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The Rapture

- ▶ Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the Rapture of the Church
- ▶ The Rapture in Matthew 24
- ▶ The Believer's Hope
- ▶ Revelation: When Does God's Wrath Begin?

The Rapture

Contents



DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS AND THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

Roy Beacham

God's revelation to the prophet Daniel of a coming "70-week" period is the most detailed prophetic chronology in all Scripture.



THE RAPTURE IN MATTHEW 24

Michael Riley

The biblically informed presuppositions we bring to the Olivet Discourse will have an extraordinary influence on the conclusions we reach.



THE BELIEVER'S HOPE

Brandon Carmichael

Catastrophic world events seem to be escalating, leading many Christians to wonder whether the end times are almost upon us.



THE DAY OF THE LORD

Kevin T. Bauder

The prophets of both testaments foretell the coming of a calamitous judgment that will end earth history.



REVELATION: WHEN DOES GOD'S WRATH BEGIN?

Mark Swedberg

God will judge the present world with wrath during the end times.



KEPT FROM THE HOUR

Kevin T. Bauder

Is Revelation 3:10 a proof text for a pretribulational rapture?



POSITION STATEMENTS

Our sincere thanks to Kevin Bauder for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

Departments



REGIONAL REPORTS




ON THE HOME FRONT



NEWS FROM ALL OVER



HEART TO HEART Nature's Complete Food *Janet Clark Shay*



AT A GLANCE Hebrews 11: What It Looks Like to “Live by Faith” (Part 2) *Layton Talbert*



WITH THE WORD TO THE WORLD *Jim Tillotson • Ready or Not*



CHAPLAIN'S REPORT Remaining Flexible *Timothy Hryniewicz*

INSPIRATION FOR THE
PASTOR'S STUDY

SOUND
WORDS

FIRST PARTAKER

.....

BRING THE BOOKS

.....

STRAIGHT CUTS

.....

WINDOWS



EVANGELIST'S PERSPECTIVE

The Doctrine of Justification

Jerry Sivnksty

The Rapture Introduction

A generation ago, fundamental Baptist churches often identified themselves as believing in three key doctrines: “the Book, the Blood, and the Blessed Hope.” The Book, of course, was the Bible, verbally inspired, inerrant, and authoritative for faith and life. The Blood was the blood of Christ offered in substitutionary atonement, a sacrifice on the cross that satisfied God’s justice for the guilt of sins. The Blessed Hope was the rapture of the church, which we believed to be

imminent (it could occur at any moment). The actions of local, state, and national leaders loom large in public discourse and in private conversations with family and friends. Many moral and spiritual issues are woven into the fabric of the exercise of governmental power. In the United States, humanly speaking, there is no richer, larger, or more powerful source of influence than our governmental institutions, especially those of our national government. Yet all the power of government is exercised only because God has allowed it. This principle was stated by Jesus Himself during His own trial when Pilate was deciding whether to free Him or crucify Him.

We still talk about the Book and the Blood, but the Blessed Hope receives much less attention than it once did. The exception is teachers who focus on newspaper headlines that they claim as signs of Christ's imminent appearing to rapture the church. This kind of sign-seeking tends to discredit the doctrine of the rapture.

The rapture will occur when Jesus appears in the air. He will raise all church saints who have died, and He will take both risen and living saints to His Father's house to be with Him forever (John 14:1–6). As our authors will argue, there are no signs of the rapture. It is the next event on God's prophetic timetable, and we should be expecting it at any moment.

The question for Bible believers is whether the rapture occurs before, during, or at the end of the tribulation. The tribulation, or Daniel's seventieth week, is the seven-year period during which God will finally judge the earth for its rebellion and rejection of Him. Pretribulationists believe that the church will be raptured before the tribulation begins. Midtribulationists believe that the church is raptured at the halfway point of the tribulation. Those who teach a pre-wrath rapture believe that the church will be caught away during the second half of the tribulation, but before the end. Posttribulationists believe that the church

will not be raptured until the very end of the tribulation: the saints will meet Christ in the air and immediately return with Him to the earth.

We can't discuss every issue related to the rapture in one issue of FrontLine, but we can introduce you to the most important biblical teachings. Roy Beacham shows how the entire church age, including the rapture, fits into a gap in the chronology of Daniel's seventy weeks. Michael Riley explains why he does not believe that the Olivet Discourse teaches us about the rapture. Brandon Carmichael explains Paul's vision of the rapture as the hope of believers. Kevin Bauder sets the rapture in the context of biblical teaching about the day of the Lord. Mark Swedberg shows why the wrath of God is present from the very beginning of the tribulation. Finally, Kevin Bauder examines the relevance of Revelation 3:10 for the timing of the rapture.

Our goal is to give you a biblical framework for thinking about the rapture. You will be

helped most by reading the articles in order.
May God bless you as you consider this precious truth.

Kevin Bauder
Associate Editor



Roy Beacham

Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the Rapture of the Church

God's revelation to the prophet Daniel of a coming "70-week" period, divinely decreed for Israel and for Jerusalem, is the most detailed prophetic chronology in all of Scripture. In four verses (Dan. 9:24–27) God describes an exact timeline for specific events beginning with Israel's return from captivity, through the atrocities of the coming tribulation, to God's ultimate destruction of the Roman antichrist. God's decree moves toward the goal of the final redemption of national Israel and the restoration of the king-

dom of God (v. 24). The timing and scope of this prophecy is unparalleled.

While a short article cannot explain the intricacies of this forecast, it will address one question: what does this timeline have to do with the rapture of the church? The answer is twofold: *nothing* and *everything*. Daniel's 70 weeks has *nothing* to do with the rapture of the church because the church, in Scripture, is called a "mystery" that is nowhere revealed or discussed in the Old Testament (Eph. 3:1–9; Scripture quotations are from the NASB). Not until the waning months of Jesus' earthly ministry did He introduce the idea of the coming church (Matt. 16:18). Later, the apostle Paul became God's messenger-in-chief regarding this new phenomenon, the communal body of Christ. So, Daniel's 70 weeks has nothing to do, explicitly, with the church or the rapture.

Still, Daniel's 70-week prophecy has *everything* to do with the church and the rapture.

In the wisdom of God's decrees and Daniel's timeline, God allows a time frame for the future church, its beginning, successes, trials, and completion, when it will be collectively gathered to God at the rapture. This time frame in Daniel's prophecy fits into a gap in the outworking of God's plans for Israel and Jerusalem. During this gap, God temporarily turns away from Israel in judgment and calls the church in grace.

To see this gap in Daniel's 70-week prophecy, we must first examine the time periods that it specifies. First, the 70 "weeks" (literally "seventy *sevens*") consist of weeks of *years*, not weeks of *days*. How do we know? Much like our English word "dozen" (a unit of twelve), the Hebrew word here translated "week" means "a unit of seven." To decide what these sevens are, we must look for other indicators. For example, in Daniel 10:2, Daniel uses this same word, "sevens," to refer to a week of seven *days*. This fact is made explicit where,

in the Hebrew text, the prophet adds the word “days” to clarify his use of the word “weeks” or “sevens” (literally: “I Daniel was mourning for three weeks [‘sevens’] *of days*”; see also verse 3, where the Hebrew text literally reads “weeks *of days*”).

The 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9 includes indicators to confirm that the “weeks” here refer to weeks of *years* not days. In Daniel 9:27, the last of these weeks, the 70th week, is categorized in two segments: the “one week” (i.e., the entire week) and “the middle of the week” (i.e., its midpoint). This segmentation views the last half of the 70th week as continuing “until a complete destruction . . . on the one who makes desolate” (v. 27). This destruction refers to the demise of the final Roman ruler, the antichrist, at the conclusion of the 70th week.

This division of the 70th week, then, provides evidence that the prophecy concerns weeks of *years* not days. Notice that other

prophecies in Daniel refer to the final half of this same period as “time, times, and half a time” (i.e., $3\frac{1}{2}$ “times”; Dan. 7:25; 12:7). God later re-uses this phrase, “time, times, and half a time,” in John’s vision of the last half of the tribulation as recorded in Revelation 12:14. This period is also equated with “forty-two months” (Rev. 11:2; 13:5) and “1,260 days” (Rev. 11:3; 12:6).

These descriptions of the last half of the 70th week (“time, times, and half a time”; “42 months”; “1,260 days”) prove that these are weeks of *years*, because $3\frac{1}{2}$ weeks of *days* cannot equal 42 months. Further, these descriptions also affirm that these weeks of years are 360-day *lunar*-calendar years, not $365\frac{1}{4}$ -day *solar*-calendar years. If 42 months equals 1,260 days, then each month comprises 30 equal lunar-cycle days. It is common in Scripture, the Ancient Near East, and other ancient cultures to calculate years in spans of lunar time. A lunar chronology is used in Israel’s religious

calendar (Num. 29:6; Neh. 10:33; Ps. 81:3; et al.) as well as in the history of the flood (compare Gen. 7:11, 17, 24; 8:3–14).

So, if the last week of Daniel's 70 weeks is a week of seven *years*, and if that week is calculated by a 360-day lunar calendar, then *all* of Daniel's 70 weeks are units of 7 years, with each year comprising 360 days. The total of years, then, is 490 (70×7), which equates to 176,400 days (490×360).

Having established the meaning of “weeks” (“units of seven”), and having determined that these weeks are weeks of years, and having discovered that the length of each year is 360 days, we can now chart the chronology of the prophecy and discover the gap in its sequence.

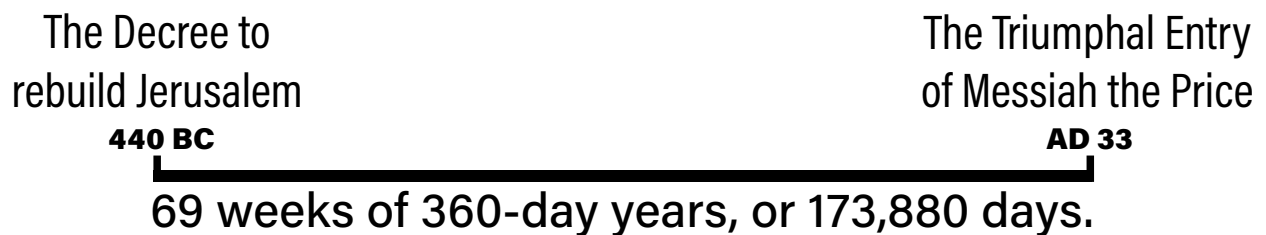
In Daniel 9:25, God isolates the first 69 weeks from the 70th week. That final week is not mentioned until verse 27. Interestingly, the first 69 weeks are also segmented into “seven weeks and sixty-two weeks” (v. 25a). The context associates this division with the

“restor[ing] and rebuild[ing of] Jerusalem” (v. 25a). The city’s rebuilding is detailed in the book of Nehemiah and was in fact a time of “distress” (v. 25b; cf. Neh. 1:3; 9:37). Historically, the restoration of Jerusalem could accurately fit the first 7 weeks (or 49 years) of Daniel 9:25.

Of greater importance in verse 25 is the event that *begins* the first 69 weeks (or the “7 weeks and 62 weeks”). Verse 25 also specifies the event that *ends* the first 69 weeks. The 69 weeks will extend “from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince.” What “decree” served to initiate the timeline of Daniel 9? Though debated, it was likely the directive of Artaxerxes recorded in Nehemiah 2:1–9, which authorized Nehemiah to restore the city of Jerusalem. That edict was issued in 444 BC.

The *concluding* event of the first 69 weeks, “until Messiah the Prince,” probably denotes the most regal or “princely” event in the life

of Messiah Jesus: His triumphal entry into Jerusalem in AD 33 (Matt. 21:1–9; Zech. 9:9; Ps. 118:26). Numerous biblical scholars have calculated these two events and have found that they correspond exactly to the 173,880 days of the first 69 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy (1 week of 7 years, x 69 weeks of years, x 360 days per year). The first 69 weeks, then, can be charted as follows:



Knowing now the initial and terminal markers of the first 69 weeks of Daniel’s timeline (v. 25), we see that the next verse (v. 26) lists events that occur “after” the 69 weeks. These events include (1) the crucifixion of Jesus, having not yet received His kingdom; (2) the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (AD 70) by the people of the coming false prince, the Roman antichrist; and (3)

an ensuing period of warfare and desolations that persist “even to the end” (v. 26). Verse 27 begins with these words: “And he [the false prince, the coming antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many [i.e., with Israel] for one week,” the last of Daniel’s 70 weeks. The verse then describes the horrors of that last week of years, the 70th week, the coming tribulation.

The gap in Daniel’s 70 weeks is now evident. *The overall purpose* of God’s decree is stated in 9:24. *The first 69 weeks* of the timeline are described in 9:25. *The intervening events* (“after” the 69 weeks but before the 70th) are listed in 9:26. Then, *the final week*, the 70th week, is described in 9:27. The interlude appears as shown in the chart at bottom.

Where do we discover the church and her “catching away”? As expected, the church and the rapture are not mentioned in this account. Nevertheless, Daniel’s prophecy allows time for the church. The church began at Pentecost

and leaves earth at the rapture. These events fit precisely into the gap of Daniel's 70 weeks. Along with God's provision for His chosen people Israel, God has also provided for another chosen people, the church. This gap in Daniel's 70 weeks fits not only with the "mystery" of God's church (Eph. 3:1–12), but also with Jesus' "mystery" parables, where He describes the delay of the kingdom (Matt. 13; see esp. v. 11). It also fits with the "mystery" of God's programmatic hardening of Israel and the grafting in of Gentiles (Rom. 11:25), not to mention the "times of the Gentiles," in interruption of Israel's kingdom program (Luke 21:24; see Dan. 2, 7).

In conclusion, we find the church and the rapture of the church only within the gap of Daniel's 70-week prophecy. The 70-week of his prophecy is, in fact, the tribulation period. If, indeed, the church is located entirely within the gap between the 69th and 70th weeks, then church saints will be raptured *before* the 70th

week (the tribulation) begins. Exactly when, before the 70th week, will the rapture occur? That question must be pursued by examining the New Testament texts that define, more precisely, the rapture and its timing.



Roy Beacham is professor of Old Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis.





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A blurred, grayscale background image showing a group of people walking away from the camera, creating a sense of movement and depth. The figures are out of focus, emphasizing the text in the foreground.

Michael Riley

The Rapture in Matthew 24

*“The one shall be taken,
and the other left.”*

It is hard for most of us to read these words from Matthew 24:40–41 without thinking of the rapture. In the Olivet Discourse (a lesson that Jesus delivered from the Mount of Olives during the week before His crucifixion), our Lord gives us a vivid picture: there are two people in a bed; there are two peo-

ple working in a field—and *then* there is one in the bed, one in the field. Two people have entirely disappeared. The shocking description fits our expectation of believers being “caught up together . . . in the clouds.” If these verses do speak of the rapture, then the surrounding context suggests events that might be signs of that blessed hope.

Despite this seemingly straightforward connection, I contend that we should avoid reading these verses as a reference to the rapture. Before turning to the exegesis of the relevant sections of Matthew 24–25, Mark 13, and Luke 21, we will first consider two overarching interpretive principles.

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION *WITHIN* THE NEW TESTAMENT

All Christians believe that God reveals His eternal plan in greater detail as history unfolds. This conviction is particularly central to dispensational theology. Dispensationalists

insist that Paul means it when he says that the church is God's mystery "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5).

The New Testament adds both content and clarity to what God previously revealed in the Old Testament. But even *within* the Old Testament, as the centuries pass, there is a substantive increase in detail on many matters. There is no reason, then, to reject out of hand the idea that certain doctrines also gain clarity *within the New Testament*. That is to say, we should not find it intrinsically objectionable that the book of Revelation gives us more detail about last things than the book of Galatians—not simply because their subject matter differs, but because God chose to reveal greater detail about His plan for the end of this age to John (at the close of the first century) than he did to Paul (nearer its midpoint).

Thus, we should not insist that, if something is true, it must be equally clear in all of Scripture, or even equally clear in the entire New Testament. It is quite possible that the Spirit of God inspired a text that offers more substantive content or greater clarity on an issue later in the New Testament than He did in the earlier books.

THE RIGHT DOCTRINE FROM THE WRONG TEXT

The second observation is one that should need no defense but is nonetheless a needed reminder: we have no right to twist the meaning of any passage of Scripture, even if—*especially if*—our goal is the defense of truth. In moments of theological conflict, we are too often inclined to give the opposition no quarter. It seems like weakness to concede that there are any verses that seem to support another position. Even to allow that there are verses that do not *explicitly* endorse our own position can feel like an illegitimate compromise.

The practice of being reckless with proof texts is a serious error, for it removes the Bible from its rightful place as the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. Preaching “the right sermon from the wrong text” asks your congregation to trust *you* rather than trusting *the word of God*. The same is true when we defend a sound doctrine by appealing to a biblical text used out of context.

Obviously, this admonition is relevant here. We can conclude that *the Olivet Discourse does not teach the rapture* without concluding that *the Bible does not teach the rapture*. These two conclusions are distinct and *must* be kept separate.

AGAINST THE RAPTURE IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Here is a trick question: are the Gospels New Testament or Old Testament books? The answer is that, while they are obviously located in our New Testaments and were written

during the church age and for the church, the events recorded in the Gospels occurred under the dispensation of the law of Moses. Jesus tells people to “leave there thy gift before the altar” (Matt. 5:24) and “shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded” (Mark 1:44). He says things like this because He is speaking to those who are under the law.

The point of this observation is that much of the content of the Gospels focuses upon God’s purposes for covenant Israel rather than the New Testament church. That being so, while we ought to be open in principle to the possibility that Jesus is teaching about the rapture in the Olivet Discourse, we cannot presume that it does. The burden of proof rests on those who believe that they see the rapture in Matthew 24:40–41. As a matter of initial assumptions, we should be surprised to find any explicit teaching of the rapture of the church before the church itself has been estab-

lished and revealed by the “holy apostles and prophets.”

For my part, I am unconvinced by expositions of the Olivet Discourse that depend on a careful parsing of the disciples’ question in Matthew 24:3: “Tell us . . . what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” There are good commentators who make much of there being two *distinct* questions here, one about Jesus’ coming and one about the end of the age. But if we consider the parallel texts (“Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” [Mark 13:4] and “Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?” [Luke 21:7]), a distinction between Christ’s *coming* and *the end of the age* does not seem to exist.

In this passage, as in so many others, the biblically informed presuppositions with which we come to the Olivet Discourse will

have an extraordinary influence on the conclusions we reach. I find particularly striking D. A. Carson's evaluation of the critical verse on those who are "taken." Carson comments, "It is neither clear nor particularly important whether 'taken' means 'taken in judgment' . . . or 'taken to be gathered with the elect.'" I cannot agree with his assessment that this issue is not "particularly important"; hardly any distinction could be *more* important.

But I do agree with Carson that the verse is not absolutely clear. To be sure, there are hints. In favor of "taken" being a blessing, just a few verses earlier Jesus says that "he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt 24:31). This might incline us to link the "gathering" with the "taking."

But even closer context suggests the opposite. Verse 39 tells us that "the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming

of the Son of man be.” The very next verse is the one that speaks of the two “in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” Now, an important point: *took . . . away* in verse 39 is a different word (*airō*) than is *taken* in verse 40 (*paralambanō*). Despite this change from one Greek term to the other, the parallelism of *concept* should incline us to understand *taken* in verse 40 negatively (taken to judgment).

Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse does not include the taken/left verses, but he does produce them in another teaching of Jesus. That account concludes, “And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles [better, *vultures*] be gathered together” (Luke 17:37). In Luke, Jesus’ answer offers little hope that those who are taken are blessed. That consideration should push us away from seeing “taken” as a reference to the rapture. We should note, however, that the proverb about vultures appears in a different

portion of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew (24:28), without the connection to being “taken.”

On balance, I do think that the evidence is that “taken” language in the Olivet Discourse is more likely to be for judgment. Especially for someone convinced by the *rest* of Scripture of a dispensational biblical theology, there is not enough contrary evidence in the Olivet Discourse to find the rapture in these words.

**ON BALANCE, I DO THINK THAT
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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Theological disputes among true brothers are hardly ever resolved by appeal to a single

passage—otherwise, the matter would likely not be disputed to begin with. Those who see the “taken/left” language in Matthew 24 as a reference to the rapture tend (not universally) to see it as strong proof of a posttribulational rapture, as that is where the language fits in Jesus’ address.

The bulk of the Olivet Discourse is taken up, not with the future of the church, but with the events of Daniel’s seventieth week and the redemption of Israel. Given the passage’s description of the events of the tribulation, it is best to understand verses 40–42 as a reference to the second coming of Christ to earth, with those who are *taken* being removed to judgment and those who are *left* remaining to enter the millennial kingdom.

Michael Riley is the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Wakefield, Michigan.



BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS





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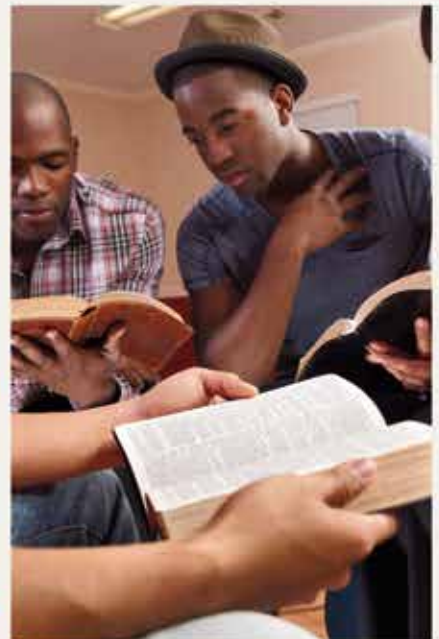
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The Believer's Hope

Brandon Carmichael

Wildfires. Wars. Moral collapse in the Western world. In these and other ways, catastrophic world events seem to be escalating, leading many Christians to wonder whether the end times are almost upon us. What should Christians expect from the last days? Is Scripture being fulfilled in front of our eyes? How should Christians respond to uncertain times?

God does not intend to leave us hopeless in the face of these questions. Instead, He tells us through the apostle Paul what Christians should expect and prepare for in these last days. He wants us to establish our hearts in

hope and peace. One of the clearest texts written to console Christians in uncertain times is 1 Thessalonians 4–5.

GOOD NEWS IN TROUBLED TIMES

In this text, Paul extends hope to believers by explaining two arrivals. The first is the coming of Christ for His saints (sometimes called the *rapture*). The second is the subsequent arrival of the day of the Lord. He concludes both these teachings with the instruction to “comfort [encourage] one another with these words.” These teachings bring good news to troubled days. Particularly encouraging is the first arrival, the rapture of the church.

Paul describes the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. The Thessalonian believers were already famous for their “patience [steadfastness] of hope” which revealed itself in their lives by their “wait[ing] for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the

dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1:10). As they waited in hope, however, some from their church family had passed away (“them which are asleep,” 4:13). Was the hope of those brothers and sisters wasted? Would these brothers and sisters somehow miss out on the glorious return of Jesus? Paul explains the details of the coming of Jesus with the goal of assuring us that all Christians will participate in that coming. No one will be left out.

Paul begins by reminding the Thessalonians—*and us*—that our hope in a personal participation in the return of Jesus is rooted in the gospel itself. Paul says, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (4:14). The logic is easy to follow: Christians have a new identity bound up in Jesus Himself. So, since Jesus died and rose again, all those who believe in Jesus and have died (“sleep”) with Jesus will rise again one

day with Jesus. The gospel assures us of the certainty of our resurrection.

THE ORDER OF EVENTS OF CHRIST'S COMING

But Paul's point is not simply to remind us of the truth of the resurrection. His point is that the dead in Christ will rise *first*. In other words, Paul is writing to explain the order of events of the coming of Christ. In fact, Paul specifies four events which will occur in sequence. Let us consider these events in order.

“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven” (4:16a). The first event that will mark the arrival of the Christian hope is the descent of Jesus “from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God.” The emphatic authority of Christ's coming is clear in these words. With such an authoritative cry of command, how could Christ's church not joyfully respond?

Paul mentions this same heralded arrival in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 where he writes, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” The descent of Christ for His church will hardly be a subtle, secret event.

Some Christians have wondered how a loud, visible event such as the descent of Jesus for His church, including the bodily resurrection of millions of saints, could be overlooked by a world that continues in a God-defiant race toward judgment and wrath. The question is fair, but Scripture testifies of similar events and similar spiritual blindness. Toward the end of Jesus’ ministry, the Father spoke to Him from heaven. Nevertheless, “the people . . . that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered” (John 12:29). Similarly, when Jesus confronted Paul on the road to

Damascus in blinding light, with a voice speaking in Hebrew, his fellow-travelers “saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake” (Acts 22:9). It seems as though regardless of what they may see or hear, unbelievers will be likewise blinded and deafened by unbelief to the reality of the descent of Jesus.

“The dead in Christ shall rise first”
(4:16b). This is the very promise that Paul began with: the dead in Christ will rise first. Though many brothers and sisters have “fallen asleep,” they are in a privileged position in Christ, and will experience the glory of resurrection “first.” Paul repeats this same order of events in 1 Corinthians 15:52: “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” Jesus has a plan, and that plan prioritizes those who have died in hope.

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the

air” (4:17a). The third event of the rapture is Jesus catching up those of us who are alive. Remember the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:15: “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep.” We shall not be “gather[ed] together unto him” (2 Thess. 2:1) *first*, but we also shall not be left behind.

“So shall we ever be with the Lord” (4:17b). The final promise of this text is that, from the moment of Jesus’ descent for the church, we shall always be with the Lord. This is the same promise Jesus gave His disciples in the Upper Room, as John recorded in John 14:2–3: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” The promise of Jesus is that He will take us to His “Father’s house.”

Though that “house” will one day come down to earth (Rev. 21:2), we will accompany Jesus to that “house” when He raptures the church.

PAUL’S HOPEFUL MESSAGE

Consider again Paul’s word of promise: rather than the dead possibly missing out on the return of Jesus, Paul makes it clear that “the dead in Christ” will have a position of prominence at the resurrection; it is they who will “rise first.” It is almost as though those who are alive will play second fiddle to the dead in Christ at the resurrection. This is a relief for those who are worried that the dead might be disadvantaged at the return of Jesus.

This teaching from Paul provides encouragement for the church even today. Christians face the uncertainty of war and natural calamity. The church faces insecurities brought on by the moral collapse of Western civilization and increasing persecution in Eastern lands. Popular preachers and best-selling Christian

authors foretell the end of the world. They read current headlines into biblical prophetic texts, then sell their insights to confused Christians who are looking for answers.

But Paul's hopeful message is that Christians need not worry themselves over prophetic events or end-times stage-setting. The church of Jesus Christ has God's promise that the next end-times event is the arrival of Jesus Himself for the church. Furthermore, Paul was so hopeful over this return of Jesus that he expected that he himself might still be alive when Jesus came. He writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that "*we which are alive and remain* shall be caught up." He fully expected that Jesus might return in his own lifetime. And this hopeful expectation of the imminent, any-moment return of Christ should be the hopeful expectation of Christians today. No matter the turmoil, no matter the peace, Christians know that Jesus may return even today, and "so shall we ever

be with the Lord.” These are words to live by.

Paul’s word of hope in 1 Thessalonians 4 is clear: do not fear uncertain days; Jesus is coming soon. When He comes, He will raise His whole church to be with Him—the dead first, then the living. Let us wait in eager expectation that Jesus’ coming could happen today, while we still live.

Brandon Carmichael pastors Victory Baptist Church in Albion, New York. He has been a missionary in Brazil.



The Day of the Lord

The prophets of both testaments foretell the coming of a calamitous judgment that will end earth history. This judgment—known as the *day of the Lord*—will usher in great wrath and great blessing, but the wrath will arrive first. It will arrive as “a day of darkness and gloominess” (Joel 2:2). People will try to run from it like a man who flees from a lion, but then runs into a bear; when they think they are safe they will be like a man who leans his hand against a wall, but a snake bites him (Amos 5:19–20). It will bring all the proud and mighty to their knees (Isa. 2:11–17). Its pangs and sorrow will strike

suddenly, as labor overwhelms a woman with child (Isa. 13:6–9). It will be such a day of wrath that strong men will cry bitterly (Zeph. 1:14–16). It will arrive unexpectedly, like a thief in the night, and its fiery climax will witness the final destruction of the heavens and the earth (2 Pet. 3:9–10).

Though it does include intense blessing, the day of the Lord both begins and ends in divine wrath. This is not the wrath of Gehenna, the everlasting lake of fire where sinners will suffer, but the wrath of a just God who steps into world history to judge His enemies, deliver His people, and demonstrate His sovereign rule over all events. This is not God's everlasting wrath (which will also come), but His temporal wrath—His wrath poured out upon sinful humanity in space and time. The day of the Lord begins with the tribulation, and it ends when the heavens pass away with a great noise and the elements melt with fervent heat. Thus, it includes the

blessings of the millennial kingdom, but these blessings are bookended by divine judgments.

When Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, the assembly was enduring sharp persecution. So severe was their suffering that the saints began to wonder whether they had somehow fallen into the day of the Lord. To reassure them, the apostle Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, reminding them that they already knew the times and the seasons (v. 1). They already understood perfectly that the day of the Lord would arrive like a thief in the night (v. 2). The thief-in-the-night language points up two similarities with the day of the Lord. First, the arrival of the thief is unexpected. Otherwise, people would be prepared. Second, the visit of a nighttime thief is a bad thing. It results in loss, perhaps great loss.

Paul also borrows an analogy from Isaiah, comparing the arrival of the day of the Lord to the onset of labor pains (v. 3). It is sudden, unexpected, and painful. It occurs at a

time when people believe they are experiencing peace and safety. Any man whose wife has awakened him to rush her to a maternity ward can appreciate this comparison. Both may be eager to hold the baby, but they also fear the process of delivery. Paul makes it clear that, when the day of the Lord arrives, no one escapes the labor pains (v. 3).

Must church saints fear the day of the Lord? Surprisingly, Paul says *no*. He reminds the Thessalonians that they are not in the night (the darkness), and one who is not in the night cannot be caught by a thief in the night (v. 4). People fear the thief in the night *at night*. While they are in the day, they are safe.

Some have suggested that this verse means that, even though church saints will have to go through the day of the Lord, they will not be surprised because they will see it coming. That interpretation is nonsense. It is like telling a man who is about to face a firing squad, “We have good news! We’re going to take

away your blindfold!” How ridiculous.

No, Paul is saying that church saints are not in the night, so they do not need to fear a thief in the night. He emphasized this point in the next verse (v. 5). Church saints are children of light and children of day. We are not night people. We are day people. Day people do not need to fear the things that happen at night, because they are not of the night or the darkness.

At this point, Paul cannot resist a minor digression. He has been using words like *night* and *day*, *darkness* and *light* as metaphors for spiritual standing. Christians are of the light and the day; the unsaved are of the darkness and night. He now insists that people of the day must conduct themselves in ways that are appropriate to the day: “Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (v. 6).

In this metaphor, Paul contrasts wakefulness and self-possession with sleep. To be alert and self-possessed is to attend to the

things of the Lord. Sleep, on the other hand, means spiritual lethargy and indifference. It is possible for Christians to live either way, but only one way of life is really suitable for the daytime. As Paul notes, people sleep and get drunk in the night (v. 7). Since Christians are in the day and not the night, they ought to be alert.

At the end of 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul also talked about sleep. There, he referred to Christians who have died as those who “sleep in Jesus” (4:14). The sleep of chapter 4 and the sleep of chapter 5, however, are not the same thing. We know this for two reasons. First, the context of chapter 4 is about death and resurrection, while the context of chapter 5 is about spiritual alertness versus sluggishness. Second, Paul uses two different terms in the two passages: *koimaō* in chapter 4 and *kath-eudō* in chapter 5.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:6–8, Paul wants believers to match their conduct to their spiritual

standing. Since they are in the day and not the night, they should do things that befit the day. To sleep or get drunk (metaphors for spiritual sluggishness or stupor) is nighttime and not daytime behavior. On the contrary, since they are in the day, Christians should wake up and put on their armor: the breastplate of faith and love and, as a helmet, the expectation of salvation or deliverance (v. 8).

Paul introduces the word *deliverance* (*sotēria*) in the context of discussing the intense wrath of the day of the Lord. He is not talking so much about general salvation (as from the lake of fire) as about deliverance from the day of the Lord. His point is that church saints should expect to be delivered from God's temporal wrath, and that this expectation is an important element in the Christian's armor.

This is a surprising claim, but Paul reemphasizes it in the next verse (9). God has not appointed Christians for wrath—any of it!

Church saints are fully exempted, not only from suffering God's everlasting wrath in hell, but also from suffering His temporal wrath in the here and now. No church saint can ever be subjected to any manifestation of divine wrath.

How can this be? After all, some people will be saved during the tribulation, but God does not simply remove them from His wrath during that time. What is different about believers during the present age? Why should they be given a special exemption from temporal, day-of-the-Lord wrath?

The answer lies in 5:10. By virtue of His cross-work, Christ has done some things for church saints that He has not done for anyone else (for example, only the church is the bride of Christ; only the church is united to Christ through the baptizing work of the Spirit). One of the things that Jesus did specifically for church saints was to die "for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him." In other words, through His death

and resurrection, Jesus has made it necessary for church saints to live with Him in heaven when God's temporal wrath is poured out on the earth. That is the promise of the rapture.

This promise applies to all Christians, whether we are awake (spiritually alert) or asleep (spiritually sluggish). In other words, this verse absolutely rules out any possibility of a partial rapture in which only "spiritual" believers are taken. It also rules out any "outer darkness" in which disobedient believers are punished after the rapture. The point of 5:10 is that when one Christian gets raptured, all Christians must get raptured to live with Christ. The rapture is universal in the sense that it will take all believers at the same time.

Furthermore, Paul ties the rapture of all believers directly to the cross-work of Christ. In other words, a universal rapture is a gospel issue. Christians disagree about when the rapture occurs: before, during, or after the tribulation. The timing of the rapture is not a gos-

pel issue. But the universality of the rapture is. A partial rapture is a genuinely heretical idea.

First Thessalonians 5:1–10 also provides an important clue for deciding the timing of the rapture. It must take place before the temporal wrath of God begins. If a scripture says when that takes place (as Revelation 5–6 does), then the Bible offers a clear teaching of when to expect the rapture with reference to the tribulation. And that is the very issue that Mark Swedberg will explore in his article on those chapters.

Kevin T. Bauder pastors Bible Baptist Church in East Bethel, Minnesota. He teaches theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis.



Revelation: When Does God's Wrath Begin?

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess. 5:9)

God's wrath is His retribution for sin. The Bible teaches that God displays His wrath in different ways. He obviously exhibits wrath when He sends people to hell, but He sometimes also pours out His wrath within the present world. Specifically,

He will judge the world with wrath during the end times. We pretribulationists believe that the church will not experience the end-times wrath of God. Specifically, we believe the church will be raptured before God's retributive wrath is poured out on the earth during the tribulation.

Some non-pretribulationists also hold this view. One example is Robert Gundry, who, in his 1973 book, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism*, argued that God's retributive wrath will not arrive until the very end of the tribulation. Another example is Marvin Rosenthal, whose 1990 book, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, recognized that the church escapes from God's wrath. He argued, however, that divine wrath does not arrive until after the midpoint of the tribulation. For Rosenthal, the rapture is "pre-wrath," even though it does not occur until about three quarters of the way through the tribulation.

The question we must answer is, “When does God’s retributive wrath begin in the tribulation?” Pretribulationists believe the whole tribulation constitutes God’s wrath upon mankind. Although the severity of the judgments increases as the tribulation progresses, the entire tribulation is the outpouring of divine wrath. Marvin Rosenthal believed that it arrives after the midpoint of the tribulation, while Robert Gundry thinks it will arrive only at the very end.

Rosenthal and Gundry use nearly identical arguments to explain why God’s wrath is not present from the beginning of the tribulation. Their most basic claim is that not every distress that befalls humanity in the book of Revelation is due to the wrath of God. In addition to divine wrath directly poured out on unregenerate sinners, Gundry identifies four other sources of distress in Revelation. These include (1) the unrestrained ravages of Satan and demons; (2) violence and other

evils brought about by the wickedness of unregenerate humans; (3) persecution of the saints by the Antichrist and his forces; and (4) God's chastening of Israel in preparation for their repentance when Christ returns (see Gundry, p. 47).

Allied to this claim, both Gundry and Rosenthal argue that the final three seal judgments occur during the latter half of the tribulation. This is important to their views because the sixth seal (Rev. 6:13–17) describes men fleeing in terror before the wrath of the Lamb. Pretribulationists typically affirm that all seven seals are opened during the first half of the tribulation.

Both Gundry and Rosenthal, however, agree with pretribulationists that at least the first four seals are opened during the first half of the tribulation. If this interpretation is correct, then the timing of the sixth seal does not matter. It can be shown that the first four seals are acts of God's retributive wrath on sinful

humankind. Therefore, the church necessarily must be raptured before the first seal is opened.

Why argue that the first four seals dispense God's wrath? To understand these seals, the preceding context must be recognized. It begins in Revelation 4, with John being called up to the throne room of God where he witnesses a worship service. This service is led by four angelic beings, with responses by twenty-four elders. The scene is glorious, full of splendor, and loud. The four living creatures cry out, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (v. 8). The twenty-four elders answer by casting their crowns before the throne and saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (v. 11).

This chapter establishes several truths about God that bear on our discussion. It estab-

lishes His holiness. He cannot put up with sin. It establishes His omnipotence. He is the Almighty, or All-Powerful One. Finally, it establishes His right to rule over the universe. God created all things because of His will.

We are, therefore, caught off guard when the mood turns to despair in chapter 5. The One who sits on the throne (God) is holding a book that is sealed with seven seals. A “strong angel” is looking for someone who is worthy to break the seals and open the book, but nobody can be found anywhere.

What is the book? A title deed? A last will and testament? We aren’t told, but there are a few things we can observe.

First, it is in the form of a scroll. Codices, which are bound books as we know them today, were not yet in use. This scroll was written front and back and sealed with seven seals.

This scroll was like the *siege perilous* in the Arthurian legends, the seat upon which only

one person was allowed to sit. In this case only one person could open the scroll. An angel was seeking someone who was worthy to open it, but no one was found—not in heaven, on earth, or even under the earth.

This deficiency caused John to weep copiously and loudly. Why such despair? John understood that the book contained the completion of world history and of God's plan. If no one was found to open it, God's designs would be frustrated, and Satan would remain in charge of this world forever. All the suffering and death of the saints through the ages would remain unavenged. No wonder that John wept.

But someone *was* found: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb who looked like He had been slain. He is worthy. He alone!

Finally, we observe that every time a seal was broken, a little more of the writing would appear, and new events would happen on earth.

Jesus was worthy to take the scroll and open the seals because He was slain and had purchased for God people from every tribe and nation (Rev. 5:9–10). After Jesus took the scroll, He and the Father were praised with “blessing and honour and glory and power . . . forever and ever” (5:13).

The significance of this scene is that whatever happens when the seals are broken is done by God the Father through the Lamb that was slain. If judgments are the result, then these are not merely the unrestrained ravages of Satan and demons. They are not merely violence caused by the wickedness of mankind. They are not merely persecution of the saints by the Antichrist, although God uses all these things. No, these are *God's* judgments. Remember: God's plan could not be put into action until the One who could open the scroll was found. Until then, all the wicked forces on the earth were pent up and restrained. Jesus is the One who unleashes them.

Revelation 6 describes what happens when the first four seals are broken: four variously colored horses with riders are released upon the earth, one after another. Each horse represents a different terrestrial calamity.

The first horse (6:1–2) is white. Its rider has a bow, and he wears a victor's crown (as opposed to a kingly crown). Like the other riders, he probably is a personification of calamitous events. John says that he goes out “conquering, and to conquer.” This figure likely represents the ability to consolidate power, leading to oppression and totalitarianism.

The second seal (6:3–4) unleashes a red horse. Its rider is given a great sword, and his mission is “to take peace from the earth” so that “men would kill one another.” Most commentators agree that he represents war.

Both Rosenthal and Gundry note that *men* slay each other. They conclude that this horseman represents the wrath of men, not of God. That answer fails, however, because the Lamb

is the One who breaks the seal, and a living creature executes the order to bring about war on the earth.

The third horse is black (6:5–6). His rider holds a pair of scales for buying and selling commodities such as wheat, barley, oil, and wine. He represents widespread famine. Famine often follows war, and if the war is truly worldwide, the famine will be global as well.

The final horse (6:7–8) is of a pale green color. Its rider is called Death, and he is being followed by Hades, which is the realm of the dead. This rider's mission is to kill one fourth of the earth "with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."

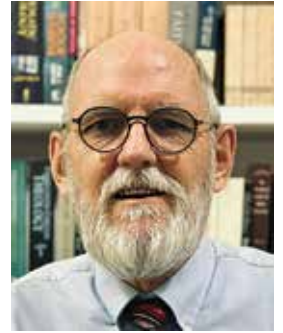
This is astounding! Rosenthal says this is a time of great difficulty but compares it to other deadly periods of history, such as the Black Plague or World War II (pp. 105–6). Rosenthal's explanation, however, overlooks the fact that this is death at an unprecedented level.

Perhaps some quick calculation will help. The world currently has about eight billion inhabitants. One fourth of that is two billion. For that many people to die during the first half of the tribulation, the earth would have to lose the population of São Paulo, Brazil (twenty-two million), every twelve and a half days. The whole population of the United States could die in just seven months, and there would still be almost three more years of death to go. This is not mere distress; this is judgment, and it is brought about by the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne.

We conclude, therefore, that God begins to pour out His retributive wrath on the earth from the first seal onward. God's wrath will begin severely, and it will continue to gain intensity until humanity is screaming for it to stop. Even its beginning will be more intense and global than anything the world has witnessed since the flood. Because the church has been promised that it will not face

God's wrath (see Kevin Bauder's article on 1 Thessalonians 5), the church must be raptured before the first seal is opened.

Mark Swedberg is a missionary with Baptist Mid Missions in Brazil.



Kevin T. Bauder

Kept from the Hour

When I was in college, I had a professor who taught that Revelation 3:10 was a surefire proof text for a pretribulational rapture. At the time, his claims seemed like a bit of a stretch, but I wasn't interested enough to explore the text for myself. By the time I was in seminary, I had decided that the text probably had nothing to do with the



rapture. Only after I had been a pastor for several years did I begin to explore seriously the question of whether the rapture would occur before, during, or at the end of the tribulation. That is when I came back to Revelation 3:10, and I was surprised by what I discovered. Here is the text.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

When I finally studied this verse as part of a serious investigation about the rapture, I found that several questions need to be answered before it could be rightly applied. The verse obviously contains a promise (“I will keep thee from the hour of temptation”), and the first question to ask is for whom this promise is meant. After all, it was addressed to a particular congregation: the church at Philadelphia. Furthermore, it seems to be a

response from Jesus to the faithfulness of the particular congregation: “because thou hast kept the word of my patience.” I found myself asking whether the verse is only a local promise for the church at Philadelphia, which is long since gone. I also wondered whether the promise was only for believers who endure in salvation (“kept the word of my patience”). Why, I wondered, should this verse be claimed by any believer today?

The answer really depends on what the verse is about. If the verse is about the rapture, then other biblical teachings about the rapture must inform its application. Particularly important is the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 (see my article elsewhere in this issue). Those verses teach that Jesus’ death secures special protection for church saints so that they will never have to endure any of God’s wrath. In context, this wrath includes the wrath that God will pour out upon an unrepentant earth during the day of the Lord.

Furthermore, Paul teaches that this promise applies to *all* church saints, whether they wake or sleep (whether they are spiritually alert or spiritually sluggish). In other words, there can be no partial rapture in which “spiritual” Christians are taken to heaven while “carnal” Christians are left to suffer the tribulation. Whenever one Christian is raptured, they all must be raptured.

If that is the case, then it really doesn't matter whether the promise of Revelation 3:10 is local or even conditional. If it is a promise of the rapture for one single saint, then all other church saints are going to be raptured at the same time. Consequently, if the verse is about the rapture, then it can be claimed by all church saints at all times.

But is it about the rapture? The verse contains important clues. It speaks of an “hour of temptation” or testing that will come upon all the world to test those who dwell on the earth. This hour of testing has a definite arti-

cle: *the* hour of testing, that is, the one that John will be writing about through the rest of this book. This hour of testing will come upon the entire world. The word is *oikoumenē*, and it is a word that means the “inhabited earth.” Furthermore, this period will test the people who live on the earth—evidently, all of them. In other words, all people everywhere on Planet Earth are going to be subjected to a specific period of severe testing, and it is the same period that John will be writing about in the rest of Revelation.

The only period that matches this description is the tribulation. The tribulation corresponds to Daniel’s seventieth week (see Roy Beacham’s article elsewhere in this issue). It lasts for seven years. Even the first half of the tribulation will be worse than anything the world has ever seen, resulting in the death of a quarter of the human race (see Mark Swedberg’s article elsewhere in this issue). The last half will be worse even than that. It is not

a time that anyone, including believers, would ever want to go through.

The good news is that Jesus promises to “keep out” (*tērēsō ek*) believers from this period of testing. What does that mean? Scholars have labored mightily to study the verb *keep*, and even more mightily to study the preposition *ek*. Some have concluded that Jesus promises to remove believers from the tribulation before it gets too bad. Others think that Jesus promises to protect believers from the worst judgments, even though they will go through the whole tribulation.

The problem is that *keep out* functions as an idiom, and it involves a more specific meaning than the separate words might indicate. Idioms are combinations of words that mean something more or different than their separate terms. If you are an English speaker, you know that a hot dog has nothing to do with warm canines. If you are skier, you know that “hot dogging” has nothing to do with

frankfurters. If you want to know what it means to “hang on the phone,” you will never find out by looking up *hang* and then looking up *on*. You have to understand the meaning of the combined phrase.

So what does *keep out* mean? The answer to this question must come from looking at other places where it is used. The precise expression *keep out* is used only in one other place in the New Testament. In John 17:15, where Jesus prays that the Father will keep His disciples from (out of) the evil one (Satan). Does this mean that God will let Satan take control of believers, but God will rescue them when the going gets bad? Does it mean that Satan can control believers, but they will be protected while he does? John answers this question decisively in 1 John 5:18, where John informs his readers that the evil one cannot even touch believers. In other words, to *keep out* in Greek means just what it means in English: to prevent from entering.

If you see a sign on an electrical substation that says *KEEP OUT*, the sign does not mean that you may enter as long as you leave before a mishap occurs. It does not mean that you may enter as long as you are kept from harm by the electricity. It is an unequivocal way of saying *DO NOT ENTER*. In fact, those two phrases might be used interchangeably.

Jesus promises that church saints are going to be kept out of the hour of trial. The hour of trial is the tribulation: Jesus will make sure that Christians keep out of the tribulation. They are not merely kept from part of the tribulation. They are not just kept from the judgments that are falling around them while they are in the tribulation. They are kept out of the tribulation itself. They are kept from the very hour of trial. They are kept out of the period during which the whole human race on earth is tested.

They cannot be kept out of the hour of testing anywhere on earth. Anyone on earth is

going to be in the hour. Anyone on the earth is going to experience the tribulation. The only way for them to be kept out of the hour is to be removed from the earth itself. The only way for that to happen is through the rapture.

I understand why some interpreters are reluctant to use Revelation 3:10 as a proof text for a pretribulational rapture. At one time I shared their reluctance. As I have considered this verse within the context of the broader biblical teaching about the rapture and the tribulation, however, I have concluded that it actually does promise a pretribulational rapture, and that its promise extends to all church saints.

Kevin T. Bauder pastors Bible Baptist Church in East Bethel, Minnesota. He teaches theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis.



FRONTLINE

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

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Contributing Editors

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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS

2 TIMOTHY 1:13

FIRST PARTAKER

“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits” (2 Tim. 2:6)

The Amen in Public Prayer: A Sermon by Abraham Booth

*Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.*

*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.*

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:*

*For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever.*

Amen.

Matthew 6:9–13

Abraham Booth (1734–1806), a British Baptist, was paid a high compliment when Andrew Fuller described him as *the first counsellor of our denomination*. For over thirty-five years Booth pastored Prescott Street Baptist Church in London. He was much respected for having *the gift of prayer in a very high degree. Whoever heard him was impressed with the idea that he was a man who prayed much in secret.*

It seemed appropriate to his fellow Baptist ministers, then, that Booth should preach to them on some aspect of effectual prayer. Their monthly ministers' fraternal had discussed and heard messages on each of petitions in the Lord's Prayer. When they came at last to the preaching of the final word, *Amen*, Booth was their choice.

Booth's message, delivered on November 20, 1800, is surprisingly long (thirty-nine pages in my copy) for a message on a single word. But this is because much of the second half is addressed successively to various categories of listeners in a congregation. Booth calls upon each category

to consider seriously how they may hear public prayer in such a way that they can join their voices, or at least their spirits, with the one praying when he concludes with a genuine *Amen*.

The first applications, however, are addressed to ministers or others leading in public prayer. As I've read, reread, and edited the sermon for this column, I've thought several times, *Were I teaching a seminary class in pastoral theology, I would almost certainly include this as required reading.*

Regrettably, the length of the message requires the omission of over half of its content, and an editing of what is included below. Yet I trust that what is here may arouse interest in the entire subject of leading a congregation in public prayer, and in Booth's sermon as a profitable contribution.

INTRODUCTION: THE WORD *AMEN*

So concise and so unusual is my text that it is highly probable I should never have appeared with it in any pulpit had it not been chosen for me on the present occasion.

But when I reflected on the meaning of the word *amen*, on the solemn connection in which it stands, and on its being, of itself, a sentence, I acquiesced in the choice which my brethren had made for me.

Even though the text is extremely concise and very unusual, the subject is of considerable importance to both ministers of the Word and private Christians. Totally banishing from our minds, therefore, all vain curiosity and every trifling thought, let us with devout solemnity and as in the presence of God proceed to consider the meaning of the expressive term as here used and the edifying truths which are suggested by it.

The meaning of the word. As to the meaning of the term *amen*, of which my text consists, it may be observed that, when prefixed to an assertion, it signifies *assuredly, certainly*, or *emphatically, so it is*. But when, as here, it concludes a prayer, whether longer or shorter, *so be it* or *so let it be* is its manifest import.

In the former case, it is assertive. It assures of

a truth or a fact. In this manner it is frequently used by our Lord in His divine discourses, especially in the Gospel according to John, and is properly translated *verily*. In the latter case, it is petitionary and, as it were, epitomizes all the requests with which it stands connected. Its meaning in the passage before us is therefore, *so be it or so let it be*.

Its authorized use. *Amen* is a purely Hebrew term, but it has been transplanted into many languages, both ancient and modern. Its first use in our English Bible is applied to an Israelite woman suspected of adultery. On hearing the conditional curse pronounced upon her, she was to reply, *Amen, amen* (*So be it, so be it*; Num. 5:22). Its last use by inspired writers is the believing response to our Lord's promise, *Surely, I come quickly. Amen, faith says, Even so, come, Lord Jesus* (Rev. 22:20).

This emphatic term was used on occasion by *whole assemblies of ancient Hebrews*. Thus, for example, when six of the chosen tribes were

convened at Mount Ebal, and the Levites denounced a variety of curses on those who transgressed the laws of Jehovah, all the people were to unite in saying, *Amen . . . Amen* (Deut. 27:14–25). And when Ezra blessed Jehovah, the great God, “all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands” (Neh. 8:6).

This branch of religious practice was far from being confined to the Mosaic dispensation; for it was adopted in the public worship of *the primitive Christian churches* and received the sanction of apostolic authority, as appears by the following words: “When thou shalt bless with the spirit [by the use of an extraordinary gift, in an unknown language], how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?” (1 Cor. 14:16; see Rev. 5:11–14).

By this remarkable passage we are taught that it was customary in the apostolic churches, when the one who led the worship concluded a devotional address to God, for all

the Christians that composed the assembly to unite, either audibly or mentally, in saying, *Amen*. This was practiced, not only by churches which consisted principally of Jewish converts, who might be supposed to have transferred the usage from the synagogue worship, but also in the Gentile churches, of which number was the church at Corinth. And it had the sanction of divine authority, for the inspired writer argues on this very ground when reproofing the misapplication of an extraordinary spiritual gift.

The same custom was *continued among the Christians in following times*, as we learn from Justin Martyr, from Chrysostom, and from others. Jerome informs us of its being the custom in his time so to conclude every public prayer that the united amen of the people sounded like the fall of water or the noise of thunder.

But whether at the conclusion of social prayer we annex our amen with an audible voice, in a low whisper, or merely in a mental way, it should always include . . . an ardent desire of

having it ratified by the amen of God Himself. Yes, my brethren, when we say *Amen*, it should be with a solemn and believing regard to that divine amen. To this, Luther, it is probable, referred, when, writing to the timid Melanchthon, he said, "I do pray for you. I have prayed for you, and I will pray for you. Doubt not but I shall be heard, for I feel the amen in my heart."

Now, my brethren, such being the import of the expressive term *amen*, and such its divinely authorized use not only in private devotion but also in worshipping assemblies, both Jewish and Christian, let us proceed to consider the edifying truths which are suggested by it with regard to prayer, whether secret or social.

THE AMEN DEMANDS UNDERSTANDING, FERVOR, AND EXPECTATION IN PRAYER

Amen with understanding. Our amen, whether in public or in private, is a mere formality if we do not pay a solemn regard to the amen of God Himself. For why do we pray, if not

that God may regard, approve, and accept our adorations, confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings that are addressed to Him? There is no reason to expect this except in proportion as our prayers are conformable to His own directions. His wise and holy and gracious will respecting this important affair must be learned from the doctrines and promises, the precepts and the examples, which are contained in sacred Scripture.

If then we pray agreeably to these, we shall approach the Father of mercies under our proper character, that is, not as claimants, but as supplicants. We should approach Him under a deep conviction of our guilt and our depravity; of our ignorance and unworthiness; and as lying entirely at His mercy. For "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13) stands on divine record as a prayer that is worthy of imitation.

If we pray as the Scriptures teach, we shall draw near to the King Eternal with a believing regard to the all-sufficient atonement and the

prevailing intercession of Jesus Christ. For as it is only through His vicarious obedience, finished on the cross, that our sins are pardoned and our persons justified in the sight of God, so it is only through the intercession of our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary that our prayers ascend with acceptance before the Most High.

If we pray according to the directions of Scripture, it will be with a special regard to the aid of the Holy Spirit, Who is expressly called “the spirit of grace and of supplications” (Zech. 12:10), His assistance being absolutely necessary to a holy amen. For such is the darkness of our minds that “we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom. 8:26). And such is the carnality of our hearts that we cannot command a devotional frame.

Amen with fervor. This adverbial and expressive term (*amen*) suggests that, when addressing God according to His revealed will, we should pray with holy fervor. For with what propriety or to what purpose do we briefly

repeat our petitions if we be not fervent in prayer—if we be not in earnest with God to obtain the blessings we supplicate? Without this, our amen loses its emphasis and becomes a superficial formality or a mere word of course.

Amen with expectation. Once more, we are taught by this expressive and solemnly concluding term (*amen*) that we should pray with expectation of a gracious audience of the King Eternal. For why do we pray, and why has Jesus taught us to conclude our petitions with an emphatical, *So be it*, if we have no ground of expectation that God will condescendingly hear and graciously answer our various requests by subjoining His own efficacious amen? It is of high importance, my brethren, in every devotional exercise, that we approach God with expectation. For where there is no expectation of a gracious audience and of receiving benefits from His liberal hand, there is either no sense of want, and it is a merely formal service, or it is under a conviction of obligation to adore God while oppressed with slavish fear. And in each case,

the animating principle is lacking, which is faith operating in the way of expectation.

As a means of exciting this expectation, we should consider and endeavor to realize the gracious characters under which the great Object of our devotion stands revealed, in connection with those divine declarations, precepts, and promises, which have a special regard to prayer.

His gracious characters. Such, for instance, as the following: "Our Father which art in heaven . . . the God of all grace . . . the God of all comfort . . . the Father of mercies . . . The LORD . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . . thou that hearest prayer" (Matt. 6:9; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Cor 1:3; Exod. 34:6–7; Ps. 65:2).

Declarations, precepts, and promises. The following are a specimen: "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. . . . Ask, and ye shall receive. . . . Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. . . . We have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him [Christ]. . . . Let us . . . come boldly

unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. . . . Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Ps. 81:10; John 16:24; Matt. 7:7; Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 10:19–22).

These and similar characters of Him Whom we adore—these and similar sayings of inspiration—together with numerous recorded facts relative to the success of prayer, fully warrant our expectation of a gracious answer in due season when drawing near to the divine Father in the name of Jesus. Nay, such is the provision which sovereign grace has made to animate prayer with hope that the vilest wretch upon earth has reason to expect the divine amen to

his prayer, when from the heart he cries, "God be merciful through the atonement to me a sinner!"

THE *AMEN* SUGGESTS A VARIETY OF SALUTARY CAUTIONS AND KEEN REPROOFS

It is apparent that those for whom one man is the mouth [of the congregation] in prayer, are under obligation so to unite with him through the whole so as to be able to conclude with a cordial *amen*. Therefore, this emphatical, *So be it*, implicitly but strongly forbids and reprove.

The use of such words and modes of speech as fellow worshippers do not understand.

Our language in social prayer should always be so plain and simple that those who cannot read and are of narrow capacities may know what we mean, or else how shall they be able to subjoin their *amen*?

Never is a desire of appearing learned or of having the command of elegant language so misapplied, so contemptible, and so abominable in the

sight of God as when addressing Him in public prayer. For anyone designedly to convert what ought to be the prayer of sinners prostrate at the throne of grace and crying for mercy, into an occasion of displaying the brightness of his own parts or the superiority of his literary excellence, is an evil of no common magnitude. They must be on guard lest the desire of making a respectable figure and the lust of popular applause be more operative in their hearts than a sense of the divine Presence, contrition for sin, faith in Christ, or a desire of communion with God.

The concluding and expressive amen loudly forbids and powerfully reproves ***all quaint expressions and low language that are adapted to raise a smile, and every term and phrase that savors of wit or of contrivance.*** Everything of this kind, being adverse to devout attention, to united fervor, and to the very nature of prayer, must be inimical to an harmonious and solemn, So be it. Language which has a natural tendency to provoke laughter in serious persons, treats them with rudeness and insults the majesty

of that divine presence in which the speaker stands. Far from serving Jehovah with fear, and equally far from imitating the profound humility and reverence of the seraphim in their sublime worship (Isa. 6:1–4), the one praying, by levity, profanes the service of the Most Holy, wounds the devotional feelings of those who are truly pious, and shocks common sense, even in those that are ungodly.

The united and concluding amen very forcibly forbids and keenly reproves ***the use of all ambiguous phrases or expressions of doubtful meaning.*** For, to petitions and thanksgivings in such language, who, besides the person that uses them can say, So be it? Undesignedly to employ phraseology of this kind interferes with the intention of social prayer. But to adopt it by choice or to have a latent meaning under well-known terms which the words themselves do not express is to be without integrity and to deceive those who unite in the solemn exercise.

The devout and united amen of all that are

present in social worship entirely forbids and sharply reproves ***a polemical or controversial turn in prayer.*** For if he who is the mouth of a congregation, instead of addressing penitential confessions, ardent petitions, and grateful acknowledgments to God, undertakes to confirm truth or to confute error, the attention of his fellow-worshippers is necessarily diverted from the proper object of their concluding amen to the pertinency and force, or the weakness and futility, of his arguments. The exercise of a praying frame is immediately suspended, and the spirit of devotion languishes. So that instead of adoring at the throne of grace and being conscious of it, they are deeply engaged in mental controversy and feel as if contending with opponents. But that all this is extremely foreign from the true nature and real design of social prayer is beyond a doubt.

In social supplication, he who leads the devotion should endeavor so to express himself that every real Christian—that everyone who enjoys the Spirit of prayer and is not under the immediate influence of some prejudice

or some temptation—may heartily unite in the closing *amen*.

I will add, it is not in preaching the Word as it is in prayer. For does a minister of Christ, as a public teacher, address an audience on the doctrine of grace or the doctrine of duty? Appearing under that character and in his individual capacity, he must, whether those around him approve or not, express his own views of truths and blessings, of obligations and of dangers, while the people hear and judge for themselves. But, when taking the lead in prayer, he appears not as a detached individual, nor yet as a public teacher, but as a member of the collective body, as the mouth of the congregation, or as the instrument of the whole assembly in making known their united requests to God.

In a word, the united, the solemn, the emphatic amen of silent worshippers in social prayer forbids and reprove ***every impropriety and moral defect*** in him who leads the devotion that has a natural tendency to interfere with devout attention, with deep solemnity, and

with the lively exercise of holy affections toward God. If he, therefore, who is the mouth in social supplication do not appear to feel the solemnity of his own situation, as addressing the Most High; if he do not apparently pray with humility, with reverence, and from the heart; if his language and manner afford strong presumptive grounds of suspicion that he performs the service in a merely official, or in a customary way; or if the rectitude of his habitual conduct and the piety of his general character be doubted by them, the concluding *amen* cannot be expected to have either that emphasis or that devotion which the nature of the case requires. Thus, we have seen how fruitful of caution and of admonition to everyone that is the mouth in social prayer is the closing and solemn *So be it!*

Dr. Mark Minnick pastors Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina. His sermons are available at mountcalvarybaptist.org/sermons and on your favorite podcast app: search for "Mount Calvary Baptist Church" and subscribe.



BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS



BRING...THE BOOKS

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

More Books for a Desert Island

I've been given the premise that I am marooned on a desert island and that I already have a Bible, a hymnal, and a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*. What other five titles would I want with me? Before I can answer that question, I need to get a few incidental considerations out of the way.

First, I want to be able to select my own Bible and hymnal. For Holy Scripture I would choose *A Reader's Hebrew and Greek Bible*, edited by Philip Brown II and others. Likewise, if I could only have one hymnal it would definitely be *Psalms and Hymns to the Living God*, edited by Scott Aniol and others. For *Pilgrim's Progress* I would choose whatever edition contains the greatest number of Bunyan's other works in the same volume.

Second, I would immediately pass over most of the books being published within the evangelical world today. On a desert island I would not want to read a book on conflict management. Books on church growth would become useless. Volumes

on counseling would no longer apply. Even books on evangelism would have limited value.

Third, my initial response would be to choose the five best survival manuals for the part of the world in which I will be marooned. I would want to know how to build shelter, find food, devise implements, treat diseases, and defend myself from local threats. I suspect, however, that choosing books like these might thwart the intentions of the editor who gave me this assignment.

So what books would I choose? I would want works to stretch the imagination. I would want books to challenge the mind. I would want books to shape the affections. Furthermore, I would want these books to keep on challenging me, even after repeated readings. Most importantly, I would want them to be Christian books (at least in the general sense of the word) that would bear upon my walk with God.

For the imagination, I would choose the one-volume edition of *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien. Rarely has a work reached so far into the imagination and shaped the conscience in such

a powerfully Christian way. Every challenge that I would face would find some analog in LOTR. Tolkien's work is the moral equivalent of a survival manual.

For the mind, I would choose the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas. If possible, I would select the literal translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. If forced to accept a one-volume edition, it would be the abridgement by Gerald McDermott. Of course, Thomas says much with which I disagree, but I find that his reasoning invariably challenges me and drives me back into Scripture. The *Summa* deals profoundly with most of the important categories of Christian theology. It is worth a lifetime of study.

For a counterweight, I would choose one of two authors. My first choice would be Jonathan Edwards, whose complete works are available in two massive volumes. Edwards was one of the most brilliant theologians of all time. He advanced virtually every area of Christian thought that he touched. I could spend most of my lifetime just on the three connected works *Original Sin*, *Freedom of the Will*, and *Religious Affections*. Edwards not

only challenges the mind, but also feeds the soul and shapes the heart.

Another hypothetical castaway who has written for this series, however, has already chosen Edwards to accompany him to his island. Should I not be permitted to take him with me, my alternative would be Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, preferably in the Battles translation. Like Thomas, Calvin is sometimes wrong, but he invariably challenges the mind. Like Edwards, he also ministers to the soul and the heart. I would choose him, not because I want Calvinism, but because I want to interact with a clear thinker who grounds himself firmly in Scripture.

Since both Edwards and Calvin are two-volume works, I am left with only one more choice. If I tell you what it is, I will run a risk, for this is an author who is easily misread, and if you read him the wrong way, he can lead you seriously astray. Read through the right eyes, however, he challenges his readers to greater levels of love and obedience toward God.

The author is William Law, and the work is *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. The danger in this

work is that it can be read and applied as a form of performance Christianity, as if our works somehow made us more acceptable to God. I think it is possible, however, to ask of Law, “Now that I have been justified, and now that the Spirit of God is shaping the character of Christ in me, what should that look like?” Law answers that question as well as anyone I can think of. This is a work that repays multiple readings.

Books are the remnants of people’s minds. Reading a good book is like carrying on a conversation. The titles I have named would bring me into conversation with some of the best Christian minds of history. The conversations that they engender could occupy months and years. Indeed, they will surely occupy the rest of my life, whether I find myself on a desert island or not. With a Bible, a hymnal, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and these books I will have a daily banquet for the heart, soul, and mind.

Kevin T. Bauder pastors Bible Baptist Church in East Bethel, Minnesota. He teaches theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis.

STRAIGHT CUTS

“Rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15)

Why Was God Angry at Balaam?

“**A**nd God came to Balaam at night and said to him, ‘If the men come to call you, rise and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do.’ So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab. Then God’s anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the LORD took His stand in the way as an adversary against him.” (Num. 22:20–22 NKJV)

It has long puzzled Bible students that God would command Balaam to go with Balak’s envoys (v. 20) but later became angry at him for going (v. 22).¹ We know that the Scriptures are inspired and inerrant and that God is righteous and truthful. Therefore, these verses present us with the challenge of legitimately interpreting them in a way that is consistent with God’s character. This challenge is also an opportunity, because as we

wrestle with this issue we gain insight into God's ways.

In verse 20, God's statement "rise and go" should be viewed, not as a command, but only as a grant of permission.² The first time the messengers came to Balaam, God told Balaam not to go with them or to curse Israel because the latter was blessed (v. 12). Upon Balaam's second request, God relented, but stipulated that Balaam do only what he was told. Therefore, although allowed by God, Balaam's journey was contrary to God's "directive will."³

Although this distinction helps us, by itself it may not be sufficient to resolve the tension between verses 20 and 22. However, the latter verse also merits closer examination. It says, "Then God's anger was aroused because he went." The phrase translated "because he went" is the particle *kî* followed by the participle *hôlek* ("going"). One proposed solution is to translate this clause, "while he was going."⁴ Although this is grammatically possible, it seems unlikely. The particle *kî* can mean "when,"⁵ but *kî* plus the participle is a normal way of giving the reason for what has just been said.⁶

Even so, the use of the participle in this text provides an important interpretational clue. The participle is not a finite verb but rather a “verbal adjective,” “describ[ing] a state of affairs,” rather than “present[ing] a bare event.”⁷ Therefore, although God became angry at Balaam with reference to his “going,” this was not simply because he went, but because of “his behavior either on setting out or upon the journey.”⁸ We know from other Scriptures that Balaam was driven by covetousness to attempt to curse Israel.⁹

In addition, God’s anger must be understood in context. Although the Angel of Yahweh threatened Balaam’s life and would have killed him without the intervention of Balaam’s donkey, it was God who enabled the donkey to see the Angel and to speak to Balaam.¹⁰ Instead of killing Balaam, God opened his eyes, and the Angel rebuked him. When Balaam asked if he should go back, the Angel demurred and reiterated the command to say only what he was told. From the whole encounter, we can see that the Lord’s anger was a part of His gracious dealings with Balaam.¹¹

The above considerations not only vindicate God

against the charge of caprice, but they also teach us essential lessons for the Christian life. For example, we learn that God's moral will is not to be trifled with. Seeking God's permission out of selfish motives does not legitimize our actions or remove our accountability to God for them. Moreover, we learn that the manifestation of God's anger can reflect His mercy. Finally, Balaam's humiliating experience demonstrates that God has a monopoly on both spiritual sight and spiritual might. Because of this, we can be confident that God will accomplish His purposes, regardless of the limitations or rebellion of His instruments.

David Shumate holds a PhD in Old Testament Interpretation from BJU Seminary. He is the academic dean of International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona.

¹ R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, NAC 3B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 388–89.

² This is a normal use of the Hebrew imperative. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick

O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 571 (§34.4b).

- ³ Ronald B. Allen, "The Theology of the Balaam Oracles: A Pagan Diviner and the Word of God" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973), 25.
- ⁴ Cole, 389. He points out that this interpretation leaves the reason for God's anger unexplained.
- ⁵ Wilhelm Gesenius et al., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. Emil Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), 502 (§164d).
- ⁶ See, e.g., Gen. 3:5; 29:9; 41:32; Exod. 5:8; Lev. 11:5–6; Num. 25:18; Deut. 8:18; 11:31; 13:4 (3 Eng.).
- ⁷ Waltke and O'Connor, 614 (§37.1f).
- ⁸ C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1: *Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 168–69.
- ⁹ See Deut. 23:4–5; Josh. 24:9–10; 2 Pet. 2:15–16; Jude 11.

¹⁰ This verse abounds with interpretational issues, including the identity of the Angel of Yahweh and the nature of the miracle of the donkey's speech. I am taking the Angel as a theophany.

¹¹ Keil and Delitzsch, 169.

WINDOWS

“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’” Charles Spurgeon

Willing to Spend and Be Spent

We live in such a weak, selfish, self-indulgent age. Even in the church, there is very little evidence of a spirit of self-sacrifice. Too many believers seem to live as if we exist to have comfortable and convenient lives. Yet Scripture exhorts us to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Where are bondslaves of Christ who count not their lives dear unto themselves? Let the real followers of Christ rise to Jesus’ challenge to deny themselves, and to take up their cross, dying to their self-life to do His will. In the paragraphs that follow, I would like to share the experiences of some who, like Paul, have been very gladly willing to spend and be spent for their Lord and His cause.

As Samuel Brengle graduated from Boston University, he was offered a prestigious pastorate but felt that God wanted him to join the Salvation

Army. Samuel went to London and presented himself to the Salvation Army's founder, William Booth. Booth said, "We don't want you. You're dangerous, because our officers are converted drunks and prostitutes and you have too much education and won't take orders." Sam asked for a chance and was sent to an unfinished basement, with a dirt floor half-submerged in water to clean mud off and polish the boots of converted street bums, now soldiers in the Salvation Army. One day he seemed to hear a voice, "You're a fool and a sinner! You buried your talent in earth. What are you doing here? You are throwing all your training away." In deep depression, Samuel asked the Lord if he'd missed his calling and failed Him. Jesus said, "Remember, Samuel, I washed their feet!" From then on, he knew that God called him not to invest himself, but to spend himself for others.¹ Do you think that may also be the Lord's plan for you and me?

When Helen Roseveare graduated with a medical degree from Cambridge, she followed God to what was then Belgian Congo to be a missionary

doctor. As her medical work progressed, she decided to build a hospital. Her mother sent her a book about brickmaking, and she taught the Africans how to make kiln-dried bricks. As they were taking the first load from the kiln and pulling the spines off the new bricks, she noticed that her fingers were wet with blood. She thought, "I came to Africa to be a doctor, not to make bricks." A runner came announcing the need to come quickly and perform surgery. As she prepared by scrubbing her hands and pouring alcohol on them to sterilize them, the pain was intense. A few weeks later an African worker said, "Doctor, when you're in surgery you're like a god. You frighten us. But when you're at the brick kiln and your fingers are bloody like ours, you are our sister. We love you." At that moment she realized God didn't send her to be a doctor, but to show Christ's love!² There is no other method to reach the people around us than to live unselfishly and serve them.

Amy Carmichael developed a burden for India's girls that were given to the Hindu temple to be used as prostitutes, so she started an orphanage and began to rescue some. The Hindu priests

went to Indian businessmen to stop her. The businessmen went to the British businessmen, and they went to the British missionaries to get her stopped. The missionaries told Amy, that it was unfortunate, but it was not their problem. Feeling all was against her, she went to her room and prayed, “Lord, I’ve done all I could, but it hasn’t helped. I give up. It’s not my problem anymore.” Amy suddenly saw Jesus. He was kneeling under an Indian tamarind tree. She saw tears streaming down His cheeks. He looked at her and said, “That is right, Amy. It’s not your problem. It is not your burden. It is My problem and My burden. But I am looking for someone who will help Me bear it.”³ She went back to work and rescued hundreds. God is looking for someone like you to co-labor with Him in making disciples, but apart from the Holy Spirit working in you, you will never care for anyone but yourself. That’s why you need the mind of Christ to think like Jesus. Will you help Jesus bear His burdens?

A man was called by God into Christian service and decided to be a missionary doctor. He studied theology as well as medicine, so he would be

prepared to be a missionary. He ended up with three doctoral degrees, one in medicine and two in theology. Then he and his pregnant wife headed into the remotest part of Africa. They worked with one tribe for four years without any response. Every week they would meet for worship, but no African would join them. Then one day their son became very ill and died. That missionary made a coffin for his boy and carried him out to bury him. He was all alone except for the presence of one African man. When he shoveled the soil onto the rude casket, he was overcome with grief and buried his face in the fresh dirt and sobbed. The African man picked up the missionary's head by the hair and looked into his face. Then he lowered the man's head carefully back into the dirt and ran into the village crying, "The white one cries like we do." The next time the husband and wife met for worship, the place was packed. Now a church exists because of that family's suffering.⁴ There is one way the world can be saved. God showed it on the cross. He sacrificed His Son. And that tribe was won to Christ through the sacrifice of a son. Are you willing to place your "Isaac" on the altar?

Are you willing to present yourself as a willing “Isaac”?

In the latter part of 17th century, German preacher August H. Francke founded an orphanage to care for homeless children in the city. One day when Francke desperately needed funds to carry on his work, a destitute Christian widow came to his door begging for a gold coin. Because of his financial situation, he politely but regretfully told her he couldn't help her. Disheartened, the woman began to weep. Moved by her tears, Francke asked her to wait while he went to his room to pray. After seeking God's guidance, he felt that the Holy Spirit wanted him to change his mind. So, trusting God to meet his own needs, he gave her the money. Two mornings later, he received a letter of thanks from the widow. She explained that because of his generosity she had asked the Lord to shower the orphanage with gifts. That same day Francke received twelve gold coins from a wealthy lady and two more from a friend in Sweden. He thought he had been amply rewarded for helping the widow, but he was soon informed that the orphanage was to receive

five hundred gold pieces from the estate of Prince Lodewyk Van Wurtenburg. When he heard this, Francke wept in gratitude. In sacrificially providing for that needy widow, he had been enriched, not impoverished.⁵ If you want your heart to be with God, you must be willing to invest and spend yourself and all that you possess in God's work (Matt. 6:21; 1 Cor. 8:4).

Legend has it that a wealthy merchant during Paul's day had heard about the apostle and had become so fascinated that he determined to visit him. So, when passing through Rome, he got in touch with Timothy and arranged an interview with Paul the prisoner. Stepping inside his cell, the merchant was surprised to find the apostle looking rather old and physically frail, but he felt at once the strength, the serenity, and the magnetism of this man who relied on Christ as his all in all. They talked for some time, and finally the merchant left. Outside the cell, he asked Timothy, "What's the secret of this man's power? I've never seen anything like it before." "Did you not guess?" replied Timothy. "Paul is in love." The merchant looked puzzled. "In love?" he asked.

“Yes,” said Timothy, “Paul is in love with Jesus Christ.” The merchant looked even more bewildered. “Is that all?” he asked. Timothy smiled and replied, “That’s everything.”⁶ That’s the secret of the Christian life, to be captivated by Christ, as the Sovereign to whom you submit; as the Savior whom you serve; as the Sufficient One on whom you depend in every situation for the grace necessary at each moment.

In Russia during the days of the Soviet Union many pastors were arrested and imprisoned. One pastor was arrested and sent to prison, while his wife and children were sent to live (or die) in Siberia. One extremely cold winter night in their remote, dilapidated wood cabin, three children divided the family’s last crust of bread, and drank the last cup of tea in the house before crawling into bed hungry. Kneeling to pray, they asked their mother where they were going to get more food. They said that their father probably didn’t even know where they were now living. Their mother assured them their heavenly Father knew and would provide, so they prayed and asked for His provision. About twenty miles away in the

middle of the night, God woke up a deacon of a church and told him to get out of bed, harness his horse, hitch it to the sled, load it with all the extra vegetables that the church had harvested and with meat and other food the congregation had collected, and take the food to that pastor's hungry family. The deacon said, "But, Lord, I can't do that, it's below zero and my horse and I may freeze!" The Holy Spirit told him he must go because the pastor's family was in trouble! The man argued with the Lord saying, "There are wolves, and they may eat my horse and me, and I may never make it back." But the deacon said God told him, "You don't have to come back, you just have to go." When he arrived and knocked loudly on the door of the rickety cabin in the pre-dawn morning, the banging must have frightened the family. But imagine the joy and amazement when they opened the door. He handed them a huge sack of food from his full sleigh and told them that the church had collected it and when it ran out, he'd bring more.⁷ That phrase that he said the Lord spoke to his heart—"You don't have to come back, you just have to go"—is in essence the whole

lesson of what it means to spend and to be spent in the work of the Lord for the benefit of others and for His glory.

Jim Bickel pastors Bethel Baptist Fellowship in Brooklyn, New York.

¹ Dennis F. Kinlaw, *The Mind of Christ*, 106–7.

² Kinlaw, 103.

³ Amy Carmichael, *A Candle in the Dark*.

⁴ Dennis F. Kinlaw, *This Day with the Master*, April 4.

⁵ www.bible.org/illustrations.

⁶ www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations.

⁷ Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God*, 166–67.

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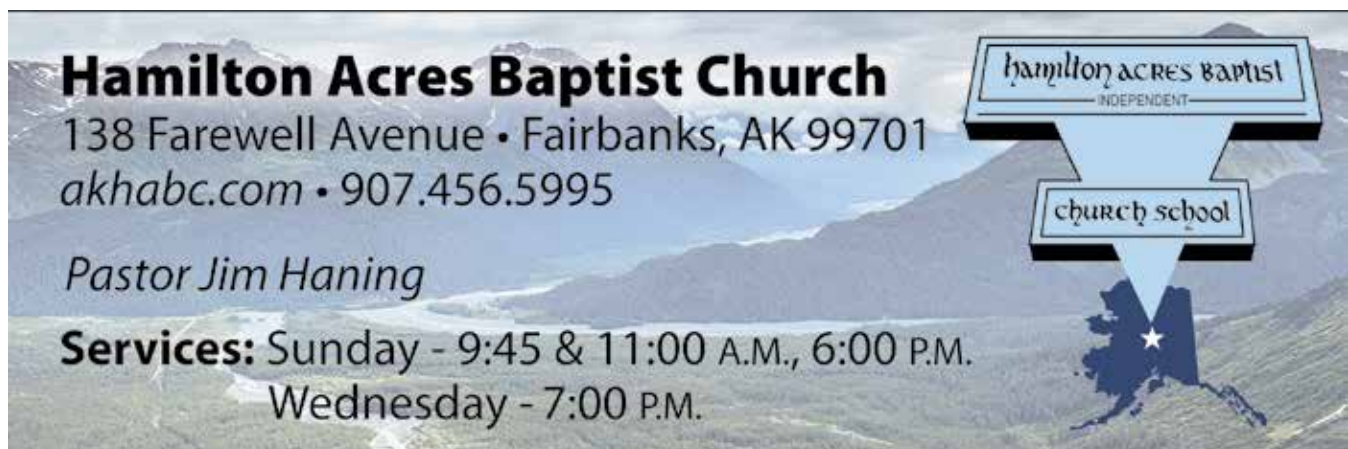
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Bethel Baptist Fellowship
2304 Voorhies Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11235
Coordinator: Matthew
Recker

October 18, 2024 New Mexico Regional Fellowship

Manzano Baptist Church
12411 Linn Ave. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87123
Coordinator: Dan Mauldin

October 19, 2024 New England Regional Fellowship

(Meeting with the New
England Foundations
Conference)
Heritage Baptist Church
186 Dover Point Road
Dover, NH 03820
Coordinator: Taigen Joos

October 21-22, 2024 Central Regional Fellowship

Faith Baptist Church
1001 South Scenic Dr.
Manhattan, KS 66503
Coordinator: David Byford

2025

January 28, 2025 Rocky Mountain Regional Fellowship

Westside Baptist Church
6260 West 4th Street
Greeley, CO 80634
970.515.9678

March 17-19, 2025 South Regional Fellowship

Swan Creek Baptist
Church
2501 Swan Creek Rd.
Swan Creek, NC 28642
Coordinator: Tony
Facenda

March 24-25, 2025 Northern California Regional Fellowship

Calvary Baptist Church
160 Seaside Court
Marina, CA 93933
Coordinator: Dan Pelletier

April 14-17, 2025 Northwest Regional Fellowship

Grace Baptist Church
2731 Matson Road
Victoria, BC V9B 4M5
CANADA
Coordinator: Don Johnson

May 12-13, 2025

Wyoming Regional Fellowship

Friendship Baptist Church
265 Vannoy Parkway
Thayne, WY 83127

May 19, 2025 Mid-America Regional Fellowship

First Baptist Church
5304 Charles St.
Rockford, IL 61108
Coordinator: David
Huffstutler

June 9-11, 2025 FBFI Annual Fellowship

(Combined with the New
Testament Association)
Calvary Baptist Church
and Maranatha Baptist
University
Watertown, WI 53094



BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS



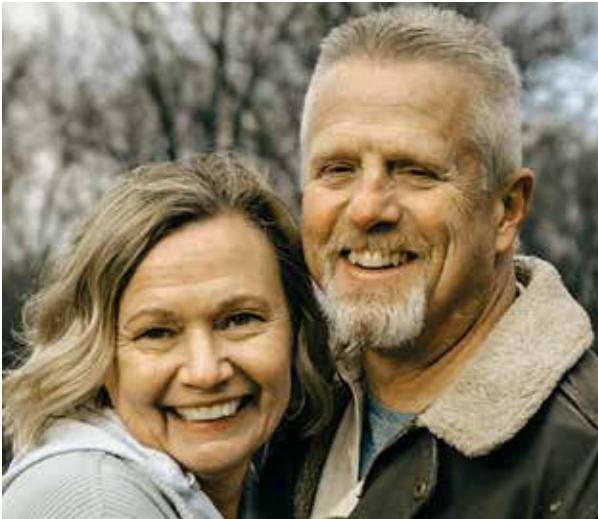
News From All Over



Dr. David Stertzbach has been serving with Gospel Fellowship Association Missions as an interim pastor for the past one and a half years. Knowing of sixteen fundamental Baptist churches without pastors

in California, Dave and his wife Diane went to help one of them, Berean Baptist Church in Fairfield. Within six months of their arrival, Pastor Mark Smith was called to the pastorate there, and the church is seeing good growth under his leadership. From there, the Stertzbachs went to Heritage Baptist Church in Antioch, California, which had been without a pastor for two years. Dave served as interim pastor there for thirteen months and will be teaching a course at International Baptist College and Seminary in Chandler, Arizona,

this fall quarter. He continues to serve on the board of Baptist World Mission.



Suzanne Fell is the new FBFI office manager and managing editor of *FrontLine*. She is grateful for all the training and preparation that Malinda Duvall has provided to

smooth the home office transition. Before moving to Arizona with her husband Tony, Suzanne was an associate professor at Maranatha Baptist University for over twenty years, teaching office management and computer courses. She now enjoys serving at Northwest Valley Baptist Church, teaching a children's Sunday School class and helping in the nursery. "It is a blessing and honor to work with the FBFI and to continue Malinda Duvall's ministry to FBFI-endorsed chaplains and their families."



The **FBFI Home Office** and **FrontLine magazine** have a new address. Our phone (864.268.0777) and email (info@fbfi.org) remain the same. Our toll-free 800 number has been discontinued. Please use the new address for all future correspondence:

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- **FBFI Directory:** A membership directory is provided on our FBFI website (fbfi.org) to foster fellowship among members and churches. Only current members have access to this resource.
- ***FrontLine* Back Issues:** FBFI members have full access to the past years' back issues in digital format on the FBFI website.
- **Ministry Support:** Your dues help support the ministry of FBFI, which includes our chaplains, *FrontLine* magazine, and annual fellowships. *FrontLine* magazine is a discipleship tool to help believers grow in their walk with Christ. The FBFI remains committed to the historic fundamentals of the Christian faith, and *FrontLine* provides a forum for faithfully applying the timeless truths of God's Word to the current culture.
- **Church Group Discounts on *FrontLine* Digital Subscriptions:** For a limited time, senior pastors with FBFI membership

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Position Statements

The position statements of the FBFI are a way for us as a fellowship to address matters of importance that we are facing in our culture and in the religious community. There are times when it is important that we speak with a unified voice either to warn about or to evaluate issues of importance to churches and believers. This year we are addressing two issues all Christians everywhere are facing—gambling and socialism. The rise in legalized gambling, especially online sports betting, is putting even Christians in a place of great temptation. Socialism is often presented as a loving Christian social philosophy that is based upon the practice of the first church in the book of Acts. That is a misrepresentation of biblical principles. We seek to present a balanced biblical perspective on the errors that provide the philosophical foundation for socialism.

24.1 — CHRISTIANITY, SOCIALISM, AND CAPITALISM

Because socialism makes promises of a more equitable and less selfish utopian future, some believers think it is a better and more Christian economic system. Socialism, however, is inconsistent with a biblical worldview.

Socialism seeks to control business, industry, and individual wealth, primarily by taking from the wealthy and giving to the poor. This supplants individual responsibility and biblical stewardship. It discourages a biblical work ethic, undermines the family, and displaces generosity.

The Bible demonstrates the value it places on private property in every era (Gen. 4:2–4; 23:13–18; Job 1:1–3; Jer. 32:6–15; Mic. 4:4; Matt. 27:60; Luke 5:7, 10). Since God owns everything (Ps. 24:1; 50:10), people are accountable to Him for how they use their property (Luke 16:9–13). Under socialism, the state steps between an individual believer and his stewardship to God. Work is a gift from God (Gen. 2:15). It is only right that those who labor should enjoy its fruits (1 Tim. 5:18). There is no economic provision in Scripture for those who refuse to work (2 Thess. 3:10). Caring for the family and the needy is the responsibility of believing family members (1 Tim. 5:8). Under socialism, the government usurps this role. The sharing of goods in the early church was a voluntary act of love (Acts 4:34–35; 5:4). In a socialistic system, by contrast, coerced redistribution supplants voluntary generosity.

Although capitalism better reflects the biblical perspective on private property than socialism does, it can be cruel without the tempering influence of a Christian ethic. Love for others must control the bottom line. There are needs that cannot be met by the marketplace (Prov. 19:17). The Scriptures commend generosity (Prov. 14:31).

Whereas socialism forces care of the poor upon all, Christians labor to give freely to the poor (Eph. 4:28).

See Kevin T. Bauder, “Is Socialism a Biblical Option?,” FrontLine magazine, vol. 33, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2023), for a helpful article on the contrast between socialism and capitalism.

24.2 — GAMBLING

Gambling has become a significant social, cultural, and financial problem in our society today. Commercial gambling is now legal in forty-eight states. Sports betting is legal in most states, and nearly every state sponsors a lottery. Advertising for gambling apps, websites, and casinos is ubiquitous.

Gambling is often motivated by covetousness, but Christians should be content with what God has given (1 Tim. 6:6–10; Heb. 13:5) and should be more zealous to give than to receive (Eph. 4:28). Gamblers can win only at another’s expense, but believers should love their neighbors and seek their good (Matt. 22:39). Gamblers can become addicted, but believers should be controlled only by God and His Word (1 Cor. 6:12). Even as gambling becomes increasingly acceptable culturally, believers should not allow the world to set their standards (1 John 2:15–16). The thrill of gambling is inseparable from the possibility of unnecessary and illicit risk and reward, but believers should find their joy in Christ (Phil. 4:11).

Therefore, the FBFI encourages believers to abstain from gambling and to resist the expansion of commercial and governmental gambling. The FBFI also encourages churches to teach biblical stewardship, aid compulsive or addicted gamblers, and promote trust in God for the supply of our needs and generosity to supply the needs of others.

See FrontLine magazine, vol. 33, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2023) for helpful articles on gambling.



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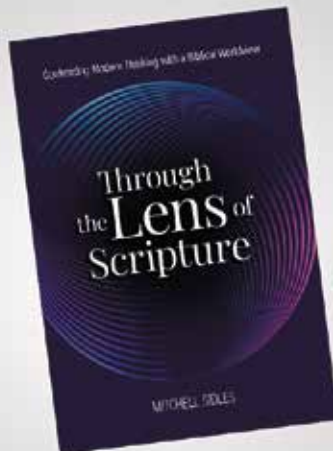
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Heart to Heart

Janet Clark Shay

Nature's Complete Food

1966 • The Vietnam War raged. On the home front, during our first year of marriage, we filled our car with our clothes, stored our minimal belongings with family, and drove from Kansas to the Naval Base at Port Hueneme, California, where my husband, Harold, reported for duty.

Because Harold was a Navy Seabee Petty Officer 3rd Class, no base housing was available, so we rented a small furnished apartment in nearby

Oxnard at a shocking \$80 a month. With this and the car payment on our secondhand Mercury Caliente, we settled in to await Harold shipping out with MCB 11 for Vietnam.

There were no credit cards as a backup when money was short, and it was certainly short. A humorous slant tacked on to an old adage brings home the point quite well: “They say money talks, and of that, I can’t deny. I heard it once. It said goodbye.” All too soon, that truth played out for us as the day came when payday and grocery shopping day went their separate ways on the most unfriendly terms.

One evening, we discussed our shortage. Surrounding details become muddled over a half-century, but some reside in our memory as if they happened yesterday.

“Well, what exactly do we have?” asked Harold.

I went to the kitchen, opened the tiny icebox, and peered inside—as if I didn’t already know the answer.

“Well, it isn’t as if we’re *completely* out of food,” I smiled. “We have mustard. And we have ketchup.”

I was a very new Christian. I had no Scripture to back me up and only a beginner's knowledge of how God worked, but wanting to appease my concerned husband, I naively said, "God is bound to supply. It'll all be okay." I was the dreamer of our duo, but I truly believed it.

Harold, being a conscientious and hard-working man, was not amused. "We can't live on mustard and ketchup," he said as he left for the naval base the next morning.

I cannot boast of a deep, abiding faith at that point in my life, but I don't recall being afraid. I cannot tell you I prayed all day for God's supply. I knew little about how to pray, but I had heard enough about prayer to believe God listened when we talked to Him, and I had also heard He would give us what we need when we need it. So I prayed, "God, I can't wait to see how you take care of this problem."

Were mustard and ketchup even in a food group? I did know they were condiments—that stuff you put *on* the main dish—*not* the main dish itself. I'm sure youth was on my side at that

point, because I remember wondering what exciting things were coming our way.

Meanwhile, at the naval base, Harold's job that day was to pass out rations—basically, box lunches—to the service personnel standing watch that night. When he was finished, the kitchen cook instructed Harold to throw away any leftover food.

“Can I have this case of half-pint cartons of milk?” Harold asked.

“Nope, I said throw it away!” the cook replied. “But you can do anything you want with it after that. Cause once it's in the trash, it don't belong to nobody.”

Although it wasn't even a common sport yet, at that moment in time, Harold performed his first act of dumpster diving. That evening, my husband entered our apartment with supper—twenty-four half-pint cartons of milk, and we were beyond excited! God could have given us a case of candy bars or potato chips.



Harold Shay
Petty Officer 3rd Class

Instead, he gave us MILK—considered for centuries to be nature’s complete food.

I’ve often thought that if I had it to do over, I would frame one of those milk cartons in a shadow box and hang it on the wall of our home—a lifelong symbol of our Savior’s faithful love and watchcare.

God supplied not only then, but He has continued to supply throughout our lives—and often before we even know what to ask.

A passage in Psalm 145 reminds me: “The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”

Janet Clark Shay is a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She is the author of *The Prayer That Makes a Difference* and *This Side of Heaven*, among other works written from a Christian perspective.





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At A Glance

Layton Talbert

Hebrews 11: What It Looks Like to “Live by Faith” (Part 2)

The believers highlighted in Hebrews 11 are noteworthy not because they were exceptionally holy, nor extraordinarily influential, but because they acted on the sole basis of a word from God even when it seemed impossible. Each of them had failures, flaws, and times of unbelief and unfaithfulness. But in God’s estimation they stand out because of ordinary trust in the words of an extraordinary God. We’ll take space in this series for only a few examples.

NOAH: TRUSTING GOD’S WORDS MEANS PREPARING FOR FUTURE JUDGMENT (11:7)

“By faith Noah, being **warned** by God [*the basis of faith is a word from God*] about things

not yet seen [*the realm where faith operates is things future and things unseen*], in reverence **prepared an ark** for the salvation of his household [*the action of faith is obedience to God's instruction*], by which he **condemned** the world [*the consequence of faith is distinction from the world*] and became an heir of the **righteousness** which is according to faith [*the result of faith in God's words is righteousness*]" (Heb. 11:7; Scripture quotations are from the NASB).

Strip out all the modifying phrases and you're left with this kernel statement: "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark." What did faith have to do with building a boat? Because the only reason he did it was a warning from God that something was coming—something no one had ever seen before and probably had a hard time imagining. Contrary to all his senses, all his experience, and the opinions of everyone around him, Noah believed God's words about something otherwise unbelievable. Noah's trust in God's words ended up defining and directing his entire life—his work, his priorities, his choices.

Building the ark was a work of faith not because it was a grand, extraordinary risk venture, nor just because it entailed a lifetime of activity that appeared absurd to everyone else and was blatantly out of step with his culture; it was a work of faith because *it was motivated and directed by a clear word from God*. The only reason he did it was because he trusted God's words about something future and as yet unseen. Even though it was a long time in coming and there was no precedent for it whatsoever ("things not seen as yet"), Noah considered God's words trustworthy. And, as a result, he saved his family.

Noah's own faith was instrumental in his family's security and deliverance from certain, coming judgment ("for the salvation of his household"). A parent's unwillingness to trust God's words is not a purely personal matter; it can jeopardize the spiritual life and welfare of the children as well.

God has warned us of coming judgment (Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10). If we trust God's words about that judgment to come, we will live life in a way that will impact our families, our priorities,

our choices, our relationships—all on the basis of God’s statements about a future and unseen reality with no visible precedent or proof (since no one has seen or experienced the judgment and returned to report it).

How did Noah’s faith “condemn the world”? God’s words surely sounded foolish to Noah’s generation. God called him to do something for which there was no historical precedent and therefore no apparent or practical need. It was his trust in God’s words that distinguished Noah from all those around him. Noah’s faith condemned the world simply by virtue of his believing response to God’s words in contrast to their unbelief, even though they both had access to the divine warning (2 Pet. 2:5). God’s faithfulness to His words vindicated Noah’s trust and condemned the world’s unbelief.

The result of Noah’s faith was not only “the salvation of his household” but also this: he “became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” James 2:18 can help us here: “Show me your faith without the works.” What if Noah had said he believed God, but then he

didn't build the ark? "I will show you my faith by my works." Noah wouldn't have built the ark had he not trusted God's words. It was his faith in God's Word that produced works, because "faith without works is useless" (James 2:20).

THE PATRIARCHS: TRUSTING GOD'S WORDS MEANS LIVING AS SOJOURNERS (11:8-10, 13-16)

The primary feature of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob highlighted in these verses is its pilgrim character. Faith-based sojourning is emphasized through a variety of expressions:

- "he left, not knowing where he was going" (11:8)
- "he lived as a stranger in the land of promise" (11:9)—the phrase "lived as a stranger" means to sojourn, to live as an alien in a foreign land
- "as in a foreign land" (11:9)
- "living in tents" (11:9)—"tents" implies transience, temporariness
- "for he was looking for the city" (11:10)—expresses anticipation, a quest

- they “confessed that they were strangers and exiles” not just in the land of Canaan but “on the earth” (11:13)
- “those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own” (11:14)

When God called Abraham out of Ur with the promise of a land inheritance, he had no idea where he was going (and no GPS). No notion of what it would look like when he got there (no travel brochures, no reports from Mesopotamian vacationers just back from holiday in Canaan). No itinerary of what would happen when he arrived. No idea that, once there, God would lead him into a famine (Gen. 12:10), make him wait twenty-five *more* years before the arrival of a son and heir (Gen. 21:5), and then ask him to give up that son (Gen. 22). And no inkling that it would take nearly seven centuries before his descendants even began to inherit the land God had promised.

Always tagging along behind our trust in God’s words is uncertainty, like a yipping, nipping chihuahua. Uncertainty about specifics and

circumstances and maybe even immediate consequences, but not uncertainty about God or the ultimate outcome. Abraham's call was not merely a call to a specific place; it was a call to radical trust and loyalty to a new God (new to him, that is). Isn't that the essence of Christianity—of following Christ? It is the very lack of sight that constituted his obedience as an act of faith. Faith is that principle by which a believer, on the basis of a word from God, lives for what he does not yet possess in light of realities he cannot see.

Abraham travelled a thousand miles on the basis of a promise that God would give him descendants and, one day, give Canaan both to him (Gen. 13:17; 15:7) and to his descendants (Gen. 13:15; 17:8). God reconfirmed that promise to his son Isaac (Gen. 26:3) and to his grandson Jacob (Gen. 28:4, 13; 35:12). That's why they lived in tents, moved into no city, and never built any permanent settlement structures. A pilgrim lives (and dies) for another time and another place. How do we do that? How do we reach out mentally (forgetting, Heb. 11:15) and emotionally (desiring, Heb. 11:16) to what is future (another

time) and unseen (another place)? By trusting God's words about the transitory nature of this present life and the certainty, reality, and glory of what's to come. What does this pilgrim faith of the patriarchs have to do with us?

First, *faith in God's words about future and unseen realities equips the believer to live a life that is both engaged in and yet unattached to this present world* ("by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange [foreign] land," 11:9 KJV). That word *sojourn* embodies an entire mindset, a worldview. That's what we are doing here—living temporarily. I don't just mean that we live on this earth in physical bodies for just a little while, and then die and go to live "in heaven." Unless I have seriously misunderstood my Bible, heaven is only temporary. We may sing, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through," but this world is going to be my home for another thousand years. "Oh," you say, "and *then* we'll go live with God in heaven." No; then we'll live on a newly recreated physical earth, in glorified but physical resurrected bodies, forever. Our eternal destiny

is not the cloudy, ethereal, non-material existence that the word “heaven” normally conjures up in our minds—it is as substantial and material and physical as this world. In one sense our calling is unlike Abraham’s; in another sense, it is exactly like Abraham’s. Have you ever thought about Jesus’ statement, “The meek shall inherit the earth”? The point about sojourning is that *this* life—with its sin and suffering and disappointment—is what’s temporary. But just as Abraham sojourned as a stranger in the very land God would give to his descendants (and one day to him), we sojourn as strangers on an earth that God intends to give to us.

Second, *faith in God’s words about future and unseen realities prompts us to pass along the legacy of a pilgrim mindset to our families* (“with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise”). Your attitudes, values, and priorities—communicated by the way you live and the choices you make and don’t make—are communicated to your children and grandchildren. We can teach what we know, and we should; but we will reproduce what we are.

Finally, *faith in God's words about future and unseen realities enables us to anticipate and live for realities that are certain and enduring* (“for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” 11:10 NKJV). “Waiting” here does not suggest hanging around and killing time; it depicts positive expectation. The writer of Hebrews applies this same Abrahamic expectation to all of us (Heb. 13:13–14). And John gives that city a name: New Jerusalem (Rev. 21). How much trust do we invest in God's words regarding these realities? And how does it actually affect how we live—our priorities and goals in life, our joy amid shortage and hardship, our consolation in disappointment or loss?

Layton Talbert is professor of theology and biblical exposition at BJU Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. This series is adapted from chapter 10 of *The Trustworthiness of God's Words: Why the Reliability of Every Word from God Matters* (Christian Focus, 2022).



With the Word to the World

Jim Tillotson

Ready or Not

When I was a kid, there was a very popular movie series about missing the rapture. The first movie was titled “A Thief in the Night,” and it is the story of a lady who misses the rapture and what she goes through because of that.

As I remember it, the opening scene showed an electric razor left running in the sink because the husband was raptured and his wife was left behind. The following movies started detailing all the terrible things that will happen during the tribulation.

An interesting side note is that “A Thief in the Night” and “A Distant Thunder” were largely filmed in and around Des Moines, Iowa, where I currently serve. I am sure some of my current college students would have a comment on why our area was chosen for a film on the tribulation period.

I remember that at the end of that movie, I was terrified that I would miss the rapture. This fear stayed with me until I got saved when I was nineteen, and I have not worried about the rapture since then. It seems that twenty to thirty years ago there was more preaching on the rapture than there is today. I still remember a sermon preached titled “What to Do If You Miss the Rapture.” The main points were the following: (1) Don’t call the church, because the pastor will be raptured. (2) Don’t go outside as there will be mass chaos and accidents due to the rapture. (3) Don’t go to the cemetery, so as to avoid being accused of being a grave robber. (4) Move to Europe, as it seems North America will be wiped out early in the tribulation. The message was clear: you do not want to miss the rapture.

The word “rapture” means “caught up” and comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:17. I personally believe the rapture will take place right before the tribulation. No solitary text of Scripture makes the entire case for the pretribulation rapture. However, when you consider all the New Testament evidence, a very compelling case for

the pretribulation position can be made, which I think answers more questions and solves more problems than any other rapture position. The Bible is clear that a rapture will take place, and it is clear that no date can be set.

Those who know Christ as their Savior would prefer to enter heaven through the rapture, not death. God has chosen not to reveal the specific times of end-time events, and He has chosen this so that all believers will live in constant anticipation of them. The thought of the rapture either thrills you or terrifies you, depending on how you are living. It will be a terrifying shock to those who do not know Jesus Christ. God warned that the flood was coming, yet only eight people believed and were saved. Lot tried to warn his family, yet most would not listen. People in those days were going about their regular daily activities—eating, drinking, and getting married—and never considered that judgment was around the corner. Though we don't know when the rapture will happen, we do know we are closer to it than we were yesterday.

As you read the book of Revelation, it is easy to see that you would not want anyone you know to go through such a terrible event. You would think this knowledge would spur us on to evangelism. How desperate Lot must have been trying to convince his family to leave Sodom and Gomorrah. How passionate do you think Noah was concerning his extended family and friends, warning them of the impending flood? Many Christians say they believe the rapture is coming, but they don't act like it. Sadly, many Christians say they love God, but they don't act like it. The Bible says that if we love God, we will keep His commandments. Church attendance alone does not prove we love God or that we care about lost people.

If you were told you had a week to live, how much would you have to set in order? What sins would you repent of? Who would you tell about Christ if you knew you were going to meet Him in a week? Don't let your funeral be your greatest outreach to lost people. Do what you can now to share the gospel. The rapture by its very nature will not give you any time to set things in order.

God's desire is that all of us would be ready to go to heaven on short notice. Is there a sin you have been hanging on to? Give it up today. Is there a relationship you need to repair? Repair it today. Is there someone you have been planning to invite to church or to your home for dinner, or that you have been planning to share the gospel with? Do it today. The tribulation period is coming. Let's do all we can to warn as many as we can and tell them about a Savior who loves them and is willing to forgive all their sins.

May we all act like we believe what we say we believe, and out of compassion may we take the Word to the world.

Jim Tillotson is the president of Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.



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Regional Reports

MID-AMERICA FBFI FELLOWSHIP

The Mid-America FBFI Fellowship met this past May along with the annual Conference on the Church for God's Glory (CCGG). The First Baptist Church of Rockford, Illinois, hosted the CCGG for the twenty-first time, and this conference has become an official meeting for the Mid-America FBFI Fellowship these past couple of years as well. There were roughly 125 attendees for the one-day conference.

Our theme was "Taking Heed to Yourself and Your Doctrine." Speakers included Dr. Bruce McAllister (Bob Jones University), Dr. David Saxon (Maranatha Baptist University), Dr. Steve Thomas (Huron Baptist Church, Flat Rock, MI), and the host pastor, David Huffstutler. The day included an emphasis on how to preach narrative portions of Scripture, a historical look at the preaching of Scottish Baptist pastor Alexander Maclaren, and other sermons with practical

encouragement for all and especially the pastors in attendance. Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Plymouth, Minnesota, kindly gifted attendees with copies of their recent book *Dispensationalism Revisited*.

The CCGG meets each year on the Monday before Memorial Day. Next year's conference takes place on Monday, May 19, 2025.



Chaplain's Report

Timothy Hryniewicz

Remaining Flexible

In 1 Corinthians 9:18–23 the Apostle Paul details how, when he preached the gospel, he was “made all things to all men . . . for the gospel’s sake.” This was an appeal for ministers to discerningly integrate themselves with those who need to hear the Word of God, and to do it without compromising biblical principles or godly convictions. Among many things, this passage challenges me to remain flexible in ministry. I’m sure many pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and others can attest that their ministry is not often as *straightforward* as they envision. Perhaps things like dissent in the local church, legal barriers, political agendas, or even sparse financial resources challenge our ability to preach the Word and practice the ordinances of the local church. Regardless of these challenges, Jesus tells us in Mark 16:15 to “Go . . . into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” We must be undeterred in

the face of adversity and remain flexible while obediently serving the Lord.

I am currently serving in the U.S. Navy and made the decision to apply for chaplain candidacy. I was challenged to remain flexible during my recent Zoom interview with the FBFI chaplain commissioning folks. For a *straightforward* Zoom interview, I envision sitting at my computer wearing a suit during the workday; that is pretty straightforward. However, in actuality I found myself using my cell phone standing on a boardwalk next to a grimy beach in Jamaica wearing a Hawaiian shirt on a Saturday afternoon; that is not so straightforward! Allow me a moment to explain the curious nature of these circumstances. I've been serving onboard the USS Leyte Gulf for the past three years. Being at sea on a deployed ship is a beautiful experience, but it doesn't always provide the best off-ship connectivity. (Imagine having to use a 1990s Motorola phone and dial-up Internet all over again!) Given these limitations and operational constraints, it was determined that the only way for me to have a Zoom interview was during the ship's port visit to Jamaica.

The ship pulled into Ocho Rios, Jamaica, late on a Friday evening. I checked my international

phone plan and thankfully I had a good connection. My original plan was to stay on the ship for my Saturday interview and find a place topside where I could be alone and focus on answering questions. Unfortunately, I was scheduled for shore patrol that day and I would have to go out with a couple sailors to walk around making sure ship's company was staying out of trouble, and offering help as needed. Being assigned shore patrol, I now needed to find a place in town where I could have a Zoom interview for over an hour. Additionally, my group was directed to patrol in civilian clothes, so naturally I chose to wear my Hawaiian shirt as it was the "tactical option" at the time, given the botanical features of the region (military humor). Being out and about I quickly realized that this port was not very clean. In fact, there was garbage all over the streets and homeless people were lying around wearing tattered clothing. Was this really the place God had for me to conduct a much-anticipated interview for chaplain endorsement?

Looking at all the obstacles to get to this point, and seeing the less-than-ideal surroundings, I had my answer. "Yes! This is exactly where God has for me to conduct this interview!" What better place to realize God's calling to ministry than to be in and among those who need to be ministered unto? Matthew 28:19

gives the imperative to “go . . . therefore, and teach all nations,” and verse 20 gives the promise of Christ’s presence: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” I don’t need to concern myself with the timing and place for the work of the ministry. I just need to bow my head, yield my heart, and go for the gospel’s sake!

At the end of the day, my interview with FBFI for endorsement went well, and I am now a member of the FBFI. I want to thank the men on the chaplain commission who spoke with me over all the commotion in the background and encouraged me in the Lord. And above all, I thank the Lord for continually teaching me to remain flexible as I serve Him through ministry.

Timothy Hryniewicz currently serves as a Surface Warfare Officer on the USS Leyte Gulf. He and his wife Rophe and their son Levi live in Norfolk, Virginia.





Fourth Annual FBFI Chaplains' Retreat

On August 13–17, several chaplains, their wives, and families gathered on the beautiful shores of the James River at the Edge Christian Camp in Spring Grove, Virginia, for the Fourth Annual FBFI Chaplains' Retreat. The theme of this year's retreat was "Be Steadfast in the Faith." The guest speakers were Pastor Ken and Judy Endean from Tri-City Baptist Church in Chandler, Arizona. One highlight of this year's retreat was the ladies' afternoon tea hosted by Malinda Duvall in the Eastover Manor, a Civil War-era mansion. It was a nice time to get away for a

few days, hear some great Bible teaching, and enjoy some much-needed fellowship with other FBFI chaplains and their families. We look forward to the Fifth Annual Chaplains' Retreat, which will be conducted at Camp Utibaca in 2025 in the beautiful mountains overlooking Ephraim, Utah.

**Following is our current list of FBFI chaplains.
Please pray for them and their families as they minister and serve our military and communities.**

ACTIVE DUTY

Army

CH (COL) Gary Fisher, Fort Liberty, NC

CH (LTC) Scott Bullock, Fort Jackson, SC

CH (LTC) Matthew Sprecher,
South Bend, IN

CH (MAJ) Seth Hamilton,
Fort Drum, NY

CH (CPT) (P) Daniel Roland,
Fort Sill, OK

CH (CPT) Trevor Shoemaker,
Fort Riley, KS

CH (CPT) Jonathan Yarbrough,
Bethesda, MD

Navy

CAPT Tavis Long, Little Creek, VA

CAPT (Select) Robert Johnson,
Okinawa, Japan

CDR Robert Spivey, Norfolk, VA

LCDR Anthony Pelc, Camp Lejeune, NC

LT Chris Wagner, San Antonio, TX

Air Force

Ch, Maj Alan Findley, Montgomery, AL

Ch, Capt Chris Pitts,
Malmstrom AFB, MT

Ch, Capt Jeffrey Rybold, Luke AFB AZ

Ch, Capt Ladron Thomas
Ramstein AFB, Germany

RESERVE

Army

CH (LTC) Joshua Cox, Elizabethtown, KY

CH (MAJ) Bret Perkuchin, Dover, DE

CH (MAJ) Matt Sanders, Fort Jackson, SC

CH (MAJ) Christian Torres,
Camp Pendleton, CA

CH (CPT) Vincent Lieb, Mobile, AL

CH (CPT) Matthew Myers,
Cincinnati, OH

CH (CPT) Jeremy Fisher,
Fort Douglas, UT

CH (CPT) Seth Weaver,
New Orleans, LA

Navy

LT Brent Baughman,
Chattanooga, TN

LT Jason McDonnell, Phoenix, AZ

Air Force

Ch, Maj Daniel Llorente,
Luke AFB, AZ

Ch, 1st Lt Caleb Schaaf, Toole, UT

Ch, 2nd Lt Samuel Jackson,
Robins AFB, GA

NATIONAL GUARD

Army National Guard

CH (COL) Chris Melvin, AZ

CH (LTC) Matthew Ortega, MD

CH (LTC) John Shay, MN

CH (CPT) Mark Hanson, WI

CH (CPT) Ken Jackson, Indiana Guard Reserve
(Regional Recruiter)

CH (CPT) Chris Koehn, AZ

CH (CPT) Casey Stephens,
Indiana Guard Reserve

CH (MAJ) Drew Paul, FL

Air National Guard

Ch, Brig Gen Michael Sproul, Washington, DC

Ch, Maj Nathan Mestler, AZ (deployed)

COAST GUARD AUXILIARY SUPPORT

Greg Kaminski, Eugene, OR

John Radacsy, Portsmouth, VA

FIRE SERVICE

Jeffrey Morris, Waterville, NY

HEALTH CARE

Glenn Booth (EMS/Regional Recruiter), Pensacola, FL

Wayne Keast (Wounded Spirits), Fayetteville, NC

John Morgan, Akron Children's Hospital, Akron, OH

Paul Phelps (PTSI), Westfield, IN

Tim Senter (Hospice), Palatka, FL

Bill Stutler (Hospice Emeritus), WV

Joe Jackson, Hospital/VFW, Lansing, MI

Tim Jackson, Hospital, Lansing, MI

POLICE/SHERIFF

Mike Ascher, Chesapeake, VA

Brian Boyd, Portsmouth, VA

Bob Condict, Union County, OH

Don Karnes, Chesapeake, VA

Bob and Jane Keller, Santa Ana, CA

Randy Livingston, Thomasville, GA

Larry Robbins
(Emeritus/Regional Recruiter), CO

SECRET SERVICE

Troy Shoaf (+ PD), Bolingbrook, IL

CIVIL AIR PATROL

Ch, Lt Col Daryl Jeffers, Sebring, FL

Ch, Maj Mike Bardon, Vernal, UT

CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Randy Kunkleman, Allen County Jail, OH

Jonathan Shafer, Greenville, SC

John Vaughn (Emeritus), Taylors, SC

CHAPLAIN CANDIDATES

Army

CPT Trent Wilson, NE
1LT Collin Bond, MI
1LT Chad Fitts, TX
1LT KC Hansen, AZ
1LT Ryan Hubbard, WV
1LT Keegan Lauzon, NY
2LT Adam Yates, TN

APPLICANTS

Tony Anaya
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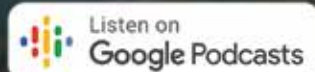
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A wooden cross stands against a dramatic sunset sky with orange and yellow clouds. In the background, silhouettes of mountains are visible. The cross is made of two weathered wooden beams.

Evangelist's Perspective

Jerry Sivnksty

The Doctrine of Justification

The word “justify” means “to declare a person righteous.” In his book *Redemption Accomplished*, John Murray defined justification as “a constitutive act whereby the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to our account and we are accordingly accepted as righteous in God’s sight.” This is a powerful statement.

The first question concerning justification is, “What is the price for justification?” The answer is the blood

of the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:9 says, “Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” Ephesians 1:7 states, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” The Scriptures declare of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:5, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” Oh, what love God manifested to all mankind through His Son! First John 4:10 says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

The second question regarding justification is, “What is God’s power for justification?” The answer is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. The angels proclaimed in Matthew 28:6, “He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” “He is risen!” became the resounding message of the men of God. Acts 5:30 says, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” Acts 17:18 states, “He preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.” In 1 Corinthians 15:20 the apostle Paul declared, “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” In Revelation 1:18 the Lord Jesus said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore.”

The third question concerning justification is, “What is God’s provision for justification?” The answer is the

grace of God. Romans 3:24 says, "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Back in 1865, the Emancipation Declaration declared all slaves to be free. They were no longer in bondage to their masters. In like fashion, the Lord Jesus has set mankind free from the bondage of sin. The Lord accomplished this by His grace. Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace are ye saved." What is God's grace? Grace is receiving something we do not deserve. Someone has said that the acrostic for grace is "**G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense." The Scriptures state in Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." John Newton, before he was saved, was an ungodly sea captain. When he accepted Christ as his Savior, he knew it was by the grace of God. That is why the first stanza of his famous song begins, "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see."

The fourth and final question about justification is, "What is the prerequisite for justification?" The answer is faith. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." A person is justified, or declared righteous, by faith. This is the message of the Scriptures. Again, look at Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace are ye saved *through faith*." Faith is simply believing the record that God has given

concerning His Son. What is that record? It is found in 1 John 5:11: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” The Philippian jailer asked the men of God in Acts 16:30, “What must I do to be saved?” They replied in verse 31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” John 1:12 says, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” So a person has to come to Jesus in faith if he wants to be justified, to be declared righteous by God, because Romans 10:4 says, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Romans 10:13 promises, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” If you will put your faith in Christ alone and ask Him to save you, He will save you.

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at evang-jsivn@aol.com.



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BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS

