

TIDINGS

Volume 85, Number 10, November 2022



SCRIPTURAL RESPONSE TO CONTROVERSY

Unity is more important than
our personal insistence on being right.

Building faith in
the Christadelphian
community.

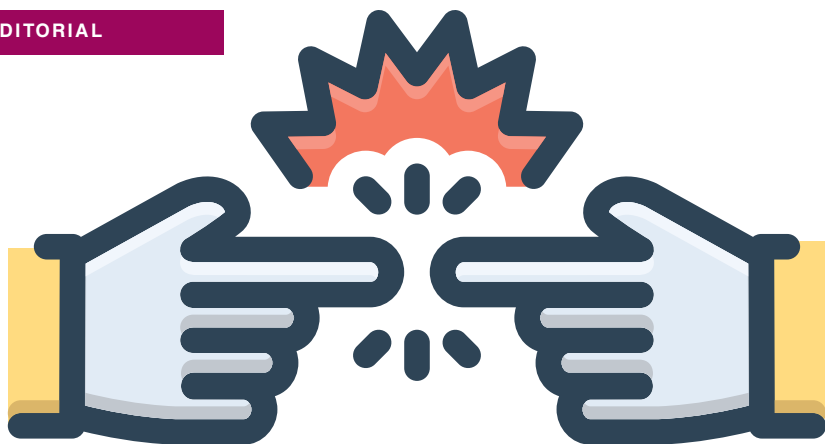
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SCRIPTURAL RESPONSE TO CONTROVERSY

By John MacDougall

We are pleased to share this guest editorial by Bro. John MacDougall. It was originally part of an exhortation given at the Portage Ecclesia, IN. The wisdom of Bro. John in this article is of utmost value to our community.

MY wise old high school geometry teacher, Ms. McGrath, used to tell us, “Learn to disagree without being disagreeable.” While this is an admirable ideal and seems very reasonable, I find it is virtually impossible for humans to do. The human race is simply not wired that way. We are emotional creatures, not reasonable ones. We can view even the slightest disagreement, the most academic of disputes, as a threat

to our pride and ego, if not to the stability of our world, our faith, and our way of life. Merely talking about a subject of disagreement, even to someone with whom we agree, causes our voice to rise in pitch and intensity. We begin to sound angry, even about subjects with no direct effect on us personally. Despite the difficulty, Ms. McGrath’s dictum was good advice. Fifty-five years later, I’m still working on it.

Uncivil Discourse

You may have noticed that the Internet often inflames controversy. Writing back and forth from a distance worsens conflict and seldom, if ever, resolves disputes. I have seen various explanations for this phenomenon, especially the lack of non-verbal cues: one of voice, facial expression, and body language that aid face-to-face converse. While that is true to some extent, I think the reason is more straightforward.

My theory is that in face-to-face conversation, the things we value most are our relationship with the other person and getting along with politeness. We have rules of behavior that people observe in personal relationships that generally prevent us from throwing screaming fits, coming to blows, or walking out in a huff. Those rules of behavior do not always work. But still, our desire to remain on speaking terms with the other person usually causes us to avoid direct insult or offense. We control ourselves. If we lose control, at least one of us sees things getting too intense, backs off, apologizes, or realizes the discussion is unproductive and changes the subject.

Of course, all this is true of our family, friends, ecclesial brothers and sisters, coworkers, and neighbors, but it also relates to others we come into contact with—even the cashier at the store checkout. Our relationships are more important than insisting on our views.

I think this is also how God views us. Our relationship with God is more important to God than our having

the correct facts. The sacrifice we remember is about reconciliation. “*God was, by means of Christ, reconciling us to Himself*” (2 Cor. 5:19).¹

Our relationship with God is so important to Him that He went far out of His way to maintain it. God has been gracious and forgiving. He still loves us and wants us to “get along” with Him. To God, our relationship is more important than being right or just. So, through the sacrifice of His Son, He shows love, mercy and forgiveness.

Why Bother?

But why would we even try to talk about controversial subjects? Is it ever useful? Can’t we just ignore those matters? In many cases, ignoring such things is the best way to deal with them. If we can’t agree, we should just let it go.

But what if an issue seems very important to others? It may not appear significant to us, but it may seem very important, even essential, to someone else. Such controversial issues can be sources of ecclesial division. They have sometimes become tests of fellowship, points that define and separate us from those who disagree. Occasionally, despite our efforts to ignore such matters, we are forced to deal with them. Sometimes, ignoring them permits them to fester into major conflicts. We learn, grow, and allow ourselves to be transformed when we confront difficult issues and challenge our assumptions and presuppositions without complacency.

When we seek to convert outsiders to our beliefs, we challenge them to confront the controversial issues that

define our faith. How can we ask our friends and neighbors to deal with different viewpoints if we are unwilling to do the same? To avoid controversy is to avoid Jesus; we know this when we try to speak to outsiders about him.

The Lord's sacrifice calls on us to transform, to change. To confront what that transformation consists of and requires of us is challenging. If we avoid the tough questions Christ's sacrifice asks of us, we are refusing to learn or grow, to remain complacent in our present imperfect knowledge. There is a saying, "Where all think alike, no one thinks very much." To avoid controversy is to avoid thinking.

Could any of us ever believe that we have The Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but The Truth? I don't think there are any examples in Scripture of such blessed people endowed with perfect Truth. There are many examples of proud people who mistakenly seemed to have thought in this manner. This is the God-like knowledge Eve aspired to. Even the Son of God is described as learning and growing. In Hebrews 5:8, we are told, "*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.*" This takes us directly back to the cross, through his suffering, where his humility is contrasted with Eve's grasping at the knowledge reserved for God alone. **Dealing Scripturally with controversy must begin and end with that example of humility.**

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any

*participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, **humbly regard others as more important than yourselves**, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:1-8).*

A Scriptural approach to dealing with controversy **must** begin and end with genuine humility of spirit that regards others as our better, does not malign or slander their motives, and considers at least the possibility that we ourselves may be wrong or at least "imperfectly right."

The Berean Example

For the most part, Christadelphians do not deal with controversy either well or poorly. Often, we simply do not deal with it at all. We avoid it. Certainly, Sunday morning meeting is not the place for it. Most Bible Schools, gatherings, or conferences have a very explicit policy against discussing controversial issues. Our weekly Bible

class, where there are young people and hopefully visitors, is not the place for these sorts of discussions. It seems only the Internet is out in the open. But there, the written public argument can be angry and bitter. Debate is worse than useless, it is counterproductive. Rather than cause anyone to reconsider their thinking, such arguing simply hardens all sides in their preconceived opinions. Where is the right place to consider controversy? I don't know. But ignoring controversy is ignoring important ideas we **need** to think and talk about.

In Acts 17, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica, where they went to the synagogue and preached the gospel of Christ. But the Jews in Thessalonica became jealous, apparently because of the response of God-fearing Greeks to the gospel message. The Jews then stirred up a mob of “worthless fellows” idling in the marketplace into a riot, which caused Paul and Silas to leave the city and go to Berea. In Berea, they found the local Jews to be more willing to listen to their message.

These Jews were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, along with quite a few prominent Greek women and men. But when

the Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul had also proclaimed the word of God in Berea, they came there too, inciting and disturbing the crowds. (Acts 17:11-13 NET).


The Berean Jews were “open-minded.” They “eagerly received the message.” In other words, they listened before judging. I do not want to minimize their daily examination of the Scriptures to verify the message. That is vital. We do need to test a controversial issue against Scripture to corroborate what is the truth. But first, we have to listen with open minds. If we allow mobs of outside agitators to stop us from even hearing it in the first place, we have nothing to compare against and test by Scripture. Worse yet is if we, like the Jews in Thessalonica, employ those howling mobs to dissuade others from even hearing the controversy.

Sadly, the agitators from Thessalonica went to Berea also, inciting mob riots there too. That is the very thing we ought **not** to do. It's improper for us to spread our troubles abroad to drum up support for our position. A Scriptural response to controversy is to calmly and thoughtfully compare it to Biblical text and to allow others to do the same.

Listen to New Things?

Next, Paul traveled to Athens, where he gave his address on Mars' hill. We read in Acts 17:21, 32-34:

We do need to test a controversial issue against Scripture to corroborate what is the truth. But first, we have to listen with open minds.



At some point, we do have to make up our minds. The purpose of listening to controversial matters is not to remain undecided.

It is to learn.

All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there used to spend their time in nothing else than telling or listening to something new. Now when they heard about the resurrection from the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul left the Areopagus. But some people joined him and believed.

We must, however, caution against going to the extreme of simply wanting to hear new things. At some point, we do have to make up our minds. The purpose of listening to controversial matters is not to remain undecided. It is to learn. Learning requires evaluating and then accepting or rejecting. We do need to test and prove our assumptions and make sure our conclusions are well founded. But we must reach a decision and then act on that conclusion. Belief, when put into action, is called faith. We do need to come to a decision we can put faith in.

Finding a Way to Get Along

In Acts 15, we have the prime example of the apostles dealing with the most controversial subject of the first century. The council at Jerusalem assembled to discuss the question of whether the Old Testament Law still applied. Were circumcision and the ritual law still in force? There was disagreement among many. Could the bitterly opposed

Jewish and Gentile believers find a way to get along?

Yes, they did! And the agreement they reached is an example of an accommodation. In the council, James referred to the prophets Isaiah and Amos to prove from Scripture that God also called the Gentiles His own. The letter the council sent was a compromise position. It placed only four "necessary rules" on Gentile believers: "Abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality." (Acts 15:29).

The council accommodated to find consensus. In other words, we don't always have to insist that the right principles be acknowledged. Sometimes, we can find ways to get along that might not feel fully correct to either or all sides. Sometimes, principles can be sacrificed for unity. We can find ways to tolerate the practices of brethren, even when we disagree.

The four gospels, Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, and many other epistles, condemn legalism, the making and enforcing of laws. They tell us not to judge each other but to judge ourselves. Much of that message concerns how far we fall short of God's standards. To that end, they all cite God's standards. We read about God's standards, and then,

as if to prove how pious we are, we begin making lists of rules and laws and then try to codify them into ecclesial laws. If we must make up rules, let's make them for ourselves, not for others.

Love is the highest truth. Mercy, forgiveness and grace are higher than justice (Jas 2:13). Unity is more important than our personal insistence on being right. In 2 Timothy 4:2-5, we read:

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

This passage is difficult to apply objectively. All parties in controversy may accuse the others of only listening to those who tell them what they want to hear. The internet and cable news enhance this, so we can easily select only those sources of information that will agree with our preconceived opinions. This reality is a danger to us all.

As the NET Bible translates verse 3, *“Instead, following their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves, because they have an*

insatiable curiosity to hear new things.”

This NET version makes it sound more like those in Athens just wanted to hear new things. I'm no Greek scholar, and I have no idea which translation is closer to what Paul may have intended, but whether *“what they want to hear”* or *“new things”* is more accurate, the danger seems to be in self-selecting our own teachers and in not doing our own due diligence to check what we are told against Scripture. Do we rely on what some teachers may tell us rather than testing it for ourselves? If we rely too much on a teacher and not enough on Scripture itself, we risk falling into errors of many kinds. We could encounter that trap if we rely on one self-selected set of teachers. The solution is to challenge yourself. Listen to the other side of a controversy. Really listen. Consider it with humility. And, of course, compare all that you hear with Scripture.

Don't be afraid to engage in dialogue and challenge others—even if uncomfortable—and don't be afraid to lose an argument. You can learn more by losing than by winning. Every discussion you lose, you can learn something. You discover nothing by winning. If you get too comfortable with your opinions, you won't know to change even the wrong ones. If you can't stand being told you are wrong, you are doomed to live with your errors. We must accept that we just “might” be wrong or are unaware of something. **Unity cannot be achieved by conformity but by embracing diversity.**

Lessons from Job

The whole Book of Job is an example of dealing with controversy, debate, disagreement, and even a crisis of faith. Job's friends traveled great distances to sit with him. For seven days and nights, they just sat with Job. No one said a word for seven days. Finally, Job spoke. He gave an entirely understandable lament, cursing the day he was born. And his friends listened. After that, they talked, talked, and talked. How long the talking went on, I don't know, but a long time. Opinions were all over the place. They disagreed pretty strongly. Job's friends may not have been beneficial in their responses, but at least they kept trying. They kept talking. Their fundamental disagreement did not take away their bond of fellowship.

Finally, after 35 chapters of talk, God speaks from the whirlwind, having listened to all that discourse. God replies: *"Who is this who darkens counsel with words without knowledge?"* (Job 38:2 NET). God dismisses them all as words without knowledge. Yet, the lack of comprehension by men does not turn God away from His love and care for us. God's fellowship with men does not depend on our having the correct answers. God is more interested to know that we are seeking the answers.

The Reconciliation Process

In addressing anger and division, we often refer to Matthew 18. The process of Matthew 18:15-17 is really excellent. The whole chapter is about reconciliation, about how to recover our brother. It is NOT about how to

disfellowship. It is NOT about what a Human Resources Department would call "progressive discipline" on the way to dismissal. Matthew 18 throughout makes the point about the goal of reconciliation or staying in unity.

The parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15) is about regaining that which was lost. Reconciliation. *"Wherever two or three come together"* (Matthew 18:20) is about unity or reconciliation, not small ecclesias. How many times shall I forgive? (vv. 21-22) is about reconciling. The parable of the large forgiven debt compared to the small debts of our fellows (vs. 23-35) reminds us of the example of Job. How much of our ignorance God tolerates, contrasted with the tiny offenses we object to in the ecclesia! The "process" in verses 15-17 is about "regaining" a brother and staying in unity.

We have looked at just a few examples of Scriptural approaches to controversy. Scripture calls on us to deal with disagreement with maturity without allowing it to divide us. We are encouraged to learn and grow from it, to be humble in the knowledge of our own ignorance and fallibility. We are asked to be open-minded, and listening before we evaluate. To act on our convictions, but to be willing to accommodate and show tolerance of others. We are called to judge ourselves rather than others. We are to trust Scripture rather than teachers. We are always to seek to stay in unity.

*John MacDougall,
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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

MY MESSY FAMILY

By Becky Elliott

ALTHOUGH I have not had the privilege of meeting you, I feel a deep love for all of you because we **are** family. This love is an imperfect, in-progress love that I pray may also grow in you as we journey towards the Kingdom.

I am a single sister in a large ecclesia. I see this ecclesia as my “immediate” spiritual family. Some members of my earthly family are baptized into Christ’s saving name, a few have drifted away and chosen a different anchor for their

lives, and others have yet to accept God’s glorious calling. As a single sister, I feel I can see the whole body as my family more easily than those who are part of an established family unit. With this unique perspective, I’ve come to appreciate how God’s gift of a spiritual family is an immense blessing.

The Need for One Body

Have you ever thought about what “part” of the body you are? Eyes? Hands? Heart? The diversity within the human body is fascinating. God

uses the parable of the body (through the words of Paul) in 1 Corinthians 12 to illustrate how our uniqueness is essential! Anyone who has stubbed a toe (arguably most of us) can appreciate that when one part suffers, so does the rest of our body. Our backs bend so our hands can grab at our injured toe. Our hearts may start racing as pain signals shriek through myriads of nerves in our brains. Look at Romans 12:5, which takes the allegory one step further. *“Each member **belongs** to all the others.”*¹ This is a language we don’t find ourselves using too often today! How often do we feel this sense of belonging to others in our ecclesia or wider spiritual body? Do we really treat our brothers and sisters like family?

Why Families?

We all come from natural families. Sometimes they are flawed, always human, occasionally broken and dysfunctional. God could have made the world and organized its inhabitants any way He wanted. Yet He chose the hierarchy and organization of the family unit to teach us about belonging, authority, love, and refining, to name just a few. How do we know this? Christ teaches us to call God *“our Father.”* We are told that we are *“all children of God through faith,”* (Gal 3:26) and we are “brothers, sisters and mothers” of the Lord Jesus if we do the will of his Father (Matt 12:50). Doing the will of the Father goes against our natural inclinations, and so His authority must be supreme in our lives.

It is a blessing to call the Creator of the universe *“our Father,”* and so we are bound together as a family.

The Trials of Family

No family is perfect. Think about the first human family. It only went downhill from there. My natural family has gone through many trials; I’m sure yours has too. As we have worked through challenges and tried to keep God at the center, our relationships with each other and our Heavenly Father have deepened.

There is no better training ground for discipleship than the interactions of our natural families. No greater magnifying glass exists to highlight the imperfections we’d probably rather keep hidden. When I moved out of home for the first time, I remember thinking: “I’m so grateful I no longer need to have my patience tried again and again.” How wrong I was. Patience is something on which I am still working. And so, God uses other people and situations to remind me constantly. Sometimes I wonder if my current struggle with impatience would be quite as challenging if I had leaned into that learning process while in my natural family.

Our families should be places of love, belonging and security, but I know there can be extreme and sometimes unsafe situations with the people closest to us. At the risk of sounding glib, it is the difficult reality of life on this side of the Kingdom. I have seen it many times during my work in

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the community, and it emphasizes the need for God's family to be different.

The Imperfect and Hurting Spiritual Family

We know from many verses throughout the Psalms that God is *"our refuge."* (Psa 46:1). He alone will be our strong tower. Yet our ecclesias should also be a haven where His love and mercy rule. However, as imperfect beings, we **all** fall short of this ideal. And so when a problem arises, or one member feels pain, how do **you** respond? How do I respond? It's easy to *"mote and beam"* issues, but the key here is to look inside ourselves at how **we** treat our brothers and sisters. We would not ignore a dislocated shoulder or the loss of sight in an eye, so why do we sometimes turn a blind eye toward a hurting member of the body of Christ?

When one member is hurting, the **whole** ecclesia should feel that pain, to reach out in love to help comfort the individual and heal the pain if possible. We need to gladly spend, and be spent for each other, in taking care of God's family (2 Cor 12:15). This is the iron sharpening process from Proverbs 27:17 on a much bigger scale, yet it still comes down to individual efforts from you and me. The process of comforting, healing, and working through disagreements and misunderstandings can be unpleasant or even agonizing to the point of wanting to "jump ship." Working through trials and difficulties together is the only way God can refine us into gold, jewels, and vessels for His Kingdom (1 Pet 1:7; Mal 3:16-17, Eph 2:10). Ignoring a health problem

in our bodies can lead to decline and possibly death! Grim indeed. So how do we prevent this from happening to our family?

My Selfish Perspective

At one point, I became disenchanted with my ecclesia. My fleshly brain took the driver's seat. Events seemed to cater to families, teens, kids, and moms-to-be, with baby showers, Sunday School activities, youth circle weekends, etc. Wedding showers were and still are sometimes hard. After some reflection, I realized I'd allowed my attitude to circle around to one of entitlement with thoughts such as: "Why is the ecclesia only helping newly marrieds start their new lives? They have two incomes, but a single person starting out has nothing, and there is no shower for them!" This simple observation (among others) became a dangerous way of thinking, as it led to bitterness and began to separate me from my spiritual family. In the misquoted and modified words of JFK, the light came on when I heard in a talk, "Ask not what your ecclesia can do for you, but what you can do for your ecclesia." I had become aware of a gap in the way our ecclesial body supported one another. Now it was my responsibility to be like Caleb's daughters and the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27) and appeal to my family respectfully (Judg 1, Num 27). This was well received. The gap existed merely because no one else had seen it! Whether single or getting married, our family members will be supported when starting out in their new homes. The process made me realize the love

that existed all along. I'd felt somewhat separated from my ecclesia and even the love of God by allowing my own perspectives and attitudes to rule versus talking to my family about my concerns clearly and patiently. It made me read Romans 8:38-39 in a different light. I'm the only one who can separate myself from the love of God by my thoughts and actions.

Mending the Body

How do we become a closer-knit spiritual family? How do we, with all our imperfections, come together and bear each other up? God gives us the answers, and it feels counter-intuitive! Because it's not about anyone else in our ecclesia. Not the arranging brothers, committees, or the sister who is well known for her thoughtful cards and meals. It's about you and me.

Paul outlined this principle when he spoke of bringing *"every thought captive" to Christ.*" (2 Cor 10:5). The writer to the Hebrews expands on the cleansing of heart and conscience by

exhorting us to *"consider one another to provoke to love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."* (Heb 10:24). By transforming our natural attitudes of selfishness into a focus on Christ and the body, we can become the change to the whole body we wish to see in our ecclesias.

And God's word is also clear about the Spirit with which we should be reaching out and giving:

- *Do all things without grumbling or arguing.* (Phil 2:14, NET).
- Jesus reminds us that when we care for the *"least of these,"* so we have done to him. (Matt 25:40).
- *If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.* (1 Cor 13:3).

How do we treat our spiritual family? Do we invest time to get to know them intimately? Do we take time to listen to and understand their trials? The day will come when they are in need and may even feel unable to ask for help.

The relationships we create now in our ecclesial families are the only things beyond ourselves and our faith that we'll be taking to the Kingdom. Not only that, but they're vital to helping us all be there.



But have we taken enough notice of them to *“bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* Gal 6:2). Do we liberally apply the fruit of the Spirit in our interactions (especially if someone has hurt us or we’ve offended a member)? Are we ruthless in our commitment to the body? This is the very body that Jesus lived and died for. Although self-examination is an active part of our discipleship, it doesn’t have to be limited to Sunday mornings. Check your thoughts and your actions. Are they in line with God’s wishes for His family?

Finally, My Family

The relationships we create now in our ecclesial families are the only things beyond ourselves and our faith that we’ll be taking to the Kingdom. Not only that, but they’re vital to helping us all be there. And there is no shortcut to good relationships. Time, effort, communication, and sometimes a lot of hard work are required. Additionally, if we are the ones struggling, we must learn to ask for what we need from our ecclesial family and sometimes keep asking (Luke 18:1-8). Allow others to come alongside and share your burdens. Work to build trust with those around you so that in times of struggle, the relationships we all need are there to lift us up. Build these relationships and extend interactions beyond the formal ecclesial gatherings. Do you see something missing within your

ecclesia? Be the change you want to see, or work with your own family and friends to help bring about that change in lovingkindness.

If we all do our best to fulfill the greatest commandment, how blessed our family will be. Starting with our own thoughts, feelings of entitlement and selfish inclinations, and moving into outward, generous action. As members of the same house, we **have** to work together to keep it standing and firm on the cornerstone. It’s time to come together as a *“living sacrifice”* (Rom 12:1) in caring for and loving each other as our Heavenly Father intended. The words of John summarize this perfectly:

If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:20-21).

God knows our frame. He gave us one another so we can learn to “get it right” with those standing alongside us, so we can better learn to love Him and accept His love. We **belong** to each other. I love you, my family. And I can’t wait to spend eternity serving alongside you.

Becky Elliott,
(Cambridge Ecclesia, ON)

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

CLAY JARS

By Dave Jennings



AT an auction in 2018, a bottle of Romanee-Conti red wine sold for the record-setting price of \$558,000. Imagine that! More than a half million dollars for a single bottle of wine nearly 80 years old. The purchaser must have seen immense value in this Pinot Noir. The buyer believed this wine had special properties that only a wine connoisseur would appreciate, and ultimately it would taste better than any other wine.

I don't know if the purchaser kept the wine or opened and consumed it. But what do you suppose the purchaser did with the bottle once it was consumed? Maybe today, it is a collector's item

and has value. But more likely, it was discarded. The bottle had served its purpose for 80 years. It carried about a treasure, but the bottle itself had no special significance. It was all about what it was carrying inside.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. (2 Cor 4:6-7 KJV).¹

How critical it is for us to understand—really understand—the power of this teaching. We are nothing but earthen vessels made from the very clay Adam was once formed from. There is no particular value in a clay pot in itself. Of ourselves, we have no real value. There is no unique capability that we have that God needs. What makes us important is what we “*carry around in our body*.” (v. 10 NIV).

Paul’s exhortation to us is essential for proper spiritual thinking. First, we need to comprehend the immense gift that has been placed in clay jars. It is far more priceless than Romanee-Conti wine. This “*treasure*” was created in us when our blinded minds, once a resident in darkness, had light illuminated into them by the power of God. The treasure was never us! We never generated the treasure. It is a gift of God through Jesus Christ. We are merely the clay jar that holds it.

We should all pause here and contemplate this spiritual message. Of ourselves, we bring no inherent value to our Lord. Jesus spoke of hired servants working in the field all day. But when they came in, they were not encouraged to recline and rest while supper was prepared for them. Instead, the worldly master reminded them of their value.

Will any one of you who has a

servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come at once and recline at table”? Will he not rather say to him, “Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink?” Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.” (Luke 17:7-10 ESV).

Unworthy servants? What does that mean to us? Different translations handle the word in varied ways. It carries the idea of being unmeritorious, even useless. Bro.

Harry Whittaker suggested the term should be understood as “not needed.” Jesus crushes the hypocrisy of the Jewish elite, who gathered to themselves the

testimony and praise of men. They did not think they were unworthy. It was everyone else.

If we really stop to contemplate what this means to our spiritual lives today, it should also help us to appreciate that not one of us, no not one, is a meritorious servant. None of us are capable by ourselves to serve God as He intends. By our own strength, we are truly “not needed.”



But that is just the message, isn't it? We never are to rely on our own strength and capabilities. Doing so will only bring frustration and eventually collapse. One of the great lessons in David's life was that he learned that in whatever situation he found himself in, he could depend on God for strength and confidence. Not by military might or Saul's armor, but by "*the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel.*" (1 Sam 17:45). David realized that it was the LORD who would deliver the giant into his hand.

It is easy to admire people when we see strength. The charismatic speaker. The brilliant scholar. The courageous preacher. It seems natural to assign a certain honor or admiration to such people. But, at the end of the day, they, too are just clay jars.

create strategies and execute my plan. The adage in business is "Plan your work, work your plan." This is a cultural expectation here in our society. Grown men and women are taught to be personally productive and self-reliant. I suppose this is fine in the workplace and secular matters. We need to develop skills that allow us to be productive members of society. But I found that this can come at the risk of segregating areas I believed I could handle as distinct from the spiritual issues of my life, where I knew I needed God. Looking back now, I can see this was a fundamental flaw in my thinking.

Jesus was not a fisherman but a rabbi like no other. The disciples would never hesitate to ask him about spiritual things. He was their Master. But in Luke 5, Jesus came to their workplace. He arrived at a time when they were terribly frustrated.

It is easy to admire people when we see strength. The charismatic speaker. The brilliant scholar. The courageous preacher. It seems natural to assign a certain honor or admiration to such people. But, at the end of the day, they, too are just clay jars.

When Paul spoke of the enormous response to the preaching unto the Gentiles, he was always clear to say that it was what "*God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.*" (Acts 15:12). Paul later reflected that when he was weak, he was strong (2 Cor 12:10). It is when we embrace our weakness and dependence on our God, He chooses to do great works through us.

This one is hard for me. I have been trained all my life to assess problems,

I don't know how many times these fishermen worked all night and caught nothing, but I suspect it was very unusual. While the disciples were washing off their nets, Jesus asked Simon to "*thrust out a little from the land.*" (v. 3). From the ship, Jesus began to do what they all expected—he preached to the people. Then, Jesus turned to Simon and asked him to "*Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.*" (v. 4). The

deep is not likely a place where most fish were caught. Now, this must have greatly frustrated Simon. "Look, Lord, I can listen to you preach all day. Your words touch my heart like no other. But you are a carpenter. Are you going to tell me how to fish? On this lake? I have been on this lake since I was a young boy." But Jesus did know their fatigue. He had control of a situation that Peter couldn't have possibly imagined was possible.

To Peter's credit, he did let down the net. The Scriptural text seems to indicate he did so almost to placate Jesus. The NLT translates this, "*We worked hard last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again.*" (v. 5). Of course, you know the rest of the story. The nets had such an abundant haul that they broke. Their partners came to help, and the fish catch was so great the boats began to sink. The astonishment of Simon and the others led to an important spiritual lesson they would not soon forget.

In his work, *A Life of Jesus*, Bro. Melva Purkis captured the lesson to Simon and all believers.

Peter was willing to acknowledge the leadership of his new master in spiritual paths, but surely Jesus had nothing to teach him in his daily tasks. Ah, Peter, how wrong you are! How wrong is every disciple who fails to acknowledge Jesus as his master in every walk of life and every place of experience. Unless

our surrender is complete we shall toil all night and catch nothing.²

Understanding that the Lord is our Master in all aspects of our life is crucial. Peter may have reflected on the psalmist's words, acknowledging that God would put all things under our Lord's feet, "*the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.*" (Psa 8:6-8).

This is a key to spiritual life. Remembering that we are but dust, that of ourselves, we have no special capability. Whether in the office, at school, in our marriages, or contemplating how to preach in our ecclesial neighborhood—our Master has the solution. Our role is to bear him about, carry him in us. If we can empty ourselves as he did (Phil 2:7 NASB), he will make us perfect in every good work (Heb 13:21).

This, then, is the great Divine work in our lives. As clay jars, we are literally wasting away (2 Cor 4:16), but inside we are being renewed. While we experience "*light affliction*" now, we look past the noise of our daily lives. Jesus works now with us in our frailties. But he is preparing a "*far more excellent and eternal weight of glory.*" (v. 17) The Lord knows where the fish are. He has control over all the variables that lead them into the net.

Dave Jennings

¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

² Purkis, Melva, *A Life of Jesus: A Devotional Study*, The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Hall Green, Birmingham, UK, 1964, pg. 97.



MUSIC AND PRAISE

PSALMS OF ASCENTS

By Philip Sweeny

SOJOURNING and songs go together; perhaps they mark time in complementary ways. A trip marks time in steps, distance, and landmarks. Songs mark time in notes, measures, and words. Walking, driving or flying, we have all experienced the suitable accompaniment of music and travel.

The Psalms of Ascents are fifteen psalms (120 to 134), inspired to encourage us on our journey, on our ascent to Zion by our Heavenly Father's grace in Christ Jesus our Lord!

The Ascent to Zion—Psalms 120-122 (Part 1)

To ascend means to go up. While we often say we go “up north” or “down south,” in the Bible, up and down are set with reference to Jerusalem, regardless of your compass point of origin. The temple (God's glory) is the highest elevation. One always ascends to get to Jerusalem and the temple.

As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way, He said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death.” (Matt 20:17-18).¹

The Hebrew word translated as ascents in the headers of Psalms 120-134 is “*maalah*” (Strong's 4609), meaning “steps.” Steps are used to climb. Thus,

the root of the noun “*maalah*” is the verb “*alah*” (Strong's 5297), meaning “to ascend.” To this day, when one immigrates to Israel, one makes “*aliyah*,” or the ascent. This is true whether starting from the United States or Australia! “Distributions of funds have focused on humanitarian aid and rescue operations; trauma relief and medical care; refugee resettlement; and aliyah and absorption in Israel.”²

In summary, the temple, God's glory, is the highest elevation. We always ascend when traveling there!

The Spiritual Journey

In our diagram, the starting point is at exile. Why did we do that? Is it appropriate if we have never experienced slavery or exile? Christ's answer:

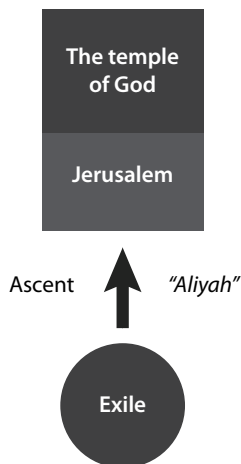
So, Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32).

They answered him,

We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, “You will become free?” (v. 33).

Jesus answered them,

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. (v. 34).



We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. All of our journeys start outside of Eden.

So He [the LORD] drove the man out, and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:24).

Adam and Eve chose to sin and were rightly exiled from the garden. God, in His mercy, set cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life until the way of return was established.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. (Rev 22:14).

We all walk the ascending journey of restoration. We start in sin, removed from the garden.

We end in the glorious presence of our God, allowed to partake of the tree of life by His grace through the cleansing sacrifice of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus.

Hallelujah! What a great hope to sing of during our ascent!

The Physical Journey

Our spiritual journey was codified in the Law of Moses in physical terms. God commanded Israel to bring gifts

to the place of His choosing three times a year once they entered the Promised Land.

Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. (Deut 16:16).

King David desired Israel to be blessed by keeping God's commandments. When David perceived the time had come to set Jerusalem as the place of worship, he sought to build God's temple in Zion. While construction was ultimately accomplished by his son, Solomon, David prepared all that was necessary ahead of time: the plans, building materials (I Chr 22:11-16), choir (I Chr 6:31-32) and musicians (I Chr 16: 4-7). It should therefore come as no surprise to find that David (Psa 122, 124, 131, 133) and Solomon (Psa 127) wrote several of the Psalms of Ascents to encourage Israel on their triannual ascents to Zion!

It is easy to picture the family of Mary and Joseph, with their children Jesus, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas, singing these same songs 1,000 years later on their festival journeys. Christ, with his band of disciples, would continue

We all walk the ascending journey of restoration. We start in sin, removed from the garden. We end in the glorious presence of our God, allowed to partake of the tree of life by His grace through the cleansing sacrifice of His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus.

in this tradition. The present tradition is for pilgrims to recite the Psalms of Ascents on the 15 steps of the temple mount.

Who wrote the Psalms of ascents, and when were they placed in their current order? The earliest compilers were David and Solomon. This would make several of the psalms prophetic: Psalm 122, prophetic of temple worship, Psalm 126 of a return from captivity, and Psalm 132 of the future anointed/Messiah. The latest possible compiler would have been Ezra, returning from Babylon. This would make Psalm 126 a retrospective of Babylon's return. While the identity of all the individual authors and compilers is uncertain, the intent of the psalms and their order seems clear, to provide a set of songs to encourage us in our ascents to Zion!

It has been helpful to me to consider the Psalms of Ascents from two perspectives. The first perspective is as a physical traveler. God commanded the children of Israel to ascend three times a year, bringing gifts. They were also given the directive to return to Zion in thought while exiled. How these psalms have encouraged such sojourners to continue their physical journey with the right mindset of praise!

The second perspective is a personal one. How can these psalms help me to depart from my Meshech (see below) and set my face and feet on the ascent to the glorious promise of worship in Christ's freedom for all eternity? We will use this dual pattern of physical

and spiritual journeys to briefly consider some thoughts on each psalm. May these psalms find a special place in your journey to Zion, the city of the great King!

Psalm 120—Trouble!

The psalmist starts the journey in desperate straits. He is surrounded by liars in a foreign land, far from Jerusalem, the City of Peace. The surrounding deceivers hate peace. Even when peace is proposed, they prefer war! This is an untenable position. Leaving Meshech and Kedar is the only option. The sooner, the better!

A Song of Ascents

In my trouble I cried to the LORD,

And He answered me.

*Deliver my soul, O LORD, from
lying lips,*

From a deceitful tongue.

*What shall be given to you, and
what more shall be done to you,*

You deceitful tongue?

Sharp arrows of the warrior,

*With the burning coals of the broom
tree.*

Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech,

*For I dwell among the tents of
Kedar!*

*Too long has my soul had its
dwelling*

With those who hate peace.

I am for peace, but when I speak,

They are for war.

The Physical Journey

The journey starts in a foreign nation, far from the Promised Land. This is Israel's recurrent history. She has found herself in Egypt, Babylon, and, more recently, the Roman "diaspora," the return from which continues to this day.

In the psalm, Meshech (a son of Japheth) is the starting point. The tents of Kedar (A son of Ishmael) are also identified. Perhaps these represent non-Semitic and Semitic peoples, respectively. The nations have never been a place of peace for Israel, nor were they meant to be (Deut 29:22-28). Returning to Zion is a necessity (1 Kgs 8:33-34).

Meshech is notably called out to remain adversarial, even until the LORD makes his name known among the nations (Ezek 39:25-29).

And the Word of the LORD came to me saying, Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him. (Ezek 38:1-2).

The Spiritual Journey

As in the physical case, in the spiritual, we will only leave Meshech when we admit we are in trouble. Troubles can be external, but our liberating spiritual journey starts when we see that the real troubles are from within. A hint is provided in the writing of James.

What is the source of quarrels and

conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? (Jas 4:1).

If trouble comes from without and from within, where can we find help in our time of need? Hint: The answer is found in our next psalm.

Psalm 121—Hope!

Q: Where does our help come from?

A: Our help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth!

The exile lifts his eyes and sees the mountains of Zion far in the distance. He remembers the LORD'S compassion and the glorious promise of Jerusalem's peace. Hope is kindled! He begins the journey home, confident in God's protection.

The protection of the LORD is emphasized in this psalm. That He is and will be our and Israel's keeper is mentioned six times. The Hebrew word translated as keeper is "shamar" (Strong's 8104), meaning: to keep, watch, preserve, etc. Take a moment to contemplate the LORD, the creator of heaven and earth, as our "shamar." God is and will keep our going out (from Meshech) and our coming in (to Zion) from this time forth and forevermore. Let us lift our eyes to Him!

A Song of Ascents

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;

From where shall my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,

Who made heaven and earth.

*He will not allow your foot to slip;
He who keeps you will not slumber.*

Behold, He who keeps Israel

Will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;

*The LORD is your shade on your
right hand.*

The sun will not smite you by day,

Nor the moon by night.

*The LORD will protect (keep) you
from all evil;*

He will keep your soul.

*The LORD will guard (keep) your
going out and your coming in,*

From this time forth and forever.

The Physical Journey

It is a multi-day walk to Jerusalem from most points inside of Israel. Sojourning from Egypt, Babylon or Meshech would take weeks or months! This song would remind the ascender of the LORD'S continual protection day and night. It would be an encouragement to sing as one traveled in the cool of the morning or rested in the shade during the midday heat. Singing confidently of God's certain protection from "*going out to coming in*" would enliven all fainting hearts.

The Spiritual Journey

Paul's letter to the Roman Ecclesia comes to mind.

*For I am convinced that neither
death, nor life, nor angels, nor
principalities, nor things present,
nor things to come, nor powers,
nor height, nor depth, nor any*


*other created thing, will be able to
separate us from the love of God,
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
(Rom 8:38-39).

Our Heavenly Father's help and protection on the journey to His Kingdom is certain. He will keep us from all evil and save our souls. As we shall see, our voyage will include many hardships, but if we endure in Christ, the good end is sure. Hymn 14 (Green Book) says, "God is my (our) strong salvation, what foe have I (we) to fear?" We have left Meshech with our eyes fixed on Mt. Zion, strong in the "*shamar*" which God supplies in His beloved son. In our next psalm, the tents of Kedar are behind us, and the House of the LORD appears on the horizon!

Psalms 122—Jerusalem the City of Peace!

This is David's vision of worship in the House of the LORD. He began this in type when he brought the ark to Jerusalem. A day of great rejoicing with those that shared the vision. He spent the remainder of his life planning for the culmination, organizing materials, singers, musicians, and this song and finally setting Solomon as king to complete the work. (I Chr 22:17-19).

This psalm has two distinct stanzas: 1) The joy of a community giving thanks to YHWH for His righteous judgments, and 2) A prayer for peace in worship, for YHWH's honor and the wellbeing of brethren and friends. Praying for Jerusalem's peace is the true love of God and neighbor.



*God's ordinance provided for traveling companions!
Sometimes it is hard for us to start our journey; good
friends can encourage us.*

A Song of Ascents

*I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD.”*

*Our feet are standing, Within your
gates, O Jerusalem,*

*Jerusalem, that is built, As a city
that is compact together;*

*To which the tribes go up, even the
tribes of the LORD—*

*An ordinance for Israel—To give
thanks to the name of the LORD.*

*For there thrones were set for
judgment,*

The thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

“May they prosper who love you.

“May peace be within your walls,

And prosperity within your palaces.”

*For the sake of my brothers and my
friends, I will now say,*

“May peace be within you.”

*For the sake of the house of the
LORD our God,*

I will seek your good.

The Physical Journey

All Israel was to journey three times a year to Jerusalem at the same time. God's ordinance provided for traveling companions! Sometimes it is hard for us to start our journey; good friends can encourage us. We are glad when fellows rouse us with the call, “*Let us go up to the house of the LORD!*” Jerusalem was both the center of praise and the seat of righteous and merciful judgments coming from the throne of David. The vision of receiving righteous judgment and its accompanying peace has always been a strong motivator. This blessing will continue in Christ's reign.

*And many peoples will come and
say,*

*“Come, let us go up to the mountain
of the Lord, To the house of the God*

of Jacob;

*That He may teach us concerning
His ways and that we may walk in
His paths.”*

*For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem.*

*And He will judge between the
nations,*

*And will render decisions for many
peoples;*

*And they will hammer their swords
into plowshares and their spears
into pruning hooks.*

*Nation will not lift up sword against
nation,*

*And never again will they learn
war. (Isa 2:3-4).*

The Spiritual Journey

Companionship is a strong encouragement in our walk to the Kingdom. We receive fellowship with our Heavenly Father through Christ. In turn, we share this encouraging fellowship with one another.

*What we have seen and heard we
proclaim to you also, so that you
too may have fellowship with us;
and indeed, our fellowship is with
the Father, and with His Son Jesus
Christ. These things we write, so
that our joy may be made complete.
(I John 1:3-4).*

As Hymn 341 in our Green Hymn Book reads, “Brethren let us walk together in the bonds of love and peace.”

Do we also look forward to judgment? We often think of judgment in a negative light, but we should not. Judgment is what we need. And only our Heavenly Father can provide it. We need the thoughts and intentions of our hearts to be discerned, divided asunder, and then made new with the law of God written upon it.

*For the word of God is living and
active and sharper than any two-
edged sword, and piercing as far
as the division of soul and spirit, of
both joints and marrow, and able to
judge the thoughts and intentions of
the heart. (Heb 4:12).*

*For this is the covenant that I will
make with the house of Israel. After
those days, says the Lord: I will put
My laws into their minds, And I will
write them on their hearts. And I
will be their God, And they shall be
My people (Heb 8:10).*

Only after judgment will we have peace in the city of peace. We pray and long for that day for the sake of our brethren and friends and for the sake of the house of the LORD our God.

*Philip Sweeny,
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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the New American Standard Version.

² Jewish News Service Staff Report, Sun Sentinel, 11 May 2022.

RECHABITES: HONORING YOUR INHERITANCE

By James McCann

THE Rechabites are the third in our series on Faithful Family Legacies. This story seems to be a tangent in the record of Jeremiah, occupying just one chapter (Jer 35). It is, however, something that has had one of the biggest impacts on my life. This is not only because of the amazing integrity of this family, but also because of how God views them. God uses the Rechabites to illustrate the entire power of His message to Israel through Jeremiah because of the longevity of their faithfulness in being willing to listen and obey their father's commands.

Jeremiah's message was, *"Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel"* (Jer 2:4). He called on them to *"return"* (used over 47 times) and to *"listen," "obey," "hearken"* (used over 184 times) to God their Father. Yet, *"I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not."* (Jer 7:13).

How powerful and relevant for us and our families today! We live in a world that doesn't want to hear what God says. Anyone who tries to hold to God's words is soon mocked as being bigoted or ignorant of modern scientific or

progressive thought. The irony is that this is exactly what Jeremiah faced. God told Jeremiah; *“Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with you, to deliver you, says Yahweh.”* (Jer 1:8).

Jeremiah's words of condemnation to a disobedient nation have caused many to think that this book is a very negative one. This is simply not the case. We have some of the most remarkable prophecies of God's salvation and future hope for Israel in the middle of many of those judgments. We also have a little chapter, Jeremiah 35, about a small family, one of the most remarkable in the Bible, that God used to witness to Israel, and us, about what God really wanted in His family. Their legacy of faith is a great exhortation to every generation.

Just consider the context of Jeremiah 35 for a moment. If we look at Jeremiah 24-34, we see it is based in the time of Zedekiah, Judah's last king. God was still warning them of coming judgment and providing them with glorious visions of the future. Then Jeremiah 35-36 is back in the time of Jehoiakim's reign. From Jeremiah 37 on we again return to the time of Zedekiah. So, why are those two chapters (35-36), marked out and turn us back in time?

Jehoiakim was the king who cut up and burned the scrolls of the word of God, refusing to listen (Jer 36:23). He stood as a clear example of Israel and their dull ears. Yet the Rechabites stood as God's illustration of a faithful family legacy, and their consistency in listening and obeying their father Jonadab was legendary.

Jeremiah is commanded to go to the Rechabites and to bring them into the temple and offer them wine (Jer 35:2). God was not trying to make them stumble; rather, He knew they would refuse because of their desire to uphold their father Jonadab's commands (35:6-8). God loved their faithful and consistent legacy and He wanted to use them to illustrate to all Israel what He wanted His family to be like. Even the meanings of their names tell the story: *“I took Jaa-zan-iah [to listen to Yahweh] the son of Jeremiah [Yahweh will exalt], the son of Ha-baz-in-iah [Light of Yahweh].”* Those who listen to Yahweh will He exalt to be His light.

Note the recurring phrases in Jeremiah 35 that illustrate their legacy. *“House of Rechabites”* (used four times), *“obeyed”* or *“hearkened”* (Hebrew: *“shama”* used nine times in the chapter. Four times used of Rechabites obeying/listening in contrast to four times used of Israel not obeying and listening), *“done”* (used twice of Rechabites v. 10, 18) and *“have performed”* (used twice of Rechabites v. 14, 16), four times in total.

When we follow the family of the Rechabites through Scripture we can see how powerful their desire to hold onto their father's commands was. The phrase *“the house of Recyab”* can be traced back to 1 Chronicles 2:55. Here, they are mentioned right at the end of a long genealogy which begins in verse 1 with *“These are the sons of Israel.”* There are some interesting details in this verse. First, they are described as *“scribes”* (think of Matt 13:52), but also as *“Kenites.”* This makes another link for

us to follow back to Judges 1:16. Here they are described as coming into the Promised Land with the faithful family of Judah, to conquer their inheritance. Note how the Kenites are identified as being from “*Moses’ father-in-law?*” This means that they were Gentiles, who had been adopted into the family of Israel.

The origins of this family are found in Numbers 10:29-32. An amazing passage that speaks of Moses inviting them to join Israel because “*The LORD had spoken good concerning Israel.*” Numbers 10 leaves us without a definitive answer whether they joined. The power of 1 Chronicles 2:55 is illustrated by the fact that they are numbered with “*the sons of Israel.*” This means they did respond to the “*hope of Israel.*” They then became faithful Gentiles who were “*grafted in*” and were one of the faithful “*tribes*” who wanted the inheritance that God had promised. (Judg 1:16-19) In Judges 1, they stand in direct contrast to the unfaithfulness of other tribes who didn’t conquer their inheritance.

The Rechabites loved God’s ways and the hope He sets before all His elect. It was this that continued to burn bright in the heart of this family for generations. What an exhortation to us, who, like Israel, grew up in “the truth” and can overlook the value of the “*pearl of great price*” which we have. It can often be the “Gentile” who comes into the faith whose passion for the truth they have found puts us to shame. Although many passages illustrate the legacy of the Rechabites, a key one is found in 2 Kings 10. This is set in the time of Jonadab, who Jeremiah 35

notes as the father whose commands the Rechabites obeyed. A little example of the proof of Biblical inspiration is found when counting the phrases in 2 Kings 10. The phrase “*house of Baal*” is used six times in the chapter, in contrast to “*the house of the Rechabites,*” also used four times in Jeremiah 35.

In 2 Kings 10, God commissions Jehu to judge the house of Baal, a problem still relevant in Jeremiah’s time (see Jer 32:33-41). Yet as he is riding along, he passes Jonadab, who he requests to join him in his mission to destroy Baal (2 Kgs 10:15-17). It is here Jehu asks, “*Is your heart true to my heart as my heart is to yours?*” Jonadab’s heart was in tune with Baal’s destruction, for he loved God’s ways. So, he joins Jehu in the chariot.

Jonadab’s name means “willing or impelled of Yahweh.” The root word is used in Exodus 35:21,29, speaking of those who brought a willing offering to God in the building of the tabernacle. The name Rechab means “rider,” as one who rides with God (see Deut 32:13 for another great connection of thought). The play on their names is evident in 2 Kings 10, where Jonadab’s willingness to serve God sees him step up into the chariot (Hebrew “*Recab*”) where he rides with God on a divine mission to destroy the evil influences within Israel. Jonadab’s desire to see the judgment on Baal and the house of Ahab lays a strong foundation for the commands that he gave his family. In Jeremiah 35:6-8 we see a list of key things they were commanded not to do. This included not drinking wine, not building a house, not sowing any seed, not planting vineyards (or having

them), but rather for them to always live in tents. This was not only the fear of God in their hearts (Jer 32:40), but also important to Jonadab in the context of his experiences.

Jonadab lived in the time of Ahab, the evil king, married to Jezebel. Ahab despised God and didn't appreciate the desire Naboth had to hold onto his vineyard because it was his inheritance given by God. Naboth said to Ahab, *"The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my father's unto thee."* (1 Kgs 21:3) Naboth saw his vineyard not as his possession, but rather as his gift of eternal life from God. But Ahab's desire was for material possessions, so he killed Naboth to achieve what the world could give him now.

Jonadab was like Naboth, who honored the inheritance of the fathers given by God to Israel (Judg 1). So, he commanded his family never to get caught up in the world by teaching them to be like their father Abraham (who dwelt in tents). Jonadab saw how many in Israel had despised their inheritance, so his family legacy was going to be the opposite. Basically, he commanded them to not allow their mind to be affected or intoxicated at any time from being focused on God (not to drink wine); they were not to become a citizen or resident of any place, nor create foundations for themselves here (not to build a house); they were not to have earthly possessions, but rather to be free from ambition and materialism (not to sow seed); they were not to spend their time cultivating things that

are temporal (not to have a vineyard), but they were to imitate their father (Abraham, who dwelt in tents) and look for eternal things! You can also parallel each of these to the High Priest, which of course points forward to imitating Christ.

What an amazing list of things that we should be trying to implement today in our families. How often we try to have the best of both worlds, professing our faith in God while at the same time trying to have the material possessions of the world. How much time do we spend cultivating our name, our education, our qualifications, our bank accounts, our investment portfolios and our leisure time while at the same time sacrificing our family and spiritual time?

Jonadab had given them these commands because it was the answer to *"living long in the land where they are strangers."* (Jer 35:7). From these words, we can see the echoes of Abraham and the Ten Commandments. To *"live long in the land"* is found in Exodus 20:12 and is even picked up by Paul in Ephesians 6:1-4 as being the *"first commandment with promise."* As *"strangers,"* they were to mimic the spirit of Abraham (see Heb 11:8-10, 13-16). Sadly, we often hear that even many in our community no longer want to be *"strangers and pilgrims"* now, choosing to participate in politics and the world increasingly. Let us be like faithful Abraham and Jonadab, who command our children to hold on to the legacy of *"looking for a city whose builder and maker is God."* (Heb 11:10)

The amazing blessing of holding on to such a legacy is illustrated right at the end of Jeremiah 35:19. God promises, *“Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.”* This phrase is a direct contrast to Jehoiakim in Jeremiah 36:30-31. Yet the promise to Jonadab’s family is the same for all those who listen to God’s commands and hold fast to His ways.

The primary fulfillment of God’s promise to Jonadab is found in Jeremiah 33:17-18. This is speaking of Christ (Jer 23:5-7), who is that one who is called *“The LORD our righteousness.”* It is Christ who will be that one to sit on the throne of David forever, as a king and priest. However, expanding the context of Jeremiah 33, note in verse 16 the change from “he” to “she”? This is

“the name whereby she shall be called.” Here we have a beautiful illustration of the Bride of Christ, who will also be named *“The LORD our righteousness,”* just like our bridegroom, because we will be married to him (Isa 62, Rev 19, 22).

This is the wonderful promise to those, who like the Rechabites, listen and obey their father’s commands, choosing to honor the inheritance that God has given them above anything that this world can ever offer. May we strive to be like Jonadab and command our families to be faithful in listening to God’s word and obeying His commands, so that we too may live long in the land that God has shared through His son, as the Bride of Christ.

*James McCann,
(Riverwood Ecclesia, Australia)*

*May we strive to be like Jonadab and command
our families to be faithful in listening to God’s
word and obeying His commands*

A TEMPLE FILLED WITH UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

By George Booker

*This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles
the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Eph 3:8)*

EPHESUS was a large, commercial city known for its famous temple of Artemis (the Greek name), also known as Diana (The KJV uses the Latin equivalent). Artemis, or Diana, was considered the goddess of fertility, and her worship in the great temple—considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—was characterized where gross immorality was practiced. Other ancient equivalents of Artemis included the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the Roman goddess Venus. A similar goddess in earlier times was

the Babylonian Ishtar, who under other names was also worshiped in Canaan and Egypt.

The great temple of Diana produced enormous wealth, both for the temple and its attendants and the surrounding community. In and around Ephesus, craftsmen and storekeepers derived much of their income from manufacturing and selling trinkets to celebrate the goddess.

The preaching of Paul and other believers in Ephesus led to a revolution in Ephesian society. Many devotees

of Artemis gave up their worship at the temple, and some gave up their livelihood. We read that:

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. (Acts 19:18-20).

The sum of money mentioned would have amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars in modern American terms.

This mass conversion of Ephesians to Christ, along with the abandonment of the great Temple in Ephesus, led to some frantic maneuvering by the remaining “priests” and businessmen, who depended on the temple for their livelihood. Meeting together, they decided that something must be done about Paul and his friends (v. 25-27). This led to riots that threatened believers’ lives and Paul soon felt it necessary to leave Ephesus, perhaps more to take the pressure off the brothers and sisters there than to protect himself (Acts 20:1).

Paul's Spiritual Temple

The great Temple of Artemis (Diana) dominated the skyline and the culture of Ephesus. When new converts to Christianity chose to leave that temple behind, they would necessarily have felt some vacuum in their lives. And they would miss, even if only subconsciously, that focus and center they had before, even if only subconsciously.

This might explain why Paul stresses

the spiritual temple of Christ and the believers when he writes back to the Ephesians. In his mind, Paul had the central vision, no longer of a literal temple of wood, stone and metal, but a spiritual temple built up of living stones—the believers themselves organized around Christ as their chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20; cp. Isa 28:16; 1 Pet 2:5 - 6; Acts 17:24). And Paul seeks to impart this same glorious vision to those in Ephesus. If there was enormous wealth involved with the worship of “Diana,” then there were infinitely greater riches—Paul calls it “*unsearchable riches*” (Eph 3:8)—to be found in the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, riches of a very different quality, having eternal value.

Recognizing this allusion helps us to appreciate the references and imagery of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. There he uses the language of the temple to describe Christ and the body of believers:

For [Christ] himself is our peace, who... has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... [to] create one new man out of the two [i.e., Gentile and Jew] and in this one body to reconcile both of them [Gentile and Jew] to God... He came and preached peace to you who were far away [Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [Jews]. For through him we both [Gentiles and Jews] have access to the Father. (Eph 2:14-18).

It's beautiful, isn't it, especially if we aspire to be peacemakers (Matt 5:9; James 3:18)? Several types of reconciliations are taking place all at once:

a. In Christ, who is our *"peace"* we sinners can be reconciled to God (Eph 2:14-16).

b. And because of that reconciliation, all sorts of sinners—Gentiles and Jews—can themselves be reconciled to one another, no matter what differences they have had in the past (v. 12, 13, 16). No matter their backgrounds, they all believed in Jesus Christ, and they all belonged to one fellowship of need!

But the part I wish to emphasize is in verse 14, where *"barriers"* and *"dividing walls"* are broken down and destroyed.

Much of the Law of Moses was about maintaining barriers and observing restrictions. Principally, the Glory of God was kept far from ordinary men and women. God's Glory was secluded in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle or temple—where it was approachable only once a year, and only then by the High Priest with the blood of a special sacrifice (Heb 9:7; cp. Exod 30:10; Lev 16:34).

But, as Paul explains, Jesus Christ has become the chief cornerstone of God's spiritual temple (Eph 2:20). This temple is a special temple made up of **all believers** (v. 22), for which there are no more barriers. This leads to another special type of reconciliation in Christ:

c. All believers (Gentile and Jew—not to mention female and male, servant and free person— have equal *"access to the Father"* (Eph 2:18; cp. Gal 3:26-29).

Paul adds that this *"mystery"*—especially of Jews and Gentiles becoming one in Christ—is now

revealed by the preaching of the gospel, and all who believe can become *"members of one body."* (Eph 3:2-6).

A Temple Filled with Glory and Grace

Paul's vision of a new spiritual Temple in Christ would have encouraged Gentile believers who had grown up with the grandeur and wealth of Diana's temple. But it would also have encouraged Jewish believers who felt a vacuum in their lives when Herod's great temple at Jerusalem lost most of its importance for them.

We might remember that the Jews were raised, not only with personal experiences of Herod's temple, but also collective memories of the Law of Moses and a tabernacle and temples of God in the Old Testament—all filled with the Glory of the LORD:

- **Moses' Tabernacle:** *Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Exod 40:34, 35; cp. Num 14:10; 16:42; 20:6; 1 Sam 4:21-22;).*
- **Solomon's Temple:** *The priests then brought the ark of the LORD'S covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles... When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could*

not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple. (1 Kgs 8:6, 7, 10-11; cp. 2 Chron 5:4-10, 13-14; 7:1-3).

So now, when Paul envisions a great spiritual temple, consisting of believers gathered together around Christ, he also thinks of the Glory of God dwelling in the midst of such a temple. In fact, this glory fills his mind even as he begins his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 1:6, 12, 14, 17).

Notice, however, that—as Paul continues—the “*glory of God*” gives way, slowly but surely, to the “*grace*,” the “*inheritance*,” and the “*riches*” of God (Eph 1:6, 18; 2:7-8; 3:2, 7-8, 16, 21; 4:7; 5:5; 6:24).

We are talking about the same thing in this case, but the terms are subtly changing. God’s “*glory*” is not just bright lights and great power. It is God’s glorious Spirit bringing grace and “*riches*” of spiritual blessings to all His children. This becomes most obvious in Ephesians 3, when Paul writes:

*This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the **unsearchable riches** of Christ.* (v. 8).

so that,

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that

you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19).

The extraordinary thing is that, while Paul essentially turns away from Herod’s Temple, he continues to use temple language. He writes about:

- Grasping “*how wide and long and high and deep*” (v. 18) Christ’s love is; and
- Being “*filled [with] all the fullness of God.*” (v. 19).

The dimensions of the walls and barriers of Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple were strictly defined by God. At each step towards God’s presence in the Most Holy Place, there were more restrictions.

But now, through Christ, all the barriers have been removed. When Christ died, the veil, or curtain, of the Temple was torn from top to bottom (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38; cp. John 19:23). The writer to the Hebrews tells us:

We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body... [therefore] let us draw near to God. (Heb 10:19-22).

The dimensions of the walls and barriers of Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple were strictly defined by God. At each step towards God’s presence in the Most Holy Place, there were more restrictions. But now, through Christ, **all the barriers have been removed.**

Paul describes the same situation when he tells the Ephesians:

- The *"heavenly places"* have been opened to all believers (Eph 1:3, 10, 20; 2:6; 3:10); and
- Everyone now has *"access to the Father"* (2:18) to approach Him with freedom and confidence (3:12).

A Holy Place with no Limits

With the walls and barriers removed, all believers have, through Christ, direct access to the presence of the LORD God. But even more than this: the removal of all restrictions means not only that believers—wherever they are—can go into the Most Holy Place, so to speak, but also that God's Glory, previously confined in the Most Holy Place, may come out to them!

For a very long time, the Glory and Grace of God had been hidden away. But for Paul, the question is no longer: "How shall God's glory and grace be hidden?" But, rather, "How wide and how long and how high and how deep will that glory and grace be, and how shall it be sent forth into the world?" (Eph 3:18).

And Paul's answer is, essentially, that there are no limits! God's Glory and God's Grace may be carried and sent everywhere!

As Paul and others preached and baptized new believers among the Gentiles, God's glorious love was set free in the world and went forth

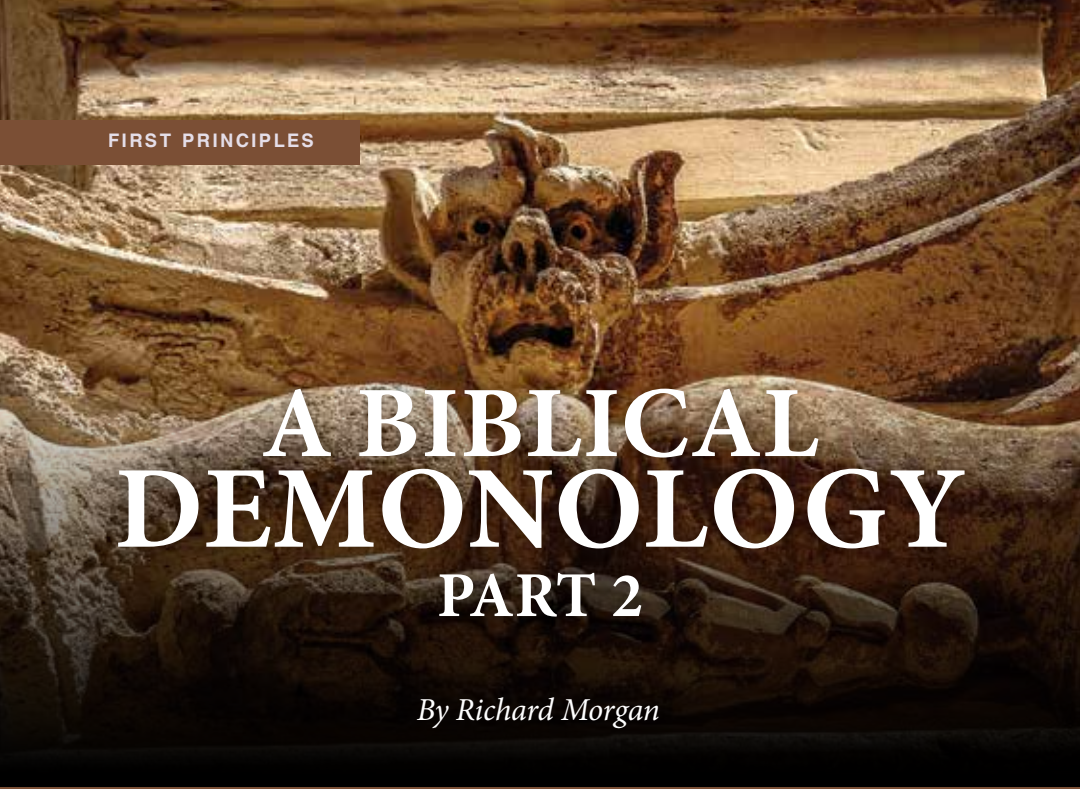
everywhere. Wherever believers came to know the love of Christ and began to show that wondrous love to others, there also was God's glory and grace to be seen and experienced. So, we might ask ourselves: What are the dimensions of this uniquely New Testament "temple?" And the answer is, there are no dimensions; this temple is immeasurable!

Again, we might ask, Are there any architect's plans for this New Testament temple? No, no architect's plans whatsoever. It is a divine plan by which God's Spirit will dwell in the minds and hearts of all believers!

Wherever believers are found—in a private room or on a hilltop, in a large public assembly, or gathered together in groups of two or three—there is also found the Temple of God, wherein is stored God's unbounded love for His dear children.

The most precious possessions of this Temple are not silver and gold and precious stones (which characterized tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament), but something of infinitely more value—the true *"unsearchable riches of Christ"*: grace and mercy, leading to eternal life (Eph 3:8).

George Booker,
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A BIBLICAL DEMONOLOGY

PART 2

By Richard Morgan

In last month's article, we began considering Paul's speech in Athens as it relates to what the Bible teaches us about demons. He was face to face with two of the great philosophical schools of thought of the day—Epicureanism and Stoicism. He is more interested in addressing the ideas of the Stoics, who as pantheists believed that divinity was found in every phenomenon within Creation. In a sense, Paul agrees with the Stoics, but with one major difference: divinity consists of only one divine being who is transcendent and sovereign over all things. The Stoics, on the other hand, as was common in the ancient world, believed in a diversity of immanent divine beings that controlled their various arenas within Creation.

The initial reaction of the philosophers before Paul's speech is noteworthy for

a couple of reasons. Luke records first an insult that they threw at Paul. In our English versions, they said he was a “*babbler*” (Acts 17:18), a word used for a dilettante, someone who has an interest in something but does not possess the requisite knowledge or expertise in the subject matter. The etymology of this word—*spermologos*—means “seed-speaker” and had the idea of someone picking up scraps of information from others like a bird might peck at seeds on the floor. Paul will silence his critics as far as that is concerned by intertwining the philosophy of the Jewish Scriptures (particularly Deuteronomy 32) with an understanding of Greek rhetoric and a knowledge of Greek writings. He was, after all, from Tarsus, one of the other great university cities of the Greek world. However, instead of developing

a religious syncretism between Bible teaching and Greek philosophy, he will use the Stoics' writings to find some common ground and hammer his point home.

There is a lesson to learn from this. Peter exhorts us *"always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you"* (1 Pet. 3:15).¹ The word translated *"defense"* is *apologia*, from which we get our English word apologetics—reasoned arguments used to justify a theory or religious doctrine. Are we armed with well-reasoned arguments for why we believe in the God of the Bible, his son, the Lord Jesus Christ and the basic first principles of Scripture? Or are we seed-speakers, having a vague notion of why we believe what we believe but not putting in the work ourselves? We, too, can be dilettantes, especially when dealing with the philosophies of our age, like New Atheism. Paul was an educated man, both from his Bible study and his knowledge of the world he lived in and its philosophies. The pioneers of the Christadelphian movement were likewise erudite both in their understanding of Scripture and the scholarly works available to them. Unfortunately, over time we have fallen into the trap of a fundamentalist approach to Scripture, and many view the works of non-Christadelphian

scholars, and even education itself, as a spiritual danger. Bible literacy, along with an appreciation for the ancient Near East world in which it was written, is at an all-time low, and we can come across as babblers to those we interact with in the world. But the apostle Paul himself, despite being a tentmaker and itinerant preacher, had done his homework and was well-read and educated so that he was qualified to be an apologist, as he was asked to exhibit in Athens.

The Epicureans and Stoics misunderstood what Paul was preaching. He had been teaching about *"Jesus and the resurrection"* (Acts 17:18) in the Agora, and they interpreted this as him being *"a preacher of foreign divinities."* The word *"resurrection"* in Greek is *anastasia*, which is also a woman's name, so they probably thought Paul was talking about some god and goddess they hadn't heard about before. Paul will take advantage of their intrigue, despite their misunderstanding.

Last month we looked at Deuteronomy 32, where Israel is nicknamed *"Jeshurun"* (v. 15). Perhaps the Greeks using the term *"foreign divinities"* (KJV *"strange gods"*), recalled in Paul's mind the Song of Moses, where Jeshurun *"stirred him to jealousy with strange gods."* (Deut 32:16). However, the word

Unfortunately, over time we have fallen into the trap of a fundamentalist approach to Scripture, and many view the works of non-Christadelphian scholars, and even education itself, as a spiritual danger.

for “divinities” used by Luke is *daimon*, demons, the same word used in the very next verse in the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32:17—“*They sacrificed to demons, and not to God.*”

The problem a lot of people have with a biblical definition of demons comes down to an anachronism. If you were to ask the general populace what is meant by the term **demon**, they’d probably say something like “an evil minion of the devil.” According to popular culture, both secular and Christian, demons are sent out by Satan to inhabit people and make their lives a misery or are found in the dark recesses of people’s homes, ready to bring evil into their lives.

But that’s not what the Athenians meant by the word “*demon*.” To them, it was another term for a god. The other main word, *theos*, was normally reserved for the higher gods in their pantheon, like Zeus. But for the all the myriad of smaller gods—whether good, evil, or neutral, they commonly used the word *daimon*. That’s why they wondered if Paul was preaching about two small gods they had never heard of before—Jesus and Anastasia.

At this point, as Luke records in Acts 17:19, “*they took him and brought him to the Areopagus.*” Commentators are divided over what exactly this meant:

Verse 19 has provoked one of the most lively discussions surrounding Paul’s Areopagus address. Was Paul tried before a formal Athenian court named Areopagus, or did he deliver a public address from a hill known as the Areopagus? The NIV has already solved the problem by translating “a meeting of the Areopagus,” which is a clear opting for the first possibility. The Greek is not so unambiguous, merely stating that the Athenians took hold of Paul and led him “to the Areopagus.” The Areopagus was both a court and a hill, due to the fact that the court traditionally met on that hill. The term Areopagus means hill of Ares. Ares was the Greek god of war. The Roman equivalent god was Mars, hence the KJV Mars’ hill²

It is quite possible, since Paul was preaching in the Agora, that they led



him to the Stoa Basileios, which was in the Agora itself, rather than to the hill where the Areopagus was initiated. Whether this was an official gathering of the court or simply Paul being given an opportunity to explain himself doesn't matter, and neither does the location: Paul now had an audience, and he took full advantage.

The Athenians, as is evident from the reason given why they wanted to listen to Paul, suffered from the cult of the new:

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. (Acts 17:19-21).

Perhaps the word "new" was a further reminder to Paul of Deuteronomy 32?

They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. (Deut 32:17).

It is worthwhile at this juncture to consider a little more of the theology and metaphysics of the ancient world. What Paul is going to do in his speech is demonstrate the radical nature of the God of Israel, distinct from the philosophies of the ancient Near East and from the Greek world of Paul's day. The mention of "new gods that had

come recently" may remind us of the concept of *theogony* (origin of the gods) prevalent in the ancient world. The ancients considered that their gods had origins, with the primordial gods arising first and then giving birth to other gods. This is of course a direct contrast with the God of the Bible who is "from everlasting to everlasting." (Psa 90:2). The concept of *theogony* is alien to both Jewish and Christian understanding of God.

However, the *theogony* of the gods of the ancient world was also tied up with their function. The various elements of the cosmos were said to be expressions or manifestations of the gods and so the two—the cosmos and the gods—were intertwined. The natural world, and the gods connected with the elements of the natural world, came into being together. Thus, the gods of paganism were in creation itself rather than being the creative force. This is perhaps why Paul wrote that they "worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator," (Rom 1:25) because ultimately idolatry is the worship of creation rather than the Creator. Indeed "every aspect of what we call the natural world was associated with some deity in the ancient Near East."³ John Walton, professor of the Old Testament at Wheaton College, continues, "Though the god is the controlling party in the functioning partnership, the god has no existence separate from, outside, or above the sun. The sun is the manifestation of the god and the expression of the god's attributes. The god is the power behind

the sun. Because of this, we might also conclude that our categories of cosmogony (origins of the cosmos) and cosmology (operations of the cosmos) are artificially distinguished with regard to the ancient world.”⁴ In his speech Paul is going to stress the contrast between this and the overarching sovereignty of Yahweh.

Paul’s speech is a model not only of preaching about the only true God but also of Greek rhetoric. In fact, Paul makes no direct quotations from the Bible, as we might do in a public lecture. And what would be the point? The Greeks were not interested (beyond perhaps a mild curiosity) in the Jewish scriptures and in their world it would have no authority. The principles, outlined above from Isaiah and Deuteronomy 32, form the blueprint for Paul’s speech, but his style is what the Greeks were used to, and what would impress them. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians “*To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law,*” (1 Cor 9:21) and Paul’s speech is an example of the requirement to know our audience when preaching the first principles of the gospel message.

A classical oration in Greco-Roman literature consisted of three parts: *exordium*, *probatio* and *peroratio*. “*Exordium* refers to the commencement of an address. Here the speaker seeks to gain the attention or win the sympathy of the hearers. *Probatio* refers to that which the orator is attempting to convince the hearers of. Then in the *peroratio*, the speaker ‘summarizes the argument and seeks to arouse the emotions of the audience to take action or to make judgment.’”⁵ ⁶ Paul begins with his *exordium* in verse 22, moves on to the *probatio* in verse 24 and finishes with the *peroratio* starting in verse 29. Paul establishes common ground with his hearers without sacrificing his theological integrity. He manages to change the form of the message in order to appeal to a group outside of the normal Jewish cultural setting and communicates the gospel message in language the Athenians could understand while keeping its thoroughly Biblical base intact.

(To be continued)

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¹ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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PRESENT...



PRAISE-FEST AT THE COLLINGWOOD ECCLESIA IN ONTARIO

By Dave Jennings

IN the “almost” post-COVID-19 world, many ecclesias are looking for new ways to share the gospel message with their communities. On Sunday, August 28, 2022, the Collingwood Ecclesia in Ontario launched an innovative outreach activity. Over one hundred visitors attended the event, held at the local park in Collingwood.

When Bro. Chris and Sis. Martha Sales visited their son and family in Melbourne, Australia, they were

exposed to a pre-Easter event held at a park. It included music, games, activities for kids, and an invitation to a Bible address. The event was well-received in the community, with nearly 400 responses to their social media advertising.

The Collingwood Ecclesia subsequently decided to develop a similar effort, which they named “Praise-Fest.” The primary objectives were to share the gospel message, get the Christadelphian name



more recognizable in Collingwood, and give glory to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. They distributed flyers and double-sided postcards and created posters and a banner. Additionally, the event was advertised on a local classical music radio station. Ads run on Facebook reached over 9,000 people. Praise-Fest included the performance of spiritual songs, carnival games, a puppet show, crafts, and lots of great food. There were Bible challenge prizes, free Bible literature and free Bibles.

The handouts for the day included an invitation to special Bible talks scheduled over the next four months.

This is really an exciting idea for helping ecclesias better connect with the community. I am sure that other ecclesias may adapt the outreach to specific opportunities, such as inviting children to vacation Bible School or Sunday School. It also appears to be a wonderful way to get wide involvement in the ecclesia for outreach work. I am sure that this event was edifying to the members of the ecclesia.

For more photos and details about the event, please visit tidings.com/collingwoodoutreach to review a PowerPoint presentation created by the Collingswood Ecclesia.

Do you have a new way to reach members of your community? We'd love to hear from you.

*Dave Jennings,
On behalf of Chris and Martha Sales*



TWO LIVES WELL LIVED

By Cassie Giordano

TIME takes a great toll on memory. My first trip to Jamaica at age 19 is now two decades behind me. In my mind, that trip has been reduced to a handful of mental snapshots, mainly focused on my wide-eyed wonder at experiencing a climate, landscape and culture so new to me. My memory for names and faces has never been strong, and most of the people I met that summer have faded from my memory. The significant exception to this was meeting Bro. Melvin and Sis. Gerzel Gordon during our weeklong stay in May Pen. The Gordons graciously hosted our Truth Corps team while we helped run a week-long vacation Bible school. They showed immense kindness and patience with the three young adults who were, in retrospect, somewhat immature, occasionally silly and at times unintentionally inconsiderate.

Bro. Melvin and Sis. Gerzel have been pillars in the May Pen Ecclesia since it first began meeting on their veranda in the 1970s. Their influence and guidance helped build a generation of brothers and sisters with a solid understanding

of the Scriptures, and a desire to share it with others. When my husband, David, and I met them again at the end of 2017, Sis. Gerzel amazed me with details she remembered about my life that she'd gleaned from conversations so long ago that I can't begin to remember what I may have said at the time. We were blessed with many more opportunities to visit with the Gordons during the next two years as resident missionaries in Jamaica, and I was constantly struck by Sis. Gerzel's exceptional hospitality and graciousness to those she welcomed into her home. By now, nearly 80 years old, she never hesitated to invite brothers and sisters to visit or stay with her, despite family and friends being concerned about her overdoing it as she aged and dealt with various infirmities. Even if you were just stopping by to do a Bible reading, Sis. Gerzel would be certain to never let you leave without at least a small snack and some juice, and for a longer stay you could count on a home-cooked meal, complete with rice and peas, vegetables and fish or brown stew chicken.

The Gordons' hospitality certainly didn't stop at physical food. They were always actively preaching to neighbors and friends. Most Sundays before the pandemic, Sis. Gerzel would usher in a small crowd of Sunday School students that she'd gathered up from her acquaintances in the neighborhood. Bible classes and discussions were often held in their home as well. I'm sure it would be difficult to count the number of lives that were touched by these experiences. But in November 2021, Sis. Gerzel's work would be tragically finalized when she suddenly passed away, leaving a gaping hole in the May Pen ecclesia and in the hearts of all who knew her. She has left a legacy of preaching and hospitality that my small words and experiences can never do justice to. As I nevertheless try, I think Sis. Gerzel would appreciate it if I let the Scripture speak for me.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.
(Rom 12:9-18 NKJV).

This passage is a comprehensive list of things for believers to aspire to, and as I read each one, I can picture Sis. Gerzel at work at home and in the ecclesia, always with a spirit of love and care for others, and complete confidence in God.

All of this was very much on my mind when I visited May Pen once more this summer, and brought a few of the young people from the ecclesia to visit with Bro. Melvin at his home. Sis. Kharma and Akeilah Johnson, two of the Gordons' grandchildren, were there as well and we enjoyed a Bible reading and lively discussion together. It felt very strange not to have Sis. Gerzel sitting with us, giving her own input as we read. Afterward, David and I joined in a long session of card games (Quiddler and Uno!) and we all enjoyed ourselves too much to notice the time passing. When we realized it was well past four o'clock, Sis. Kharma pointed out in dismay that we all must be hungry. We'd hardly noticed it, but we'd completely missed lunch in our enjoyment of the afternoon. Suddenly Kharma was dashing about, running to the shop to pick up drinks and snacks and making tuna sandwiches for the six of us in no time at all. Watching her at work, I had a bittersweet moment picturing how Sis. Gerzel would do the same on our previous visits, but it felt right to see Sis. Kharma carrying on the spirit of love and hospitality that her grandmother demonstrated throughout her life.

*Cassie Giordano,
(Norfolk Ecclesia, VA)*

THE INEXTINGUISHABLE FLAME

By John Bilello

THIS is a book of poems (Simon Shepherd, 216 pages, (2016), \$25 CAD, \$20 US), based on Biblical themes and spiritual inspirations that the author has gathered from society, culture, friendships and nature. I am not a poet. The reader should note that the last time I ever read a poem, other than those in the Scriptures was when I was an undergraduate some sixty-five years ago. Classic poetry was part of a mandatory English literature survey class aimed at nerd engineering majors. The one thing I do remember from that course was Lord Byron's poem "The Destruction of Sennacherib," a poem alluded to by Bro. Simon in his forward. Like the author, I admired then and now the majesty of that poem. Hence, it was a pleasure to go on from his foreword to read the many poems that alluded to Scripture.

There is no need for me to comment on the poetic structure because I don't know the differences between free verse, sonnets, Haiku, etc. However, one



doesn't have to be an artist to appreciate the great art in a museum—it's just a question of knowing what you like. In the case of this book, there is much to like. It's worth noting that approximately a third of the Bible was written in poetry. There was a good reason for that—poetry makes thoughts easier to remember and transmit. For example, I have known many

individuals who could recite bits and pieces from the Psalms without ever being aware they were quoting the poet, King David. This book provides many outstanding passages that are well worth remembering in times of doubt, stress, grief, love, fear, sadness, depression, cheerfulness, and thanksgiving (to name a few special to me).

I will recite a few examples, specifically to whet your appetite, so you will rush to read this book. The poem on page 119 is a tribute to missionaries (and is apparently where the author based the name for his book). He wrote, "There is an inextinguishable flame—within the breast of those who proclaim."

That particularly resonated with me, having traveled to many parts of the world to teach the gospel message. Other poems give spiritual insight into how people can respond to something so simple as an unexpectedly warm day in winter (“The Day Spring came in December,” page 23). Some poems seem so melodic they cry out for music (page 30, “Whims of the Wind”). Other poems particularly touched me because of my current situation in life (i.e., old age!). The poem “Hands of Time” on page 111 was especially poignant. The author also has several very evocative poems written as tributes to beloved brethren who are now asleep in Christ, awaiting the resurrection. They deserve to be remembered because the memory of their lives inspires us; the author’s poems help us do that. The book is replete with graphic illustrations from many different brothers and sisters that add immeasurably to the beauty of the manuscript. Note also that contrary to custom, many of the poems in this book include footnotes. They are worth reading and provide insights not usually associated with poetry. Moreover, all proceeds from the sale of this book are donated to “Agape in Action.” I recommend this book, without reservation and I truly hope it goes through multiple print runs in the future.

To purchase this book or make inquiries, please contact simon.shepherd777@hotmail.com. Also, please see for additional information on this fine book.

*John C. Bilello,
(Ann Arbor Ecclesia, MI)*

Here’s a sample from *The Inextinguishable Flame*

ABIDE WITH ME (THE RESPONSE)

I know thy grieving, dear child, have no doubt.
It is My shadow that blocks the sun’s rays out.
For sun and cloudless skies won’t bring you near,
As darkened days provoke Me to appear.

As rain clouds bring the rainbow up above,
Know I must chasten all those whom I love.
As stormy night precedes the morning sun,
Eternity waits for each suffering one.

My voice propels the wind at My command.
When storms surround you—I will hold your
hand.

You’ll not be forsaken or ever out of view,
Abide in me as I abide in you.

Come, hear My son, whom I sent you in My
Name,

Whose sacrifice of love endured the shame.
His tears were previous in Gethsemane,
As was the blood which flowed from Calvary.

I’ve done My utmost that man be reconciled,
Withholding not My dear beloved child.
His pain was great, so great a sacrifice,
No other offering could pay such a price.

Psa 50:15

Lam 3

Heb 12:1-11

This poem is a proposed sequel to the hymn that we will all know and love, from the One who is more than just its subject matter, but our very Creator. These words are simply a poetic rendition of what He would have us know from His Word, that we often rely on Him when times are difficult and so must we see chastening as a calling to draw closer to him.

EGYPTIAN IMAGERY IN JOB

FROM *JOB'S QUEST*

By Ethel Archard

JEWISH tradition attributes the Book of Job to Moses, making it the oldest book in the Bible. Yet it offers no hint of the Red Sea crossing, the giving of the Law, or the Israelites' wilderness wanderings. This suggests Job's trials and their dramatic retelling took place before Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Job is usually identified with Jobab in the Genesis and Chronicles genealogies. (Gen 36:33-34 and I Chron 1: 23, 44-45). The great-grandson of Esau, he is called a prince of Edom and one of the greatest men of the east. He lived in the land of Uz (Job 1:1), likely in the north-western part of what is now Saudi Arabia, along the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba and often identified as the kingdom of Edom.

Moses was born, raised, and educated in Egypt. Nursed by his own mother, he was well aware of the God of Abraham. Brought up by Pharaoh's daughter as a member of the nobility, he was literate and familiar with all things Egyptian. He fled to Midian at the age of forty.

During his sojourn in Midian, Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite priest called Reuel in Esau's genealogies. Moses' in-laws were Kenites (Judg 1:16 and 4:11). He must

have heard (perhaps quite often) about his wife's long-suffering ancestor Job.

The Book of Job contains subtle hints of Egyptian background. The allusions are clear enough that in a work of Jewish fiction from around the time of Christ, Job is a king of Egypt.¹

The First Clue

I first became aware of the Egyptian background to Job when I read that the Egyptian hieroglyph for the dawn is the eye of the crocodile (Leviathan) rising just above the water level.² Twice in Job, the eyes of Leviathan are compared to the eyelids of the dawn or the morning. (Job 3:8-9 and 41:18).

Another Nile denizen appears along with Leviathan at the end of God's speeches from the whirlwind: Behemoth, or the hippopotamus. In fact, these two beasts lived along the Nile in Moses' day, often in an uneasy relationship.

Nile hippos became extinct but would have been around in the time of Moses. Today, crocodiles only live south of the Aswan Dam. Both could be fierce and aggressive, and they sometimes fought each other. A hippo killed the first pharaoh, Menes; crocs were known for attacking people.

Moses would be familiar with these two impressive creatures, as would many of his fellow Israelites.³ So might Job, at least second-hand, because Uz was on an ancient trade route between Midian and Egypt.

Where is Wisdom Found?

Significantly, Job is the first of the Wisdom books. Its message revolves around the inadequacy of human wisdom in contrast to the wisdom of God, epitomized in the hymn to wisdom (Job 28).

The hymn's first section (Job 28:1-11) portrays the impressive ingenuity involved in discovering and digging for precious metals and gemstones, as well as controlling the flow of waters. It describes the risks people take in descending deep into mine shafts, sometimes hanging in midair, to extract treasures from the rocks. This is the only Biblical description of ancient mining techniques. Bronze Age people like Job and Moses would certainly be familiar with mining. The Kenites—(Judg 1:16 and 4:11)—were known for their skills as coppersmiths and metalworkers. While this may seem like a piece of trivia, it is a significant contextual clue.

The mention of copper smelting reflects the fact that Midian was well-known for copper mines from a very early time. The Trans-Sinai Highway, called the King's Highway (Num 20:17), was an important trade route in the ancient Near East, enabling Egypt to import copper directly from Midian and could be the route Moses took when he fled from Egypt to Midian.

Horus, one of Egypt's oldest and most revered gods, had the head of a falcon. The Eye of Horus was a hieroglyphic symbol for protection. This passing reference seems to be more than a mere coincidence:

The falcon's eye has not seen it.
(Job 28:7).⁴

True wisdom cannot be found by mining the depths of the earth. Not even the most revered bird of prey, with its acute vision, looking down from the sky, can see the whole picture.

Its second section (Job 28:13-19) makes the point that heavenly wisdom is priceless when compared with treasures that come out of the earth. The rich and powerful of ancient Egypt, as Moses would know, adorned themselves in both life and death with gold, lapis lazuli⁵, and other precious stones. The stunning artifacts found in the tomb of King Tutankhamun (a relatively minor pharaoh) are only the tip of the iceberg!

From a human perspective, diamonds are forever.⁶ In contrast, in God's wisdom, only the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Cor 4:18). The Egyptians, in all their opulence, could never achieve eternal glory.

In its final section (Job 28:20-28), the hymn identifies where to find true wisdom. One must look upwards to God—not downwards to the earth.

From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding?

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding. (Job 28:20, 28).

Allusions to Egyptian Mythology

In His revelation from the whirlwind, Yahweh focuses on certain animals. The original language was challenging to translate into English, but there are at least a few veiled references to the Egyptians' sham gods and goddesses.

Their god of writing and wisdom was Thoth, often portrayed with the head of an ibis (see illustrations on next page). The ibis is a long-legged wading bird that still thrives along the Nile; it stood for science, mathematics, and wisdom. The engineering feats and complex artistry of the ancient Egyptians continue to amaze and intrigue scholars even today. Moses grew up amid these impressive human achievements.

Hidden in God's speech from the whirlwind is a key question (Job 38:36 NIV, also see ESV note): "*Who gives the ibis wisdom?*" Translators have obviously struggled with the language here, but this interpretation fits the context: Yahweh, not some bird-headed idol, is the source of wisdom.

Ma'at was their goddess of truth, justice, and order in the universe—key themes of the book of Job. Her image appears in numerous tombs, often wearing an ostrich feather. According to Egyptian mythology, the heart of a deceased dignitary would be weighed on a scale against Ma'at's ostrich feather (representing truth) to judge worthiness for the supposed afterlife.

The wings of the ostrich wave proudly, But are they the pinions and plumage of love?... God has

made her forget wisdom and given her no share in understanding.
(Job 39:13, 17 ESV).

Yahweh's description of the ostrich seems like a parody: her wings look nice, but underneath all her beauty, she's not very smart. Similarly, Egyptian ideas about truth and justice might look good, but they offer no real understanding.

In part, Yahweh's message was an attack on Egyptian religion. Later, through the ten plagues, He would attack and defeat the Egyptian gods, demonstrating to the Israelites the power and reality of the one true God of Abraham.

Moses and Job

The Egyptian imagery, while obscure to the modern reader, attests to a Mosaic origin for the Book of Job. Moses had to see the emptiness of Egyptian culture and put it behind him. His time in Midian enabled him to break away from the vanities of Egypt.

Moses probably went through a process similar to Job. Job started with a simplistic view of his God (the God of Abraham) based on tradition, then came to appreciate His mercy and majesty. Moses arrived in Midian with a strong but simple faith, and there he began to understand his God more deeply.

*Ethel Archard,
(Ottawa Ecclesia, ON)*

Continued on next page

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM *JOB'S QUEST*

Relief from the tomb of a princess at Sakkara

The crocodile is about to snatch away the hippo's calf. This not only shows both animals lived in proximity but also that they had an uncomfortable relationship.



Ma'at wearing an ostrich feather on her head

Artist's reproduction on papyrus
of art from an ancient tomb.



Relief from Kom Ombo Temple in Edfu

Thoth (far left: the ibis-
headed god of wisdom) and
Horus (far right: the revered
falcon-headed god).

¹ *The Testament of Job* is an imaginative re-telling of the Job story.

² Roy Zuck, *Everyman's Bible Commentary: Job* (Moody Press, Chicago. 1978), p. 182.

³ For an interpretation of their significance in Yahweh's revelation from the whirlwind, see *Job's Quest*, Chapter 22: "Job's Monsters."

⁴ All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version.

⁵ Job 28: 6, 16 NIV. Called "sapphires" in other translations. The Egyptians prized lapis lazuli; they used it in their jewelry and as the base for the vivid blue color in their tomb paintings. According to Norman Habel (*The Book of Job*, 1985) sapphires were unknown until Roman times.

⁶ "*Diamonds are Forever*" was the title of a 1956 Ian Fleming novel which was the basis for a 1971 James Bond movie. A similar phrase, "a diamond is forever," is the advertising slogan for De Beers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNITY UPDATE

Please accept our appreciation for the Unity Update article published recently in the magazines. We would concur that, in view of agreement over doctrinal issues, it is a reasonable request for ecclesias to independently make fellowship decisions with the "few occasional" visitors from non-participating unamended ecclesias that may attend. In our West Coast unity experience, this has proven not to be a threat to the Truth, and may actually encourage even more unamended ecclesias to participate in the FA2018.

*On behalf of Pacific Coast Christadelphian Reunion Committee,
Bob Stodel*

REGISTRATION FOR THE U.S. DRAFT

Last night I gave a talk to our ecclesia on the topic of conscientious objection, after reading Bro. Peter Hemingray's book, "*Within the Camps*." I reported that failure to register for selective service can result in ineligibility for U.S. federal and state jobs and other benefits, as Bro. Hemingray states in his book. But also, failure to register is a felony offense, punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000, and/or up to five years imprisonment. Over 90% of all eligible males are currently registered. Failure to know may not be a strong argument. In thirty-seven states (CA is a notable exception), one is automatically registered for selective service when given a driver's license. If a federal student loan app (FASFA) is submitted, an eligible male is automatically registered. Once registered, the selective service system, within 90 days, sends out a letter to the registrant containing his draft card and proof of registration.

Several people mentioned to me that they had never heard this. It may not be widely known in our community. Part of our spiritual consciousness is that we obey the laws of the land if they do not conflict with God's laws. I feel all should register. It is also important to note that registration does not mean losing one's ability to claim conscientious objector status if he/she were ever to be drafted.

*Bob Korbelak,
(San Diego Ecclesia, CA)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FULNESS, FAITHFULNESS AND FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

This article reminded me of the importance of noticing gratitude and living in gratitude. The importance of becoming aware of where our inner battles come from, and the root of our own needs, desires and even the critical condition we can fall into when our focus switches from a spirit of gratitude to a spirit of resentment. Grudges and lack of awareness is with us, our minds, and negative emotions. I have come to the realization that when we lose sight of God and put our sight on our circumstances, or people, we give room to disappointment, which leads to deprivation, based on emotional needs and wants. We become so reactive rather than proactive when we focus on the things people haven't done for us, instead of the characteristics God has shown us through His Son. We are offered to live in abundant peace, mercy, unconditional love, and gratitude. I really am looking forward to reading and commenting on more of these posts! It is a great reminder to me.

*Jessica Frias,
(Los Angeles Ecclesia, CA)*

Ciucaș Peak, Romania

Thoughts on the Way

POGGLE

FIRST, you'll have to understand what it was like when my mother was growing up in the depths of the Great Depression. Ruth Hatcher's father died of tuberculosis when she was 12 years old. This left her widowed mother, Jesse Hatcher, with a daughter and no means to care for them both. It was a real blessing when Jesse's older brother, George Johnson—a bachelor who taught school in Houston, Texas—generously invited his sister to move in with him and take on the role of homemaker and cook. Years later, in memory of Uncle George and his kindness, my mother named her firstborn George.

Times were hard, very hard, in the Great Depression. Women made clothes for their children out of empty flour sacks. My mother wore such dresses and was grateful to have them. Mom's story was no exception; there were millions like her. (My father's family, the Bookers, were no better off. My father had to leave school when he was fourteen to help provide for the family.) Nothing came easy for anyone who lived through the 1920s and the 1930s. So, it should be no surprise that families scratched and struggled and saved and stretched their resources to buy food and simple necessities.

At mealtime, everyone was expected to eat everything on their plate. Not a crumb was overlooked. Food that was left over from one meal was sure

to find its way onto the table for the next meal.

The habits of a young girl growing up in such a time were not easily forgotten. Years later, when the economy revived, when life was more comfortable, and food was more plentiful, my mother still could not bear to throw out the least bit of edible food. When the peach season came around, she asked us to buy the very overripe peaches, which cost practically nothing. Then she would spend hours cutting out the bad parts and using what was left to make peach cobbler. We called it "Mom's Rotten Peach Cobbler."

Later still, when my mother was living with us, she never really approved of us eating out. Why should we go to a restaurant and spend money, she asked, when we have plenty of good leftovers right here at home?

Her reminder became a saying in our home. So, when Mom began her familiar sentence, we finished it for her. "We don't need to eat out," she would begin, and we would jump in with, "when we have plenty of good leftovers." It didn't take long before the phrase became an acronym: "**Plenty of Good Leftovers**" became **POGL**—which was pronounced (you guessed it!) "Poggle." Now that Mom is no longer with us, we still ask one another, "What do we have for Poggle?"

Plenty of Good Leftovers

The Bible is full of references to leftovers, and especially really good leftovers.

When the Israelites traveled through the Sinai desert, God provided food for them, “*manna*” from heaven in the form of wafers with a taste of honey—“*all the bread you want in the morning.*” Each day the people gathered their daily ration, which was enough for one day. However, on the sixth day of the week, God gave everyone twice the usual allotment—providing manna enough for one day, plus **Plenty of Good Leftovers** for the seventh day, when they were commanded to refrain from all labor (Exod 16).

Many years later, Jesus attended a wedding, where he learned that the “*master of the banquet*” had run out of wine. Jesus suggested to his disciples that they draw water out of the water jars. As they brought what had been water to the host, it miraculously became wine—as the host said, the best wine he had ever tasted. Quietly, to his disciples, Jesus had demonstrated that there was plenty of the finest wine to be had from him (John 2:1-11).

In later years, large crowds of people followed Jesus and his disciples. Some came hoping to be healed; some stayed to hear his

teachings. Many of them ate at the table he provided for them, in the countryside or the wilderness, and he never failed them. When it looked as though there was not enough food for such multitudes, Jesus took the disciples’ supplies, and miraculously turned them into a feast for thousands. Starting with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt 14:17; Mark 6:38), or seven loaves and a few small fish (Matt 15:34), he provided more than enough food. No matter what happened, all his followers were filled:

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. (Matt 14:19-20; cp. Mark 8:4-8).

“*Twelve basketfuls*” or “*seven basketfuls*” of “*broken pieces*” were, surely, “*plenty of good leftovers.*” But the wondrous increase of food was not even the most important part of these stories. The “*headline*” was Jesus himself:

He who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna



in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living [or 'life-giving'] bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:48-51).

Jesus was, and still is, the living and life-giving bread. Even today, those who follow him, and figuratively partake of his body, will live forever in his Kingdom.

The seemingly endless supply of bread and fish surely captured the attention of thousands, so much so that they devoted their lives to Jesus. But the endless supply which he was offering them, and us, was and is eternal life. And that miraculous provision has undoubtedly captured the attention of millions.

Jesus offers us forgiveness of sins and an eternity alongside himself:

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. (Luke 6:36-38).

God provided food in the wilderness, with extra to spare, and Jesus fed the multitudes with plenty of good leftovers. These were miracles indeed.

But the most extraordinary miracle of all is the endless supply of forgiveness that our Savior offers to us. No matter what sins we have committed, no matter how many times we have stumbled and fallen—if we repent, and if we forgive others—**we will be forgiven!**

You and I will never find a better deal than this in the whole wide world—plenty of lovingkindness left over for us—a spring whose blessings never fail and a sea without a shore. We have heard of the “*unsearchable riches of Christ*.” (Eph 3:8). Those riches include love, kindness, grace, mercy, and an eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God.

Such riches are much better than ordinary gold and silver, infinitely better than positions or possessions, which the world considers “wealth.” The wonder of Christ’s “riches” is that when it looks like we have exhausted all the available reserves of forgiveness, then we see that our Master’s love is bottomless, and there is still **plenty of good leftovers** in his basket of blessing.

George Booker,
(Austin Leander Ecclesia, TX)

*Dedicated to Mom,
who had plenty of good leftovers
and plenty of love for all of us.*

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