

E-Herald of the Coming Kingdom

*"The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near.
Change the way you think and act, and believe the Good News."
Mark 1:15 GW*

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What Every Christian Should Know

**DEDICATED TO SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S COMING
KINGDOM TO BE ESTABLISHED WHEN JESUS RETURNS**

EDITOR'S NOTE

Co-Editors: Wally Winner - Kent Ross



If Not Now, When . . . If Ever

This month saw the passing of the date of the end of Age, as established by a Mr. Camping. When he saw his date for the return of Christ unfulfilled, he was led to correct himself, and now it is to be expected on October 21, 2011.

The Church of God actually emerged from a similar controversy known as the Millerite Movement. Whitney Cross, in his book on The Burned Over District, details the excitement that developed when William Miller began to preach the imminent return of Christ, and proclaiming that, according to his calculations, Jesus would be returning to earth sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. When that year passed without fulfillment, a Samuel Snow found that the date-setting was a bit off, and the actual date was to be Oct. 22, 1844. More than 100,000, some estimate, were persuaded of its truth and on that day watched for the opening of the heavens. To their chagrin, it did not transpire, any more than it did last month.

The tragedy of this date setting is so obvious, it bewilders our minds to think that some believe they can know more than Jesus himself. He clearly said that He did not know when He was to return, nor did the angels, but only His Father. What seeming egotism to think that one can know more than God's own Son.

As a sub-point how confusing this must be for trinitarians to think that Jesus, in their view God, did not know something that the Father, also God, who along with the Holy Spirit, also God, did know. That can hardly be explained, and is an embarrassment to all reasonable thinkers, who must fall back on the "mystery" explanation for so much.

But setting a date that inevitably fails also invites the scoffers to laugh and say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2nd Peter 3:1 ff). The foolish date-setting gives strength to the scoffers predilection that Christians are just foolish in their dreaming.

But Jesus will come, and most will not be ready. Of course we don't know when. If Jesus, Himself, didn't know, how presumptuous to think that we can know. He did tell us to watch the signs of the times, and those appear to be showing the nearness of His return, but yet we do not know when! We know it will be, but we keep watch, and pray for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done.

The Need for Laborers

Perhaps this has been the call since Jesus' day, but there seems a real dearth of those women and men called to minister in the world. There is only one college, of which we are aware, that teaches a clear understanding of Biblical truth and that is Atlanta Bible College, but it is going through difficult times.

The Korean Extension had nine graduates, but the main campus had no one graduating, and only five receiving two-year certificates. That cannot provide the workers really needed.

The college is making a mighty effort at recruiting by offering a free tuition program. Hopefully this may reverse the trend, as classes of three to five people is very discouraging to prospective students.

In the last ten years or so, while there was a dramatic increase in attendance, fewer and fewer ministry candidates entered the field. Finances became a tremendous issue, and the decision to sell the campus itself may, in retrospect, been ill-advised. Leadership faltered, and it has taken a dramatic effort by the Board of Directors and staff to reverse direction.

We need a college for the training of those desiring ministry; we need candidates that feel God's call to them, and we need our leadership to strongly lead the way back.

Establishing a New Direction

With the concern for our college and its situation, there is an equal concern for our churches. In my almost fifty years of ministry, we have seen churches planted and churches buried. That seemingly is inevitable.

Unfortunately, we have no department in our organization that is directly involved in the work of encouraging new works in new areas. Our leaders, have of necessity, focused their energy and effort on survival as a viable organization. They have had to expend their time and energy in maintaining the programs, and there has been little time, money and effort left to to evangelistic work, especially in the United States and Canada.

It seems there is a lack of vision, perhaps among us all, to set forth in evangelism with the expectation that God will open doors of opportunity . . . if we walk by faith and not by sight.

There needs to be intentional prayer for this. For more new works, more new churches (not necessarily buildings), but new works where the wonderful truths of God's coming Kingdom are proclaimed, where the One God is taught honestly, where Jesus Christ is clearly identified as our Savior who is returning.

Will it happen?

It certainly could because God can do what He wants done in and through us, weak though we may appear to be, but it may not occur. While with God all things are possible, Jesus also posed the question, that when He returns will He even find faith on the earth.

Whether or not new directions will be heeded, brave new paths followed, is yet to be seen. Often existing organizations cannot remake themselves. Some can, though most cannot. Let us hope and pray that this one can.

Encouraging the Faith

Last month we celebrated the twentieth Theological Conference. People from 8 or 9 countries came to share in the joy of fellowship with believer's of "like-precious faith." Traveling from Germany and even Australia they came to share their discovering the truth about the identity of the One God.

One came from Germany to be baptized and proclaim that this was her family, though she had just personally met many of us. There was rejoicing as the notion of "like-precious faith" took form and meant more and more to the attendees.

It was also very encouraging to see the new leaders emerging with brilliant minds, and insights into the Bible that promise wonderful results should time last. These leaders will publish and proclaim, through written work, both printed and on the Internet, these truths that have been held down through the years.

Unfortunately very few o/f our regular pastors chose, or were able to come and share in the excitement of this gathering. Some of these may well become leaders in the revitalization of the work of God in these Last Days.

Ominous Signals

Just this past month, the United States' President Obama has indicated that Israel ought to give up land, her land, the promised land from God, Himself. God has promised that this land is to be for His people, Israel, and woe to those who mandate differently.

Now the Lord may punish Israel for her unbelief, but for us to abandon her, as her ally brings us closer to the day when Israel will be surrounded and all alone.

Then the Lord Himself will go forth to defend His people. Note carefully Editor Winner's first installment on the Israel. He presents the biblical story of Israel's claim. Next month Israel's political claim. This is God's land!

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Pastor T.M. Ferrell is celebrating his 70th year in ministry this month. He began as a student pastor hitch hiking to Iowa on weekends to preach. He now serves the Greenville, SC Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith



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LET'S GET A HANDLE ON HEAVEN AND HELL

By Dennis Baldwin

"Heaven and Hell": subjects discussed in religious as well as non-religious circles. For people all over the world, both religious as well as non-religious, *heaven* conjures up ideas of spirits, ghosts, harps, clouds, all as a result of death. *Hell* on the other hand invokes thoughts of fire, everlasting pain, agony all as a result of death. Most feel that heaven and hell alike are experienced the moment a person dies. Death is considered by many of our friends to be a friend and to be the gateway to life, a truly unusual turn of a phrase.

A visit to a friends' funeral will usually be accompanied by talk about how our friends are blissfully enjoying the presence of the Lord while we mourn their absence from our presence. Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (*Luke 16:19-31*) is sometimes mentioned in this context. Paul's comment about being *absent from the body and present with the Lord* (*2 Cor. 5:6*) is very often alluded to as well. We are usually reminded of Jesus' comment that *in his Father's house are many mansions*. Favorite scriptures include *Psalms 23* and *John 14*. Comfort is offered as we listen to assurances that our dearly departed friend is not with us but is with the Lord.

- Is this an important subject or should we simply leave it alone?
- Let me suggest an even more stirring question; "should we encourage our friends to spend the time to sort these subjects out?"
- Should we go so far as to suggest that a proper comprehension of these subjects is in some way, at the most necessary and at the least important?

Most of us have struggled with these subjects and feel comfortable that the Bible is quite clear on both issues. Perhaps our minds were open at one time or perhaps not; but we at some time struggled to grasp the meaning of death, heaven and hell. Sometimes relatives, friends and colleagues never and will never sympathize with one another in his conclusions. Should we even bother?

THE SCRIBE WHO GAVE AN INTELLIGENT ANSWER

Let me begin by declaring, in my humble opinion, I have no problem suggesting it to be very important to accept that God is one, or if you will, there is one God who is the Father. Please give me a few moments to make my case. Jesus pressed this notion so concretely in his conversation with the scribe in Mark:

28 One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29 Jesus

answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord ;30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart , and with all your soul , and with all your mind, and with all your strength .'31 "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself .' There is no other commandment greater than these."32 The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is one, and there is no one else besides Him;33 and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength , and to love one's neighbor as himself , is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."34 When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions. Mark 12:28-34 (NASB). Notice that Jesus was impressed by the intelligent response of the scribe. ("Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently").

There are doctrinal issues which need our attention because of their importance. This instance brings to the forefront an issue of great importance. Jesus believed in the "shema", "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one". Deut. 6:4 and would not deviate from that all-important truth. A declaration made by Jews at births, weddings, funerals and during all of life in general, and which Jesus said should be at the front of our consideration, demands our attention. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus; being the God of truth that He is; expects his creation to make every effort to "receive the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so". Acts 17:11 (NASB)

- God is a God of truth: ¹⁶ "Because he who is blessed in the earth Will be blessed by the God of truth; And he who swears in the earth Will swear by the God of truth; Isaiah 65:16 (NASB).
- Jesus his Son of God is "the way, the truth and the life": John 14:6

How could Jesus have made it any clearer than he did in John 17:3? "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." John 17:3 (NASB) Scripture, the OT, as well as the New Testament state unequivocally that there is only one God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus and yes, our Father as well.

Inasmuch as "Without faith it is impossible to please Him",

- "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a **rewarder** of those who seek Him. Heb 11:6 (NASB)
- Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of the Lord. 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 (NASB); we would do well to build our faith on truth rather than what could be unbiblical notions.

A FRESH LOOK AT TRUTH

Before going further, it would not come amiss to consider these words of Paul: *“God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth”*. 2 Thess 2:13 (NASB) Above the writer of Hebrews clearly states that in order to please God we must believe that *God is* and that he is a **rewarder** of those who diligently seek him. If God is a **rewarder**, then what exactly is that reward? What is the truth about our reward as well as punishment? Is that important? Is *going to heaven* the reward of which he is speaking?

We can and we often do try to determine what is fundamentally important. What, after all, is necessary to believe in order to be saved? Will my friend, who died believing he would surely be entering immediately into the presence of God, be saved? What about my friend who believes he will sleep in death until Jesus comes? Even though we hope our friend had everything in order at death, might I suggest That final judgment belongs to God, his son which he has personally appointed judge, those disciples appointed to sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and the saints, who will, at that time, assist in judging the world. (Acts 17:31, Luke 22:28-30, 1 Cor. 6:2). We shouldn't elevate ourselves to being the judge just yet.

“Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.” 1 Cor. 4:5 (NASB)

However, (*you knew there would be a however*) this does not mean we should not be very deliberate in our assertions regarding who exactly God is and what exactly is his reward as well as what is the truth about death. Nor should we fail in our duty to call what is truth, true and what is false, false.

In addition to other things, it becomes our lot to:

- Help our families and friends to understand God's program;
- To get on the right page; to be aware of his time-table;
- To understand his truth. Someone said *it is not our truth*.

Perhaps it is *our truth* if in fact we own it; if it has become so important as to *“sell all that we have and buy it”*. (See the parable in Matt. 13:46) Solomon said to *“buy the truth”* Prov. 23:23. Invest in truth. What we buy, often at a great cost, we ought also to *buy into*; to own those words as our own. To believe them so deeply as to hold to them no matter what the cost. If you don't believe is a cost, just tell your friends that you actually do not hold to the tradition that Jesus is actually God of very God. You will pay the cost. Tell them you do not believe you are going to heaven when you die. You will pay the cost. Share with them that you do not hold to the notion that wicked people will suffer, writhing in pain for eternity; you will pay the cost.

Are these teachings important? Yes they are! Are they fundamentally true? Actually, yes they are. Will my friends be lost if they believe otherwise? We will leave that up to God and his appointed judge at the last day. Again; “*Wait until the Lord comes*”.

God does in fact have a time-table. Paul said that in the fullness of time God send his Son, made of a woman. *Gal 4:4*. God has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world. *Acts 17:31*. God knows the day and hour in which his Son will come again:

36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.37 "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. Matt 24:36-37 (NASB)

It is a day and hour Jesus said that the angels do not know nor does he know. Jesus asserted that our primary concern should be to ready ourselves for when that day and hour does come. May 21 at precisely 6pm we were told by Harold Camping, an 89-year-old retired civil engineer who has built a multi-million-dollar Christian Media Empire that publicizes his apocalyptic prediction, that that day would come. He, didn't know the day or hour anymore than those who have gone before him and asserted their predictions. He didn't, the angels don't, and neither does Jesus know that day or that hour. God only knows.

UNDERSTANDING DEATH FREES OUR MINDS TO UNDERSTAND HEAVEN AND HELL



Human beings first disconnect with God was because they did not believe the truth that God had given them regarding death. They believed a lie instead. Paul applied this principal to his audience in Corinth:

But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent.⁴ You happily put up with whatever anyone tells

you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.
2 Cor 11:3-4 (NLT)

We tread on dangerous ground when we do not hold to God's truth. The Corinthian Christians happily put up with teaching regarding another Jesus and another gospel. Eve heeded the words of the serpent. Jesus warned about that serpent:

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" John 8:44 (NASB)

The battle between truth and error has been waged ever since. How that affects our lives is significant to each of us. This spirit of error will continue to pervade humanity until the very end, when:

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming ;9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. 2 Thess 2:8-12 (NASB)

It is still our responsibility, our charge, our duty to *study to be diligent to present ourselves approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Tim 2:15 (NASB)* We continue to be challenged to be the *church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. 1 Tim 3:15 (NASB)* If people cannot find the truth in the church where will they find it? If the church isn't looking for and finding the truth, is the truth lost forever?

Many of our friends have come to the point prophesied in Isaiah. Where should they go to find what the Book says?

"The entire vision will be to you like the words of a sealed book , which when they give it to the one who is literate, saying, "Please read this," he will say, "I cannot, for it is sealed." 12 Then the book will be given to the one who is illiterate, saying, "Please read this." And he will say, "I cannot read." Isaiah 29:11-12 (NASB)

Please give me a fair hearing as I delve into the subject of Heaven and Hell. But first we need to get a handle on death. Our personal theology regarding Heaven and Hell is so wrapped up in our perceptions regarding death. A thorough examination would be helpful. I will plan on venturing further into these subjects in the next issue. While we hope to find truth as we continue in our quest to "give intelligent answers" as did the scribe.

- Death...is that really what happens to us when we die?
- Heaven...is this the future place we will spend eternity?
- Hell...how can it be the second death when people who are cast there never die?

DECEIVED BY ALL

THE STORY OF MODERN ISRAEL

Part One

By Wally Winner

Can you remember when the Middle East was not in the news? Israel and her relationship with her neighbors kept out attention for years. More recently, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan have certainly had the focus of the United States. The unsettled governments in what has come to be called the “Arab Spring,” have us concerned. Tunisia’s long-term dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted in January. The next month, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stepped down in the face of a popular uprising. Other countries that have seen uprisings include Syria, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain.

Just when everyone was focusing on how Arab states could get their internal politics in order, President Barack Obama shifts the attention back to Israel. Just when the addition of Hamas was undermining the case for the UN “approving” of a Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, the President legitimizes the effort.



The response from Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was perhaps predictable, but the only real answer he could give. He clarified to the world Israel’s positions on key issues. Jerusalem, he said, “must never again be divided. Jerusalem must remain the united capital of Israel.” Israel will not compromise on key security issues, insisting that any future Palestinian state must be fully demilitarized, and that Israel will maintain a military presence in key areas, including along the Jordan River. He insisted that “Israel will not return to the indefensible boundaries of 1967.” And he was unequivocal in his rejection of Hamas: “Israel is prepared to sit down today and negotiate peace with the Palestinian Authority... But Israel will not negotiate with a Palestinian government backed by the Palestinian version of al Qaida.”

As the Prime Minister stood before a very receptive United States Congress, he elaborated on the Israeli position. He said the fundamental problem between Israel and the Palestinians is not the fact that there is no Palestinian state it is the continued rejection by Palestinians of a Jewish state. He addressed Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas personally: “It’s time for President Abbas to stand before his people and say, ‘I will accept a Jewish state.’ Those six words will change history ... And those six words will convince the people of Israel that they have a true partner for peace.”

Political unrest and ferment are nothing new to that region. In fact, they are a continuation of the strife that has characterized and plagued that portion of the globe for centuries. Many wars have been waged and

much blood has been shed as the armies of succeeding generations have battled again and again for possession of the same parched, barren, and bleak areas. At the geographic and political center of all the turmoil lies the nation of Israel.

In the light of all this, these questions naturally arise: Why is the entire world concerned about a Palestinian homeland? Why do events in that particular region arouse such fears? And what draws the other nations into that arena? Who rightfully owns the land anyway?

There is nothing more fascinating in all literature than the Bible revelation of the destiny of Israel, the only nation whose history was written in advance. It is not generally known that it was Moses who gave us the first complete outline of what is going to happen to the Jewish people (Deut. 28:1—30:10). It extends from the occupation of the land of Palestine by Israel all the way to the coming of the Messiah to rule over His glorious kingdom. A score of other prophets have filled in countless details. Everything fits together in a mosaic so extraordinary as to confound the human intellect and lead to the conclusion that such a record demands a supernatural explanation.

Much of what was written has already taken place. The stage seems to be set for climactic events yet to come. For the proper understanding of all this, some knowledge is needed of a few elementary facts about the people called the Jews some three hundred times in Scripture. They are the only nation made up of one family. All are descended from one man. They are children of Abraham and Isaac, sons and daughters of the patriarch Jacob, who became Israel. Their genealogy is carefully recorded in the Bible.

The Hebrews have been the most persecuted people in history. There is even a word to describe it: anti-Semitism. Much has been written about its possible causes. Scholars have offered explanations based on economic, religious, and even personal factors.

An examination of the Scriptures shows anti-Semitism to be one of the results rising from the relationship between the people of Israel and Yahweh. In one sense, Israel begins at Genesis 3:15, when the “Seed of the Woman” is first announced. (The summary of this Woman occurs in Revelation 12). In another sense, Israel’s beginning occurs at the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. But the Scripture reckons the birth of the Nation Israel at the Exodus (Ex 4:22)

Biblical Right to the Land

God dealt with all people alike from creation to the call of Abraham. Everyone was on the same level. After the flood, which destroyed all human life except Noah and his family, God revealed Himself to Noah, who then spread the knowledge of God over the face of the repopulated earth. People rebelled against the revelation God gave them, however, and raised up gods for themselves.

From this rejection God chose Abraham to raise up a new nation through which God could make Himself known. He found a man dwelling in Ur, living in the home of an idolater (Josh. 24:2). God attracted Abraham from his idolatrous family, from an idolatrous city, and separated him unto Himself.



When God called Abraham, He gave him a promise of three blessings. The first was contained in the words, “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee” (Gen. 12:3). “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing” (Gen. 12:2) is the second promise here. And “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3) marks promise number three. This was an unconditional covenant.

After Abraham received this promise from God, he departed from Ur of the Chaldees and came to the northern border of the land of Palestine, which God was going to give him. Accompanying him was his wife, Sarah, his father, Terah, and his nephew, Lot.

Abraham stayed outside the land of Palestine until his father died. After his father’s death, Abraham again started on his journey and came into the land of Palestine (Gen. 12:4-5), There the Lord appeared unto him again and said, “Unto thy seed will I give this land” (Gen. 12:7).

This promise was reiterated and reaffirmed many times in God’s dealing with Abraham and his descendants. In Genesis 13 we read about dissension between Abraham’s and Lot’s herdsman. As a result Lot was separated from his uncle. God was bringing Abraham to the place He had previously spoken of now that he was separated from his father’s country, his father’s house, and his kindred.

Following the separation from Lot, God said, “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. . . . Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee” (Gen. 13:14-15, 17). Abraham was in that separated place where God could bless him, and God appeared again to reaffirm that which He had promised—that the land belonged to Abraham and his seed forever.

In Genesis 14 we learn about a coalition of kings who conquered the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot had taken up residence in Sodom. When Sodom fell into the hands of this coalition, led by Chedorlaomer, Lot was captured. Abraham vanquished Chedorlaomer and the coalition of kings and delivered Lot. The king of Sodom, out of gratitude, offered Abraham all the spoils of conquest, thus conferring great riches on the deliverer. But Abraham refused to take anything the king offered (Gen. 14:23-24). Abraham had God’s promise of protection and provision, and he trusted God to fulfill His promise. In response to this trust, God again spoke to Abraham saying, “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1).

When God reminded Abraham of His faithfulness, Abraham took courage to remind God that He had promised him an heir. At that time the closest thing Abraham had to an heir was a stranger who managed his household. God strengthened Abraham's faith by promising him a seed as multitudinous as the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5). To this Abraham replied with a trusting "Amen." "He believed in the Lord" (Gen. 15:6). On the basis of this affirmation, Abraham was declared righteous (Rom. 4:3).

To this one declared righteous by faith, God said, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" (Gen. 15:7). The previous promise of God is reiterated and is now to be confirmed through the strongest possible affirmation, the blood covenant.

In the blood covenant the contracting parties would slay an animal, divide the carcass down the backbone, and place the divided parts opposite each other on the ground to form a pathway between the pieces. The two would join hands, recite the terms of the contract, and walk together between the divided halves of the slain animal. This signified that they were bound in a contract until death, and if either violated the terms of the contract, his blood would be poured out as the blood of the animal had been poured out.

God called on Abraham to prepare the animal that would make a blood covenant possible. God was about to confirm His promise to Abraham with a blood covenant. Because of the large number of animals God required for this ritual, when one would have been sufficient, Abraham surely realized the great significance attached to what was happening. Abraham slew the heifer, the goat, the ram, and the birds and laid their carcasses on the ground, preparing to enter into this blood covenant about which he and God had been speaking.

The terms of the covenant were clearly stated, "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'Unto thy seed have I given this land. . .'" (Gen. 15:18). The dimensions of the land are clearly stated, stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates and from the Arabian peninsula to Asia Minor. In no clearer way could God signify to Abraham and Abraham's descendants that Palestine was their God-given possession forever.

Even though the Lord had promised Abraham that his seed would become in number like the stars of the heavens and the sands of the seashore, he and his wife were childless. Sarah apparently concluded that the only way Abraham would have his own son would be through a concubine. In keeping with the common practice of that time, therefore, she gave him her maid Hagar. Through this union Ishmael was born when the patriarch was 86 years old. Abraham undoubtedly believed that this child was the "son of promise," but 13 years later God miraculously rejuvenated him and his wife Sarah, and she gave birth to Isaac.

Many of the peoples of the Middle East trace their lineage back to Abraham. Through his son Ishmael, his children by Keturah, and his grandson Esau, he became the progenitor of numerous kings and nations, including many of the Arabs. But the line of special promise went from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob and his 12 sons.

The closing chapters of Genesis recount the well-known story of Joseph, the eleventh of Jacob's sons. As a young man he was sold into slavery by his brothers but eventually became the prime minister of Egypt. The Lord brought him to this position so that the family of Jacob would leave Palestine to escape a killing

drought and move into Goshen, an especially fertile area near the Nile delta. There, under the blessing of God, the Hebrews multiplied rapidly during the next 200 years, free from repeated attacks by the hostile tribes of the Palestine region. Besides, the religious system of Egypt declared the Israelites to be a ceremonially unclean people. This kept the Jews from intermarrying with Egyptians, and adopting their heathen practices, thereby losing their national distinctives.

The nation increased until they numbered more than two million people. Undoubtedly they loved the security and prosperity of Goshen. But God decreed that it was time for them to return to Canaan, the land of promise. Therefore He permitted a cruel new dynasty to take over in Egypt. The reigning Pharaoh viewed the Israelites as a threat and took harsh measures to prevent their further growth. He reduced them to slavery and subjected them to unbelievable oppression. Intense suffering bound the Israelites together as a people, reminded them of the living God, caused them to accept the leadership of Moses, and made them willing to leave Goshen.



The next period in the history of Israel can be called an era of miracles. It began with the call of Moses in about 1450 B.C. and ended about 100 years later. The historical narratives of Exodus through Joshua are replete with stories of openly supernatural events. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, gave him a series of supernatural signs, sent 10 plagues upon the Egyptians, and opened up a path through the Red Sea wide enough to permit the passage of more than 2 million Israelites. They went into Egypt as a family; they came out as a nation.

God gave His wandering people manna as food, caused water to gush from rocks, kept sandals and clothing from wearing out, and led them on their journey with a pillar of cloud and fire. He spoke audibly to their leaders.

In this connection, Deuteronomy 28-30 is very important, for it outlines God's dealing with Israel and explains Israel's present position. The children of Israel had been out of the land of Palestine for more than four hundred years when Moses delivered the message in Deuteronomy 28. The land itself was again in the possession of Israel's enemies, who sought to bar her readmission to the land.

As they stood on the edge of the Promised Land, Yahweh once again affirmed His promise to Joshua. "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go." (Joshua 1:3-7)

God opened up the Jordan for their entry into Canaan, flattened the walls of Jericho, and gave them special help in conquering the land. In a period of 16 years under Joshua's leadership, and against superior numbers,

they captured most of the land of Palestine. Even in the time of Joshua they did not obey the Lord's command to rid the land completely of its inhabitants. Once the people got comfortable, they halted their conquest and never took possession of all the property that Yahweh intended them to have. This would prove to be disastrous spiritually and nationally for the Hebrews.

After the death of Joshua, some of the Israelites married their heathen neighbors, and soon many of them were adopting their vile religious customs.

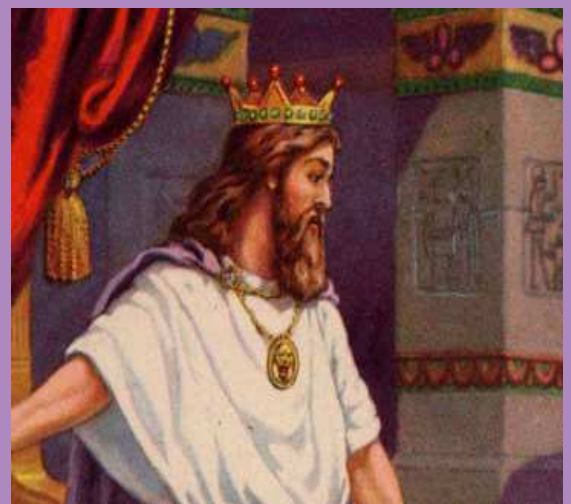
The period described in the book of Judges lasted about 300 years. Though the Israelites had no central government during that time, anarchy did not prevail because local communities had their own civil rulers. God was worshiped at the tabernacle, a tent located in a place called Shiloh. The worship there and the nationwide observance of Mosaic ordinances were good unifying influences.

They were not strong enough, however, to give the people a sense of national unity and to keep them from being contaminated by their heathen neighbors. As a result, a tragic cycle of events began: spiritual conditions in the land would degenerate until the people were far from God. Then the Lord would allow them to be subjugated by a heathen country. In response, the Israelites would repent and cry out for deliverance. God would hear their cry and send a judge to deliver them. But soon the downward cycle would begin again.

Samuel became a priest-judge in Israel shortly after 1100 B.C., and he was an excellent leader. He was greatly loved by the people, and it appears that he gave them a new sense of national unity. But toward the close of his long tenure, the people sent representatives to ask him to give them a king like the other nations. Although he was no doubt offended by this apparent rejection of his leadership, he turned to the Lord for direction. To his surprise, God instructed him to grant their request. But He also told Samuel to warn the people that having a king would mean heavy taxation and the conscription of their sons into hard labor and military service. This didn't dissuade them, however, and soon Saul—a tall, handsome, shy, and humble young man- was crowned as Israel's first king.

Though he possessed some fine qualities and led the Israelites to several important victories over old enemies, he did not greatly strengthen the nation. His rule gradually degenerated, and even before his reign had ended the Lord led Samuel to anoint David as the next king of Israel. Shortly after Saul and his sons were killed in battle, David came to the throne.

David was Israel's greatest king. Under his rule, which began about 1000 B.C., the nation became united, strong, and respected. His armies defeated the Philistines so soundly that they never again menaced Israel. He captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of the country. He subdued the surrounding enemy nations that had sought to hinder Israel's growth and made them tributaries. He brought material prosperity to the land and established a fair system of justice. A high cultural climate was encouraged, and music and literature flourished. He brought the ark of the covenant to





Jerusalem and had it placed in a special tent. He developed a beautiful system of worship which included the singing of many of his own magnificent psalms.

When David died, his son Solomon ascended the throne. This gifted ruler led the nation in building the temple, a structure of unusual splendor and beauty. Solomon dedicates the First Temple in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. He erected many buildings, furthered the development of the arts, and made Jerusalem the envy of the world. His lavish lifestyle and ambitious enterprises, however, placed a great strain upon the people, taxes soared, and many were drafted into labor gangs. Then too, Solomon succumbed to the temptation of marrying foreign women to enhance his position among the kings of the nations, opening the door to paganism. The moral and spiritual trend had turned sharply downward in Israel by the time he died about 930 B.C.

Solomon's son Rehoboam was Israel's next king. A proud man, he was warned against continuing the extravagant policies of his father. The people were tired of the heavy taxes, and they didn't want their sons conscripted into government labor. But Rehoboam refused to listen to his wise counselors. Instead, he haughtily informed the people that they could expect even heavier taxes and more forced labor from him than from his father. This was a serious mistake.

About 880 B.C. a civil war divides the Kingdom into "Israel" in the north and "Judah" in the south. A gifted young man named Jeroboam led the 10 northern tribes to secede, and he established a separate state. Rehoboam was left with only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. A little later, the entire tribe of Levi chose to reunite with him, and the two kingdoms went their separate ways. The northern tribes were known as Israel, while the Southern Kingdom was called Judah.

Israel was ruled by several dynasties and never had a good king. From the very outset it began to lose citizens, for many of them immigrated southward to Judah. In 1 Kings 12:23 we are told about a group from the 10 tribes, called "the remnant of the people," who chose to live in the Southern Kingdom. On two other occasions, large numbers of people left Israel to join Judah. The first took place when King Asa led Judah in a widespread spiritual awakening (2 Chronicles 15:9). The second occurred during the great religious revival under Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30:25, 26). Thus, large numbers of people from the northern tribes were absorbed into the Southern Kingdom.

As the Northern Kingdom continued to degenerate spiritually, it became weaker militarily and industrially. Finally, in 721 B.C., the Assyrians overran the land and deported the most desirable citizens to their own country. They left the lowest working class in their homeland, and many of these people identified themselves with the two southern tribes (2 Chronicles 34:9). The Southern Kingdom, therefore, though beginning with

people from only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, gradually drew into it a significant number of members from all the other tribes.

After Israel's fall, Judah continued to exist as an independent kingdom for another 135 years. The royal family of David remained in power, but most of the kings were not godly men. The few who were, however, led in revivals that temporarily halted the degenerative slide. But, the citizens in the Southern Kingdom became increasingly involved in heathen practices and worship, and in 586 B.C. the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and subjugated the entire land.

In 612 B.C. the combined forces of Babylonians, Medes and Scythians attacked and destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. The only remaining power of significance was the Egyptians. The Babylonian Chronicle records the defeat of Pharaoh Necho and the Egyptians at the famous battle at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar and the then known world was under Babylonian rule.

Nebuchadnezzar did the same with Judah that Assyria had done with Israel. Beginning with the first siege of Jerusalem in 606 B.C., he took the most desirable people out of their homeland, about 10,000, and planted them in his own colonies. Daniel and his three friends were taken captive to Babylon during this siege. Jehoiakim of Judah was installed vassal king at Jerusalem. Three years later, he would revolt (2 Kings 24:1; Daniel 1:1, 2).

King Solomon's temple was destroyed in August of 586 BCE. The Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem in January 587 BCE, and after eighteen months, breached the wall (in July 586 BCE). The demolition of the temple commenced the next month, August 586 BCE ("In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon," 2 Kings 25:8). The destruction date according to the Hebrew calendar was the 9th of Av, also known as Tish B'Av.

Nebuchadnezzar hoped they would merge with his other subjects, and some of them did. They intermarried with the heathen and were absorbed into the Assyrian, Babylonian, or Persian cultures. Similarly, some of the people who had been left in the area around Jerusalem married heathen mates and became part of the Gentile civilization of that day. But many others, representing all of the tribes (those remaining in Palestine as well as those in various localities throughout the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires), did not forget their roots. They maintained as much of their national distinctiveness as they possibly could. They remained loyal to Jehovah and the law of Moses, and married their own people. Synagogues were established as instruction centers. They spread out and settled everywhere throughout the ancient world—Asia Minor, Cyprus, Crete, the coastal region of Greece, the islands of the Aegean Sea, Southern Europe, Egypt, North Africa, and even India and China. Everywhere they went they built synagogues for teaching the Mosaic law. They continued to worship Jehovah as their God and considered Jerusalem to be their holy city.

While many of these representatives from the 12 tribes of Israel were prosperous and happy in their new homes, others longed to return to their native homeland. In 537 B.C., by the authority of the Persian ruler Cyrus, Zerubbabel led a group of Jews back to Palestine (2 Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1-4). This is also mentioned

in the Steele of Cyrus. It is interesting that Cyrus recognized the Jews had a homeland and sent them back to it.

Some years later, Ezra headed a similar expedition, and they succeeded in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, reconstructing the walls, and erecting a new temple. These people looked upon themselves as representing the entire 12 tribes. This can be seen clearly in the fact that at the dedication of the temple Ezra offered “twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel” (Ezra 6:17).

In 445, Nehemiah gains authority to rebuild the city (and walls) of Jerusalem. Artaxerxes knew exactly the city Nehemiah was talking about when he referred to it as “the place of my fathers” (Neh. 2:3). The king gives Nehemiah letters for traveling and for suppliers for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

In the following years, people from every Jewish tribe continued to trickle back to their homeland. The population increased dramatically in 336 B.C. when Alexander the Great encouraged large numbers of Jews to return to Palestine.

The majority of the Israelites who did not choose to leave the affluence they enjoyed in foreign territories continued to be loyal to the faith of their fathers. Multitudes made pilgrimages to Jerusalem from far and near to celebrate the feasts of the Jewish calendar. Though the inhabitants of Palestine endured a time of terrible persecution shortly after the death of Alexander the Great, they were not destroyed. Nor did they abandon their distinctiveness as God’s special people.

The Jewish persecutions continued under the cruel and violent Antiochus Epiphanes. In the spring of 168 B.C., the armies of the Syrian king had arrived within four miles of the great city of Alexandria to compel the pharaohs to surrender. But the Egyptians had appealed to Rome for assistance. A Roman fleet was anchored in the bay and their representative Popilius Laenas, soon met with the king. After drawing a circle with his staff around the Syrian king, and forcing him to give an immediate response, the king reluctantly accepted the ultimatum to depart.



After being humiliated and forced to leave Egypt, Antiochus vengeance was quickly turned upon Jerusalem. He killed over eighty thousand men, women, and children and sold forty thousand into slavery (2 Macc. v. 5-14). The holy place was robbed of its treasures and the temple was dedicated to Jupiter Olympus. The temple was defiled by offering a sow upon the altar and scattering its juice over all the sanctuary and vessels. He substituted the Jewish feasts with the drunken revelry of Bacchanalia, forcing the Jews to worship Bacchus, the god of pleasure and wine. The licentious festival of Saturnalia, the worship of Saturn, was also enforced upon the inhabitants. He forbade the reading of the Holy Scriptures and the tradition of circumcision. Throwing them headlong with their infants off of the highest wall in Jerusalem, Antiochus killed two mothers who had circumcised their children in defiance of the law. He also cut out the tongues of a mother and

her seven sons. He had the sons roasted alive on a flat iron (2 Macc. vii. 3-5). Then the mother herself was murdered.

On December 25, 164 B.C., Judas Maccabeus restored the sanctuary and sacrificial system. According to the Talmud, oil was needed for the sacred menorah in the Temple, which was supposed to burn throughout the night every night. But there was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet miraculously, it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the menorah. An eight-day festival was declared to commemorate this miracle. This is the origin of Hanukkah celebration. It was imbedded in the life of Israel by the time of Christ (John 10:22).

Following further Hasmonean victories (147 B.C.), the Seleucids restored autonomy to Judea, as the Land of Israel was now called, and, with the collapse of the Seleucid kingdom (129 B.C.), Jewish independence was again achieved. Under the Hasmonean dynasty, which lasted about 80 years, the kingdom regained boundaries not far short of Solomon's realm, political consolidation under Jewish rule was attained and Jewish life flourished.

General Pompey and his Roman legions conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC. (Pompey, a non-Jew, had initially been asked to help resolve an internal Jewish dispute about high-priest appointments, but he greatly overstayed and expanded his welcome.)



With Pompey's victory, Rome began its domination of the Jews and their country (then called Judea) which lasted nearly 400 years (63 BC - 313 AD).

At first, the Jewish people still had their own rulers (referred to as the Hasmoneans) and their country was a Roman protectorate. But in 37 B.C., Jewish leaders were replaced with friends of Rome. The first - and still notorious - was Herod (later called "Herod the Great"), an Arab from Edom (the area known today as the Negev and referred to as Idumea in Greek).

Rome appointed Herod King of Judea in 40 B.C. It was his only path to power because as a converted Jew - he and his family were Edomites - Herod could never be a Jewish priest. His loyalty was to Rome, even though he built many projects in Judea and reconstructed the Jewish temple (sometimes referred to as the Second Temple) in Jerusalem in 19 BC.

He built a famous city on the Mediterranean - with an impressive artificial harbor - and named it Caesarea in honor of his ally Caesar Augustus, the Roman ruler. Despite all the buildings he initiated, Herod was deeply unpopular with the Jewish people.

When Herod died, in 4 BC Roman oppression of the Jews worsened dramatically. By 6 AD, Judea was a Roman province where the tax burden imposed on the Jews became nearly unbearable.

Although Roman rulers (called Procurators) ran the country, Judea was one province Rome could not totally tame absent a very heavy hand.

With rebellion seething under the surface of first-century Jewish life, is born Jesus of Nazareth. He begins a ministry that has a core message of love and forgiveness. In the third year of his public ministry, a Roman procurator named Pontius Pilate - appointed in 26 AD and whose power was second only to the emperor - imposed a death sentence on Jesus.

The method of death would be the cruelest of all forms of Roman torture: Crucifixion. The tragedy of all history (Mt 23: 37-39); National blindness on the nation of Israel is declared by Jesus and later Paul (Luke 19:40ff; Rom 11:25).

In 66 AD, the inept and callous procurator Gessius Florus seized 17 Talents from the Temple treasury in partial payment of tribute already owed the Romans. Demonstrators held a street collection for him, mocking his "poverty." The procurator Florus (64-66 AD), notorious for his cruelty, marched on Jerusalem with an army, demanding the arrest of the offenders, and imposing martial law; in subsequent riots over 3,000 Jews were killed. Floris had gone too far. He withdrew to avoid further provocations — but too late. That same year a band of Zealots ambushed the Roman garrison at Masada near the Dead Sea, and seized weapons from its armory. At the same time the populace of Jerusalem bottled up the Roman soldiers in towers of Herod's palace. Eventually they were allowed to leave unarmed, but once out of the city they were attacked and killed. Meanwhile virtually the entire Jewish community of 20,000 in Caesarea, the Roman provincial capital, was massacred. Anger swept the countryside as the governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus, marched on Jerusalem to restore order. Bezetha, the northern quarter of the city was burned, but when his soldiers reached the Temple wall and undermined it, Gallus unaccountably withdrew. His troops were ambushed northeast of the Jerusalem and large quantities of weapons fell into the hands of the rebels. War was now inevitable.

To restore order, an alarmed Nero (54-68 AD) called retired general Titus Flavius Vespasianus (familiarily known as Vespasian) back to duty. After raising an army of three legions, perhaps 60,000 men, he systematically swept through Galilee. Then he moved southward and eastward, methodically destroying each town in his path. Meanwhile Nero was overthrown and committed suicide, and civil war ensued. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius succeeded one another as emperor. Vitellius was assassinated and the eastern legions proclaimed Vespasian emperor. Vespasian left for Rome and, late in 69 AD, he was affirmed by the Roman senate. He left the task of putting down the Jewish revolt to his son Titus.



A spectacular victory was needed for Vespasian's prestige. Jerusalem had to be taken, but Titus faced an extremely difficult task. The city was almost impregnable with steep valleys on three sides and three lines of fortifications: one around the Lower City (the original City of David) and the Upper City, another bracketing the area immediately to the northwest of the Temple and a third, begun by Agrippa I, around the northern suburb of Bezetha, and completed by the rebels as part of their siege preparations. Additionally, the northern side of the Titus advanced in the spring of 70 AD and surrounded the city with three legions on the western side and a fourth on the Mount of Olives to the east. To put pressure on the food and water supplies of the inhabitants he allowed pilgrims to enter the city to celebrate Passover, then refused to let them leave. After Jewish sallies killed a number of Roman soldiers, Titus sent Flavius Josephus*, a former Jewish commander, now loyal to Rome, to negotiate with the defenders. The Jews wounded him with an arrow and launched another sally. Titus was almost captured, but escaped.

In mid-May Titus destroyed the newly built Third Wall and breached the Second Wall. He then turned his attention to the Antonia Fortress immediately north of the Temple Mount. The Romans sustained heavy casualties in street fighting with the Zealots and were forced to retreat. Josephus failed in another attempt at negotiations, and Jewish attacks prevented the construction of siege towers at the Antonia.

Food, water, and other provisions dwindled. The suffering was great. Josephus recorded “innumerable corpses piled up all over the city,” emitting a “pestilential stench.” The defenders, he said, “devoured belts and shoes, and stripped the leather from their shields and chewed it.”

To prevent escapes and to keep supplies from reaching the rebels, Titus ordered the construction of a four and a half mile wall around the entire city. While some of the Jews attempted to disrupt Titus’ assault preparations, others filtered through the lines to scavenge for wild plants and herbs. Many were caught and crucified — numbering 500 a day — in sight of the city. Josephus further wrote: “The soldiers themselves through rage and bitterness nailed up their victims in various attitudes as a grim joke, till owing to the vast numbers there was no room for the crosses, and no crosses for the bodies.” Observing these horrors from the walls, the defenders were under no delusions as to what defeat would mean.

Temple Mount was protected massive by the Antonia Fortress. After several failed attempts to breach or scale the walls of the Antonia, the Romans launched a secret attack. They overwhelmed sleeping Zealot guards and took the fortress, the second highest ground in the city after the Temple Mount. It provided a perfect point from which to attack the Temple itself.

Battering rams made little progress, but on Tisha B’Av, at the end of August, the very anniversary of the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in 587 BC, the sanctuary was set on fire and destroyed, counter to Titus’ orders. Most likely, he wanted to seize it and transform it into a



pagan temple, dedicated to the Roman Emperor and the Roman pantheon. As the flames spread the Roman legions entered the residential sections of the city. Jewish resistance quickly crumbled. Most of the remaining defenders escaped through hidden underground tunnels. Some made a final stand in the Upper City, temporarily halting the Roman advance. But, by September 7 Jerusalem was completely under Roman control.

Seven hundred survivors were shipped to Rome to be paraded in a victory celebration, others were sold into slavery. A few hundred Zealots managed to escape to carry on the struggle from Herod the Great’s former strongholds at Machaerus (in Perea, modern Jordan), Herodion (near Bethlehem) and Masada (by the Dead Sea).

According to Josephus, the Romans left only the three great towers of Herod's palace on the western side of the city standing "in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well-fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued." The Tenth Roman Legion was stationed in Jerusalem area with standing orders to execute any Jew who claimed to be a descendant of King David.



Back in Rome the following year Titus, together with his father Vespasian, celebrated the victory with a procession of seven hundred Jewish prisoners and spoils of war, including items captured from the Temple: "a golden table, many talents of weight, and a lampstand (seven-branched menorah), likewise made of gold ... after these, and last of all the spoils, was carried a copy of the Jewish Law." This event is depicted in carved relief on the Arch of Titus erected in Rome.

A group called the Sicarians escaped to Masada -the name means 'citadel'- in the Judaeen desert, a fortress situated on a single standing plateau with rough, steep cliffs on all sides, overlooking the Dead Sea. There were, it is said, 966 people -women and children included.

Although they did not provide a security threat, the Roman prestige had been damaged. They needed an impressive victory. So an earthen ramp was made and the fortress entered only to find a mass suicide. Only a woman and five children survived. All was relatively quiet for a few years.

In A.D.132 the Bar Kochba revolt began with by destroying the Roman 12th Legion. The immediately tried a rebuilding of the Temple. The Jewish warriors were able to hold off Rome until A.D. 135 when the revolt was crushed.

At the time of the Bar Kochba revolt, the Roman Emperor Hadrian made a decision of great historical importance. Hadrian orders Jerusalem plowed under and builds *Aelia Capitolina* on the ruins. He then has a Temple to Jupiter built over the site of the Jewish Temple.

He changed the name of the province from JUDAEA to PALESTINA. This name in the form of Palestine has existed ever since until 1948 when it was legally changed to Israel.

Most surviving Jews were forced to scatter throughout the Roman Empire. From that time until the present century, the Jewish people were dispersed throughout the earth, having no official homeland or center of worship. Through it all, however, they maintained their identity.

As a result of the Bar Kochba revolt, bold lines were drawn between Judaism and Christianity. Christians were suffering already under the Rome Empire and by association with their Jews since it was considered to be a cult of Judaism. Christian made some dramatic declarations to try and separate themselves from their Jewish roots. The organized church begins a course of anti- Semitism that will eventually lead to the death of millions of Jews.

The Hebrew people had a deed to the property given to them by Yahweh, but did not have many peaceful years to enjoy it. They would have to go through far worse before a land was named Israel again.

“THE CHURCH OF GOD AND CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY,”

By Ron Dilamarter

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The Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith has always laid strong emphasis on doctrine. In a world of indecision, instability, and confusion, a solid knowledge of one's beliefs, particularly in matters of the Christian faith, is a necessity for straight thinking and straight living.

We of the Church of God share with many Christians today, even more than we might at first think, a doctrine which incorporates many other points of Christianity. This doctrine is called Conditional Immortality.

I am indebted to Dr. Moses C. Crouse, Professor of Theology at Aurora College, for the three main points of my message. These three points are Dr. Crouse's "boiled down" statement of the doctrine of conditional immortality. The points are:

1. Man is a dying creature.
2. There is life only in Christ.
3. Aside from Christ, there is death.

These are three short, concise statements, but there is a world of information in them concerning the conditionalist's view of the nature of man.

Christianity is divided into three main views—orthodoxy, universalist, and conditionalist. Generally speaking, the orthodox and universalist would say that man has an immortal soul. The orthodox would say man's soul receives either eternal blessedness or eternal torment. The universalist would say that even wicked immortal souls, after cleansing fires, receive salvation.

How do the three points of conditionalism agree or disagree with the other two main views in Christianity? Let us enlarge upon the three points of conditionalism in an attempt to gain some light on this question.

Man Is a Dying Creature

We are all familiar with the story of creation. Genesis 2:7 tells us that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Remember how God created woman and everything went along fine with Adam and Eve until the serpent stepped into the picture? This was indeed a black day for mankind; for, because of belief in the serpent's lie, man was doomed to death! God has said they should not eat of the tree or they would surely die. But they did eat, and so God said, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). From this we see that mankind dropped from a state of perfection with God to a state of condemnation. Every man is under this same condemnation which befell Adam. Romans 5:12 says, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Man, then, is condemned to die in this life because of Adam's fall, and in a future judgment because of his own sins.

If we are able to die, we are certainly mortal. Orthodoxy and universalism say that man is possessed with an immortal soul, or spirit, or inner part. This is an idea which was held by Plato and by the Greeks in the world at the time Christ lived. This idea gradually crept into the Christian Church until now it holds almost universal recognition as a true doctrine of Christianity. But conditionalism holds otherwise. Dr. C. H. Hewitt, in his "Classbook in Eschatology," brings out the fact that "over five hundred times in the Old Testament, the word enosh, which means 'mortal,' is used as the name for man."

The word "soul" has as its primary Biblical meaning, "physical life." The soul can die, for Ezekiel 18:4 tells that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Matthew 10:28 tells us, in part, to "fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." This part of verse 28 shows that the soul is not indestructible. Getting back to our original point, "Man is a dying creature," we might conclude that before the fall of Adam, man was without sin, and consequently, without death. Since the fall of Adam, two curses have been placed upon man. These are sin and death. Adam sinned and brought death to the race. Following Adam's example of sinning, the world brings upon itself the consequence of sin, the second death.

Life Only in Christ

The second main point which conditionalists have held to be true is that there is life only in Christ. How necessary Christ is! He came to a dying world and with His death and resurrection conquered the enemy of man, death. The death we all know today has lost its sting for those in Him. The terrors of the grave now hold no sway over those who have faith in Him. His resurrection gives us a hope of our resurrection. He has also provided a way to escape the second death, for He bore the penalty of death for sin and offers us salvation! Oh, how Abraham looked for life in his promised land; How Job looked for life! Job asked, "If a man die, will he live again?" Then he expressed an answer to his own anguished cry in a later chapter. Few stronger words in the Bible express the confident hope of Job as he stated, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Then Jesus came to break the shackles of death and to offer mankind an answer to the longing hope held by all people of the world, the hope of life after death!

You might rightfully say, "The other two views say that Christ brings life after death, so wherein lies the difference?" Do they say the same thing? Do orthodoxy and universalism say that only Christ brings life? No! They say that man has life in him in the form of an immortal soul or spirit; that he is born with it, and when he dies, it continues to exist. This is why orthodoxy says that Christ brings eternal blessedness, with the opposite being eternal torment. This immortal-soul view of the nature of man is why universalists believe that a wicked man's soul survives punishment and then goes to a reward. These two views, then, say that Christ brings eternal blessedness, the opposite being a continued existence in torment, at least for a certain period of time.

Conditionalism says that Christ brings life only; that man is not already immortal; man is now doomed to die, but through Christ, immortality is offered to him. But man must meet certain conditions before he receives this gift. He must accept Christ and have faith in Him. We can probably all quote John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten, that whosoever believeth in him, should not



perish, but have everlasting life.” To receive everlasting life we must fulfill certain conditions, of which accepting Christ is first and most important, for if we truly believe in Him the other things will follow. Conditionalism says, then, that man is not already immortal, but that man can be made immortal through belief in Christ.

Aside From Christ, There Is Death

This brings us to our third point of conditionalism: “Aside from Christ, there is death.” Orthodoxy would say there is eternal torment aside from Christ. Universalism would say there is a cleansing period, a purging of the soul. We say that “now is the time of salvation,” and that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” We say that we are on trial now for our lives and that at death, or at Christ’s coming, should we be alive at the time, our time of probation is over, finished, and after that, the judgment.



Christ tells us, in Matthew 13:49, that in the end, the angels will “come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them in the furnace of fire.” In Matthew 23:33, He said to the scribes and Pharisees, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” The word “hell” here is “Gehenna,” according to the Diaglott. We are sure all are familiar with the word “Gehenna, and what it means. The original Gehenna, from which Christ drew this teaching, was in the Valley of Hinnom, outside Jerusalem. There the Jews kept fires burning continually by throwing their rubbish and the bodies of condemned criminals on the pile of rubbish.

It is there that the wicked will be destroyed and burned up like chaff. There they will perish; be completely annihilated. The fire is everlasting only in that it burns until all is consumed. The result, not the process, will be everlasting, for, as we know from the Bible, the wicked dead will never rise from the second death!

These are the main points of conditionalism:

1. Man is a dying creature.
2. There is life only in Christ.
3. Aside from Christ, there is death

There is a great message in these three points—a great message for the whole world. Our church has been conditionalist from its beginning. Many of our church founders and early preachers had difficulty in proclaiming the doctrine of conditional immortality. They had a fight on their hands to preach it.

But what about now? Well, now, even though conditionalism is a minority belief, it is becoming much more widespread throughout Christendom than it has been for centuries. Things are different now than they were a few years ago. No longer is it our task to fight, argue, and debate these doctrines. The world is receptive to a positive, life-giving hope these days. The power of the atom and hydrogen bombs, and the fast and furious pace of life has people seeking “the missing thing” in their lives. That lack is Jesus Christ.

We must be careful that we do not lose the opportunity that is ours. If universalism and orthodoxy are trying to bring the Saviour to the world, why should we conditionalists not do even better, with our reasonable, Biblical message? Let us, as conditionalists, bring Jesus Christ to a hopeless, dying world!



“MAKING MARRIAGE WORK”

By Michael Hoffman

We need to rethink marriage. It is not working well. Jokes about marriage are abundant. Henny Youngman had some great one-liners. “My wife dresses to kill. She cooks the same way.” “I was married by a judge. I should have asked for a jury.” Some of my favorites from others: “I haven’t spoken to my wife in 18 months; I don’t like to interrupt her.” “Our last argument was my fault. She asked what was on TV and I said, “dust.” “We always hold hands. If I let go she shops.” I have personally seen far too much pain in marriages to laugh very long. The divorce rate in our society both in “the church” and in secular society hovers consistently around 50%. Half the people who try it fail and about 98% of the population of the United States marries. Marriage has become another item on the long list of disposables. If it doesn’t work out, if my needs are not met, if we just grow apart – then just end it and go find a new spouse (a new set of problems). We need to rethink marriage.

Philippians 4:8 and Romans 12:2 are not about marriage, nor were they written in the context of marriage. They are about the way we think. *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”* *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”* (NIV) It is high time to apply those thoughts to marriage and understand marriage is God’s idea and plan and it is not all about me, me, me. We need to rethink marriage so we think about it in God’s terms.

Marriage is not a contractual relationship, at least not in God’s design. I believe marriage is a covenant relationship. A covenant is an unbreakable promise and that is an understatement. Many are very familiar with the covenant made to Abraham, first in Genesis 12 and then repeated several times. The unbreakable promises God made to Abraham will be carried out no matter what. God will never go against his word. Regardless of the response of others, God will always keep his word. A covenant relationship is well illustrated in God’s relationship with the nation of Israel. Deuteronomy 7:6-9 says, *“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the people on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and chose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”*

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. “

God deliberately chose to love Israel and remain faithful to her no matter what. Israel responded at times like a highly selfish spouse, turning away from God to idols, betraying God, disobeying him, complaining about virtually everything. But, no matter what, God stayed faithful and constantly sought only the best for Israel. He was thinking primarily of her good and meeting her needs. That is dramatically different thinking than what is so prevalent in our society. The predominant thinking is about terms and conditions in marriage; a 50/50 relationship, his and hers, like partners in business. Scriptures like Proverbs 11:15 declare the dangers in business partnerships. *“He who puts up security for another will surely suffer, but whoever refuses to strike hands in pledge is safe.”* God was not seeking a contract with all sorts of terms and conditions. He was affirming a covenant where he would be faithful no matter what. The chart below very well illustrates the differences between a contractual and covenant relationship. The differences are stark.

Contractual	Covenant
Focus on things	Focus on people
Contract broken	Violated, not broken
Defined time period	Forever (or until death separates)
Civil matter, State as guarantor	Spiritual matter, God as guarantor
Understands business	Understands mental, emotional, and spiritual maturity

We need to rethink marriage. It is a covenant relationship not contractual. A covenant relationship is a very different mindset than typical in the world today. As we rethink marriage God’s way we would also benefit from a better understanding of the word love.

Love is an overused, misused, and misunderstood word. In Scripture there are several words translated love. My understanding of the meaning of the word for perfect, godly love is that it is a matter of will, a deliberate choice. It is not a feeling or emotion. A common definition is “always seeking the highest good of another.” That kind of love is an intentional, deliberate, purposeful choice for the good of another. It has nothing to do with a feeling or fantasy or some silly romanticized ideas that have no basis in reality at all. People have those ideas about both love and combat and neither is the least bit accurate. God chose Israel on purpose from all the nations of the world. It was not a feeling on his part. It was an act of will. He made a mature, deliberate choice knowing full well the other party was far less than perfect. It is less than wise to enter marriage based solely on a feeling of love. Feelings are far too fickle to trust with such a significant and consequential decision. I am certainly not anti emotions, feelings or hormones. I just think they need to be kept in their proper perspective and not allowed to rule our lives inappropriately. So many people got goofy over the recent Royal wedding because they want to live in fantasy land. I believe it is more important to prepare for the reality of marriage than for the fairy tale 20 minute wedding. God’s intent for marriage is that a deliberate choice is made to always seek the highest good of the other.

The intentional choice to love is illustrated in the following verses:

John 3:16 – *“For God so loved the world he gave...”*



Matthew 22:37 – *“Jesus replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*

Romans 5:8 – *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

A deliberate choice is made in each of those verses. It is not a matter of feelings. There is another pertinent example where the word love is not used but it is highly evident. Luke 9:51 – *“As time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”* Jesus was about as far from Jerusalem as he could get and he made the deliberate choice to set out for Jerusalem knowing that crucifixion and death awaited him there. He did that out of love for you and me. In spite of all the feelings associated with being mistreated and put to death, he remained highly focused and chose to go and endure it all in payment for your sins and mine. He did it for our higher good. We need to rethink marriage. It ought to be based on a deliberate choice to seek the highest good of the other. It truly ought to be based on biblical, godly love.

We need to rethink marriage. We can indeed make marriage work if we think in God’s way about it. I’ll share 3 passages to illustrate this point.



Malachi 2:13-16 says, *Another thing you do: You flood the LORD’S altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,”*

says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.”

There is much that could be said about this passage. The two phrases that jump out at me are “guard yourself in your spirit.” Those speak to me of being careful about my thoughts. I need to be thinking in God’s ways. Proverbs 4:26 says, *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”* I dare not think of marriage in the same ways the world does. It is a covenant relationship. Loving my spouse is a deliberate daily choice, not a feeling. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* Taking my every thought about marriage captive for Christ brings me far closer to what God desires in my life. I have to guard my heart / thoughts in a world rather hostile to God’s design and intent for marriage.

We need to rethink marriage. It is a covenant relationship. Love is a highly deliberate and daily choice. We need to guard our heart and our thoughts about marriage and very specifically about our spouse. The world bombards us with lies and with totally wrong thinking about the gift and wonder of marriage. It is for the benefit of the other. It is hard work. It is worth giving of self. It is God’s wonderful design and plan and can be shared to his glory and honor. So how might we respond to this rethinking about marriage?

Let me suggest the following 6 thoughts for pastors in their ministries:

1. Consistently preach and teach at least an annual series on marriage and family issues.
2. Insist on a minimum of a one year engagement from couples planning to wed
3. Require a course of counseling to be completed 6 months prior to the wedding date. One or two sessions is far from adequate.
4. Do not allow newly discovered pregnancy and / or impending birth to rush a couple into marriage.
5. At every opportunity dispel marriage fantasies and teach marriage realities.
6. Do not hesitate to refer people to counselors with far more expertise.

Pastors can do all of that and people will still break their heart at times. They must simply choose to love them anyway.

Marriage can and does work if we will work at it in God's ways. So, I make the following brief suggestions to make your marriage work better:

1. Keep your focus on the other. Covenant love says it is not about me. I need to stay focused on meeting the needs of my spouse. None of us is perfect so that gets hard at times because we all have some selfish tendencies. However, if both spouses are thinking in this way, the needs of each tend to be met nicely.

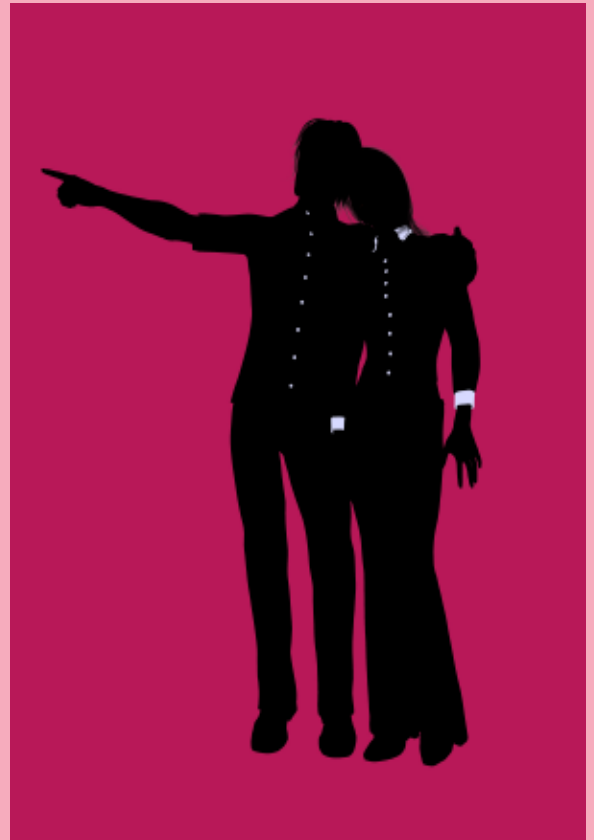
2. Make a daily effort. Most people tend to work pretty hard and pretty consistently at "catching" their spouse. Don't stop after the wedding. Keep up the effort to win their heart. Make an effort to constantly grow and build your relationship with each other.

3. Forget the myths and stay based in reality. You won't live "happily ever after", at least not without some real challenges. The grass might seem greener on the other side of the fence but it still has to be mowed. I love the story of the little girl that came home from school and recounted the story of Cinderella to her Mom. She said the girl kissed the handsome prince and then she asked, "Do you know what happened next?" Her Mom said, "They lived happily ever after." The little girl said, "No! They got married." She was wise beyond her years.

4. Make the deliberate daily choice to love. Seek the highest good of the other.

5. Thank God daily for your spouse. In that way, you guard your heart and honor your God.

We really do not need to rethink marriage. It is God's idea and plan. We cannot improve on the idea. We can improve our daily application of it. All God's best to you in your daily efforts to live and love in God's ways.





Understanding Our Church in Light of Acts 2:42-47


By Dale H. Swartz

Have you ever read Acts 2:42-47 and thought “Wow, what a Church! If I could only have lived back then and be a part of that congregation! Imagine sitting in a Bible Study with the apostles leading the discussion, quoting the words of Jesus and seeing God work in a mighty way among His people! I wonder why we don’t see that kind of church today. I wonder if we could be a part of a church like that again. Come to think about, why couldn’t we? If God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, and His power hasn’t changed, then why couldn’t we have a church like that? What did they have that we don’t have? Look what we have going for us today. We have the advantage of modern innovation and technology that was never conceived of or thought of back then. We have television, books, tapes, videos, computers, and cell phones. We have e-mail, instant messaging, Facebook, twitter, Wikipedia and the list goes on and on. Despite all of the modern wonders that we have today, we don’t seem to have churches today like the first century Church. What did they have in those early days that we don’t have today?

Take a look at Acts 2:42-47. There are basically two things that made the early church what it was. As a result of these two things, the people had a sense of awe and respect; they saw many signs and wonders performed by the apostles because the Holy Spirit was at work in their lives. It is true that the believers had things in common, they sold their possessions to support the work and aid the poor, they were unified together, went to the temple daily, they fellowshipped with one another and they broke break together (vv. 43-47). But all of these activities seem to be an outgrowth of these other two things practiced by the early Christians.

The first of these two things is found in Acts 2:42. Here the scripture says: “And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching...” To me it is no coincidence that “devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching” is the first item listed in what the early Christians did. In those early days of the Church all the believers, leaders and followers alike, had seen Jesus and listened to Jesus; some had even been his very close personal disciples. These people were first generation followers of Jesus and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they articulated Jesus’ message just as He had taught it to them. They had no doubt who Jesus was (Peter had stated that in the middle of Jesus’ ministry, Matt. 16:16), they had no doubt what Jesus meant regarding the kingdom of God and they had no doubt what their mission and responsibility was because Jesus had personally given them the Great Commission.

Down through the centuries since that time the words of Jesus have been debated, analyzed, and scrutinized to the point that parts of Jesus’ message, including His very identity has been misconstrued and convoluted. After the death of the early church fathers, new converts to Christianity who had other theological and philosophical ideas in their backgrounds accepted the teachings of Jesus; but like new converts today, they had difficulty separating and setting aside the false ideas from their past. Instead they tried to integrate their old ideas and




philosophies with the new teachings of Jesus. The result has been a diluted message. Notice I called it a diluted **message**. I did not call it a diluted gospel. In Galatians 1:6-9 was apparently confronted by the beginnings of this deviation and said it was NOT another gospel, but a perversion of the gospel. The gospel is the good news about the kingdom of God, and this other teaching is neither about the kingdom, nor is it good news.

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy that this perversion and deviation from the truth was going to happen. In 2 Timothy 4:3 Paul said: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...” and today in the 21st century we have seen that come to pass. The word ‘sound’ in 2 Timothy 4:3 comes from the GK. word *hoog-ee-ah’ee-no* meaning to *have sound health, to be well* (in body); and figuratively to be *uncorrupt* or (*true* in doctrine). That is part of the trouble. Much of what is taught today may be doctrine, but it isn’t sound (uncorrupted) doctrine. Remember, doctrine means teaching and every church has its teaching; but what exactly they are teaching is what comes into question. Jesus’ doctrine and the apostle’s doctrine was, and still is, the true and uncorrupted doctrine. It is a different doctrine than what is taught in many mainline churches today.

The second basic thing that the early Christians followed that resulted in the spectacular growth of the first century Church was prayer. At this point you may say; “our church prays and as an individual I pray. That’s so simple, there has to be something more than that”. No, I believe it is as simple as that; but I also believe we don’t fully understand prayer today as they did in the first century.

In his book, ‘The Heart of a Great Pastor’, H. B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, both from Focus on the Family, wrote the following.
“Don’t expect a miracle until you have gone way beyond your own resources. God doesn’t waste the supernatural on what you can do on your own. Peter, the coward before Pentecost, did this in the Early Church. In Acts 4:29, 30, Peter’s (and the Church’s) prayer for ‘signs and wonders; asks God for boldness to speak convincingly before Herod and Pontius Pilate and for supernatural results in the Early Church. God answered Peter’s prayer. The Bible says the place was shaken. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the Word of God with boldness”.

Jesus set the example of prayer for his disciples. By his own life example he showed them they needed to be in prayer contact with the Father on a continual basis. A great example of this type of prayer is recorded in Matthew 17:21. The passage records an account of a miraculous healing that took place at the hands of Jesus. The disciples tried to heal a man with an unclean spirit but couldn’t do it. Jesus healed the man and then said regarding the healing: *“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”* Jesus had a very intimate relationship with His Father and his prayer life was greater than any of his followers; but he taught them that by maintaining a more dedicated prayer life a miracle of that same proportion could be performed by them; but it was accomplished only through prayer and fasting. When Peter prayed his prayer recorded in Acts 4 he prayed with confidence and truly believed God would answer the prayer. Today, too many people pray without a true confidence and belief that God will hear and answer their prayer. If we pray, believing, God will



give us what we need. H. B London said: "The work of God in the human heart and in the Church may not always be spectacular, but it will be supernatural." We may not see some of the miracles of the early church, but what about those close-at-hand, and less sensational miracles that are seldom noticed? A student receives a \$100 check unexpectedly when his dorm room cupboard is bare. The prayer of faith that does not heal the cancer, but gives the cancer patient the peace, comfort and resolve that God is near. Too many times today answers to prayer are considered 'coincidences' instead of 'God moments'.

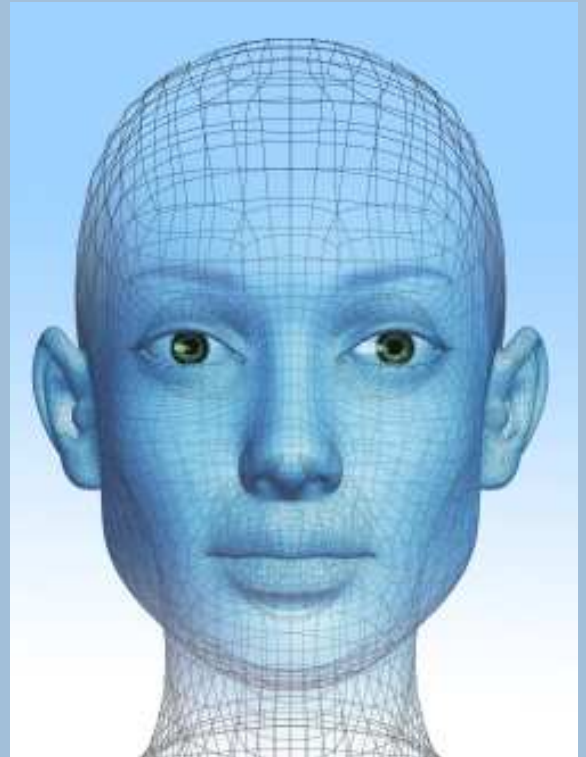
If we want the twenty-first century church emulate the first century church we must dedicate ourselves to the apostles' doctrine and to the type of prayer that was demonstrated by Jesus and practiced by the apostles. We must live our Christianity every day and then in turn, teach these things to other people. James 5:16 says "the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" and when it comes to our Christianity Jesus said "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). What the Scripture appears to be saying is that we prove our belief and faith through our actions. Therefore if we REALLY believed what James said, we would be more of a praying people; we would be praying like Jesus and the first century church; and we would see a reappearance of that first century excitement and enthusiasm in our twenty-first century church.

One of the most magnificent praying persons I ever met was the late Z. B. Duncan. He was not only a dedicated man of faith, but also an extraordinary man of prayer. Z. B. spent hours upon hours in prayer; in fact he even constructed a small prayer closet on the roof of the back porch on his house. He had it enclosed so that he might use it even in inclement weather. Z. B. prayed often and a lot and whole heartedly believed, thought doubting, that God hear and answer his prayers. As a result God revealed things to him and used him in ways that I have never seen in any one else before or since. As a boy, I remember sitting in our living room when he was a guest in our home. I listened to him testify about the power of God. Oh the stories he would tell of how God had spoken to him in his meditation and prayer time and revealed intimate and personal things about other people that no one would have been able to know except someone tell them. These were true stories of God working through him to impact the lives of others. His stories inspired others to reaffirm their faith and rededicate their lives to God. Listening to his stories reminded me of the early first century church might have been like.

Could we ever have a church like the first century church again? My answer is YES, but it is a qualified yes. To have a church today like the first century church in the Book of Acts we first must preach the apostle's doctrine, which was Jesus' doctrine; not the doctrine of the second and third century church. Secondly, we must dedicate ourselves to lives to a more fervent life of prayer. Jesus set the 'prayer bar' very high, but not out of reach. In John 14:12 Jesus said "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father." Jesus was going to the Father and He promised to send the Holy Spirit would which would be God's active agent working in our lives. If we would truly abide in Christ on a daily basis I believe we could see the first century God-blessed, Christ-empowered Church come to life again.

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW –

By Dave Hixon



In Acts 1 we find the very final words that Jesus spoke to His disciples before He went to the right hand of God to wait for the establishing of His kingdom. In **Acts 1:4** we read:

Acts 1:4 – Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; If you go through this chapter and the next one, you will notice that promise, the phrase “the promise” keeps coming back and it’s an important one.

V. 5 – He said... not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father, for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

V. 6 – So...it’s an important word, we sometimes skip over the word itself but in essence the disciples recognized there is an Old Testament prophecy in the book of Joel about the giving of the holy spirit and it seems to say that this is going to take place right before the kingdom is established so that’s why we read in verse 6... **So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”**

Now many of the times they had come and said, “Is it now, is it now, is it now” and every time they’ve been told, “No, not yet.” So this time they don’t come in quite the same way but looking at the scriptures, saying, we think we understand what you’re saying, is that what you mean, is that what you’re telling us?

The FIRST THING that every Christian Should know is CHRIST IS RETURNING TO THIS EARTH TO ESTABLISH THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

How many people in today’s world have a false hope? So many believe that this world will come to an end! God’s word tells us quite the contrary! That Jesus is returning to RENEW this earth! To make it what God planned for it in the beginning in the Garden of Eden.

V. 7-8 – He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

*That word Power occurs 136 times in the New Testament. This power is intimately connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in **II Tim. 1:7**:*

II Tim. 1:7 – For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

The power of God’s spirit working in our lives is an awesome power; it transforms us from what we were to a very different state. It works at the very basic level of what we are and yet we realize that God’s spirit working in us is just a small sample of the power that God Himself possesses and uses in working out the plan that He has for all mankind.

While we can tap into God’s power, we’re still very limited in what we can do compared with His power.

There is going to come a day when you and I will have powers that people don't even dream of today, we will share the very power of God but we don't have that power today. We have all seen situations around us where we wish that we had the power to make things right but we don't have it.

So I have a fundamental question for you today, which will be at the core of the whole message. If you had the power of God right now what would you change? You look around you and you see the situations that exist, what would you change?

Now that may sound in some ways like kind of a philosophical question, But I think we'll find as we go a little further that as a matter of fact, that question is a very profound one that affects the way we live our lives and the relationship we have with God. So we're going to come back to it repeatedly as we go throughout the message today.

If God shared His power with you right now, what would you change about life in this world? I think for many people probably the first thing that would come to mind would be the aspect of healing; I mean we hear prayer requests week after week of individuals who are sick, who are suffering. If you had the power to change things, is that where you would use that power?

*We've all seen our friends or relatives who have suffered through sicknesses, some inside the Church, some outside, wherever it may be but we've all seen it, we've recognized individuals who suffer as they go through those difficult times. **Surely that would be an acceptable way to use God's power, wouldn't it?***

I mean after all, when Jesus was here, He healed people and as we look at the biblical accounts it would certainly indicate that He probably healed thousands of people during his three and half years of ministry. So that must be an acceptable way to use the power of God – if you had it today, wouldn't that be a good way to use it?

But there's some questions we have to ask about that – which individuals did Jesus Christ heal while He was here? His entire ministry was in a very small little area in the Middle East and He dealt almost entirely with the Jewish people, that was His whole ministry, that's where He worked, that's what He did. Those who came to Him were Jewish people, those who came out seeking that intervention – oh there are one or two examples of exceptions to that but for the most part it was all the Jewish people. How many Greeks and Romans did Jesus Christ heal while He was here? How many How many Chinese? How many Zulu's did He heal?

Was it because they weren't sick? Well no, they were sick too, they weren't in any better health than the Jewish people that were around, they weren't suffering any less than those that He dealt with.

But He healed some people and He used that power in that way but He didn't heal them all, how did He choose? How did He decide who should benefit from that power and who shouldn't?

If you had the power to heal right now, are there people that you would decide to not heal? See Jesus Christ made that decision! He had that power and He made that decision. How would you determine who should be healed and who shouldn't?

Would you heal all the sick people in the Church? Would that be a good way to make the decision? If you had the power of God to heal, could you stand by and allow someone you loved to suffer and perhaps even die from their sickness? It's a difficult thing to do.

Did Jesus do it to maybe bring people to Him? Does that always work?

I personally know of a person who is alive today by none other than an act of God. One of our Elders in the middle of the night found this person pinned under his car from an accident. After many visits to the hospital and long months of recovery they started attending church. This went very well until the healing took place and the cares of the world carried them off once again.

If you had the power to heal, would you allow people to die? People you loved, people you cared about. Now perhaps some would go a step further and they would talk about raising the dead. If you had the power to bring a dead person back to life, who would you want to raise up?

Who would you raise back to life if you had the power of God? Because God obviously has the power to do that, who would you raise back to life? A parent, husband, wife, brother or sister, a child, friend? It's been said by those who study such things that the loss of a child is the most difficult loss you can go through, it's extremely painful to see a child of yours gone. Would you raise them back to life if you had that power?

On a more positive note, what if you had the power of God to open minds to an understanding of God's truth? Whose mind would you want to open? You look on the people that you know who don't know, who don't understand – whose mind would you open?

We all know that prophecy tells us that the conditions just prior to Jesus Christ's return are going to be the most terrible in all of mankind's history. Who among your relatives would you like to spare from all of that? Who would you like to open their mind so they could escape those tragic days?

But we don't have that power. Unfortunately even when people are converted and they are given power; sometimes they don't use it all that well. In Luke 9 there is an example of the disciples who, in this case simply thought they had power but notice the approach that's taken.

James and John (the sons of thunder) asked Jesus if He wanted them to call fire out of Heaven and destroy the Samaritans because they wouldn't receive Jesus. You remember the story. What did Jesus tell them? He said He didn't come to take men's lives but save them.

You see they envisioned themselves as having a certain power, whether they had it or not we it doesn't say, but their thought, their approach to the power they thought they had was really not right, it wasn't the proper use of power.

NUMBER TWO : WE MUST HAVE FAITH!

In many ways when we consider our question, if you had the power of God what would you change, in many ways the answer to that question relates to our understanding of faith.

Heb. 11:1 gives us what is probably the most familiar definition of faith. **Heb. 11:1 - "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."**

Y

ou and I base our lives upon beliefs, which can appear to be totally without foundation, the existence of God for example. What proves that to you? What is the proof to you that God exists?

Could it be answered prayers? That really helps us believe but what about someone else?

Scientists, educators, philosophers, the movers and shakers of society marvel at the gullibility that you and I have and our beliefs and yet those beliefs are very firmly based on things that cannot be seen, that cannot be measured.

*Let's take a look at **Hebrews 11:25-27** with the story of Moses. "**choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.**"*

Moses' perception of God was so clear that though God was invisible, Moses could see Him, Moses could recognize Him, it was like he could see God even though God was invisible. In one sense the

entirety of Hebrews 11 is a definition of faith, it's just stated and illustrated in several different ways. Notice **verse Hebrews 11:6-**

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

On the surface it seems to tell us that the person who comes to God must believe that there actually is a God. Is that all there is to it then? Do we have to just believe God exists? Well then the Pagans must be ok then because they believe in MANY Gods! Many Christians believe in three Gods.

NUMBER THREE: IF YOU'RE KEEPING TRACK IS GOD IS ONE! NOT THREE

Could it be that the person of faith, rather than merely acknowledging the existence of a God, must believe that God is exactly what He claims to be? You see God tells us He is the Almighty, He's the Eternal, He's the Holy One, the Lord of hosts, the heart knower, there are all kinds of different titles that God takes upon Himself.

When I'm faced with a problem that's too overwhelming for me to even imagine a solution, it is vital for me to know and believe with all my being that the Almighty is Almighty. It's more than just knowing He's there, I need to know that He is what He says He is.

“HEAR O ISRAEL THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD!” If I face the possible end of this human life, then it's important for me to know that He is Eternal and that His promises transcend the time limits of this human existence. That requires much more than just simply acknowledging God's existence.

When I read that phrase that **“he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”** To me it tells me much more than simply to say He exists, I have to believe He is what He says He is.

When we talk about those who diligently seek God, we tend to waiver don't we? Could I have sought Him more? How diligent have I really been? We find ourselves wondering if we've been diligent enough. On one level we believe the statement but we find our own faith wavering, we sometimes say, “Well I know if I had enough faith, God could...”. But we question our own faith.

All of us know from experience that our faith is stronger at some times and weaker at others, it's a part of our Christian experience but at those time when our faith is weak it's often because we're looking at the wrong thing, we're looking at ourselves and our failings instead of looking at God.

There's a tiny three-letter word in an earlier passage in Hebrews that I think can help us understand this. In **Hebrews 6:1**, I really only want the last part of it but we'll read the whole verse.

“Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,”

I want to look at the last three words, Faith towards God. The word “toward” there in the Greek is a familiar word to us. The word is “epi”. It is a common word used today. Have you heard of an epi center when speaking about earthquakes? It isn't where the earthquake started, it is the point on the surface directly above where it was. How about epi dermus? It is the outer layer of skin, what is right on top.

Epi simply means on top of or resting on something. So what would it mean if we say “faith epi God? It means faith that is resting on or has its foundation on GOD.

See this helps us understand why it's so important for us to believe that God is exactly what He claims Himself to be. Our faith rests upon our conviction that God is exactly what He reveals Himself to be.

Therefore we have faith because of what we know God to be, not what we know ourselves to be. In fact what I am, what I feel, what I perceive makes no difference to the truth. **Faith in God is based not on what**

someone told me, how I feel about it, it has to do with what God is. He is the Eternal, Unchangeable, and Immortal.

The same goes for our Savior Jesus Christ. We must have this same faith. We have to believe that he is indeed who he says he is!

In John Chapter 6, we won't read the whole account, but Jesus had many following him. He tells them that if they're going to be followers of His, they have to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

And we're told from that point forward a lot of them turned and walked away because they could not figure out what in the world He meant by that. Then we're told He turned to His disciples to ask them what they were going to do.

In **John 6:68-69** he said, KJV **"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. "**

Note the reason that Peter gave for not leaving. We know who **You** are. Peter did not claim to understand the meaning of Jesus' words, he didn't say, No, we don't need to leave because we understand. He doesn't even say, Well it's O.K., I know you'll explain it to us after everybody is gone.

What Peter understood and placed His faith in was the fact that God reveled to them that THIS MAN STANDING BEFORE HIM WAS THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD! THE PROMISED Messiah!

In a sense, what we're seeing here is that this hope that we have, based upon the promise of God, based upon the unfailing character of Jesus Christ, that hope is an anchor. You don't know what direction the winds and the storms are going to come from and neither do I. But if the anchor is there, then no matter what happens, you will not be moved and you will survive.

So back to our question, If you had the power of God what would you do? Would you heal? No matter how wonderful healing is still only temporary.

What would you change? The answer I propose to you is, not one thing, not one thing. You see God has always had the power to change things on this earth and He has always used it perfectly.

NUMBER FOUR: WE MUST KNOW GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING

When we come to see things through God's eyes, we'll be able to see why He made the decisions He made and we will see that He was always right. Always.

Until then, we live and we walk by faith. We have a faith which is based upon, which has as its foundation and core, not the shifting sands of human experience, but the unchangeable perfect character of God Himself.

We believe that He is exactly what He says He is and that He is the faithful rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

It's not always easy, but until we can come to that point, God cannot share the fullness of His power with us. Only when He knows that we will use that power exactly like He does, will He be able to share fully that power with you and me.

He is eagerly looking forward to that day and Pentecost is the promise, a down payment so to speak, of that.

We can look forward eagerly as well to that time when we can fully share the power of God and share in the joy of His only son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior

Look who is having an anniversary



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“...for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” - Romans 10:17

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