

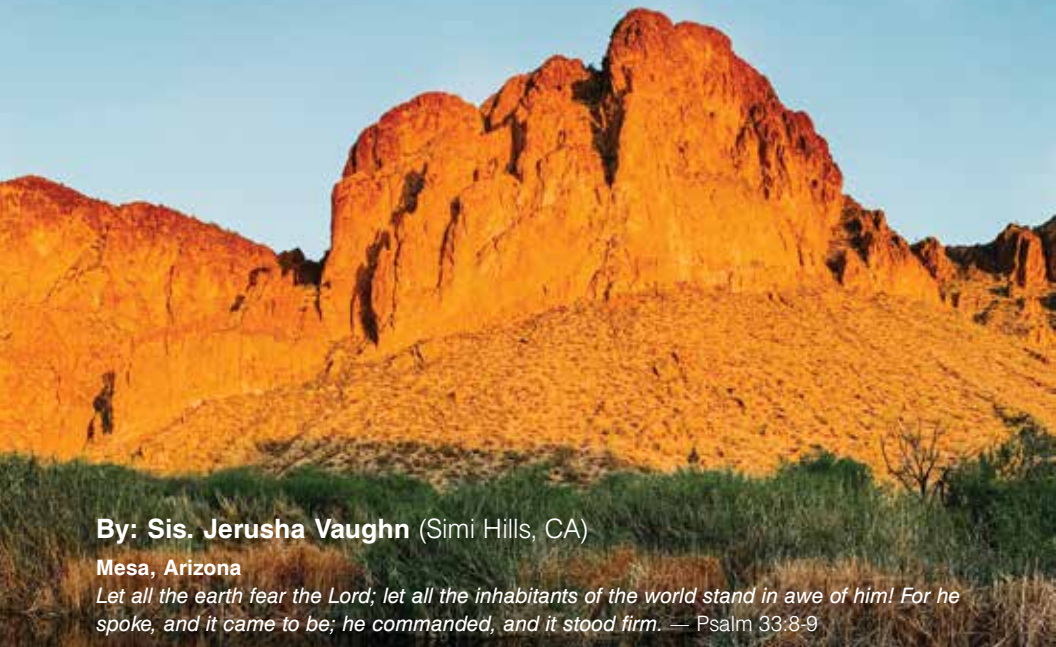
# TIDINGS

A person is seen from behind, walking a tightrope. They are wearing a dark t-shirt, blue jeans, and a climbing harness. Their arms are outstretched for balance. The background is a dark, rocky cliff face.

Volume 84, Number 5, May 2021

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Sometimes it seems we are precariously dancing on a tightrope. Periods of high-stress and an accumulation of competing demands can cause challenges to our work-life balance.



**By: Sis. Jerusha Vaughn** (Simi Hills, CA)

**Mesa, Arizona**

*Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. — Psalm 33:8-9*

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# TIDINGS

Volume 84, Number 5 / May, 2021



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# CONCEPTUAL SKILLS FOR FAITHFUL LIVING



By Dave Jennings

**W**HEN I first started learning to drive in 1970, my dad, seated next to me in the front passenger seat, used to ask me where on the road I was looking while I was steering. I told him I was looking about 20 yards in front of the car so that I could avoid hitting anything. He properly instructed me that I could not do anything about what was happening 20 yards in front of the car when I was traveling at 50 MPH. He said, “You don’t drive, looking at the hood ornament!” (For our younger readers, in the past some cars had a decorative “ornament” on the front of the hood.) I soon realized the value of this counsel as a motorist. Seeing what is coming far off and what is behind you in the mirror is critical to effective driving. It is, however, the spiritual lessons of how we navigate in life that I would like to discuss this month.

## IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR

The first skill we can all employ is the ability to look backward and see the hand of God in our lives. Doing so gives us great reinforcement about the bumps in the road today. Each of us can recall countless examples where in key moments of need, it was the hand of the LORD that delivered us. How many times has He already demonstrated to us His love and care during times of great uncertainty and risk? David spoke of how under painful duress from an enemy, his “*spirit was overwhelmed*” and his heart was “*desolate*.” (Psa 143:4). In his moment of need, how did he regain his spiritual resolve? He looked backward. “*I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands.*” (v. 5). David knew that God would deliver him from the present enemy because he had already delivered him from several enemies.

Abraham, when considering the judgment of God on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, could look back at the faithful and righteous acts of God and declare, *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* (Gen 18:25). When we find ourselves boxed in and feeling like we have no way out, look in the rear-view mirror. Recall where you have been. Do you not have ample evidence to trust in God rather than yourself? This was the frequent message of God to the people of Israel. When they came to the desert of Sinai, God regularly reminded them when they faced challenges of faith that His powerful hand had delivered them from the Pharaoh of Egypt. He intended this to be evidence for them to move forward in confidence.

### BEYOND THE HOOD ORNAMENT

Another skill we learn early in life is how to make plans. We acknowledge that not everything can be done today, so we measure out our responsibilities into days, weeks, months and even years. Similarly, we learn this essential skill in our spiritual lives. We recognize that life is not only defined by the present but also by what the future will bring. The potholes that are right under us may be unavoidable. The bumps can easily dominate our perspective. A spiritual life that is focused only on the view of the “hood ornament” is surely at risk.

Reading through the prophets’ messages, I am struck by just how well this concept is conveyed. Isaiah, for example, had some difficult messages for the sinful nation of Israel, a *“people laden with iniquity.”* (Isa 1:4). The need for repentance was urgent, and

the consequences for not turning to God were significant. Yet, as Isaiah’s prophecy unfolds, he supplements beautiful visions of redemption with these warnings. Some of the best illustrations of the future Kingdom of God are provided often just after a pointed exhortation for repentance. This repetition is frequently seen in the words of the prophets. There must be a lesson for us in this stylistic teaching.

Of course, our best lesson about having a future focus when dealing with present difficulties is the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Faced with great challenges of his faith, how did he not weary? How was he able to bear through being reviled and suffering wrongfully? (1 Pet 2:20-23). I believe his ability was due in large part to his future vision. We are told that the exhortation and example for our lives is *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Heb 12:2).

This is how God encourages us to think. Don’t have a myopic or short-sighted view of your life. Look beyond the present to the glory of the future. The faithful characters of Hebrews 11 illustrate this. One example, Moses, looked beyond the immediate opportunity for fame and fortune in Egypt, *“esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt”* (v. 26). These faithful *“having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”* (v. 13). Being able to see what lies ahead is a keystone for our faith.



## HOW CAN THIS CHANGE OUR PERSPECTIVE OF PRESENT DISTRESS?

When we self-examine, what we perceive about our lack of faith may lead to great disappointment. We can be overwhelmed with a sense of failure as we see the insidiousness of our carnal mind and sinful behaviors. We can walk away from the Breaking of Bread service with our chins on our chests, feeling quite overwhelmed. David, facing his personal failure, said, *“For mine iniquities are gone over my head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.”* (Psa 38:4). But when we embrace the wonder of grace in our lives, we realize at the conclusion of our memorial service that we should instead be filled with joy. We have been forgiven, and the victory is the LORD’s, not ours. David emerged from his anxiety by recognizing that his hope was in the LORD, not himself. (Psa 39:7).

The Apostle Paul, with great precision, went through the painful diagnosis of his own failures in sin. He saw the domination of his flesh over his spirit and described it as an agonizing experience. He rightly recognized that he was a *“wretched man.”* (Rom 7:24). However, Paul could look beyond his individual failures to the Lord’s success and be assured of deliverance in Christ Jesus. It was the *“gift of God”* that would deliver him from “the wages of sin.” (Rom 6:23).

When Israel assessed the Second Temple at the time of Zerubbabel, the sound of those rejoicing was matched by those who were weeping. Many had seen the prior glory and splendor of Solomon’s Temple. Those who wept saw the current Temple as being *“in comparison as nothing.”* (Hag 2:3). The current Temple was built with serviceable wood from local forests, rather than the impressive “cedars of Lebanon.” It lacked many of the appointments of Solomon’s Temple. Beyond this, Israel was still under the control of a foreign power and continued to fall short of its mission to be a light to the world. Haggai rightly tells them to take their eyes off the imperfections and limitations of the present Temple and look to the day when the *“desire of all nations shall come.”* (v. 7). A day was coming that they needed to fix firmly in their minds—a day of redemption and exaltation of Jerusalem beyond any of the glories of Solomon’s day, a time when *“the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former.”* (Hag 2:9).

## THE EYE OF FAITH

Seeing what God has done and what He will do changes our view of the road before us. We see our own imperfections but know that we are being changed into the image of our Lord. *“We are his workmanship.”* (Eph 2:10). Through the eye of faith, we can see over the horizon to a time when, by the grace of God, we shall be like him.

**The eye of faith can see fellowship far beyond our human ecclesial organization, to a time where we as kings and priests beautifully collaborate, free from the flesh, to lead a world to righteousness.**



## *We are his workmanship...*

We can apply the same principle to our brothers and sisters, who are also on a transformational journey under the care of our LORD. When our ecclesias fall short of divine standards, it can be demoralizing, especially if we drive looking at the hood ornament. The eye of faith can see fellowship far beyond our human ecclesial organization, to a time when we as kings and priests free from the flesh, will beautifully collaborate, to lead a world to righteousness. While most people reject our proclamation today, we know that in the Kingdom of our LORD, we will be to the nations *“a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a rock in a weary land.”* (Isa 32:2).

We must cultivate these vision skills in our lives. They lead to a godly perspective about our present imperfections and to confidence about

what God has already done and will do for us all. What lies beyond the hood ornament is our destiny and what we must keep our eyes focused on.

Today we live in a world that lives primarily “in the moment.” Mankind lacks a vision of God’s power and His plan and purpose. The future glory of the Kingdom is a bright light that has illuminated all ages. It is still the answer today. Let’s make a point to describe that beautiful vision to all who will listen. There is nothing today that compares. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”* (1 Cor 2:9).

That is what lies beyond the hood ornament.

*Dave Jennings*

# WORK-LIFE BALANCE

*By Andy Bilello*

I keep an itemized to-do list in my head. “The List” includes upcoming deadlines for projects and scheduled events at work, ecclesial responsibilities and family obligations: whether a school activity, a family birthday celebration or simply running an errand.

Life presents a bevy of competing time demands. Dealing effectively with this challenge necessitates making priorities and frequently re-evaluating them. It’s a balancing act. There’s no one size fits all approach. For me, family, ecclesia and work are the three primary focal points. I periodically sort through the list to decide what has high priority and schedule appropriate time for each.

## THE PRINCIPLE OF BALANCE

While achieving balance is seldom easy, I believe it is possible. There’s no single moment when we can feel satisfied our

life is in perfect adjustment. But we can embrace the challenge and effort it takes to attempt balance. In my experience, people find themselves most out of adjustment and less happy in life when they don’t give regular thought to striving for balance. A commitment to a balanced decision-making process can be an invaluable influence in our life. The Bible illustrates this principle as follows: “*A just weight and balance are the LORD’S: all the weights of the bag are his work.*” (Prov 16:11).

Surely the passage above is intended to teach us more than business ethics. The visual of adjusting weights on a scale to determine a fair commercial transaction is also used to represent how we make choices. Intellectually, we weigh the relative importance, personal desire and required effort in deciding how to dedicate our time and energy.



The timeless wisdom of Proverbs offers insight regarding the priorities we select. When Scriptural principles properly influence these priorities, we tend to make wiser decisions.

Proverbs 16:11 indicates “all weights” are the LORD’s concern. This means every aspect of our life impacts our spiritual development. God cares about our total person. All activities influence our character and ultimately our relationships with family, ecclesial members, friends, co-workers, neighbors and most especially the LORD. Although we may attempt to compartmentalize our different life activity boxes, these areas encroach upon one another. Mercifully, the LORD evaluates each of us as a whole person.

The story of Belshazzar in Daniel 5 is a dramatic example of this principle in action. The chapter describes the self-indulgent King of Babylon hosting a grand celebration while defiling the symbols of worship looted from the Temple in Jerusalem. During this great feast, God’s hand appeared in frightening fashion to write on the palace walls. The writing indicated to Belshazzar he had been “*weighed in the balances and found wanting*.” (Dan 5:27 ESV).

The LORD had weighed (or considered) the actions, intentions and resulting character of Belshazzar. By the LORD’s measure he had not lived up to the standard. Therefore, his life’s work no longer served the LORD’s purpose. Scripture tells us an individual motivated by the LORD’s principles understands they are

evaluated as follows: “*Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!*” (Job 31:6 ESV).

Job welcomed an investigation of his life. He was confident the LORD’s evaluation would recognize the uprightness of his character. Job’s statement highlights the believer’s need to integrate varied roles and responsibilities. The man—or woman—of God is not afraid to be weighed in the balances, for they make adjustments to keep the scales of their life properly balanced.

### MAINTAIN BALANCE BY KEEPING FOCUS

The Bible encourages us to develop self-discipline (i.e., focus). The best way to practice balanced decision-making is to maintain our focus on God’s principles. We enhance our skill at sorting through priorities by never losing sight of the most basic, yet profound, lessons. Scripture instructs, “*Do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.*” (Josh 1:7 NKJV).

The LORD inspires us to keep our focus by not becoming distracted or veering off course. “*Do not turn... to the right hand or to the left,*” is a word picture describing a disciple’s journey in life. The image of balancing scales is not only a reference to how God can judge us, it’s how we make decisions. The image is of an individual moving forward through life without deviating from a chosen path.

Work-life balance is an ongoing process. A specific choice might push you to one side of the path or the other. However,

a commitment to God's word gives us the information and inspiration needed to properly focus on our journey. If we apply lessons from Scripture, we will minimize distractions and remain on the figurative road to the Kingdom. *"Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you."* (Prov 4:25 NKJV).

Do your best to maintain a spiritual attitude in all things. The disciple committed to balance keeps their footing firm through attentiveness to individual steps or decisions as follows: *"Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil."* (Prov 4:26-27 NKJV). Achieving balance is fundamentally a healthy process. The experience we gain over time fine-tunes our focus and helps guide us to make good choices.

## WORK INVOLVES DEDICATION NOT OBSESSION

The Bible encourages us to demonstrate a strong work ethic and become industrious. *"The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, But diligence is man's precious possession."* (Prov 12:27 NKJV). It is reasonable for believers to have ambition or seek some measure of satisfaction in their professional lives. *"Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men."* (Prov 22:29 NKJV). A person who is effective in conducting their business can deservedly receive praise for performance. There is nothing wrong with working diligently and achieving success—financial or other—often evidence of wisdom and diligence in practice.



Balance is recognizing worldly achievement should not become an obsession. However, such an attitude could easily ignore the needs of others. *“There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches. The ransom of a man’s life is his riches, But the poor does not hear rebuke.”* (Prov 13:7-8). We should work *“heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men,”* (Col 3:23-24), and provide for ourselves and families. But those efforts should not come at the expense of good character or reputation. Rather, our definition of success should include a genuine interest to influence others for good and to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31).

We need to guard against becoming obsessed with wealth or its imagined lifestyle. A certain of amount ambition is not sinful. But greed, the excessive desire for wealth, has always been a weakness of the human condition (Prov 1:19; 1 Tim 6:10).

How do we avoid an unhealthy attitude regarding money and possessions? It is critical to ask ourselves questions periodically in the process of self-examination to remind us where we’re going and who we are. For example: Do we treat money and possessions as resources? It is reasonable to gain resources to support ourselves and provide for others. However, it is not in the best interest of our spiritual development to vigorously pursue something Scripture reminds us is only temporary. *“Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They*

*fly away like an eagle.”* (Prov 23:4-5 NKJV).

God’s Word offers an ideal example of a balanced attitude toward money and possessions. *“Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.”* (Prov 30:8-9 NKJV). In this passage Agur asks the LORD to help him find a happy medium regarding riches. We would do well to echo this request, not to be so wealthy we neglect God and assume success is completely of our own making. Nor should we be in desperate poverty that we might resort to theft or harm others to survive. The wisdom of Proverbs reminds us to seek balance in our lives with the LORD’s assistance.

### THE DAILY BALANCING ACT

Sometimes it seems we are precariously dancing on a tightrope. Periods of high-stress and an accumulation of competing demands can create serious challenges to our work-life balance. Missteps will occur, but we can always regain our balance.

The boundaries between work and home life have never been more blurred than in our present age. The technology we enjoy comes with mixed blessings. The ease of modern communication with e-mails, text messages, cell phone calls and other devices, allows opportunities to work remotely. However, the flexibility to spend more time at home with family or to travel can be offset by increased expectations to respond to work requests or task completion non-stop.

A supervisor or work associate can contact you at any time and anticipate an immediate reply. Increasingly, people find themselves catching up with e-mails and work responsibilities at late hours. For many, workday now requires cutting into their personal, family or ecclesial time.

The evolving work environment requires adjustments on our part to maintain a proper work-life balance. The most practical approach is to manage our time by clearly establishing priorities. In my experience, scheduling plays a key role in providing balance. I often look ahead over a period of weeks, or a month, and simply list what I need to do by asking a series of questions. Here are a few examples from my “List”:

- Do I have any travel for work?
- Are there any work projects with deadlines?
- Does my daughter have sporting events?
- Does my son need help with schoolwork?
- Do I have any exhortations or Bible classes to prepare?
- Do I make necessary time to pray?
- Do I need to do maintenance at the ecclesial hall?

- Do our cars need service?
- Who is shopping for groceries this week?
- What do I want to do to relax—go out to dinner as a family, catch up with a friend, etc.?

The potential variables are virtually endless and unique for each individual, but the process remains consistent. Give thought to what needs to be done over a defined period, make a list and establish priorities. This method can help us to properly allocate our time and attention. I do this to some degree daily. Conceptually, it's not difficult, though implementing it can be challenging. But I find the idea of making “balance” as one of my priorities to be quite helpful.

We must never stray from our spiritual values and the all-important relationship we are developing with the LORD. If we do our best to maintain a spiritual attitude in every circumstance, then we will find balance far more often than not.

*“A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight.” (Prov 11:1 ESV).*

*Andy Bilello,  
(Baltimore, MD)*

*If we do our best to maintain a spiritual attitude in every circumstance, then we will find balance far more often than not.*



# GOD'S WITNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

By Craig Stickney

**I**n this article we want to look at a few experiences we have had and methods we have used as God's witnesses in the workplace. We are told in Matthew 5:16 to *"Let our light so shine before men so they can see our good works and glorify our father in heaven."* The word *"before"* is the Greek word *emprosyen*, meaning "in front of" or "in the sight of." In other words, we need to preach by example, demonstrating our faith by our works.

Growing up, my mom and dad used to tell me that "I might be the only Bible some people might ever read." That is especially true in this generation when fewer people read or study their Bibles. So, it is becoming more and more important to show our faith to those around us by the godly things we do—with honesty and integrity.

Honesty and integrity used to be demonstrated by your word and a handshake. Now it seems to take a 50-page legal document and another 50 pages of legalese to ensure a person lives up to their agreement. We need

to show in the work environment that we are people who can be trusted, displaying our faith by our works.

Being trustworthy is one of the important ways of sharing God's Word and His way to those we work with. In today's vernacular, "We need to be authentic" and people of our word. Jesus, in Matthew 5:48, says, *"Be ye therefore perfect [or complete], even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Hebrew *tummah*, "having integrity").

By being honest and acting with integrity, we can gain a person's trust, allowing us to share the keys to eternal life with others in the workplace. Jesus used the example of preaching to a corrupt earth in the days of Noah (Gen 6:11-12; Luke 17:26-27—however, the context can be tricky for new Bible readers to get the point). *"All flesh had corrupted God's way on the earth."* The *"days of Noah"* seem to resemble the age in which we live: a world full of corruption, where truth is not always important, and many people follow their own ways.



In contrast, Noah was a *“just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.”* (Gen. 6:9). Is this us? Do people see us as different than the corrupt world around us? Are we people of integrity, walking with God and guiding those around us in God’s way? Does our honesty and integrity show forth in all we say and do? We have no idea who God has called out of this world of darkness to His glorious light, so we need to *“sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear.”* (1 Pet 3:15).

### THE STORY UNFOLDS

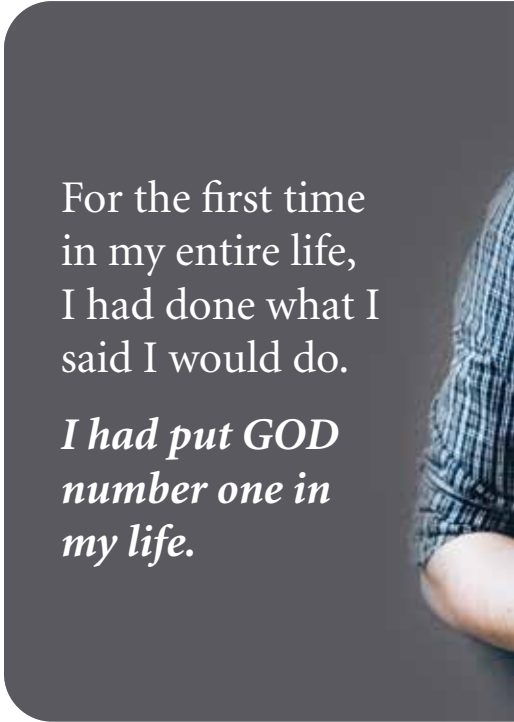
My story starts with my career in the automotive aftermarket in 1988 in Southern California. I had been employed in the retail automotive aftermarket parts business for about 17 years when Carol, the family and I decided to move to Oregon to care for my elderly grandparents and help out the Southern Oregon Ecclesia.

We put the question of relocation to God in prayer, and the following week our house in California sold. We were moving to Oregon. We purchased a house in Southern Oregon, and I landed a job selling tires wholesale in the Northwest United States. The company base was in Tacoma, Washington. I drove from Oregon to Washington every few weeks and also visited my sister Pam in central Oregon. Each time, we had breakfast together and discussed the Truth. My grandmother prayed every day that my sister would accept the Truth; within three years Pam was baptized.

Shortly after that, both my grandparents died, and the automotive

aftermarket in Oregon and Washington dramatically declined. So, we decided to move back to California, where I found employment once again in the automotive aftermarket parts business. After this move, I was employed by a company in Gardena, California, called Pro Comp. As God would have it, I needed to purchase a specific product manufactured by a company named Daystar, owned by a family in Phoenix, Arizona.

Shortly afterwards, the owners of Daystar, Dick and Jean, flew to Gardena to visit me at the Pro Comp facility. I sat down with them in my office, and behind my desk was my grandfather’s library of Christadelphian books, containing three copies of Elpis Israel. Dick picked up a copy, began reading



For the first time  
in my entire life,  
I had done what I  
said I would do.

*I had put GOD  
number one in  
my life.*

it and asked if he could borrow it. I told him he could have it. That paved the road to my next 26 years of employment and a lifelong relationship with Dick and Jean and their journey in the Truth.

Shortly after that initial meeting in Gardena, Dick invited me to Phoenix, Arizona to present a proposal to run Daystar. Again, we went to God in prayer and asked Him to *"Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths."* (Psa 25:4). He most certainly did.

So, with God at the lead, Carol and I went to Arizona, and I stood up in front of the five owners of Daystar and wrote on the White Board in huge letters **"GOD,"** then under that **"Family,"**

then under that **"Ecclesia"** and in really small letters the word **"Work."** I then said, "before we continue, these are my priorities. Does anyone have any questions?" After a moment of silence, Dick asked if anyone had any questions, and the oldest son said, "Are you serious?" I replied, "as a heart attack." Once again, they were silent. For the first time in my entire life, I had done what I had often said I would do. I had put God number one in my life.

The results of that commitment in the workplace have been life-changing for me and all those I have worked with. Dick opened the door for free and transparent communication about the Bible and prayer. Putting forth the gospel message in the workplace became an everyday event. Dick loved talking about and sharing Bible prophecy, current events and his newfound faith. Within three years both Dick and Jean were baptized, and a few years later, two of their neighbors were as well.

Dick began attending our "Learn to Read the Bible" seminars and then started the seminars at lunch for anybody wanting to attend. All of this resulted from putting God number one in life and sharing that priority with all we met.

*"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Mic 6:8).

All we needed to do was to present our requests to God in prayer, put the right foot forward and let Him do the rest. God desires to work through us. What





Bro. Craig Stickney

we must do is ask, and be present and willing. God, Jesus and the angels can bless us with the rest.

Dick began encouraging me to offer prayers before meals and sales meetings, which opened opportunities for discussion with employees about the Truth and situations in their lives. It led to other opportunities for prayer and bringing God into their lives.

I began to realize how many times before that I had said I would keep an employee or family member or client of mine in my prayers, and I didn't do it. From then on, I would be sure and ask the person's first name for whom we were praying. Prayer became much more than mere words but opportunities to engage God into the situation. Not my will but God's be done.

A few years ago, after we moved back to California, my boss, Mark, was in a racecar accident, and I flew out to Phoenix to visit him and his wife during his recovery and engage God in the situation. I prayed with him and his wife Sue at the hospital that God would

heal him. Mark was unconscious most of the time, but he was aware of our prayers. After Mark recovered, he began to ask me to offer prayers at meals and before company meetings. Here again, God opened opportunities to let His light shine before men that they might see His works in us and at the same time build-up our faith. It became evident that simple, yet powerful, things had the greatest impact. So, I began to look for other ways to witness in the workplace, and I started adding relevant, godly phrases at the end of my emails. For instance, with the COVID-19 pandemic I would add, "God be with you and your family" on emails before the weekend. If I knew someone was traveling, I would add "God be with you and give you a safe trip home" or something as simple as "God bless." These short, meaningful phrases demonstrated to my co-workers and clients that God is in the center of my life, and I am open to sharing my faith with them and encourage them to share theirs. All we have to do is *"sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."* (1 Pet 3:15). This is not about promoting a list of things we don't believe in but rather God's message of hope: the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

Let us carry that same message to all we meet, both in and out of the workplace, that at Christ's coming, they too might inherit a place in God's eternal Kingdom.

Craig Stickney,  
(Santa Barbara, CA)

# FURNISHING OUR HEARTS AND MINDS

*By Sam Taylor*

**D**o you have a family heirloom that you cherish? If you do, picture it in your mind and consider what makes it significant to you. What is this item's rich history? Maybe it's that classic design you just don't see anymore? Perhaps it just reminds you of someone you love? Whatever makes it important to you, I'm sure you can appreciate its place in your life.

A few years ago, I inherited two pieces of antique furniture from my dad after he died. Both needed substantial work to restore them to their former beauty. After a lot of thought, I have decided to keep and restore one but sell the other. As you read on, see if you can figure out which I plan to keep and which I plan to sell.

One piece is a hand-carved solid wood sofa made in France in the late 1700s. It's been in my family for over 200 years, having made the voyage with them across the Atlantic. This sofa was

sacred to my dad because of the family history associated with it. As a kid I wasn't allowed to sit on it or even touch it. All I could do was admire it from a distance.

The other piece is a solid wood secretary bookshelf with a dropdown desk. It was made in the early 1900s and belonged to my great grandfather in New Jersey. My dad loved this piece also because it belonged to someone that he looked up to all his life. When I was younger, my dad let me use it so I could study. I learned about all the secret compartments for storage and hid keepsakes in it throughout the years.

Which one do you think I kept? The French sofa or the secretary desk?

If you guessed the desk, you were right. While the French sofa is steeped in history and old-world craftsmanship worked into its frame, it isn't very practical. I don't dare to sit on it because

of how old it is. It just takes up space in my house, never to be used or loved. I only kept it out of obligation to honor my dad, not out of appreciation or an intent to use it.

On the other hand, I had a lot of interaction with the desk early on, knowing it would someday be mine. I got to choose what I kept in its compartments and how I used it. Though it was handed down to me over several generations, I learned to appreciate its utility for myself and make it my own. When it came time for me to decide what I would refinish, it was an easy choice to pick the desk. I wasn't worried about restoring it to how it looked 100 years ago. I had a personal investment in keeping this desk in good condition for my own enjoyment.

Although I agonized over my inheritance of furniture, my real struggle was with inheritance of tradition. Whether you've had experience with treasured keepsakes

or not, you've likely encountered pressure to uphold tradition. It can feel stifling to carry on tradition, especially when the answer to "Why should I do this?" is "Because we've always done it this way." While that answer is sadly common, it is also dangerous because it can cause people to be skeptical of all traditions—good and bad. People in the Bible were no strangers to tradition and often felt the same pressures you and I do about upholding them. Just like today, they had dealings with good and bad traditions. Listen to what Jesus told the Pharisees about one of their traditions in Mark 7:9-13:

*"And he said to them, 'You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, "Honor your father and your mother"; and, "Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die." But you say, "If a man tells his father or his mother, 'Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban'" (that is, given*





*to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”<sup>1</sup>*

In that tradition, Pharisees used a feature of the Law of Moses to bypass God’s command to care for their parents for their own selfish gain. Contrast that with healthy traditions, like Daniel’s devotion to daily prayer found in Daniel 6, where he opened a window facing Jerusalem to pray three times per day. This raises a critical question for us: what makes a tradition good or bad? To determine this, we need to understand what traditions are and what their role in our lives should be. Traditions don’t just come into being. They start as individual behaviors driven by thoughts and feelings. When these behaviors are repeated over time, they become habits. If a single person’s habits are influential enough to be picked up by a group of people, they become customs. Once a custom is passed down from one generation to the next, it finally becomes tradition.

Because traditions eventually become reflexive behaviors due to repetition, it’s important to ask ourselves: what motivates these behaviors? Is it to help us follow the Lord’s commandments, or is it to satisfy our desire to feel righteous? The Lord raised this very point about Sabbath when He told the Pharisees in Mark 2:27: *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”* God did not create mankind to uphold the laws of Sabbath rest, but rather created the Sabbath Day after

**People in the Bible were no strangers to tradition and often felt the same pressures you and I do about upholding them.**

creating humanity, as a tool to help us understand the need to rest from works of the flesh. While traditions can help us follow God’s commandments, they shouldn’t take the place of God’s commandments.

This brings me back to the example of the antiques my dad left me. By examining the function of each piece of furniture in my life, I decided to take a 200-year-old tradition and figure out if it was serving me or if I was serving it. Following traditions without questioning their utility in our lives will lead to a weakened faith. A living faith, however, compels us to challenge the behaviors, habits and traditions in our lives to ensure they serve us in our service to God, Jesus and our brothers and sisters in Christ. This might be why the Apostle Paul wrote these words in Romans 12:1-2:

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

# Keep your eyes on the prize.

You are running towards God's Kingdom, and you need to focus to serve that end. The traditions you uphold will either help you toward that goal or need to be cast aside so that you might keep running.



Bear in mind that, just as I plan to keep one furniture piece and sell the other, you may find some traditions still help you. Not only that, you and another follower of Christ may look at the same tradition and derive different levels of benefit. Suits and ties in worship are a common example—one person may see them as a financial burden that causes partiality in the household of faith while another person might see putting on a suit and tie as helpful in preparing their mind for worship. As we all deal with the extra-Biblical traditions in our society, we need to show each other compassion. We all come from different backgrounds and are at different stages in life. For you, a tradition might be a weight that helps you build strength. For someone else, that same tradition might be a ball and chain that keeps them from running

altogether. Whatever the case may be, keep your eyes on the prize. You are running toward God's Kingdom, and you need to focus to serve that end. The traditions you uphold will either help you toward that goal or need to be cast aside so that you might keep running. To conclude, we'll consider the thoughts of Hebrews 12:1-2:

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Sam Taylor,  
(Paris Avenue, OH)

# LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

Matthew 22:39



# CHRISTADELPHIAN WORSHIP BOOKS

*By Kristin Atwood*

**I**T has been a blessing to be the *Tidings* Music Section Editor for the last year. It has been my hope and prayer that readers have enjoyed learning about amazing work with music and praise from around the world. Hopefully, you have incorporated more music in your home ecclesia and daily life. I hope many of you have seized the opportunity to grow closer to our Heavenly Father and have reflected on the use of your time.

I have found that when there is too much on my plate, my time for prayer, readings and singing praises to God gets pushed to the side. So, although it makes me sad to step down, I am very excited to have Sis. Jessica Gelineau become the new Music Section Editor. For those who do not know Sis. Jessica, she is an amazingly talented and devoted sister and is well-connected with the worldwide community. I am confident she will produce and find articles that will be a blessing and encouragement to read.

I wanted to write one more article about the beautiful Christadelphian *Worship* books. It had been a few months into quarantine, and I remember feeling that my soul longed to sing and praise and worship. I sat down at the piano for the first time in months and just couldn't stop crying. I missed it so much! I missed being with others and singing together more than words could express. We all know that when God tests us in life, it is essential to always look for how to praise Him in every situation. Are there still opportunities to praise God through song, even when we are isolated or unable to assemble? What can we do?

I own the orange and purple *Worship* books, and even though I knew a handful of songs from each book, I decided to take the opportunity to sit down and learn some of these new songs. The more I played, the more I wanted to play and sing, and it felt so wonderful to be able to praise God

with new songs! For those of you that already use these books, I hope this article gives you more information and encouragement. For those who have never heard of them, I hope review inspires you to learn more and begin to use these books. If your ecclesial library does not contain these song books, they can be purchased here:

[www.theworshipbook.com/](http://www.theworshipbook.com/)


*order-worship-books*

Let's first start with background information about the purple book and its development. "*Worship* was first published in 2008, by Christadelphian Art Trust (under the New South Wales Christadelphian Committee (NCC) umbrella) responding to a need within the Christadelphian community for usable original music. It was released in time for the Australian National Christadelphian Conference, held at Sydney, and quickly over 1000 copies were sold. By 2013, nearly 2,800 copies were sold worldwide."<sup>1</sup> I have loved music for as long as I can remember. There is something so beautiful about taking spiritual words and elevating them through song. I know many of us feel incredibly connected to our Heavenly Father through music, especially through communal praise. There are many of you who can play and sing music, but it takes another type of talent to compose music. Although I have never had this talent, I genuinely admire and appreciate the brothers and sisters who use this talent in service to God. What an amazing blessing that God has given so many brothers and sisters the talent to compose spiritual music and to then organize it beautifully for the worldwide community!

As discussed in an earlier article, music can be a complex topic in Christadelphia because there are so many opinions about what is appropriate or inappropriate for worship. The *Worship* book represents the spectrum of praise used today in the Christadelphian community. The songs within *Worship* are intended for both personal and congregational singing. The word "worship" has referred to both an immediate reaction to the presence of God manifested and the formal services organized for praise and remembrance of God and His promises, especially the fulfilled promise of His son, Jesus. The works within this volume are themselves an action of worship, both immediate and planned, because of God's greatness, His message and His calling. *Worship* consists of piano/vocal, SATB (soprano, alto, tenor and bass), and lead sheet arrangements.<sup>2</sup> Many of the songs have already been recorded in Australia and the UK. A wide range of musical styles are within the book, including contemporary pieces, choral pieces, ballads, hymns, rounds and works from original musicals.

The status of face-to-face assembly around the world right now is varied. No matter where you and your ecclesia are, there is always an opportunity to incorporate spiritual music into your life. One of the things that many of us have felt incredibly thankful for during this time is technology. Can you imagine if this pandemic hit 30 years ago what the impact would have been on the Christadelphian community before Zoom and other technologies?





Although there are many of you out there that can play and sing music, it takes another type of talent to compose music.

Not only have brothers and sisters composed amazing spiritual music to share in the *Worship* book, but the majority of these songs are also available to listen to. All these beautiful worship songs have been recorded in some capacity so you can just listen to them at home, or you can listen to an instrumentalist/vocalist to learn songs. How often do we struggle to learn new music together? It is frequently difficult to read through sheet music and to pick out parts. Almost all the *Orange Worship* book songs have a piano and/or vocal track available ([www.theworshipbook.com/worship-orange-sound-files](http://www.theworshipbook.com/worship-orange-sound-files)). These could be used for personal use and/or for ecclesia members to listen to in preparation for learning new songs. What a great time to learn a new song or two to sing at home or to use at the ecclesia.

When looking into a new resource, sometimes it can be overwhelming, so I thought I might suggest a few songs to get started with. To be honest, I am still learning a lot of the songs in this book, so this is not a comprehensive list by any means. It is more of a suggested list of songs to start with.

We know and love deeply so many hymns, but have you ever listened to the familiar words with a different tune? It forces you to pay more attention and refocus on the words. The following songs in the *Orange* book do just that:

- *We Come, O God, to Bow* (#34)
- *We Bow in Prayer* (#47)
- *Teach Me Thy Way* (#79)
- *Though the Night be Dark Around Us* (#105)
- *God Be With You* (#13)

Are you and your ecclesia comfortable with hymn-formatted songs? These might be a great place to start:

- *I Will Extol Thee* (#14)
- *More Like Thee* (#41)
- *Prayer For the Lost* (#44)
- *Let Yours Not Be the Outward Adorning* (#66)
- *Christian Ever Faithful Be* (#67)
- *Let Us Help to Live in You* (#71)
- *Good Stewards* (#75)
- *Angels O'er the Sleeping Earth* (#96)
- *Striving* (#103)
- *God's Grace to all who Love Him* (#109)
- *Almighty Maker of my Frame* (#126)

Do you want some fun upbeat songs for kids or teens that are great with guitar? Try one of these:

- *Good News of the Kingdom of God* (#111)
- *Blessed Are You* (#17)
- *Revelation 4* (#61)

Do you want to try to teach your ecclesia a couple of songs that are not in hymn format but are easy to learn? These three songs are a great place to start:

- *Psalms 20* (#11)
- *Love the Lord* (#58)
- *Love is Patient* (#128)

Do you love pulling together a small group of singers to try more challenging music? You might want to try some of these:

The word “worship” has referred to both an immediate reaction to the presence of God manifested, and the formal services organized for praise and remembrance of God

- *Morning* (#1)
- *Psalms 93* (#9)
- *Psalms 103* (#15)
- *How Amazing* (#22)
- *To You* (#28)
- *Awaken the Dawn* (#39)
- *Who is Like the Lord* (#57)
- *Come Let Us Go to the Mountain* (#110)
- *We Wait* (#113)
- *Live and Reign* (#117)
- *Worship the Lord* (#121)

Lastly, these songs would be beautiful for a wedding or baptism:

- *Walk with Me* (#129)
- *Arise* (#130)
- *Numbers 6* (#133)

Hopefully, you or an instrumentalist at your meeting will get the opportunity to play through some of the amazing songs created for the brotherhood with these books. It is my personal hope, prayer and vision of the Kingdom for all to join in voices of praise to God together. May we glorify Him with these songs and pay tribute to that vision and purpose. Through God's grace, may that day come soon!

Kristin Atwood,  
(Verdugo Hills, CA)

<sup>1</sup> [www.theworshipbook.com](http://www.theworshipbook.com)

<sup>2</sup> A **lead sheet** is a simplified version of a **music score**, providing just the melody, lyrics and chord names. It lets you fit a whole **song** on a **sheet** of paper or two, and strips away all the detail of the arrangement, leaving just the essence of the **music**.

# TEXTUAL CRITICISM AND THE STORY OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

*By Richard Morgan*

**D**ISCOVERIES have been made of thousands of Old and New Testament manuscripts stretching over hundreds of years. There are hundreds of thousands of variances between those manuscripts, and textual criticism helps ascertain what was most likely to be the original wording. Textual criticism scholars look at variations and, using several techniques, determine what was part of the original text and what are scribal errors. Textual criticism helps us unravel questions like “Why do we have different Bible versions?” “Why do some people want to cling to the King James Version?” and “What are we meant to make of the differences between Bible versions?”

Let’s look at it against the backdrop of the story of the English Bible. Over the following few articles, we’re going to go through the history of when the Bible

was first translated into English and see how that process became part of the need and desire for textual criticism.

First, let’s consider the history of Bible translation in general. During the early Church in the Roman Empire, Bible translations were dominated by Latin versions, springing from the work of a Latin priest named Jerome (c. 345-420 AD), who began compiling Latin texts dating from the second century. The various editions of the Latin translation became known as the *Vulgate*. For over a thousand years, the *Vulgate* was the main translation in circulation and is one reason why the authoritarian church held so much power over the masses. The masses were largely illiterate, and Latin began dying out as a language in common use after the fall of the Western Roman Empire by invasions from Germanic tribes in September 476.

You might think the Latin *Vulgate* doesn't have much relevance to our English translations, but it has had considerable influence that continues to the present. For instance, the Hebrew word *māšiah* (or anointed) the word for Messiah—meaning someone anointed for office with oil—wasn't translated into Latin. That word would be something like *unctus*, but it seems that the translators were unhappy with the basic meaning of that word—oily or greasy. So, they chose to go with a transliteration of the Greek word instead and used *christus*, like in this verse from 1 Samuel 12:5 (from the 16th century Clementine Vulgate):

1 Regum 12:5—"Dixitque ad eos: 'Testis est Dominus adversum vos, et testis **christus** ejus in die hac, quia non inveneritis in manu mea quippiam.' Et dixerunt: 'Testis.'"

In our English versions, that verse reads something like:

"And he said to them, 'The LORD is witness against you, and his **anointed** is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.' And they said, 'He is witness.'"

As you can see, instead of *unctus* for "anointed," we have the word *christus* in the Latin text. That tradition has been continued in just about every English translation, and today we know God's Messiah as Christ. This is only one example of how translations do not often occur in a vacuum but trace their influences on previous work.

Now you may have heard that the Latin version was the only one available during the entire Middle Ages until

men like John Wycliffe (c. 1320-1384) and William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536) started translating the Bible into English. That isn't entirely true. English translations, for instance, go back several hundred years before Wycliffe, who was around in the 14th century. However, unless you are versed in Old English, you probably won't understand those translations at all. Here's one example from the *Wessex Gospels* circa 1175:

"In principio erat uerbum. Her ongind þæt god-spell þe Iohannes se godspellere ge-wrat on pathmos þam eiglande. On anginne ærest wæs word. & þæt word wæs mid gode. & god wæs þt word." (John 1:1).

Since we all know what John 1:1 says in modern English, you can probably make out some of the words. But English has changed a lot since then.

Wycliffe himself, famous for being the first translator of the Bible into modern English, is an example of a pre-textual criticism scholar. Unlike later translators like William Tyndale, Wycliffe didn't have access to the original sources, i.e., the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Instead, he translated the Bible from the Latin *Vulgate*. His work, like many translations, went through more than one edition. Early on, Wycliffe decided on a literal word-for-word approach which made the English rendition rather awkward. For example, translating from the Latin of Genesis 1:3 (*Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux.*), this was his first attempt:

"And God seide, Be maad lizt; and maad is lizt."



Later, Wycliffe decided to change the word order to make it more readable in English:

*"And God seide, Ligt be maad; and ligt was maad."*

It was the Renaissance (AD 1400-1600) that changed the discipline of translation forever. Coming out of medieval feudalism, which stifled education and advancement, Europe erupted into a period where art, literature and scientific discovery burst onto the scene. Men like Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, who under the old system would have been confined to plying their trade in their local fiefdom, now could make a name and a living for themselves. During the 15th century, as the movement spread, Europe saw the rise of Renaissance Humanism, so-called because they emphasized what it means to be human instead of focusing on religion. However, we shouldn't mix it up with what we call humanism today. Instead, it was part of the ongoing reaction against authoritarian religion and the power of the established church, culminating in the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

One of the Humanists' mottos was *ad fontes*, which means "to the sources." The Renaissance coincided with a renewed interest in classical philosophy and other ancient literature, including

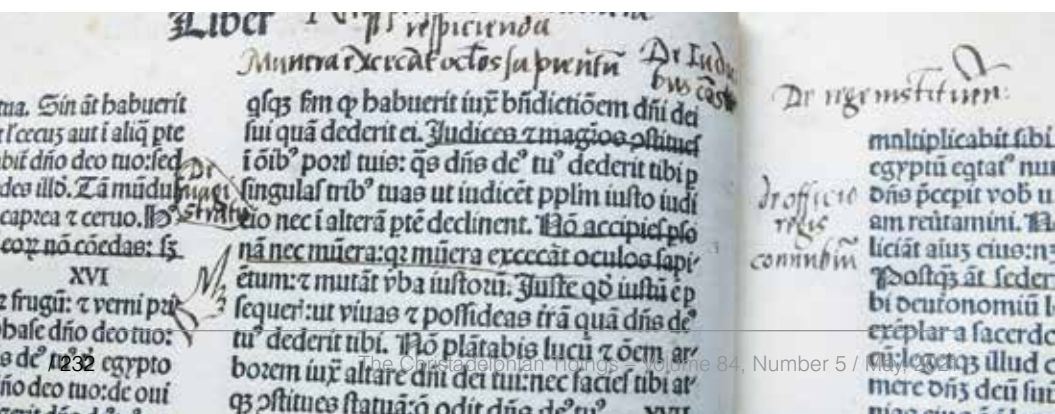
the Bible. *Ad fontes* meant there was a desire to find the original manuscripts rather than relying on things like the Latin *Vulgate*. One of those humanist scholars was a Dutch theologian by the name of Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) who became the pioneer of textual criticism.

Erasmus studied at Cambridge and was influenced by a Greek scholar named Manuel Chrysoloras (1355-1415). He was an emissary sent by the leaders in Constantinople to appeal to the princes in western Europe for help against the impending invasion of the Ottoman Turks, which eventually would bring an end to the Byzantine Empire.

Chrysoloras, arriving in western Europe at the end of the 14th century, brought with him several Greek manuscripts. Greek had not been studied in western Europe for centuries, so he was in high demand to teach Greek studies in various cities, especially in Italy, such as Florence, Venice and Milan. Eventually, his influence was felt by Erasmus.

Next month we shall continue our story and see how Erasmus and his contemporaries, working at the time of the Protestant Reformation, began the discipline of textual criticism and laid the foundation for our English Bible versions.

Richard Morgan,  
(Simi Hills, CA)





# EVERYONE DID THAT WHICH WAS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES (PART 4)

By Neil Robin

**JUDGES** 20 opens with all the people of Israel gathered “*together as one man*” to heed the Levite’s call for justice. This in itself was a remarkable thing. When there was no king or any other central authority to bind them together, all of the people had rallied as one. Not even the greatest of the divinely appointed judges, such as Ehud or Deborah and Barak, had been able to muster all of Israel as a coherent, motivated fighting force.

We can only speculate as to the reasons why this was. Could it have been that Israel found it easier to rally to an entirely human call for justice against their own people than a God-given call for repentance and deliverance from a numerically superior outside oppressor?

As humans, we often find it easier to commit to action when it doesn’t involve personal introspection or change. It’s much easier to right a wrong or to institute change when the problem is identified as someone else’s fault, not ours, and when the solution is

to force that person to change or have them removed entirely.

This seems to be one of the biggest problems facing Western society today: every social issue is politicized and polarized so that one side is to blame for all of the other side’s woes. Unfortunately, this attitude appears to have made its way into various churches, including our own.

Where was God in their thinking? Verse 1 says that they assembled as one man “*to the LORD*” and, in verse 2, as “*the assembly of the people of God*.” This suggests that their self-identification as people of Yahweh had not entirely disappeared. Perhaps it is easier to consider oneself faithful to Yahweh when it involves passing judgment on others rather than examining oneself.

The tribe of Benjamin did not appear at the assembly. Evidently, they were aware of the details of the Levite’s complaint and had decided to stand with Gibeah in tribal loyalty rather than seek justice for what Gibeah had done.

Is that a trap that we, too, might fall into? Do we let friendship or family loyalties get in the way of applying God's principles? Do you ever find yourself relaxing the standards of doctrine or behavior you expect from others when it concerns a close friend or family member?

In verses 4-7, the version of events recounted by the Levite could be described as "sanitized" at best. He managed to absolve himself of all blame and make himself the victim of the night's horrors rather than the helpless woman whom he sacrificed and failed to rescue or revive. It's a natural human reaction to push the blame onto others and portray oneself as a helpless victim who can do nothing to help the situation. In doing so, we put all of the responsibility for the problem onto someone else. As Christians, we must strive to overcome our survival instincts and to accept the portion of blame, however small or large it may be, that lies at our door.

The Levite's words were powerful. The distribution of the murdered woman's body parts had served to gather the disparate tribes as one, yet it was his speech that motivated them to fight as one. However, we may notice that in his speech, the Levite made no mention of God. As a Levite, he was responsible for teaching the people the spiritual significance of these events and ought to have called them to action in God's name, not his own.

Despite his making himself the center of this gathering, he vanished entirely from the account after finishing his speech and was never mentioned again. Perhaps the movement for justice and vengeance had taken on a life of its own, and he was no longer in control of it, much less able to stop it. What had started as an act of atrocity by one city against a single woman then escalated into a pan-tribal crusade against that city. As we shall see, it would then escalate further into a civil war that virtually annihilated an entire tribe.

When we have a goal in mind, it can be very tempting to convince others of our perspective by presenting a technically true narrative...

When we make decisions in the heat of anger to act against those we perceive to be entirely at fault, the situation can gradually yet irreversibly grow into something far worse.

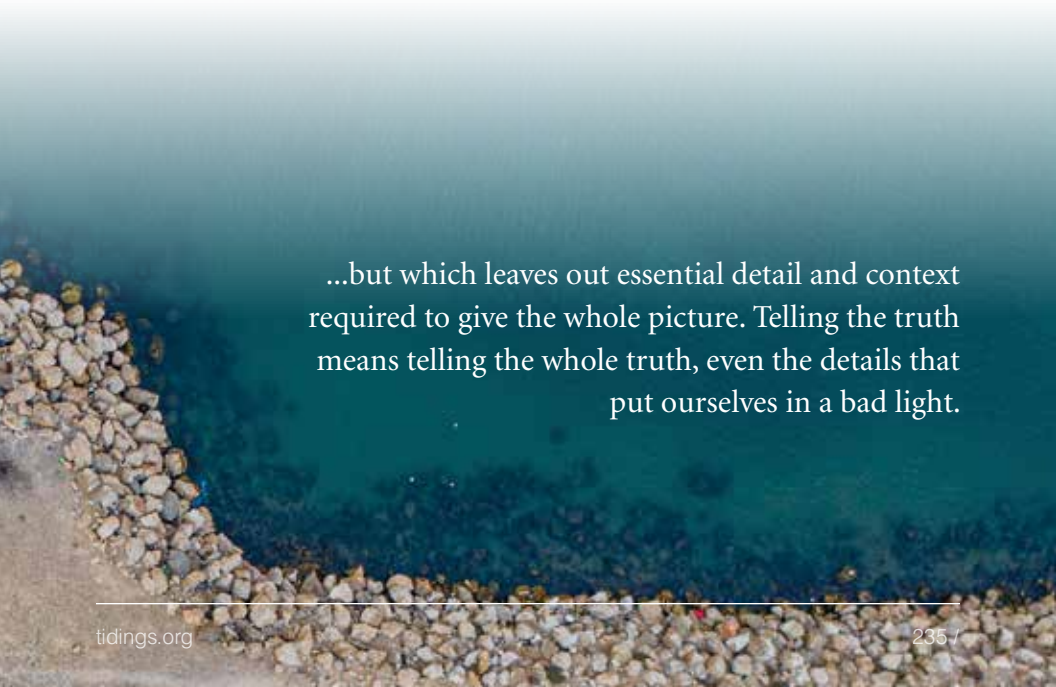
It's been suggested that the account presents the Levite almost as an ironic parody of the judges. Whereas the judges rose up in God's name to gather the people to fight against an external evil to deliver themselves, the Levite rose up in his own name to gather the people to fight against an internal evil, an act which ultimately only harmed themselves as a result, as we shall see.

One more thing we may note about the Levite's speech is that nothing he said was false. It was the truth, and yet it was not the whole truth. When we have a goal in mind, it can be very tempting to convince others of our perspective by presenting a technically true narrative, but which leaves out essential detail and context required to give the whole

picture. Telling the truth means telling the whole truth, even the details that put ourselves in a bad light.

In Judges 20, telling only part of the truth set in motion an escalating campaign of violence in which one side thought they were entirely in the right and that this justified anything they might do against such a terrible evil. We can only speculate about what might have happened had the Levite told the whole truth and included his failings at Gibeah. Perhaps the thirst for vengeance could have been quenched by destroying only Gibeah, and some agreement could have been reached with the rest of Benjamin.

In verse 8 and following, the tribes began planning for the military campaign against Gibeah. Note that they did not involve God at all during this initial phase. In verse 9, they used the casting of lots to determine who would lead the charge. The casting of



...but which leaves out essential detail and context required to give the whole picture. Telling the truth means telling the whole truth, even the details that put ourselves in a bad light.

lots was one way God's will could be determined (see, e.g., Acts 1 with the choice of Matthias), but that doesn't seem to be the case here.

The tribes appeared to have been unaware that Benjamin had a secret weapon: an entire group of left-handed slingers. Block describes it thus: "Alone a left-handed person was considered handicapped and in a contingent of right-handed troops an actual liability, but if enough left-handed men could be assembled to make up an entire contingent, a disadvantage would be transformed into a distinct advantage, physically and psychologically." (Block, p. 557).<sup>1</sup>

The record does not state the reason for Benjamin's overwhelming victories on the first two days of battle. Perhaps the rest of Israel had no answer to this elite group of "special forces." Had God been with the rest of the tribes during the first two battles, neither these left-handed men nor anything else would have been able to achieve victory for Benjamin.

Why didn't God help them? Perhaps there is a parallel here to the Israelite attempt to conquer Ai in Joshua 7. There they fought, confident of success in their strength, and were soundly defeated. It wasn't until they turned to God in humility and dealt with the sin of Achan that God enabled them to prevail.

Nevertheless, on the eve of the first day of battle, God was willing to answer their question about who should go first into battle. His answer was Judah. This may have been because the murdered concubine was from Bethlehem in Judah, and so perhaps in God's eyes, the tribe of Judah had the first claim to justice from Gibeah.

Notice that God did not promise they would succeed on this occasion, but then again, that wasn't the question they had asked him. Perhaps they were so sure of the rightness of their cause and their hearts that they'd assumed God would help them no matter what.

Whether they listened to God and sent Judah in first, we are not told. Either way, the first day resulted in an utter defeat in which the tribes lost about as many men as Benjamin had in their entire army. The record doesn't tell us how many, if any, Benjamite casualties there were.

On the evening of the first day, they went weeping before God and finally asked what they should have asked at the start: whether they should have been engaging in this fight at all. We can only assume that they didn't understand how they could have been defeated with God on their side and concluded that perhaps this war wasn't His will at all. They didn't at this time understand that ultimately Benjamin's defeat was, in fact, God's will but that it would not happen until they had corrected their attitude toward God.

God confirmed He wanted them to keep fighting, yet He did not promise whether they would succeed. The second day of fighting saw them suffer another massive round of casualties, though not quite as many as the day before. Again the record depicts only the perspective of the eleven tribes and is silent about the reasons for Benjamin's success or any casualties on their side.

On the second evening, they once more went before God and sat before Him, fasted and offered sacrifices. It seems that they began to understand it wasn't

enough for them to be fighting for justice against a terrible atrocity. They had to be standing faithfully in covenant with God before they could fight and claim victory in His name.

This should give us much food for thought in our own time. In the modern-day, there are countless evils, abuses, injustices and so forth taking place in the Western world and beyond. There are also numerous people and groups standing up to denounce such things and demanding that something be done about them. As Christians, we should also wish to see an end to abuse and injustice against those who cannot defend themselves.

Yet, Jesus said we must look at our faults first before we begin to call out those of others (see, e.g., Matt 7:1-5). As humans, it's only natural to call attention to others' sins while trying to minimize or hide our own. Our own eyes do not see our faults. That's why we need to see through God's eyes.

Anyone who calls for justice to be done in God's name or by quoting God's Scriptures must make sure he/she is right with God first. That does not mean a person must be sinless but rather conscious and repentant of his/her faults. Few things blind us to our faults more than a crusading attitude against evil outside of ourselves.

Today there are so many people, Christian or otherwise, who see the world in such a polarized way that they

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can only see evil in those on the "other side." Perhaps with good reason, they may perceive themselves as having been victimized by those on the "other side." Yet there lies a danger in identifying oneself as a victim, namely that a victim generally sees no need to accept responsibility to examine or change him/herself or make a sacrifice to improve the situation or seek reconciliation.

In many ways, the thinking of the Western world encourages us to embrace the idea of victimhood. God does not. Instead, he encourages self-examination and repentance before we attempt to right any wrongs we perceive in other people. Jesus will not allow us to criticize and demand change from others while refusing to address the same faults in our own lives.

Examine yourself. Do you do the same things you find it so easy to criticize in others? Do you use people for your own satisfaction? Do you ignore the suffering of the helpless? Do you live for pleasure at their expense?

The Israelites' question on the second evening now ended with "*or should we not?*," implying their growing doubts whether God was really behind them in this quest for justice.

In verse 27, we see that they had brought the ark of the covenant along with them. It's unlikely the ark made the journey from its usual place to Gibeah in a single day, suggesting it had



been there since the first day of battle. Perhaps, as in 1 Samuel 4, the Israelites had brought the ark to battle as if it was some talisman whose mere presence would bring them success. Yet now, after two punishing defeats, were they beginning to understand that the ark's physical presence did not guarantee God's blessings on their actions?

What might this tell us about the attitude with which we ought to approach God? We should always be wary of expecting to be blessed with success or safety in our endeavors when God hasn't promised us either thing. It's only when we come to God in humility and repentance that He'll be receptive to our requests.

In verse 28, we see that Phinehas, apparently the grandson of Aaron, is in charge of the ark. If we assume that this is the same Phinehas who brought Israel's intermingling with Moab to a brutal end in Numbers 25, then along with Jonathan in chapters 17-18, it's an indication that these events took place within the lifetime of some of those who first entered the land under Joshua.

If it is indeed the same Phinehas, then we know from Numbers 25 (and Joshua 22) his reputation for extreme, even violent, zeal in defending the truth and its purity. Perhaps we can imagine him pushing for similar violent action against evil in this situation as well. He likely was one of the foremost voices exhorting the tribes to repentance after the defeats on the first and second days of battle.

On this occasion, God, presumably satisfied with their change in attitude towards Him, finally promised victory. On the third day, again in parallel

with the conquest of Ai in Joshua 8, the Israelites laid an ambush against Gibeah. In Joshua 8, God commanded them to do this, but on this occasion, we aren't told whose idea it was.

On the third day, we first get to see the battle from Benjamin's point of view. In verses 32 and 39, we see their confidence that Israel is fleeing as they did twice before. Presumably, they know nothing about the change of attitude the eleven tribes have gone through and God's new willingness to help them.

In verse 34, we see their complete ignorance of their imminent destruction, and in verses 40-41, their sudden dismay at the now inevitable defeat. We should reflect that these will be the general feelings of the world in which we live when Jesus returns. Most people have no idea he is coming and will have no reason to think anything has changed when he does. They will realize too late that the way of things they wish to cling to is gone forever.

The smoke rising out of the burning city was a sign to the "fleeing" Israelites to turn back and re-engage in battle. What was a sign of impending victory for those on God's side was a sign of inescapable doom to those clinging to the side of evil. The return of Christ will be no different.

Unfortunately, the similarities between these two events only go so far. Instead of the Israelites beginning a time of peace and justice and faithfulness to God, they turned only to more bloodshed and violence. The fleeing army of Benjamin was almost entirely cut down. The Benjamite towns, now without any fighting men to defend them, were burned and the citizens massacred.

Ironically this sort of warfare was what God had commanded to be done to the Canaanites in the first place, something the Israelites mainly had failed to do. That failure was the reason they had become more and more like Canaanites themselves in their thinking and lifestyle, doing only what was right in their own eyes. Now that way of thinking had led to the unsanctioned slaughter of fellow Israelites. Their failure had come full circle.

God had not commanded Benjamin to be wiped out. Did wrath consume the tribes after two humiliating defeats? Were they determined to wipe out the evil “infecting” Benjamin before it could spread to anyone else? Did they convince themselves this was what God wanted them to do? Israel overreacted disastrously in their massacre of Benjamin. Ultimately they only harmed themselves by almost losing an entire tribe, including many excellent fighters who were now unavailable to help engage the Canaanites.

If sin within the community is dealt with in a heavy-handed or over-the-top manner, the whole community may suffer. There is always a danger that in the zeal to eradicate evil, the innocent will be destroyed along with it. This should cause us to think very carefully about our approach to those in our midst who are consistently unrepentant of their sin.

Nevertheless, sin must be opposed and confronted in the correct, godly manner. Anything that stands in opposition to God must be challenged. We should not make the mistake of thinking that it is “unloving” to hurt a person’s feelings by confronting their sins and encouraging them to turn to God in repentance. Daniel Block (1943- ), Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, puts it this way: “The extent to which people will stand up to defend evil and evildoers is a measure of how deeply rooted is the Canaanizing rot in a culture.”<sup>2</sup> If we leave a person to do what is right in their own eyes and tell ourselves we are acting in love, we are badly mistaken.

Block sums up Judges 20 with “Perhaps most ironic of all, this chapter portrays the nation of Israel engaged in a holy war against their kinsmen with all the passion they should have displayed in their war against the Canaanites. Israel has discovered who her greatest foe is: she is her own worst enemy.”<sup>3</sup>

Is there genuine passion in your faith? If so, where is it directed? Toward the pursuit of godly principles and character in your own life? Toward the encouragement of the same in others? Toward what’s right in your own eyes or the eyes of God?

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, Publishers, 1999), from the New American Commentary series. Page 557.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* Page 568.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* Page 569.

## THE BIBLE AND FOOD

## PART 2

*“You give them something to eat”**By Lorna Dean*

**SCRIPTURE** is liberally seasoned with the provision of food and woven with the golden thread of hospitality. How might we practically use ideas about food to follow Jesus?

When Jesus is speaking to friends and followers who already believe in him, he directly preaches the good news of the Kingdom of God. But when he comes across those who are marginalized or on the edges of society, those who have had a bad experience with “religion,” who have been knocked down by life, who can barely summon up the energy to listen, who can’t take one more disappointment, then he sits down with them and eats. And the lonely person finds empathy and kindness at that table and someone who will truly listen to them.

You might wonder how you fit into your world, anxious that you are not the sort of person who has any worth or value. You might doubt if there is anyone out there who would want to be your friend. Jesus is that friend. He has asked

you to sit next to him. He was endlessly criticized for eating and drinking with the wrong sort of people (Matt 9:10). The Pharisees and lawyers called him a glutton and a drunkard. They willfully misunderstood what they saw. Jesus sat down to eat with sinners; he didn’t sit down to sin with sinners. He’s still calling out down the side streets and over by the park benches. And he needs us now to be that friend who invites the lonely or troubled to take a seat at the table. If you’ve ever walked into the dining room at a Bible School and looked out and seen everyone eating and chatting at crowded tables and have stood worried and paralyzed with your tray, not knowing where you could find a place, then Jesus has a seat next to him for you at his table. Jesus is looking for friends who are like this: *“He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend.”* (Prov 22:11 ESV).

In the lonely world of the 21st century, scared and alarmed by crises,

sociologists tell us that the thing people want most is to belong. Jesus tells us that the people on the streets that hustled into his banquet were the poor, the blind, the lame. All the people who didn't belong, with no access to the Temple, never invited to sit at the table, stepped around by people hurrying by. They are now sharing a meal with Jesus. What about these challenging words? "It seems to me that if we eat the body and blood of Christ in expensive churches without care for the hungry, the sacrament is no longer a foretaste of the feast to come but a trivialized picnic to which not everyone is invited."<sup>1</sup>

### RISE TO THE CHALLENGE

Our world is questioning its response to injustice and inequality. You might be making conscious decisions to be better aware of what is happening and wondering how to offer the hope of the gospel message in a meaningful way.

A missionary who lived for many years in India had this to say about making a difference in our inequitable world, "The living God is a God of justice and mercy, and He will be satisfied with nothing less than a people in whom His justice and mercy are alive."<sup>2</sup>

Food is one good way to connect with people of other cultures and other faiths. If a friend says they care about social justice, you could quietly show that the God you serve has mandated that people have enough to eat, that workers are treated fairly, that animals are raised humanely and that crops are grown environmentally responsibly. His laws cleared generational debt every 50th year when land was returned to its rightful owners, and

no farming was done, the fields left fallow. You could show them how God from the beginning told man to look after the earth and treat his neighbor with dignity. That laws laid out in Deuteronomy tell us to open our hand to the poor, to leave the fruit trees to flourish and a border in the field for those who need it. This generous way of living meant that King David could say that he had never seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. But how could you or I say that? We see hunger all around us. David lived in a God-oriented dispensation. We live in a godless world of greed and misuse of resources. But how many times have you or I been moved by what we've seen or read and yet done nothing about it? How can we respond? Psalm 37:26 tells us this: the Lord God is ever generous. We can copy that. Ever generous.

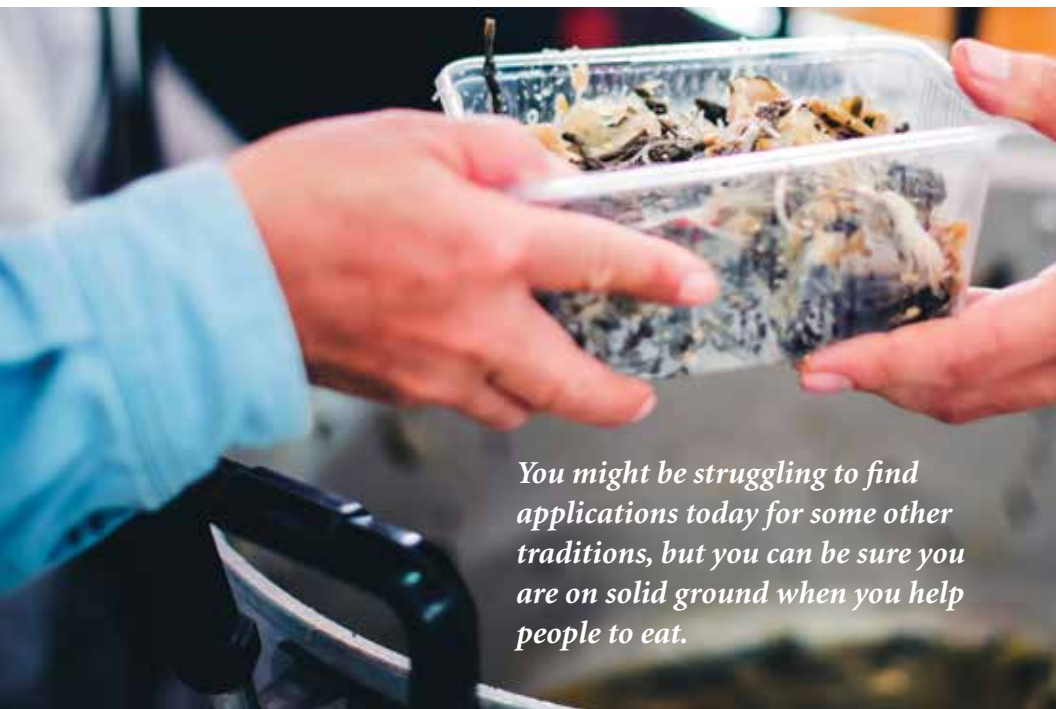
We are incapable, as Jesus himself tells us, of helping or feeding every poor person in the world. But that is not a get-out clause to do nothing.

We are incapable, as Jesus himself tells us, of helping or feeding every poor person in the world. But that is not a get-out clause to do nothing. In Matthew's gospel (26:11), he picks up Deuteronomy 15 and tells us that people with needs are always going to be here. While the laws of a just God do not prevail in our world, we have an opportunity to act to help. The prophet Amos was a shepherd and a gardener, looking after the sycamore fig trees,

and he calls out Israel for amassing their wealth while oppressing the poor and crushing the needy. This sin, he says in chapter 8, will spell the end of them as a nation, heading to a day of darkness and exile from God when only a tiny remnant will remain to be restored. Israel had trampled the head of the poor into the dust of the earth. They'd sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a new pair of shoes, and God was sickened with their unjust ways. I look in my closet and see a lot of fancy shoes, but I persuade myself that's probably not what God is talking about. We know from the Gospels that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor. They will be blessed and the rich disappointed. So perhaps, like David, we see what we see with our own eyes, in our own street, in our own neighborhood, in our own city, and we

can learn to be generous givers—not qualified at all by our financial starting point or our natural inclinations, but by a change of our character to be like our Lord.

Asking someone to eat with us doesn't require fine china, lots of money, wine glasses or a vase of Pinterest flowers. We are not aiming for “Instagramable.” Hospitality requires our time and effort, our prayers and patience, our thoughtfulness and generosity. And sometimes these are more challenging things to find than the wine glasses and the flowers. God knows that serving someone food on a plate is something everyone can pick up on and put into action. You might be struggling to find applications today for some other traditions, but you can be sure you are on solid ground when you help people to eat.



*You might be struggling to find applications today for some other traditions, but you can be sure you are on solid ground when you help people to eat.*



“[Jesus] did not come as the celebrity messiah everyone was expecting... [but] as the suffering servant the baby refugee, the homeless rabbi.... Jesus did not simply come to help the poor; he came as the poor.”<sup>3</sup> Get involved in helping people to eat in the larger world arena through organizations like Christadelphian Meal-a-Day, who run food, water and education projects. Or through The Garden Outreach Initiatives, linking up with others to help with supporting the homeless. Consider volunteering at a street kitchen or a homeless shelter in your ecclesial neighborhood.

You can make a meal and do something direct and basic and real to address this challenge in your own small sphere—like the Lord Jesus did, with love and

kindness, one meal at a time. “A shared meal is the activity most closely tied to the reality of God’s Kingdom, just as it is the most basic expression of hospitality.”<sup>4</sup>

More than 54 million Americans, including 17 million children, are currently relying on help to put food on the table. We need to make sure that we are generous to the best of our ability—“*Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over,*” (Luke 6:38 ESV). God calls us to share our bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into our houses, and if we do that, He promises that He will guide us continually, He will answer our cries, and that our darkness and gloom will be instead like shining light and the brightness of high noon (Isa 58:7-8).

## PRAGMATISMS

There are some practicalities and obstacles to deal with. Maybe you are a student in a dorm, and your college roommate hates religion, and there’s no way you could invite a friend over to eat and to talk about God. Maybe you are in a family with little sympathy for your beliefs, and you just can’t invite people home. Maybe you live alone and would feel frightened about inviting a stranger. Maybe you’re struggling to stretch your budget to feed your own family. Maybe, because of COVID-19, you can’t imagine having anyone round for dinner ever again. Take heart, “If the righteousness of God is present, there is always enough to go around.”<sup>5</sup>

If your home is not a safe space to talk about God and Jesus, go out. When money is tight, make cheese



sandwiches to take to the park. Sit socially distanced at a sticky plastic-topped café table and talk about things that matter. Jesus sorts out fish and bread, not lobster and meringues. And he says not to mistake hospitality for entertainment. This isn't a photo op for your social media pages. Hospitality doesn't need a return invitation. It is quietly done with the desire to share the gospel message at its heart. If you can't cook, then spend less time looking at cute cat videos and master some simple recipes.

Jesus gives us the courage to act. When the disciples see a crowd as a logistical mealtime nightmare, Jesus sees lost souls waiting to be fed. Start everything with prayer. Tell your ecclesia you'd like to invite someone over to listen to their story and share a little of your faith. If you'd be in over your head answering questions or if the problem you're hearing from a friend is overwhelming, still don't worry. Talk to a family in your meeting, and ask if they would open their home for you.

### THE LESSON

Trying to think ahead and plan meals might sound contrived. Shouldn't our witness just be spontaneous and spur of the moment? It is what our life should look like, always swinging into action with faith and food and testimony. But truly, is that your life? I know it isn't mine. If I want something to happen, I generally need to do some work. And

Luke in the Book of Acts reassures us that this is no bad thing. In the wildfire enthusiasm for preaching after Jesus' resurrection, practical matters got a little lost. We nod in sage agreement with Acts 6:2 ESV, "*It is not right that we should give up the preaching of the word of God to serve tables.*" Seeing as lackluster the work in question, the distribution to the Greek widows, making sure fatherless families got fed. But look at how seriously God takes it. The man appointed to co-ordinate is totally exceptional—one of the most spiritual, dynamic, educated, Christ-like characters we have the good fortune to model ourselves on. A young man in his late 20s, the early Christian martyr Stephen, the narrative says, is full of faith and the Holy Spirit. He will later give one of the most compelling testimonies ever recorded (Acts 7). His assignment isn't some side-line task. It is to work hand-in-hand with the preaching of the gospel. Making sure everyone had enough to eat was overseen by seven incredible people. The verse that follows their inauguration says that "*the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly.*" (Acts 6:7). When preaching and pastoral care are intertwined, we know God will bless the work.

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**Next Issue:** *The Breaking of Bread Meal.*

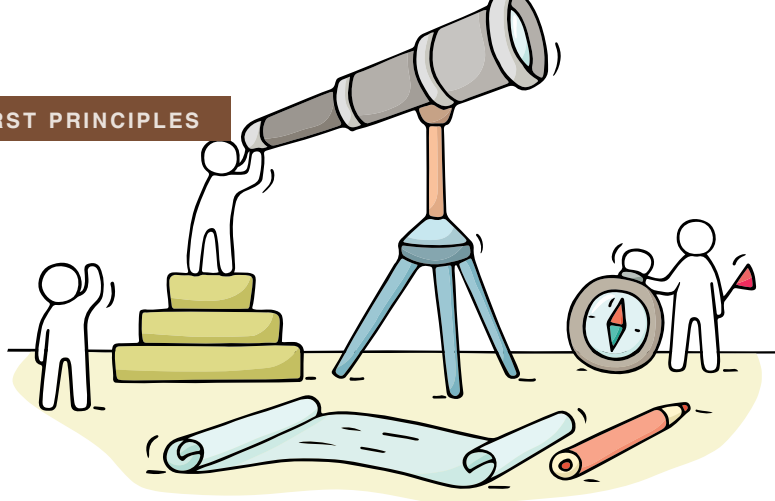
1 *Power, Weakness and the Tabernacling of God*, Marva Dawn, 2001

2 *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Lesslie Newbigin, 1989

3 *Follow me to Freedom*, Clairborne and Perkins, 2009

4 *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christine Pohl, 1999

5 *Breaking Generational Poverty*, (Meeks), Robert L. Graves, 2017



# TRUE PRINCIPLES & UNCERTAIN DETAILS ABOUT PROPHECY

## PART 3

By Joe Hill

### THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL RESTORED

**BASF Clause #21**—That the Kingdom which he will establish will be the Kingdom of Israel restored, in the territory it formerly occupied, namely, the land bequeathed for an everlasting possession to Abraham and his Seed (the Christ) by covenant.<sup>1</sup>

**BASF Clause #22** — That this restoration of the Kingdom again to Israel will involve the ingathering of God’s chosen but scattered nation, the Jews; their reinstatement in the land of their fathers, when it shall have been reclaimed from “the desolation of many generations”; the building again of Jerusalem to become “the throne of the Lord” and the metropolis of the whole earth.<sup>2</sup>

**A**GAIN, these are fundamental principles of the one true gospel. They are based on, among other Scriptures, the beautiful restoration prophecies of Ezekiel:

*“And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the*

*children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to*

*them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.” (Ezek 37:21-22).*

*“And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it.” (Ezek 36:34-36).*

These passages are from the second part of the book of Ezekiel, which plays an important role in much of our understanding of end-times prophecy. Ezekiel can be outlined as follows:

**Part 1.** “Israel of the Past” (Ezekiel 1-33)

- A. Against Jerusalem (1-24)
- B. Against Moab, Ammon, Edom, the Philistines, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt (25-32)
- C. The Fall of Jerusalem (33)

**Part 2.** “Israel of the Future” (Ezekiel 34-48)

- A. A prophecy which asserts Yahweh’s kingship against the rulers of the past (34)
- B. A two-panel prophecy in which the land of Israel is claimed against foreign occupiers (35:1-36:15)
- C. An anthology focusing on spiritual transformation and the blessing resulting from this transformation (36:16-38)

**D.** The central vision of Israel’s transformation—political and spiritual aspects combined (37:1-14)

**C.** A sign act on political transformation with another anthology of blessings resulting from the transformation (37:15-28)

**B.** A two-panel prophecy in which Israel’s security in the land is affirmed against foreign nations (38-39)

**A.** A vision which asserts Yahweh’s kingship in territorial rhetoric (40-48)”<sup>3</sup>

Part 2 tells how Yahweh will restore and transform His people Israel. As indicated by the lettering in the outline, Ezekiel 34-48 forms a chiasmus whose center is the “Vision of Dry Bones” (Ezek 37:1-14), which represents God’s “resurrection” of Israel, when they have lost all hope:

*“Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.” (Ezek 37:11-14).*

Ezekiel 34	Ezekiel 36-39
34:13 I will... gather them... and will bring them to their own land (cf. Deut 30:3-4)	36:24; 37:21; 38:8, 12; 39:27, 28 I will... gather you... and will bring you into your own land
34:23 I will set up one shepherd over them	37:24 they all shall have one shepherd
34:23, 24 my servant David	37:24, 25 David my servant... my servant David
34:24 I the LORD will be their God (cf. Lev 26:12)	37:23, 27 I will be their God
34:25 I will make with them a covenant of peace (cf. Lev 26:9)	37:26 I will make a covenant of peace with them
34:25 I will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land (cf. Lev 26:6)	
	37:27 My tabernacle also shall be with them (cf. Lev 26:11; cf. Ezek 40-48)
34:25, 27, 28 they shall dwell safely... they shall be safe in their land... they shall dwell safely (cf. Lev 26:5)	38:8, 14; 39:26 when my people dwell safely
34:26 I will cause the shower to come down in his season (cf. Lev 26:4)	
34:27 And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit (cf. Lev 26:4)	36:30 I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field
34:27 I have broken the bands of their yoke (cf. Lev 26:13)	
34:30 they, even the house of Israel, are my people (cf. Lev 26:12)	36:8, 12, 20, 28; 37:12, 13; 38:14, 16; 39:7 my people Israel

## THE NEW COVENANT

These chapters have to do with the new covenant (cf. Lev 26:3-13; Deut 30:3-4). The **above table** shows the connections between Ezekiel 34 and Ezekiel 36-39.

The references to Israel being Yahweh's people, who He has gathered back into the Promised Land, and who are now dwelling safely without fear of their enemies are all new covenant themes that continue right on into Ezekiel 38-39. All of Ezekiel 34-48 refer to Yahweh's fulfillment of His promised new covenant blessings. The restoration at the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi was an initial fulfillment of these blessings. The Kingdom Age will be the ultimate fulfillment.

## UNCERTAIN DETAIL: WHO IS GOG?

Since Bro. Thomas took Gog (Ezek 38-39) to be Russia in his book *Elpis Israel*, this identification has been repeated over and over in our literature and lectures. It is a common interpretation among many Christian groups besides us Christadelphians.

Unfortunately, there are serious questions about its legitimacy, as illustrated by the following quotes from various Bible scholars:

"Certainly... ('chief') is to be connected to... ('prince') and is not to be interpreted as a geographical indication... This renders superfluous the various attempts



to find an equivalent of [ro'sh]... in the Russians.” (Zimmerli).<sup>4</sup>

“So it is necessary to repeat that *ro'sh meshech* (38:2) has nothing to do, etymologically or otherwise, with Russia or Moscow... Gog is further described as ‘chief prince’ of Meshech and Tubal. There are only two proper names here, since *ro'sh* (‘chief, head’) is nowhere attested as such. It has no more connection with Russia (a name of Norse extraction) than Meshech has with Moscow. There is an evil empire here, but it is not the USSR.” (Blenkinsopp).<sup>5</sup>

“Heb ‘the prince, the chief of Meshech and Tubal.’ Some translate ‘the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal,’ but it is more likely that the Hebrew noun in question is a common noun in apposition to ‘prince,’ rather than a proper name.

See D. I. Block, *Ezekiel* (NICOT), 2:434-35. As Block demonstrates, attempts by some popular writers to identify these proper names with later geographical sites in Russia are anachronistic. See as well E. Yamauchi, *Foes From the Northern Frontier*, 19-27.” (NET Bible, 1996-2017, translation note on Ezekiel 38:2).

Other possibilities have been proposed. For example, several expositors, including some Christadelphians,<sup>6</sup> have connected Gog to Agag (Num 24:7), the king of the Amalekites (1 Sam 15); the two names “Gog” and “Agag” are nearly identical in Hebrew. Alan Fowler suggested that the initial historical application of Ezekiel’s prophecy of Gog’s invasion of Israel might refer specifically to Haman the Agagite (Esther 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24) and his attempt to destroy the nation



of Israel.<sup>7</sup> Bro. Fowler also linked the other passages in Ezekiel to the time of the restoration. In any case, we should remember that the original setting of Ezekiel was the exile of Israel following the Babylonian destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. This setting should play a critical role in our understanding of his prophecies.

With respect to modern day applications, humility dictates that we recognize our limitations in identifying Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and that we refrain from requiring others to adopt our own viewpoints, even if they are traditional. These details are not first principles and we need to be careful not to treat them as such.

On a related topic, Bro. Harry Whittaker made a case for a last days' application of the prophecies about Edom (Esau), Moab and Ammon (Lot), Tyre and Sidon, the Philistines, and the Ishmaelites (Hagar the Egyptian)—e.g., Ezekiel 35-36; Obadiah; Psalm 83—to the modern Arab nations and their hostilities towards the nation of Israel.<sup>8</sup> Others have argued against this position, going so far as to say these prophecies don't indicate a successful invasion of Israel by these nations.<sup>9</sup> Again, it is best to acknowledge our uncertainty about these details.

### UNCERTAIN DETAIL: WHEN WILL THESE THINGS HAPPEN?

Another major issue is the question of timing. When will the Gogian host invade Israel? And will they be successful or not? The traditional view is that Gog will invade Israel prior to the return of Christ and that

the invasion will be successful. On the other hand, based on the references to new covenant blessings continuing into Ezekiel 38-39 (see table above), others have suggested that this invasion will come after Christ's return and will be a complete failure.<sup>10</sup>

Renz shows that Ezekiel 38-39 is a two-panel prophecy each having a sequence of four panels:<sup>11</sup>

#### Panel A: The Defeat of Gog (38:2-23)

Frame 1: The Conscription of Gog (38:2-9)

Frame 2: The Motives of Gog (38:10-13)

Frame 3: The Advance of Gog (38:14-16)

Frame 4: The Judgement of Gog (38:17-22)

Interpretative	Conclusion
(38:23)	

#### Panel B: The Disposal of Gog (39:1-20)

Frame 1: The Slaughter of Gog (39:1-8)

Frame 2: The Spoiling of Gog (39:9-10)

Frame 3: The Burial of Gog (39:11-16)

Frame 4: The Devouring of Gog (39:17-20)

Interpretative	Conclusion
(39:21-24)	

If this outline accurately summarizes the content of the two chapters, as it seems to do, then there doesn't seem to be any basis case for a successful invasion.

Again, we need to allow for different opinions. We should also think twice

about using our own understanding of these prophecies as the basis of our preaching and teaching of first principles. We are completely confident that someday the Kingdom of God will be established on the earth, and it will be the restored nation of Israel. The details of what will happen before that actually happens, and what nations will be involved, is in God's hands. We must study His word and be prepared as best we can to recognize its fulfillment when it comes to pass. Beyond that, we should be careful not to impose our ideas on others.

## CONCLUSION

Ezekiel summarizes Yahweh's interactions with His people:

*"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby*

*they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house."* (Ezek 39:25-29).

We may be unsure of some of the details, but the essential principles are plain for all to see, understand and believe!

Joe Hill  
(Austin Leander, TX)

1 Mic 4:6-8; Amos 9:11, 15; Ezek 37:21-22; Jer 23:3, 8; Gen 13:14-17; Heb 11:8-9; Gal 3:16; Lev 16:42; Mic 7:20.

2 Isa 11:12; Jer 31:10; Zech 8:8; Ezek 36:34-36; Isa 51:3; 60:15; 62:4; Jer 3:17; Micah 4:7-8; Joel 3:17; Isa 24:23.

3 The phrases "Israel of the Past" and "Israel of the Future" and the chiasmic structure for Part 2 above are from Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, Brill Academic Publishers, 2002, p. 128.

4 Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Chapters 25-48, Hermeneia, Fortress Press, 1983, p. 305.

5 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, John Know Press, 1990, pp. 181, 184.

6 P. Wynn, "An Intertextual Analysis of Ezekiel 38 (Part 1)," *Christadelphian eJournal of Biblical Interpretation*, Vol. 10, No. 4, Oct 2016, pp. 21-40; [www.christadelphian-ejbi.org/pdfs/eJournal16q4.pdf](http://www.christadelphian-ejbi.org/pdfs/eJournal16q4.pdf). Nathan Kitchen, "Ezekiel's Gog Oracle," [www.living-faith.org/2019/08/12/ezekiels-gog-oracle/](http://www.living-faith.org/2019/08/12/ezekiels-gog-oracle/).

7 Alan Fowler, "Suggestion: Ezekiel 38-39 Explored," *Tidings*, March 2005, pp. 119-125.

8 See, for example, Harry Whittaker, *The Last Days*, Chapter 2, "Jew and Arab" ([www.christadelphianbooks.org/haw/lastdays/ch03](http://www.christadelphianbooks.org/haw/lastdays/ch03)) and *Jews, Arabs, and Bible Prophecy*.

9 Don Styles, *Israel's Defeat: by Gog or the Arabs?*, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service.

10 See, for example, Harry Whittaker, *The Last Days*, Chapter 1, "The Gog-Magog Invasion. When?" ([www.christadelphianbooks.org/haw/lastdays/ch02](http://www.christadelphianbooks.org/haw/lastdays/ch02)), and *Time of the End*, Chapter 18, "Gog of the Land of Magog," ([www.christadelphianbooks.org/haw/timeofend/ch19](http://www.christadelphianbooks.org/haw/timeofend/ch19))

11 Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, Brill Academic Publishers, 2002, p. 119.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Bro. David,

Of recent years, we have seen many brothers and sisters referring to the Lord Jesus Christ as our “elder brother.” I can understand their reasoning, based on several Scriptures. For example, we read in Hebrews 2:11-12, *“he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, I will tell of your name to my brothers.”* (ESV). However, we also need to notice these passages are referring to Christ’s attitude towards his disciples, not the other way around.

Also notice in verse 13 the quote is, *“I and the children which God hath given me.”* (ESV). Verses 11-12 are used to support calling Jesus our brother, along with what Jesus himself said, *“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”* (ESV).

Notice in the last quote, nobody would assume to call herself the “mother” of Christ, or in Hebrews 2:13, to call himself a “child” of Christ.

Does this suggest we’re picking and choosing which to apply and which to gloss over?

Obviously, it’s Christ’s prerogative to call us his brothers and sisters, and it is to our honor to be called as such. It’s his honor to bestow and not ours to claim. As Christadelphians, we have taken the name Brethren in Christ, not Brethren of Christ.

We have always strived to be careful Bible readers. We try not to pick out passages which support our views while ignoring others which do not. For me, what Jesus said to his apostles, *“You call me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am,”* (John 13:13 ESV) is really important. Even more important is that nowhere in Scripture do Christ’s disciples call him “brother Jesus.” Even as Stephen died for his Master and was granted the blessing of seeing Jesus standing in honor of the sacrifice of his faithful servant, Stephen called to his Lord, *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* (Acts 7:59).

We know we are privileged to call the LORD God “Our Father.” That is an honor which we can claim. A Father is above and greater than his children. We also know that Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father, but to call him “our brother” while we are still in our present, mortal and sinful state is not given to us. That would be bringing the risen Son of God down to our level. We know that *“At the name of Jesus, ever knee should bow, in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Phil 2:10-11 ESV).

So, although we have the blessing of the love of Christ, and a special relationship with our Lord, let us also remember to honor him as we love him.

Margaret Stonell  
(North Bay, ON)



# ENGAGING PREACHING RESOURCES

*By Dan Weatherall*

**B**IBLEFEED.ORG is a growing collection of podcasts, videos and other material to preach the gospel in a modern, relatable and accessible way. In this article, I share some of the scriptural reasoning that sits behind our aims and suggest ways in which you can use the content—and also how you can help.

## A PREACHING TEMPLATE FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL

I sometimes wonder what the Apostle Paul would be doing if he lived in today's world. How would he preach? What tools would he have used? What sort of things would he be saying? Would his preaching be comparable to all our community's different initiatives? I suspect we would all be stunned by his constant drive and enthusiasm and also his willingness to think outside

the box to win hearts and minds for Christ. Perhaps 1 Corinthians 9:22 is suggestive of how he would constantly adapt to a changing world, becoming "*all things to all people*," ensuring he gained an audience in every situation. Perhaps 1 Corinthians 2:2 is an important reminder to us that his preaching content would not have strayed far from teaching the simple good news message of "*Jesus Christ and him crucified*." Undoubtedly, he would be reaching out to people rather than waiting for people to come to him. That was, after all, the *raison d'être* of his whole life.

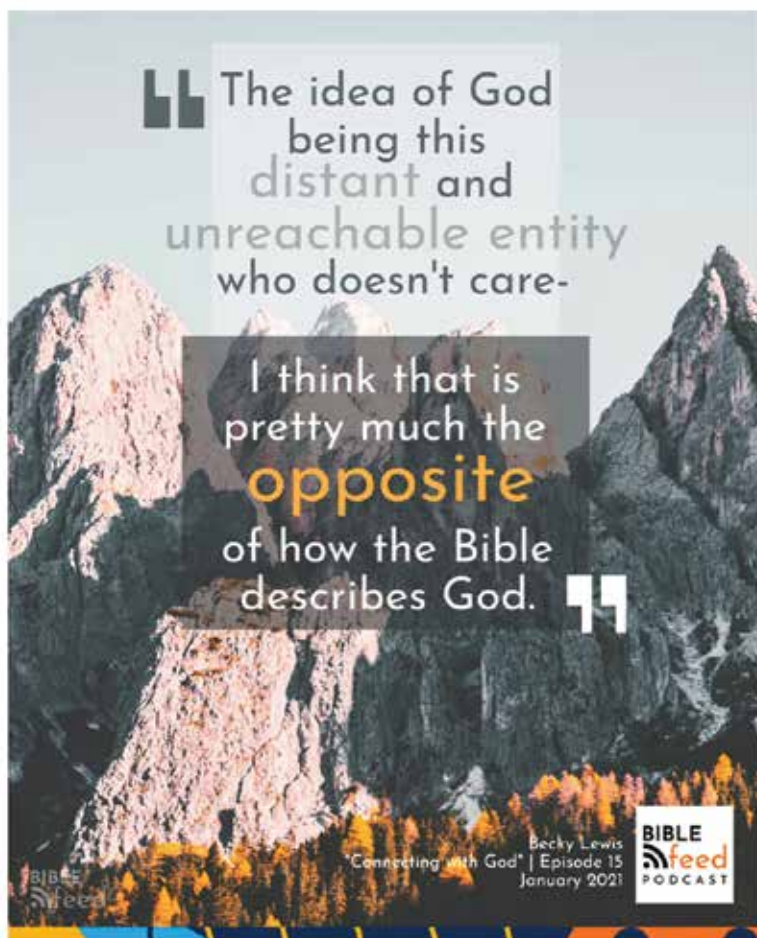
Paul's mission was characterized by preaching the core good news and taking this message to people in a way that gave them the best opportunity to engage with the Word and be converted



by it. Whether or not we have the same mandate as Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, we are called by our Lord to be “a city set on a hill” that cannot be hid and “*the light of the world.*” (Matt 5:14). We can learn much from Paul’s approach and how he broke down as many barriers as possible to allow people to come to Christ. As a city on a hill, visible to all around, we can aim to make our preaching as accessible as possible, using all the tools available to us in ways that engage with people. This is why Bible Feed was born.

## A GROWING HUB OF RESOURCES

There are many preaching initiatives in our community, but I thought that there was a need for something else online that was accessible and approachable. Something I would be happy sharing with interested friends and contacts. Something that tried as much as possible to fit Paul’s preaching criteria. With the help of several enthusiastic brothers and sisters, we created a growing hub of resources we hope are engaging and relevant and teach the Truth in accessible ways in a modern world.



## We really try to focus on being relevant to the concerns and questions of people living in this modern world, always bringing Christ into the conversation.

Our podcast is built around a series of conversations about the Bible and faith in the modern world. This currently lies at the center of what we do. We host discussions with different brothers and sisters, choosing topics and sections of Scripture to illuminate important truths. We are midway through a series that is walking through the Gospel of Matthew and have opened a conversation on the origins of the Trinity. We avoid speculative topics such as predictions based on interpretations of prophecy, and we really try to focus on being relevant to the concerns and questions of people living in this modern world—always bringing Christ into the conversation. The episode on “The God Question” discussed several philosophical reasons why it makes sense to believe in a God, while “Connecting with God” explored concepts running through the entire Bible about being in God’s image and how that relates to being part of the body of Christ.

We know from website analytics that the podcast is being listened to, and we would be delighted if you could recommend it to your friends and family. It’s easy to send someone a link to a specific episode if you’ve been asked a question. It would be wonderful to know it is being used by Christadelphians in their personal preaching conversations. Even if you don’t have opportunity to share it with anyone, listening along helps to

boost the visibility of the podcast, as does leaving a review on the podcast app you use. For most of the podcast episodes, we release short soundbite videos on Facebook and YouTube for promotion. Short video clips are an excellent way to reach large audiences on social media and direct them to our content.

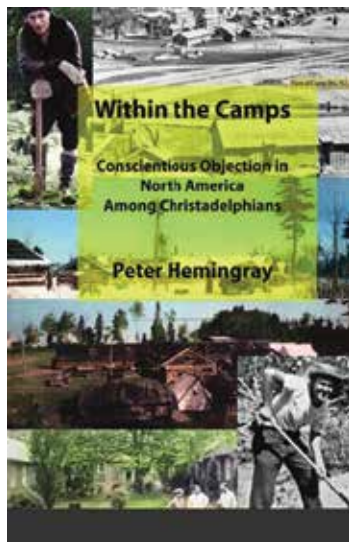
Everything we do is brought together in a hub of resources on our website at [www.biblefeed.org](http://www.biblefeed.org), where you can find episode show notes, additional blog articles and links to other preaching material from our community. Our website is searchable, and all posts are tagged and categorized, making it a user-friendly experience to navigate around the site. You can link to [biblefeed.org](http://biblefeed.org) on your ecclesial webpage to encourage more traffic or perhaps embed one of our YouTube videos. One voice among many podcasts is on the rise. There are a vast number of Christian podcasts out there, representing a bewildering number of Christian traditions and ranging from sermons to conversational episodes like ours. We pray that the Bible Feed podcast and all the other resources around it can be one voice among the masses that can take God’s call to some in the world. We hope it can play a small part in building faith in God, increasing understanding of the Bible, and ultimately leading people to Christ.

*Dan Weatherall,  
(Whitestone, UK)*

## BOOK REVIEW

# Within the Camps: Conscientious Objection in North America Among Christadelphians

*By Peter Hemingray*



The letter to the Hebrews encourages us to follow the example of faithful men and women who embraced the promises of God, and “*confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*” (11:13). Like them, we are encouraged to leave aside earthly attachments and to “*go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach, for here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*” (13:13-14). Many first century recipients of this exhortation made these choices

at great personal cost; Hebrews 12:14 (ESV) says, rather ominously, that “*In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.*” The persecutions to come, under Nero and Domitian, are horrifying to contemplate.

Brothers and sisters in the western world today face little in the way of persecution. This is a blessing, mostly. But the challenge of living in an affluent, permissive society is to have our vision fixed on the Kingdom, to

see clearly. Moses could well have been blinded by the prosperity of his Egyptian circumstances, but instead (in the rich cadences of the KJV) *“had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”* (11:26). *“He endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”* (11:27).

It is not that long ago that some of our number took the courageous stand of conscientious objection to military service. It was a difficult decision to take during the Vietnam war, and perhaps even more difficult in World War 2, due to the scale of the conflict and the seeming righteousness of the Allied cause. The courage of our brethren in those difficult times is worth contemplating. I’m inspired by the examples of my own father (in WW2) and both grandfathers (in WW1). But there are now few brethren alive who have had to face this challenge. Our last surviving conscientious objectors to WW1 fell asleep in the 1990s, and (so far as I know) there is only one from WW2 still alive.

The brotherhood thus owes a debt of gratitude to Bro. Peter Hemingray

for his compilation of the history of Christadelphian conscientious objection in North America. Bro. Peter’s thoroughly researched book traces our history of conscientious objection back to the American Civil War, with details on its role in the choice of our “Christadelphian” name. He traces the legal history of conscientious objection in the US and Canada and the hard work of brethren in gaining our community’s status as religious objectors. The book is seasoned with first-hand accounts of the experiences of our brethren. Many of the names mentioned will be familiar to us: fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers who *“had respect unto the recompense of the reward”* and were willing to endure severe difficulties for their faith. Some were imprisoned, a few died; many spent time “within the camps”—performing alternative service with little or no compensation—rather than serving in the military. Many suffered the reproaches of their contemporaries.

William Link  
(Baltimore, MD)



#### 2021 SPRING INITIATIVE

In the United States and Canada, approx. 40,000,000 people, including **12,000,000 children**, live in a food-insecure household.

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**BUILD A GARDEN | FREE GARDENING KIT | BUY GROCERIES**

The Garden Outreach Project’s **Grow2Give** initiative aims to inspire Christadelphian families with children to learn about God and nature, and our responsibility to provide food for the hungry. Showing our children that they too have a role to play is an important step towards growing a compassionate faith.



Get started today at  
**[thegardenoutreach.org/grow2give](https://thegardenoutreach.org/grow2give)**

# NEWS & UPDATES

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## PITTSBURGH, PA

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We are sad to report the loss of our Bro. Troy Davis due to the Covid virus on March 28, 2021, at age 51. Bro. Troy studied the Scriptures through Sis. Marilyn Seago's preaching activity for prisoners. Sis. Jean Cheetham also assisted him with Bible study. He joined the Pittsburgh meeting while living in Erie, PA and met with us each Sunday by phone and then by Zoom. He had a strong belief and now awaits the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

*Kevin Flatley*

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## SOUTHWESTERN BIBLE SCHOOL

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The Southwest Christadelphian Bible School Committee is happy to announce that plans are being made to hold the Bible School this summer at the usual location on the campus of Schreiner University in Kerrville, TX. The dates are: July 11-17, 2021.

The teachers are Brethren Dennis Bevans, Mark Giordano and Jason Hensley.

Registration information is available on the website: **[www.swcbs.org](http://www.swcbs.org)**

*Dwayne Tunnell*

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## TIDINGS COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENT

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**Bro. Duncan Kenzie** recently decided to retire from the Tidings Committee after many years of faithful service. The Tidings Committee very much appreciates his past service, however Bro Duncan will continue contributing to the Magazine as he remains as the Section Editor for the Exhortation and Consolation section of the Magazine. We know brother Duncan continues to be active in other activities in the community continuing his desire to help build the faith of brothers and sisters. We pray our Heavenly Father will be with him and continue to bless his efforts.

*Alan Markwith, Chairman*



# Thoughts on the Way

## Revelation's Exhortations (3)

*"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth." (Rev 21:1)*

**T**HE following table outlines some of the comparisons (and contrasts) between Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22. In Genesis, God gave the first Adam authority over the physical creation. In Revelation, Jesus Christ—the last Adam—is how God will bring to completion His new, spiritual "creation."

Where the early chapters of Genesis tell a story of failure, they also provide

a pattern for success. What the first Adam lost, the last Adam (the Lord Jesus Christ) has found and recovered. The Book of Revelation is about so much more than the interpretation of difficult prophecies. It also tells the story of a new "creation," a new world, to be erected on the foundation of the old world—a beautiful paradise offered to all those who put their trust in our Savior.

GENESIS 1-3	REVELATION 20-22
Genesis, the book of beginnings.	Revelation, the book of the end.
The heavens and the earth are created (Gen 1:1).	The first "heaven" and "earth" pass away, and a new "heaven" and a new "earth" are created (Rev 21:1).
The sun is designated to rule or govern the day (Gen 1:16)	There is no more need for the "sun", because the Glory of God gives light (Rev 21:23)
The darkness is separated from the light and is called "night" (Gen 1:5)	"There will be no more night" (Rev 22:5)
The waters are separated from the dry lands and called "seas" (Gen 1:10)	There will no longer be any "sea" (Rev 21:1)
A river waters the Garden (Gen 2:10-14)	A river waters the Garden (Rev 22:1,2)
God creates man in His image, and gives him dominion over all His creation (Gen 1:26)	God creates, in His image, a glorious family of immortal men and women who "will reign for ever and ever" (Rev 22:3-5)
God also creates Eve, a companion for the first Adam (Gen 2:18-25)	They are the "Bride" — the companion for the "last Adam" (Rev 21:9,10)
But man's dominion is lost (Gen 1:28), or broken (Gen 3:19), and he is driven out of the Garden (Gen 3:24)	Through Jesus Christ, mankind's dominion is restored, in a renewed Garden (22:5)
Paradise is lost (Gen 3:23)	Paradise is restored (Rev 21:22-27)
The Tree of Life is lost (Gen 3:22)	The Tree of Life is regained (Rev 22:1)
Adam and Eve use leaves to cover their nakedness, but they prove ineffective (Gen 3:7)	The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2)

GENESIS 1-3	REVELATION 20-22
God imposes a curse upon the ground (Gen 3:17)	The curse is removed (Rev 22:3)
Mankind will experience sorrow and death (Gen 3:16-19)	"No more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Rev 21:4)
The Serpent (the symbol of sin and deception) triumphs (Gen 3:13)	The Serpent (i.e., sin and deception) is bound or restrained (Rev 20:2,3)
The doom of the old Serpent is pronounced (Gen 3:15)	The old Serpent is finally destroyed (Rev 20:10)
Adam and Eve are sent away from the presence of God (Gen 3:24)	God dwells with man again (Rev 21:22,23; 22:3,4)
Heaven and earth are separated from one another (Gen 1:6)	Heaven and earth are brought together, and their unity is restored (Rev 21:1,2)

*"They overcame... by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 12:11).*

This is the last reference in the Bible to the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here it is the overcoming blood, enabling believers to withstand the temptations of the world and to suppress and destroy the power of sin in their own lives. There are at least 43 references to the blood of Christ in the New Testament, all testifying to its great importance in the salvation and daily life of the believer.

It should go without saying, that the literal blood of Christ is not some magical potion to be adored superstitiously but that it is a Bible-based way to speak of his obedient sacrifice, with all that it includes.

The blood of Christ is described in various ways in the New Testament. Judas, the betrayer, spoke of Christ's blood as *"innocent blood."* (Matt 27:4). Peter called it *"the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* (1 Pet 1:19). It is the cleansing blood in 1 John 1:7 and the washing blood in Revelation 1:5, stressing that it removes the guilt of

our sins. Paul calls it the purchasing blood in Acts 20:28 and the redeeming blood twice (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14), thus declaring that Christ's obedience in shedding his blood was the price paid for our salvation. Therefore, it is also the justifying blood (Rom 5:9) and the peacemaking blood (Col 1:20). However, its effectiveness does not end when we are baptized, for it is also the sanctifying blood that remains with us throughout our lives (Heb 13:12), helping us to "overcome."

There is infinite and eternal power in the blood of Christ, for it is *"the blood of [God's] everlasting covenant."* (Heb 13:20). The first reference in the New Testament to Christ's blood stresses this "covenant" aspect. At the Last Supper, Jesus said:

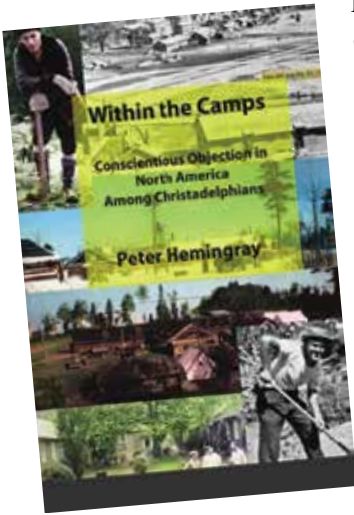
*"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* (Matt 26:28).

Without Christ's blood, we will certainly perish. With it, we will live forever.

George Booker,  
(Austin Leander, TX)

# Within the Camps: Conscientious Objection in North America Among Christadelphians

*By Peter Hemingray*



How many know about Ernest Wells, who died in Leavenworth Prison for his faith? Or of those who suffered torture, imprisonment and shipment overseas so that succeeding generations might be able to avoid such treatment?

Christadelphians in North America suffered greatly in WW1 to establish the principle that they could not, in good conscience, serve in the Armed Forces in any capacity, so they were, at best, forced into Army camps after conscription, or sentenced to prison. In WW2, they were sent to camps to perform manual labor under sometimes harsh conditions in

remote locations—and in the case of the USA, forced to pay for the privilege. It is to remind us of their sacrifice for their faith that this book was written, and it is to be hoped that it will help ensure their sacrifice in the camps was not in vain.

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