were. At the same time, Jim handed little Charity back to Veronica. A few moments later, the fighter jet opened fire. As Donaldson hollered into his radio, "They're killing us," bullets ripped through the cabin—one entering Veronica's back and exiting through Charity's skull—both were killed instantly. The pilot was shot in both legs, but somehow managed to land the now burning plane. In the water, Jim extracted the bodies of his wife and daughter from the plane, and with Cory clinging to him, waited on one of the capsized pontoons until a canoe picked them all up a half hour later.

Jim Bowers hasn't quit. In fact, the secular press reported to the world that at the funeral service for his wife and daughter, Jim Bowers proclaimed, "Cory and I are experiencing inexplicable peace right now. God gets people's attention with a crisis." Ah, Jim Bowers has learned to suffer; his wife was faithful unto death—I believe both will receive the "crown of life."

God hasn't called every saint to "resist unto blood," but He has made different degrees of suffering part of each Christian's life. Christian friend, you and I will suffer, but are we in the running for a "crown of life?" Each of us can be, even if we have failed in our response to suffering in the past. Confess the fear and failure and then respond in faith and trust when the next trial approaches. "Hast thou a cross, shoulder it manfully. It is Christ's cross, and it is an honor to carry it" (C. H. Spurgeon). 

Three Days at Ground Zero

Larry Robbins

On Thursday, September 27, at 12:30 a.m., I left on a “red-eye” flight to JFK International Airport. The purpose of the trip was to assist local pastor Matt Recker with a “Tribute To Our Heroes” service honoring the missing firemen, policemen, and rescue workers lost in the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11.

Arriving at 6:05 Eastern Daylight Time, our group of six from Colorado made our way to the East Side of Manhattan where we would be staying for the next three days. After a brief and much-needed nap, we loaded up pamphlets and invitations for the Friday night rally and headed for lower Manhattan.

I had brought my chaplain credentials with the idea of perhaps visiting local precincts to invite officers to the service honoring them. Wearing my black windbreaker with CHAPLAIN emblazoned across the back and the black ball cap clearly marked POLICE CHAPLAIN, I quickly entered into conversation with every NYPD officer I met, which increased in number as I approached the area now known as “Ground Zero.” On every corner, and seemingly every few feet along the perimeter which had been set up along Broadway, I spoke with dozens and dozens of police officers, giving them materials to encourage them and invitations to the “Tribute” service. It wasn’t long before I was invited inside the perimeter to speak with scores of others.

Officers were there in mass, representing every precinct throughout the city of New York—from the Bronx to Queens to Brooklyn—assisting the local officers in Manhattan. State Patrolmen were also stationed around the area. To help cover their regular beats outside the WTC area, officers from New Jersey were donating time to cover the surrounding burrows. They were weary, but had great resolve to press on one day at a time. Some 16 days into the recovery and clean up of the WTC attack, all officers were on 12–14 shifts with no days off.

Making my way into “Ground Zero,” I had contact with more and more officers, and now firemen as well. Their openness and response to my words were exciting. Their faces reflected a genuine respect for the message I brought to them.

On the first day, Thursday afternoon, I spoke to a NY State Patrolman in the center of Ground Zero. He introduced me to “Ann,” a young woman about 25 who he had escorted into the area. Ann began to tell me why she was there.

She worked for a company in one of the World Trade Center buildings, but had been off work the day of the attacks. She and her fiancée had just purchased a home and were fixing it up for when they were married. He, along with 80 of her co-workers, was in the towers on September 11 and was missing. She said that until that

day, she had been in total denial. The previous week she had been telephoning various friends to go get a cup of coffee, but every single one was “gone.” *Every person* in her social circle of friends was gone!

I returned to Ground Zero on Friday to find different officers at every post, discovering they rotated positions every day. I made my way even closer to the rubble, where I talked with many firefighters. For the most part, they were expressionless and visibly exhausted. As I made my way from group to group, I was pleasantly surprised to speak to some members of the West Metro Fire/Rescue group from Denver!

About mid-morning, I made my way into a Red Cross station. A worker came up to me telling me that I might be needed outside. “They believe they have found another body.” I walked up the street to the west of the rubble where a group of workers was gathering. Before I could get there, everyone came to attention and saluted. We all stayed in that position for some five minutes while an ambulance was loaded about a half block away. Then, without a sound being heard, all the officers and firemen turned and proceeded back to the rubble to resume their work. Solemn and nearly emotionless, the numbness of the past 16 days was painfully obvious. Among those there were two firemen whom I had spoken with at length earlier in the day. I asked them about the body. “They think it was a fireman because they found some netting and grappling hooks near the body.”

Friday afternoon I went to the memorial for the missing rescue workers. It was set up on the path between the “boat,” a ferry docked on the Hudson River being used to feed all the workers, and the “pile”—the rubble of the WTC towers. In the memorial were photos of the missing firemen, officers of the Port Authority, and police. Just behind this memorial across a walkway were dozens and dozens of small teddy bears lined up along a retaining wall leading into a small park area. The rainbow of stuffed animals was being used as paperweights for hand written notes and letters from the children of missing rescue workers.

The Friday night “Tribute To Our Heroes” was well attended, filling the 1400-seat Metropolitan Pavilion on 18th Street in Mid-Town Manhattan. Governor Pataki came and spoke for about ten minutes before honor was given to representatives from various fire and police agencies. Following the service, our small group from Colorado made our way to Times Square where I continued to contact every police officer I saw until about midnight.

On Saturday, I went back in Ground Zero meeting and encouraging as many as possible. Again posts had been

rotated, and new officers were everywhere. On this day, however, many of the officers were coming back after getting a needed day of rest! For the first time in 17 days, officers were getting a chance to be home for more than four or five hours.

Near the end of my last day, outside a Red Cross station, I spoke with another firefighter. It was obvious by the ash covering all his gear that he had been working for some time in the rubble. I asked him how long he had been working. "Since about 4 this morning." After I encouraged him to get some rest, he immediately said, "No, I'm just getting a little refreshment here and going back in on the pile. We still have guys in there."

While the police were spending 14 hours per day in Ground Zero, I found that many of the firefighters would not even go home, sleeping occasionally on cots.

The immensity of destruction and peripheral damage is beyond belief. Smoldering fires continued some eight stories underground where the WTC towers once stood. The smell of ash fills the air. I've been asked how to best describe what I've seen. It's not really possible to sum up what it's like—perhaps a giant crematorium with thousands of tons of compacted remains of edifices, reduced to mere rubble. The ashes of more than 6,000 Americans are all in one great urn called Ground Zero.

While I walked among the dazed inhabitants of Manhattan, I was reminded over and over again of the general despair of having their sense of security ripped from their lives. While there were thousands of lives lost, there are multiplied millions of victims. My experience in New York has made a lasting impression on me. It has been the most incredible experience of my life, but at the same time I would not wish it on anyone else.

My perspective now, several days removed from this experience, is one of gratefulness to have been used by God in the extensive sowing of God's Word to very, very fertile soil.

I'm convinced that God's hand was in every part of this trip, from the sudden opportunity and financial supply to go to New York, to the miraculous invitation into Ground Zero for the express purpose of distributing of God's Word in tract form. More than 300,000 pieces of literature with a clear gospel presentation were distributed throughout the city of New York. Hundreds and hundreds were given out within the perimeter of Ground Zero itself, each with a personal word of encouragement and support.

May this lead to a great and wonderful harvest in the days ahead.

Larry Robbins is associate pastor of Tri-City Baptist Church in Westminster, Colorado, and serves as Chaplain to the Westminster Police Department.

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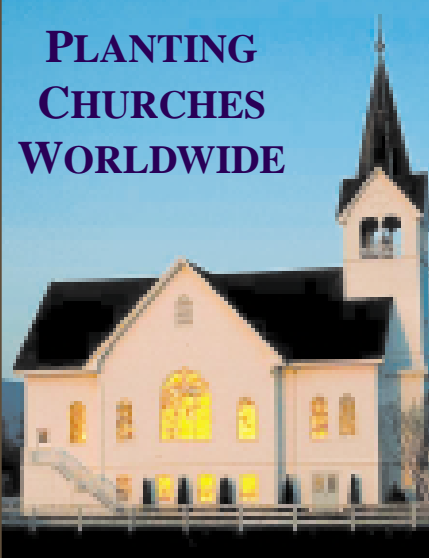


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Compassion Makes a Difference

Walter G. Fremont

I was on my way to the dentist on a hot summer day. Driving in air-conditioned comfort, I passed a grandmotherly looking woman standing by an older car with a flat tire. I felt pity for her, but I had only ten minutes to spare and a meeting after my dental appointment. I didn't want to be hot and sweaty for either, and changing a flat tire could put a real strain on my deodorant. However, at the next light, I turned around and went back to see if I could be of help. I found out the woman had a disabled husband at home, whom she had already called for help. He had called his son at work, but the son wasn't able to come until after 5:00, which meant she was planning to wait three hours for him. I changed the tire and was able to give her my testimony of God's saving grace.

That experience made me understand that compassion is not just sympathy or feeling sad or even shedding tears for the unfortunate. Compassion and pity are two different mindsets. Compassion is a response of love that draws one into the situation. Compassion makes a difference in the lives of people and involves actions to relieve suffering and give assistance. Pity is a reaction to fear of being in the same situation and causes one to withdraw from the situation or, at best, to give only superficial help.

In studying the Biblical examples of compassion, such as the account of the Good Samaritan, I found there is action. James 1:22 says, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only." In Isaiah 1:17 we are told to "learn [i.e., make it a practice] to do well."

Compassion should be the motivation of every ministry; and, since Biblical love is "an unselfish or self-sacrificing desire to meet the needs of the loved object," real compassion should involve a sacrifice of one's time, effort, and money to put love into action. I still had many lessons to learn about compassion.

Many years ago our pastor, Woodrow Finger, came to me before church and asked to borrow five dollars. He was working on a doctorate and was pastoring our small church for \$50 a week. He had a wife and two children, so he had to work at a local department store to make ends meet. You can trust a preacher, so I loaned him five dollars. After church I was standing just inside the church and overheard the pastor at the door talking to Oscar. He said, "Oscar, I know you've been out of a job and needing food money, so here's five dollars. Keep it; it's from the Lord." That was a humbling lesson, for I had known Oscar was out of a job and needed food money; Oscar was my next-door neighbor. Needless to say, when I went out the door later, I said to Pastor Finger, "You know the five I loaned you? Keep it; it's from the Lord."

From that incident came the "Flying Five." When you see a need, put a five-dollar bill in an envelope, accom-

panied by an appropriate Scripture verse but with no name, and send it to the person in need. With inflation it now needs to be a "Flying Twenty," and occasionally a \$100 bill. This idea has spread all over the world as a multitude of compassionate people, led by the Holy Spirit, have used this means to help others.

Compassion doesn't come easily to most people. The amount of compassion a person feels and exhibits is a result of early training in the family and the parents' example. My parents showed a lot of compassion, especially during the depression. We did not have much, but we had a warm kitchen and food, and no one was turned away.

I remember an older man who came to the door at lunchtime on a cold winter day. As he came in, he stomped the snow off his shoes. He took off his overcoat and unwound a big wool scarf he had over his head covering his ears and his neck. Before he ate, he grabbed a pepper shaker and shook it over his bowl until the surface of the split pea soup was black. After two bowls and three peanut butter sandwiches, he thanked us profusely and went on his way. My parents' reply to any thanks or offer of payment was always, "Just glad we could be of some help." Since love comes from God and is part of the fruit of the Spirit, the effects of one's home background can be drastically improved by being filled with the Holy Spirit.

There are many needy people all around us; which ones should we help? Jesus Christ, in His earthly ministry, helped only whom the Father wanted Him to help (John 5:30). Sometimes He healed everyone present (Matt. 8:16; 12:15; Luke 6:19), and other times he healed only a select few. For example, in John 5:3 Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda where there lay a great multitude of sick people waiting to be healed. Instead of healing all the people there, Jesus healed just one person. In John 5:19, explaining why He followed that course of action on the Sabbath, Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."

In any large city in the world, you can't walk down the street without seeing an overwhelming number of needy. Even in my own community or church, the needs are more than any one individual can handle. I had to learn that I needed to be led by the Holy Spirit in doing what God wanted me to do with my resources.

Jude 22 says, "And of some have compassion, making a difference." Through many experiences I began to realize that compassion which makes a difference should affect or change someone else's life. Toward this end, compassion would include warning others against evil such as illicit sex, pornography, abortion, drugs (including alcohol), or anything else that could ruin their lives.

How could I put my Biblical love into action to the

glory of God so that it would make a difference? Here are three methods I learned:

1. Help people who can't help themselves. This would include older people, orphans and widows (James 1:27), the handicapped, the needy, and the sick.

2. Teach people to help themselves by teaching them a skill, such as English or reading or the use of tools, or by counseling them. A friend of mine worked for many years in the Frank Laubach Literacy program. When asked why she spent so many hours volunteering, she replied, "Reading is a tool that opens the door to better jobs and increased academic and cultural advantages. It can even open the door to eternal life if through reading the Bible they come to know Jesus Christ as Savior."

3. Help people eternally. Invite someone to church, pass out tracts, send a gospel letter to a friend or relative in another city, give a personal witness to someone, go on a missionary team to another country, help support an orphan in a Christian orphanage, volunteer to help in a Christian ministry or mission work.

I learned to practice compassion continually by being on the alert for opportunities to help strangers, family, friends, church members, and leaders, and by not being a burden to others by having a selfish, rebellious, or bitter attitude.

My faith has been strengthened from these ongoing experiences in learning to make a difference. In every opportunity I hope people will be helped and good things will result. Rarely do I know the full extent of my efforts. However, relying on faith (Heb. 11:1), I've learned to follow God's command to love by planting good deeds, watering them, and trusting God for the increase. One can be sure that compassion, love in action, can make a difference for the glory of God.

Dr. Walter G. Fremont is retired after serving many years as Dean of the School of Education at Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina.

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The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable.
—Ralph W. Sockman

Better shun the bait than struggle in the snare.
—John Dryden

In thankfulness for present mercies nothing so becomes us as losing sight of past ills.
—Lew Wallace

Every virtue divorced from thankfulness is maimed and limps along the spiritual road.
—Henry Ward Beecher

Some people always sigh in thanking God.
—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Hell is full of the ungrateful.
—Unknown

Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation.
—J. I. Packer

At Christmas love took the risk of birth.
—Anonymous

Once in the year and only once, the whole world stands still to celebrate the advent of one life. Only Jesus claims this worldwide, undying remembrance.
—Unknown

Christmas is the day that holds all time together.
—Alexander Smith

The manger is situated on Golgotha, and the cross has already been raised in Bethlehem.
—Dag Hammarskjöld

Every furrow in the book of Psalms is sown with the seeds of thanksgiving.
—Jeremy Taylor

As Simeon took Jesus up in his arms, he was holding an armful of forever.
—David M. Atkinson

The Gospel only speaks of the Virgin's virginity up to the birth of Jesus, everything is in relation to Jesus.
—Blaise Pascal

The nurse of infidelity is sensuality.
—Richard Cecil

The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.
—Martin Luther

The minister's work debilitates nature; like the candle, he wastes while he shines.
—William Gurnall

It never occurs to teenagers that someday they will know as little as their parents.
—Unknown

Behind every work of God you will always find some kneeling form.
—D. L. Moody

A cynic is a person who knows the cost of everything, and the value of nothing.
—Martha McHenry

The ministry will not grace the man; the man may disgrace the ministry.
—Joseph Hall

Christianity must mean everything to us before it can mean anything to others.
—Donald Soper

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.
—Jim Elliot

The repetition of small efforts will accomplish more than the occasional use of great talents.
—Charles H. Spurgeon

Some facts are so simple that clever people can't accept them.
—Robert Locke

Faith is seeing the invisible, but not the nonexistent.
—A. W. Tozer

It is hard to fail; but it is worse never to have tried to succeed.
—Theodore Roosevelt

We can stand affliction better than we can prosperity, for in prosperity we forget God.
—D. L. Moody

What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly.
—Thomas Paine



"... OUR GUEST THIS EVENING JUST SPENT SEVEN YEARS IN THE JUNGLES OF SOUTH AMERICA AS A MISSIONARY, ... WITHOUT A LAP TOP, PALM PILOT OR CELL PHONE... WHICH WE FIND HARD TO BELIEVE..."

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

Elisabeth—A Spirit-filled Woman

Sheila DePenning

They were days of great oppression. Godless, bloodthirsty men were ruling the land. Men who, in fits of anger, killed their own wives.

Those who lived and labored under these wicked tyrants were often filled with fear and hate. Morality among the people decayed, and there was corruption in both religion and government. The spiritual leaders were rejecting the God in whom all of their ritual should have found fulfillment. They were evil and coveted political esteem.

But the darker the night of sin, the brighter shines the light of faith. And before this backdrop of gloom we see one glowing gem—a woman.

She had grown up with all the fear and hatred, but her own soul had remained untouched. Could it be by accident that her parents had given her a name meaning “my God is the absolutely faithful One”? And was it mere chance that her husband, a minister before God and the people, should bear a name that declared, “the Lord remembers”?

It was later to be said of this man and wife that they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But their contemporaries looked on them with a hint of suspicion. This godly wife and husband were now an elderly couple—and Elisabeth was barren.

Zacharias and Elisabeth lacked the most obvious outward sign of God’s blessing on a marriage: children.

But one wonderful day Zacharias returned home to Elisabeth after ministering in the temple, and, though rendered speechless because of his own disbelief, he wrote excitedly the message the angel had given him by the altar: Elisabeth was to bear a son! His name would be John, and his calling would be to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Can you imagine Elisabeth’s excitement at such a declaration? Or her thrill as, day by day, her own body showed those unmistakable signs of motherhood? Surely she must have felt compelled to run and share her news with all her friends and family!

But as we turn to Luke’s account of this wonderful miracle, we read this of Elisabeth: she “hid herself for five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein He looked on me, to take away my reproach among men” (Luke 1:24, 25).

What self-control! But why would Elisabeth hide away like that? Perhaps to spend time in worship before her God. Perhaps to have fullest proof of the accomplishment of the promise before appearing in public (donned in the latest maternity fashions!). Perhaps even to speak of this most precious of God’s mercies would seem to desecrate the wonder of it all. Perhaps God alone would understand the outpourings of her heart at such a time; there are times like that in life.

But after being hidden away with God for a time, Elisabeth is prepared for a special moment of ministry.

We all remember the account of Gabriel’s announcement to Mary, the young mother-to-be of the Christ child. And at the angel’s prompting, whom does Mary turn to as her heart and mind are flooded with perplexity and wonder? To Elisabeth!

Why Elisabeth? Mary was probably well aware of the godly reputation of her cousin. She knew she could trust Elisabeth to enter into this most blessed of secrets with her and to help her sort out all the joyous turmoil of her heart. And now Elisabeth was with child, too!

The meeting of Mary and Elisabeth is described in Luke 1:39–45. As soon as Elisabeth hears Mary’s greeting, we read that “the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.” And so Elisabeth stepped into her brief but blessed time of ministry to the mother of God’s Son.

What a lovely picture we have here of the Spirit-filled woman! Notice Elisabeth’s first words to Mary: “Blessed art *thou* among women, and blessed is the fruit of *thy* womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

Elisabeth did not blurt out, “Just wait till you hear what has happened to me!” Even in all the wonder of what was taking place in her own life, Elisabeth nobly and voluntarily placed herself in the background and joyfully acknowledged that her younger relative had received infinitely more than she. Because Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, she was capable of such *selflessness*.

How about us? When we meet others upon whom the Lord seems to have bestowed “more abundant honour,” how do we respond? Jealousy—

Continued on next page

or selfless rejoicing with those whose circumstances place them in the spotlight of blessing and privilege? How we need to be as Spirit-filled Elisabeth—selflessly rejoicing with those that rejoice, realizing that God sovereignly bestows greater honor on whomever He chooses. Only the Holy Spirit can produce this selfless attitude that rejoices in the honor of another.

But we see something else in this account. Notice Elisabeth's recognition of Mary as "the mother of my Lord." The Spirit gave her unusual *discernment* of Mary's unique calling to be the mother of our Lord.

Any mother must smile when reading verse 44 of this chapter: "For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy." We know that tiny unborn babies move a great deal—but leaping? Interestingly enough, such an event could have served as a sign to Elisabeth of the blessedness of this occasion. According to Jewish tradition, the yet-unborn infants in their mothers' wombs responded with an "Amen" to the hymns of praise at the Red Sea!

Could we ask the Holy Spirit to give us such a spirit of wisdom and discernment? The apostle Paul prayed that the Ephesians would have a spirit of wisdom. And for the Philippians he requested that their love might abound still

more and more in real knowledge and all discernment to distinguish the things that are excellent. Think of the ministry we could have to others as we exercise this work of the Spirit in discernment.

As we look around us, are we discerning of the strengths of others? Do we see the potential for teachers, musicians, children's workers, and artists among our church families? Or how about discerning God's leading in others' lives? Is there a young person whose witnessing experiences may be preparing him or her for missionary or pastoral ministry? And then there are the needs of others. Many people are hesitant to share personal burdens and struggles with others. It takes spiritual discernment to recognize those unspoken needs and then to minister to these individuals.

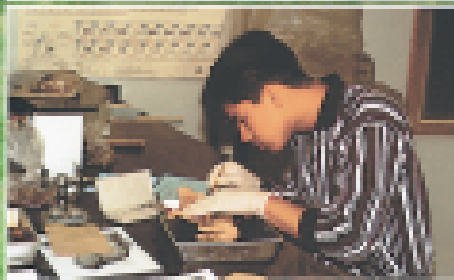
Now what did Elisabeth's discernment of Mary's special position and circumstance prompt her to say? Read verse 45: "Blessed is she that believed:

for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." Elisabeth went on to offer *encouragement* of Mary's faith in God. Both faith and exhortation are gifts or works of the Spirit.

Did we encourage anyone's faith today? How about the college student in church struggling to pay that tuition

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bill? Could we share with him how God has met our needs in a similar situation? Or perhaps a timid young woman has accepted the challenge of teaching a class of junior high girls. She's taken a step of faith. We can remind her that "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

They come to all of us—those opportunities to minister, enabled by the filling of God's Holy Spirit. As Elisabeth seized her opportunity, what was Mary's response to the spiritual ministry of Elisabeth? Was it, "Oh, Liz! What a very spiritual person you are!" No, indeed. We read that Mary's response was exaltation of the Lord and rejoicing: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." That is the outcome of a truly spirit-filled ministry to others.

Of course we must rejoice at another blessed outcome of Elisabeth's godly, Spirit-led life. In verse 57 we read, "Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son." He was a most wonderful son—of whom Christ later declared, "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7:28).

Now it would be easy to think, "But I've never had such a special ministry to anyone. Why isn't the Lord using me that way?"

We need to remind ourselves of some truths. The Spirit of God may take a long time to teach us true selflessness. Or to develop wise discernment. Or to cultivate the gift of

encouragement. Days or even years of quiet service and preparation before the Lord may come before a time of great opportunity and blessing.

And when it is our turn to truly minister to others, we may not recognize it at first. Somehow we expect the evidence of a Spirit-filled ministry to be very public and spectacular. But was Elisabeth's service public and spectacular? No, it involved two women, talking things over in the kitchen! One on one. And if we could walk on through life with Elisabeth, I believe we would see her spiritual ministry to her son John—in the home, by the bed, at the dinner table. One on one. This Spirit-filled woman's ministry touched and greatly affected the lives of two of history's most prominent personalities: Mary and John the Baptist. Yet Elisabeth remains forever in the background. Hers was only a supporting role in the great drama of redemption.

Is God preparing us for a Spirit-filled ministry to others? Have we been hidden away with God, even in a godless society like Elisabeth's, learning God's ways and recognizing His hand at work in our own lives? And then do we have such a testimony that others come to us to share very precious and blessed secrets and to be ministered to? May we be faithful in the days of preparation, yielded to the Spirit in ministry to others, and joyful in the blessed outcome of praise to God!

Sheila DePenning is a freelance writer living in Owatonna, Minnesota, where her husband teaches at Pillsbury Baptist Bible College.

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A Contrast Among Nations

Phil Shuler

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Proverbs 14:34

I am currently in the midst of a one-week revival with Dr. Ed Nelson, pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church in Tucson, Arizona. Last week I, like the rest of America, sat glued to the television set and watched as sin, in a very direct way, became a reproach to our great nation. My eyes were filled with the horror of passenger planes knifing into the tallest buildings on the New York skyline, of plumes of smoke not seen by these eyes since the bombing of Pearl Harbor, of fellow Americans leaping to a certain quick death from a hundred stories up, of desperate men and women trying to help each other and find each other! And all the while, my mind is quoting our text: "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

It is not my purpose to take advantage of a national tragedy, but as a minister it is axiomatic for me to question, "Why, God?" Why do we see thousands of workers simply disintegrate into the rubble of falling buildings? Why would God allow such a tragedy to befall innocent people? The unsaved world certainly would not agree with my answer, and I feel a good number of Christians would join them, but our text poignantly gives us the answer: "sin is a reproach to any people."

America is not a Christian nation. America is a secular nation consisting of godless and godly citizens. The government sets our rules through the Congress, and the Congress is made up mainly of unsaved people. The ACLU is dedicated to the liberal philosophy of the day with great emphasis in clearing the Bible out of every decision of government. Prayer is no longer allowed openly in any public school function; yet those of my age remember the public school they went to opening each day with prayer, and recollect having either Scripture verses or the Ten Commandments on their walls as they studied. No, we are a nation that contains Christians, but many of them of the silent variety.

I am a veteran of World War II. I spent my time in the South Pacific rooting the enemy out of islands. Ours was a noble cause. We knew who the enemy was and where they were and, most times, in what numbers. As we go to war this time, we face a fight that is almost unknown to our soldiers. This war is going to be much like a dangerous Easter egg hunt. The possibility of death will be the companion of many of our

boys as they seek to eliminate the terrorists who did this awful act.

Who is to blame? Who should take responsibility for this? I think that the casual Christian should consider this question in the light of our text. I've traveled the field of evangelism for 53 years, and I have seen the deterioration of Christian resolve to serve Christ with a whole heart. I have watched television take the place of the Bible. I have been in Christian groups in which the knowledge of actors on sitcoms far overshadowed their knowledge of Biblical characters. The children of Christians have no trouble reciting the batting average of almost any great baseball player, but they cannot remember the books in their Bible. Prayer meetings before our revival services were well attended after World War II, but today church members are too busy to attend. Both parents in many homes work, and the children have late sports practice. We have become an anemic nation spiritually. Our churches have a heap of world mixed up in them. We sacrifice our standards in church music to lure the young people to our services. We have replaced worship with entertainment, and then we wonder why our youth do not grow spiritually. We have met the enemy, and the enemy is us!

There is a solution. It is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Our churches must get back to preaching the Word and obeying the Word and not allowing the demands of the membership to supersede the demands of God. Our youth must be taught the meaning of repentance for sin and of loyalty to God's cause. We need to read our Bibles more than we need to carry them for appearance. We need pastors with character and a strong dose of holiness. We need to prove 2 Chronicles 7:14 with experience rather than memorization!

Brethren, let us ask God to give us another chance, and if He allows us one in this war, ask God, as will I, to allow revival to sweep our land and conquer the worldliness that is neutralizing our followers of Christ.

Dr. Phil Shuler is an evangelist based in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He can be reached at philshuler@juno.com.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS:

Many today may doubt the deity of Jesus but almost no one questions the genuineness of His humanity. The great stumbling block of modern unbelief is the assumption that he was *merely* man. The natural tendency of the Christian church is to respond by emphasizing the deity of Christ. But such responses always risk the pendulum effect. "The splendor of His deity should not be stressed to the extent of obscuring His real humanity" (Berkhof).

Curiously, one of the first heresies that confronted the early church involved a denial not of His deity but of His humanity. The miraculous works and divine claims of Christ were so indisputable and fresh on the minds of first-century witnesses that Satan's initial strategy was not to undermine Christ's perfections and miraculous acts. Rather, he used the leverage of those supernatural aspects of Christ's earthly life to cloud the memory by suggesting that it was all a mirage. He only *appeared* to be a man. After all, how could flesh and blood do those kinds of things?

Yet the assertion that Christ was God but not really man is equally as heretical as saying that Christ was a man but not really God. So essential to our salvation is the real and full humanity of Jesus that the New Testament argues for it repeatedly and abundantly.

The Humanity of Christ in the Gospels

The profoundest expression of the full humanity of Christ follows immediately on the heels of the profoundest expression of the full deity of Christ. John compresses into a single verse (John 1:1) the eternal pre-existence of Christ ("*in the beginning was the Word*"), the distinct personhood of Christ ("*and the Word was with God*"), and the divine identity of Christ ("*and the Word was God*"). A few verses later (1:14) he similarly compresses the humanity of Christ into the most concise and theologically pregnant statement imaginable. The divine Word did not merely take up a human form, or put on flesh, or inhabit a body. Rather, "*the Word was made (or became) flesh.*"

In recounting the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1), Matthew points out that He was the great grandson (times 24) of David the king and a descendant of Abraham as well. Luke carries the genealogical record of Jesus (Luke 3) back to Adam himself. Stunning—the *Creator of man makes Himself a descendant of the first man He created*. While both Gospels that record the actual birth of Christ (one penned by a physician) clarify that

the origin of the conception was not natural but supernatural and miraculous, they nonetheless use only the common terminology for a normal, natural, human birth (Matt. 1–2, Luke 1–2). Nine months of pregnancy, greatness with child, movement in the womb, followed, no doubt, by pain and blood, the cry of the first breath outside the womb, and the joy of first nursing this miraculous but very human infant boy wrapped up in Mary's arms. No talking animals. No mysterious luminescent aura radiating from the stable. No halos floating over anyone's heads. The unborn, unbegun God was born. Eight days later, He was circumcised (Luke 2:21) and certainly bled and cried at that procedure like any other male infant.

Luke the physician alone gives us the only description of His life in Nazareth from birth to age 12 (2:40)—"the child grew"—and again the only window into His development from age 12 to age 30 (2:51–52)—Jesus "was subject" to His parents and "increased in . . . stature" (i.e., grew up, matured physically). Even after His resurrection He was no mere spirit but had a body of "flesh and bones" which the disciples could and did handle (Luke 24:39). John the Baptist called Him a man (John 1:30) and Jesus called Himself a man (John 8:40).

Throughout the Gospel record of His earthly ministry, the Biblical writers include a variety of details that quietly assume Jesus' humanity. God never wearies (Is. 40:28), yet Jesus did (John 4:6); God never sleeps (Ps. 121:4), yet Jesus did (Matt. 8:24); God never hungers or thirsts (Ps. 50:12–13), yet Jesus did (Matt. 4:2; Jn. 19:28); God never dies (Dt. 32:40), yet Jesus did (John 19:30).

"How can this be?" you ask. "Great is the mystery of godliness," replies the Spirit through Paul. "God was manifest in flesh," with all the limitations of human nature in a fallen world.

The Humanity of Christ in Acts

The witness to Jesus on the part of those who knew Him includes patent admissions of His humanity. "Jesus of Nazareth" was "a man" (2:22; cf. 13:38, 17:31) in the Davidic line and "of the fruit of his loins," whose "flesh" was raised from death (2:30–31). He was of the seed of Abraham (3:25). That God purchased the church "with His own blood" (20:28) is a clear reference not only to the deity of Christ but to His humanity as well, for God is Spirit and has no blood apart from the humanity of Christ.

GOD WAS MANIFEST IN FLESH

The Humanity of Christ in the Epistles

Paul opens the grand theological treatise of Romans by declaring that Jesus was “made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (1:3), and later affirms that Christ was “of [the Israelites] according to the flesh” (9:5). He was a “man” (1 Cor. 15:21, 47), “made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4), “made in the likeness of man” and “found in fashion as a man” (Phil. 2:7, 8). It is only because He is man that He qualifies as a mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). The first element of the “mystery of godliness” is that “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

Hebrews is the most explicit manifesto of the manhood of Jesus among the epistles. His efficacious work as both High Priest and Sacrifice demands His real and full humanity. Since we, the objects of His saving work, are “*partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same*” flesh and blood in order to conquer death and deliver us from its power. That is why “he took not on him the nature of angels, but *he took on him the seed of Abraham*” because “it behooved him in all points to be *made like his brethren*” (2:14–18). The writer refers later to Christ “in the days of his flesh” (5:7) and to “the *body*” prepared by God for Him (10:5). It is “through the offering of the *body* of Jesus Christ once for all” that we are saved and sanctified (10:10), and “through the veil” of “his *flesh*” that we have access to God (10:19–22).

Peter, too, draws attention to the humanity of Christ by repeatedly referring to the “sufferings of Christ” on Calvary (1:11; 5:1) where Jesus “bore our sin in His own *body* on the tree” (2:24), “suffered for us in the *flesh*,” and was “put to death in the *flesh*” (3:18; 4:1). He further reminds us of the very human price He paid to secure our redemption—His own blood (1 Pet. 1:19). The death of Christ bore all the marks of His full humanity—from the blood He sweat the night before in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44), to the blood that flowed at His scourging and crowning with thorns (Matt. 27:26, 29), to the blood He spilled at His crucifixion (Matt. 27:24, 25; John 19:34). The historic orthodox doctrine of the hypostatic union, formulated at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), asserts that Christ is one Person whose two natures, divine and human, are “without confusion” and “without change,” “the distinction of the natures being in no way annulled by the union.” There is no mixture between His natures so that a third nature is produced “which is neither

humanity nor divinity but possesses the properties of both. This is an impossibility” (Charles Hodge). His deity does not make His blood divine; that would be a “confusion” of and “change” in the distinctive natures. Rather, it is His sinless humanity that gives His blood its efficacious value, and His identity as the one Theanthropic Person that gives it its infinite value—or what makes it, in Peter’s words, “precious.”

Finally, John addressed his epistles to believers who were confronting an early form of docetism (from a Greek verb that means to “seem” or “appear”), a heresy that diminished the importance of the humanity of Christ. That is why he, as an eyewitness, stresses the real humanity of Christ as “that which we have seen, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). In fact, he describes the error of those “who confess not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” as being the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7–11).

The Humanity of Christ in Revelation

Surprisingly, this spectacular prophetic presentation of the coming reign of Christ is laced with exquisitely subtle images of the enduring humanity of the glorified God-Man. He “washed us from our sins in his own *blood*” (1:5) and when He returns He will be seen by those “who *pierced him*” (1:7). When John turns to see the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, there stood “a Lamb, as though it had been slain”—literally, a Lamb freshly slaughtered for sacrifice. In fact, “Lamb”—with all its sacrificial overtones that require the humanity of Christ—is the dominant title for Christ throughout the book (used 28 times). That Lamb is praised for being “slain” and redeeming men to God by His “blood” (5:9; cf. 12:11). Christ is also referred to under the image of “a man child” born of a woman (12:6).

Importance of the Humanity of Christ

Clearly, in some respects Christ was not like any other man—as the God-Man He *couldn't* be if His saving work was to have infinite and eternal merit. And yet, in other respects, He was just like every other man—as the God-Man He *had* to be if His saving work was to have vicarious and substitutionary value. May a fresh appreciation of this miraculous and historical union between full deity and genuine humanity in the person of the God-Man—the Christmas event—make our celebration of it more profoundly spiritual.



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Falwell Apologizes to Liberal Groups

Southern Baptist pastor and television preacher Jerry Falwell has apologized for blaming abortion doctors and homosexuals, as well as the ACLU and People for the American Way, for the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. In an interview with Pat Robertson on the September 13 edition of *The 700 Club*, Falwell said, "The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularize America—I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'" He also said the ACLU should "take a lot of blame" for "throwing God out successfully with the help of the federal court system, throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools," according to a transcript made by PAW. Falwell, senior pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, released a written apology September 17, saying his comments were "insensitive, uncalled for at the time and unnecessary." (Baptist Press, 9/19/2001)

Historic Church Leaves SBC

On September 23 First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City terminated its affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention by a 300–69 vote. First Baptist was led by the late Herschel Hobbs, a popular pastor-theologian, from 1949–73. The church hosted two SBC annual meetings during its 87-year affiliation with the SBC. Anthony Jordan, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, responded to the church action by saying, "First Baptist saw its zenith under Dr. Herschel Hobbs, who was noted for his firm commitment to the Word of God and his love for the SBC. It is beyond comprehension that the church would have ever contemplated such a move under his remarkable leadership." Hobbs was the 1962–63 president of the SBC and chairman of the committee that drafted the SBC's 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement of beliefs. In its prime, First Baptist's Sunday school enrollment during Hobbs' pastorate approached the 3,000 mark. Current attendance stands at about 350. Last year's revision of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement was the driving force that caused the church to leave. First Baptist's current pastor, Jeffry Zurheide, said, "Among other things, the convention's 2000 Baptist

Faith and Message restricts the office of pastor to men only, and requires wives to 'submit graciously' to their husbands." First Baptist began ordaining women as deacons in 1983, and its board of deacons believes women should not be excluded from the role of pastor. (Baptist Press, 9/26/2001)

The Abandonment of Israel

Prior to the September 11 attacks, a speech had been prepared for Secretary of State Colin Powell to speak out in favor of a Palestinian state. Both President Bush and the National Security Council had approved the recognition of a Palestinian State as part of a major Middle East peace initiative. Plans were also being made for President Bush to meet for the first time with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at the United Nations General Assembly meeting scheduled for late September. Due to the September 11 attacks, however, these meetings have been postponed. Bush admitted that the U.S. has always supported the creation of a Palestinian state, as long as the right of Israel to exist was respected. The plan would establish Jerusalem as the capital of both states, with American embassies in both the Palestinian and Israeli-governed areas. (K-House eNews, 10/2/2001)

Homosexual Ambassador Appointed

While thousands of Bush administration nominees wait in the wings for confirmation, the administration did manage to appoint an openly homosexual ambassador to represent our nation abroad. Secretary of State Colin Powell administered the oath of office to Michael Guest, the administration's new ambassador to Romania—with Guest's "domestic partner," who will live in the embassy at taxpayer expense, beaming broadly in honored attendance. (*The Federalist*, 10/5/2001)

ACLU: "God Bless America" a "Hurtful" Message

Ms. Margaret Crosby, counsel for the ACLU of Northern California (based in San Francisco), insists that a "God Bless America" sign at an elementary school is "a hurtful, divisive message" and it "must be replaced immediately." Cosby states further in her complaint, "By displaying a religious message, the Breen Elementary School is dividing its young students along religious lines. School officials are hurting and isolating their schoolchildren of minority faiths when they should be supporting them and the values of pluralism and tolerance." (*The Federalist*, 10/8/2001)

Judge Upholds Florida Ban on Adoption by Homosexuals

Federal judge James L. King ruled August 30 in favor of a Florida law prohibiting adoption by homosexuals. The ruling is a noteworthy development in the ongoing battle over the campaign by homosexuals to gain legal rights in numerous areas. It likely will be appealed, however. Adoptions by homosexuals have not been allowed in many states, but Florida is the only state in which the legislature has barred adoption by homosexual individuals and couples. The law was adopted in 1977. The legislatures of Mississippi and Utah have passed laws prohibiting adoption by same-sex couples, although it is improbable individual homosexuals would be able to adopt in those states either. (Baptist Press, 8/31/2001)

Capital Gets "Domestic Partner" Benefits

Using the recent terrorist distractions as cover, the House passed, 226-194, legislation sponsored by homosexual activist Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ) to create marriage-like status for homosexual and unmarried heterosexual "domestic partners" in Washington, D.C. This action allows your tax dollars to pay for these "marriage-lite" benefits. (*The Federalist*, 9/28/2001)

Teaching the Bible as Literature

Terrebonne, Louisiana, is considering offering its public school students a class on

NOTABLE QUOTES

The per-pupil cost of public schools averages \$6,000, compared with \$3,100 for private schools. In other words, all else being equal, we could abolish all public schools and the taxes that support them tomorrow, let the market replace them with private schools, and cut the total cost of education by nearly half. Why isn't this done? The short answer is that there are many people on the payroll of the education bureaucracy who would be unhappy.—Llewellyn H. Rockwell Jr.

We have to dismantle the entire madness called multiculturalism. No, people are not the same everywhere, and what they do, believe and advocate is not of equal value.—Balint Vazsonyi

The real text of the sacred writers does not now (since the originals have been so long lost) lie in any MS. or edition, but is dispersed in them all. 'Tis competently exact indeed in the worst MS. now extant; nor is one article of faith or moral precept either perverted or lost in them; choose as awkwardly as you will, choose the worst by design, out of the whole lump of readings. . . . Make your 30,000 [variations] as many more, if numbers of copies can ever reach that sum: all the better to a knowing and a serious reader, who is thereby more richly furnished to select what he sees genuine. But even put them into the hands of a knave or a fool, and yet with the most sinister and absurd choice, he shall not extinguish the light of any one chapter, nor so disguise Christianity, but that every feature of it will still be the same.—Sir Richard Bentley (1662-1742), universally acclaimed as one of the greatest classical scholars of all time and a defender of the Scriptures against the attacks of Deism

I pledge allegiance to the Earth on which I stand, one world, one people, undivided, with food, shelter and justice for all.—Text of a "pledge of allegiance to the Earth" Los Angeles City Councilwoman Ruth Galanter proposes should begin each council meeting

Anyone who can blow up the Pentagon has my vote.—University of New Mexico history professor Richard Berthold

There is no longer any room in the world for a merely external form of Christianity, based upon custom. The world is entering upon a period of catastrophe and crisis when we are being forced to take sides, and in which a higher and more intense spiritual life will be demanded of Christians.—Alexander Berdyaev (1874-1948)

the Bible as historical literature. The class would be structured like an English class and would cover the writing styles of Biblical authors. The Bible has long been recognized for its high quality literature, which uses a large variety of ancient genres. The ACLU has been reported as saying that the idea is a "cruel joke on students" and has considered fighting the school if the school board allows the class to go through. This shows a bias on the part of the American Civil Liberties Union, considering that most high schools teach Greek and Norse mythology and other ancient literatures. Public schools are not prohibited from teaching about religions, but only from promoting particular religions. (*K-House eNews*, 8/28/2001)

Supreme Court to Rule on Cleveland Vouchers

The U.S. Supreme Court announced September 25 it will rule on a Cleveland, Ohio, program allowing vouchers to be used at religious schools, setting the stage for a controversial decision that could dramatically affect public education. A panel of the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals voted 2-1 in December of last year to uphold a federal judge's opinion that the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program violates the separation of church and state, because most of the private schools in which vouchers are used are religious ones. The Cleveland program, which was estab-

lished by the Ohio legislature, permits a low-income family to use a voucher of \$2,250 in state funds for tuition costs at the private or public school of their choice. More than 4,000 students use the vouchers in more than 50 private schools, most of them religious ones. (Baptist Press, 9/26/2001)

Public School Teacher Burns Flag

A suburban Sacramento area sixth grade teacher has been suspended with pay for allegedly burning part of a U.S. flag in his classroom while his 30 distressed students watched, one week after the terror attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. (*The Federalist*, 9/28/2001)

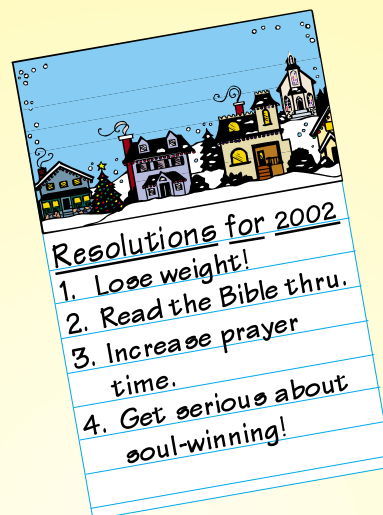
Faith Matters . . .

Ringgold, Georgia, now has a notable distinction, discovering how to bridge the non sequitur of the "free exercise" of atheism—as the town council decided, in response to the terror attacks, to post in public buildings a display of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and empty picture frames. Calling for a return to Christian values, Councilman Bill McMillon explained that the blank frames were included to acknowledge the "faith" of "those who believe in nothing." (*The Federalist*, 9/28/2001)

Mormonism's New Face

The Mormon Church is trying to appear as just another sect of Christianity. The church leadership has advised the media that the term Mormon Church is no longer acceptable. Henceforth, officials stated, short references to the church should read: "The Church of Jesus Christ." Mormons are trying to emphasize what they have in common with historic Christianity, not what makes them different. There has been a dramatic shift in the focus of the Mormon Church. Almost all the images of Joseph Smith have been removed from church halls and replaced by images of Jesus acting out key parts from the Bible and the book of Mormon. This is in an effort to distance themselves from the sordid past of bigotry and polygamy associated with founder Joseph Smith. Mormon doctrine, however, still remains largely distinct from that of traditional Christianity. They believe that Father God was once a human who progressed to divinity as He gained in knowledge and power, that He has a body, is married, and that human spirits are all His progeny. (*K-House eNews*, 9/4/2001)

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The Most Important Day in Human History

Ask a number of people to identify the most important day in history and you will get a variety of answers, among them, "September 11th." Certain days have changed the course of history. Columnist George Will recently commented on a court opinion that came down "six days before September 11th purged much of the silliness from public life." It is, for now, almost impossible to discuss serious matters without putting them in the context of that day. Older generations can remember several dates that have changed history, but for many, September 11th will be the defining moment of their lives, the most important day in history, at least for now.

This capacity to understand that some things are more important than others and that attitudes and actions must change because of them is a helpful characteristic of human nature. Wisely used, it should enable men to come to the right conclusion about what is, in fact, the most significant date in human history, or is at least the date set aside to remember it: December 25th. Nearly everyone knows that it has something to do with Christ, even though, for many, not much. Bible believers sometimes feel cheated by both the commercialization of the day and the name itself. "Christmas"—or the "Mass of Christ"—we have heard, is a contradiction in terms; it isn't about the death of Christ, but about His birth.

That criticism is probably not helpful. Admittedly, "Mass" now means a formal observation of the Eucharist, which includes the doctrine of transubstantiation, a

heresy which teaches that the elements become the literal body and blood of Christ. It denies the finished work of Christ and teaches men to "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." That is clearly not what Bible believers mean when they use the term "Christmas." We use the word as a part of popular culture instead of false theology, but the day still holds its significance.

The word "mass" is from the Latin word for "to dismiss." It is part of the liturgy used to end the formal service with the implication that communicants should "go" and practice what they have celebrated. We say something similar when we baptize, saying, "buried in the likeness of His death, raised to walk in newness of life." It is not surprising that Satan should cause confusion about the most important day in human history, which is clear to us because we don't just celebrate it once a year. Every Lord's Day is as significant to us as Christmas is to some.

At least once a week, we set aside other concerns and meet together to worship the Lord, to sing His praises, to pray together and learn from His Word. When we are dismissed, we are to go and practice what we have celebrated or learned. Our meetings end not with the mere formality of stated responsibility, but with practical obligation. The connection of Christmas to the Mass is an odious connection, but there is no need to cringe at the term so that we fail to honor the event. For us,

Christmas actually does mean, "Because of Christ, we can go and live differently."

Everything hinges on the incarnation of Christ—the crucifixion and resurrection were made possible by it. God made man to live in perfect fellowship with Himself. Sin destroyed that fellowship; Man was banished from the garden where he met with God. God's justice demands that his mercy cannot negate His righteousness, so He came to Earth in human flesh to suffer the penalty of sin Himself. The woman of Tekoah said it well, "For we must all needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him." The incarnation of the Son of God was that means.

We have a choice. We can sit on the sidelines and humbug error, or we can serve as a compassionate voice of accuracy. Since the fourth century, when Roman calendars began to indicate December 25th as the day of Christ's birth, the whole world has been affected. Something happened that changed history. We know what that was, and we ought to rejoice in it and tell others about it because they

too know that Christmas is an important day, even though they don't really understand it. He's coming again on that day when every man will get his history right. Until then, the day the Divine Savior appeared the first time is the most important day in human history.



DR. JOHN C. VAUGHN

Who's That Man?

Neil Cadwell

Chinese pastor Jin Wu (not his real name) sat down to dinner with his family recently and overheard one of his children whisper to their mother, "Who is the man who is staying in our home tonight?"

Tears flowed freely down Pastor Wu's cheeks when he shared that story during our recent visit with him in China. He has been home so seldom over the past 14 years that his own children don't even recognize him. For seven years the visits have of necessity been scarce because of an outstanding warrant for his arrest that could ultimately lead to his execution. The Chinese government has done its best to silence the voice of this man of God, a man who like Enoch walks with God every day of his life.

Pastor Wu comes from central China, a third-generation preacher in a family that traces its Christian heritage to the ministry of missionary Hudson Taylor. He accepted Christ when he was 16 years of age and by the time he was 23 was serving six different provinces as a traveling evangelist. God was blessing his ministry to the point where he attracted the attention of the Communist government. In 1986, just one year after his itinerant ministry began, he experienced his first arrest.

The charge? Preaching the gospel. The sentence? Three years.

Those three years in prison, besides separating him from his family, included regular beatings and systematic starvation. Often his daily rations consisted of less than two ounces of dry bread and nothing else. Yet God preserved his life through three long years of torture.

Friends and family marked Pastor Wu's release with a wonderful time of rejoicing, praising God, and celebration. Once again he took up his duties as a traveling evangelist, ministering to the many converts God was winning to Himself. When one of the young ladies in the church asked him to perform her wedding ceremony, he gladly accepted the invitation. The Christian wedding provided a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel with friends and relatives of the bride and groom, but it also gave a friend of the bride an excuse for reporting the pastor to the authorities.

This time the judge handed down a sentence of life imprisonment on the same charge as before—preaching the gospel. In spite of the opening of China to American

markets, the Communists have no intention of allowing their country to be opened to the gospel of Jesus Christ. More torture and starvation brought Pastor Wu to a physical condition that nearly robbed him of his eyesight. Threadbare clothing and one very thin blanket provided negligible protection from the harsh prison conditions. The officials made no secret of the fact that they would just as soon have seen him freeze to death. His testimony for God amazed them, for they often heard him pray in the midst of his suffering, "God, if it is your will for me to serve You blind, Your will be done."

Pressure from human rights groups finally brought this imprisonment to a close after two years, and with proper food and medical attention Pastor Wu's eyesight partially recovered.

This unexpected reprieve prompted a wonderful celebration and another short time for a reunion with his family. But then it was time for more preaching trips to encourage and challenge the house churches he loved. People needed the Lord, and they also needed the Word of God. Evangelist Wu knew the risk was great, but he gladly accepted a smuggled shipment of religious materials from Hong Kong. The materials arrived safely, but the drivers had been spotted, and once again the authorities had a charge they could level against this faithful man of God.

This time Pastor Wu was brought before the highest police chief of the entire province. The prior arrests and the seriousness of this offense led to a beating that rendered him unconscious even before a new sentence was passed.

But after the beating, everything changed. Instead of being taken back to prison he found himself in a small but comfortable room with warm clothing and adequate food. Several individuals came to visit him. They offered to enroll him at one of their finest Chinese seminaries at no expense to himself. He would be given a stipend that would provide for his own needs and those of his family. Permission would be given to continue preaching among his house churches just as he had done before. All he had to do was sign some papers, and they would stamp his signature with the official seal.

Pastor Wu smiled through weary eyes, still struggling

with the effects of his long years in prison, and shook his head, "I'll not deny or surrender my faith," came his quiet answer.

The next day his brother-in-law, who was a member of the Communist Party, came to the room to convince him to change his mind and accept their conditions for his release. To him the pastor replied, "Satan, get away."

When the officials returned to hear his final decision, Pastor Wu again spoke quietly but firmly, "I do not need even two minutes to make this decision. I'll not betray my faith."

For a time the officials seemed willing to accept that answer, but before long the strong-arm tactics that characterized his other imprisonments began again. He was beaten with bamboo canes until his flesh was ripped and torn. Stripped of his clothing, he was required to stand naked for hours in freezing winter temperatures. One form of torture involved severe jolts of electricity administered through metal bands around the prisoner's head. When Pastor Wu learned he would be facing that torture, he prayed and fasted for three days. To the amazement of his guards, the torture produced none of the usual damage to his body. "What kind of God do you serve?" they asked, and he was glad to tell them.

Two days later his third imprisonment came to an end. It had lasted one year.

Another reunion, another few days at home, and another alarm, this time in the middle of the night. Warned that officials were coming to arrest him, Pastor Wu fled through a back window in his pajamas and escaped.

Seven years have passed since that night. Ten to 12 hours a day Pastor Wu preaches and teaches, seven days a week. Travel is constant, not just because of the needs of the house churches, but in an attempt to stay one jump ahead of the authorities. Visits home are made at great risk to both him and his family, and though they miss him greatly they rejoice that he has remained free to serve his God.

Our brief two-day visit with Pastor Wu involved careful planning as to where we could meet and talk. It reminded us that the official openness of China does not extend to the faithful men who are sharing the gospel of Christ at tremendous personal cost. And it brought us face-to-face with the sobering question, "What price am I willing to pay to serve Christ in 2002?"

Neil Cadwell is an evangelist based in Muncie, Indiana.



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