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TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 4, April, 2023

INTO THE WILDERNESS

All people go to the wilderness.
Some go without God;
others go under His care and supervision.

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

Volume 86, Number 4 / April, 2023

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E D I T O R I A L

INTO THE WILDERNESS

By Dave Jennings



THE gospel record provides a fascinating juxtaposition of two men being “*led into the wilderness*.” Of the Lord Jesus, immediately after his baptism, “*the spirit driveth him into the wilderness*.” (Mark 1:12). Of the tormented man, Legion, he was “*driven of the devil into the wilderness*.” (Luke 8:29). Two very different men, driven for different reasons into the dangerous perils of the wilderness. One represents the work of the Spirit, the other the natural trials of the man of the flesh.

All people enter the wilderness. It is a land of solitude, where one stands completely alone and is tested. It is a time when we learn about ourselves and what matters to us. We learn what is useful, as well as what is frivolous. The wilderness exposes us to threats against our faith and even against our life. It proves us like a refining fire. We learn how to survive. When we emerge, we can be stronger and more prepared to face future wilderness experiences.

Jesus was driven, or “*led up of the spirit*.” (Matt 4:1). This was a God-led exercise. Previously, Moses had been on the mountain before God for forty days and nights and had not eaten bread or drunk water (Exod 34:28). During this time, Moses would see the remarkable revelation of the character of God. His skin shone like rays shooting out. In the wilderness, Moses became more fully equipped to lead God’s people and endure the trials and temptations that would come his way.

Jesus was fully aware that the wilderness was an important part of God’s preparation for his ministry. Each temptation was laser-focused

on the major challenges Jesus would later face. He would be tempted by the risk of inappropriate use of the Spirit for his benefit, to demonstrate his authority, and compulsion to be exalted as king of this world. The Lord masterfully conquered each trial by citing Deuteronomy for his spiritual direction. God directed Jesus to go to the wilderness for his own spiritual growth.

Legion

Legion’s experience was quite different. He was “*driven of the devil*,” not the Spirit, into the wilderness. The madness of this man was not a recent phenomenon, for we are told he had suffered for a long time. His flight from his hometown in the region of the Gadarenes to the wilderness was a fruitless escape rather than for a positive purpose. It was the release of a wild man. This poor soul was under torment that few of us could imagine. His illness was so uncontrollable that even when bound by chains and fetters, there was no controlling him. His family had been powerless in all attempts to bring his madness under control. With no other hope, he fled into the wilderness, naked and homeless, finding no better sanctuary than the desolate tombs. He found others with similar madnesses, but their company provided no solace. The wilderness was not a place of spiritual testing for this man. It was a place of utter torment.

The Wilderness Today

Thankfully, our wilderness journey is more like the Lord’s, not Legion’s. The trials we endure are prompted by God for our learning. We are told that:

No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised [trained] thereby." (Heb 12:11).

In the wilderness, we will be scourged, *"as with sons."* (Heb 12:7). Our entire lives are to be lived under the righteous hand of God, who works carefully with us to build our faith. Our whole experience in the wilderness is about development.

Sadly, most of the world is in the wilderness with Legion. Lonely. Terrified. In agony. Unable to master the basic impulses of the flesh. Survival is day by day. There is no hope or expectation of a better day ahead. What joy is found is fleeting and balanced with sorrow.

We feel deeply for such people because we were once part of the same experience. Apart from the grace and salvation of our Lord, life can only be measured by a series of disappointments. Without the Lord, we were powerless to control our flesh and bring it into obedience. Bad habits and sins we wanted to conquer instead brought us into captivity. Until our Lord delivered us, we also were those *"who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."* (Heb 2:15). We were Legion.

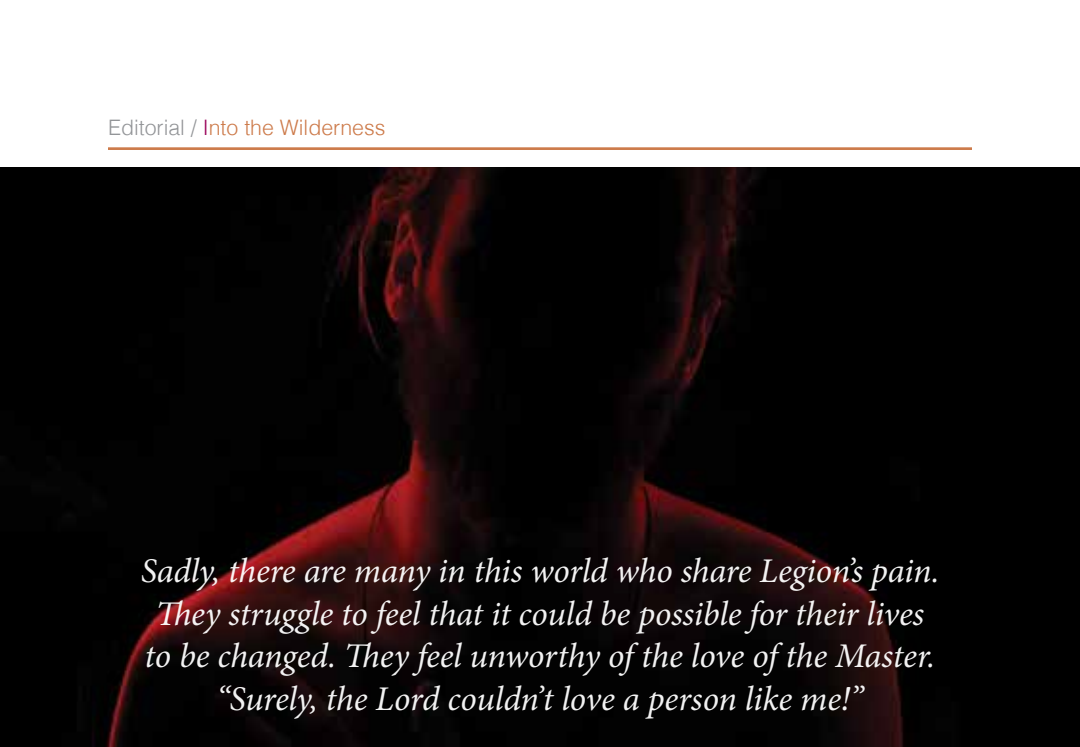
Meeting Jesus

The encounter with Legion was extremely dramatic. Matthew describes Legion as *"exceeding fierce."* (Matt 8:28). Matthew's account clarifies that it was not one, but two possessed

men who approached Jesus. The NLT translates this as they *"were so violent that no man could go through the area."* Their very appearance (and likely smell) would have been repulsive, as they were unclothed, with skin torn and festering from cuts made with rocks. Even courageous people would avoid such an encounter. Further, as Jesus and his disciples came near, one of the madmen ran as fast as possible toward Jesus.

But the approach was not to attack. Instead, Legion prostrated himself at the feet of the Master and *"worshipped him."* (Mark 5:6). I wonder how the disciples reacted to this? I suspect some were paralyzed in fear. Others may have felt the compulsion to protect their Master. Then, after lying on the ground before Jesus, Legion screams out, *"What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not."* (Mark 5:7-8).

I find Legion's reaction most interesting. First, while most were still grappling with who Jesus was, this man, who was an outcast and filled with madness, knew exactly who he was! This declaration is well before Peter confessed in Caesarea Philippi that Jesus was *"the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matt 16:16). Yet this poor man didn't calculate that he could be healed. He only asked that Jesus not torment him as so many others had. He worried Jesus would banish him again, and he would have to search for a new haven. At this point in their interaction, Legion saw the Lord as a man of great authority, but he did not know that he would merit compassion. People only



Sadly, there are many in this world who share Legion's pain. They struggle to feel that it could be possible for their lives to be changed. They feel unworthy of the love of the Master. "Surely, the Lord couldn't love a person like me!"

feared Legion. Could somebody show him love and compassion? He didn't think so.

But Legion was at the feet of the most compassionate man that has walked this earth. I am certain the Lord's heart was abounding with great love as he looked down on him. Jesus asked, "What is thy name?" (Luke 8:30). I wonder when the last time someone had asked this of the man? Jesus didn't see him as a monster but as a man worthy of redemption. He responded, "Legion." His identity was no longer his given name. He identified only with his torment. But the Lord didn't label him as Legion. He was interested in the man himself.

Sadly, there are many in this world who share Legion's pain. They struggle to feel that it could be possible for their lives to be changed. Their lives are too messy, too manic. They feel unworthy

of the love of the Master. "Surely, the Lord couldn't love a person like me!"

Jesus demonstrates his power to heal by sending the madness into the swine that were feeding nearby. Interestingly, the swine ran "violently" into the sea and were drowned (Matt 8:32), running just like Legion himself had run before the Lord. Legion must have been astounded as he saw the swine wildly running away, as he had done so many times.

The man, now healed, would wash and be clothed. How long had it been since he was clean and clothed? When the keepers of the swine saw this, they ran, and the whole city came out to see what had happened. They found the wildest of men now sitting, clothed, "and in his right mind." (Mark 5:15). Undoubtedly, this man would return home to the joy of his family. The Master returned their lost son.

Paul describes the Last Days as “*perilous*.” This is the same word Matthew and Mark use to describe Legion—fierce. Because our Lord has compassion on us, we face this perilous world “*in our right mind*,” not as aimless, retreating creatures. We need not be afraid, for we are driven not by the devil into the wilderness but by the Spirit.

The Value of Our Wilderness

The first message to all of us, is to preach urgently to those huddled with Legion in the wilderness. Do we see them as men and women with a name, or do we label them by their anguish? What a powerful message of hope we offer. We cannot heal them, but we can bring them to the feet of he who can. Each of us can choose the road that no others will journey for fear of Legion. What a remarkable opportunity it is for us to witness the transformation of the souls of people under the care of the Master!

All people go to the wilderness. Some go without God; others go under His care and supervision. This provides an important perspective on our spiritual lives. The trials we face are for a purpose, assuming we can have our minds exercised by them. Going through difficult experiences does not guarantee spiritual value will be realized. The man who battles a life-threatening illness may emerge less godly and not see his Creator as the one who granted health. But for those who learn in the wilderness, it brings us closer to our God. We learn to depend on Him. We feel His presence near us, rather than loneliness. We obtain the “*peaceable fruit of righteousness*” when we recognize that our God provides

abundant strength in our hour of need. Just as Jesus’s temptations in the wilderness prepared him for the work ahead, so our God is shaping each of us as individuals to prepare for the work ahead. Paul described this when he wrote,

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:10 NIV).

God is working through His Son, who is deploying the angels to shape us and prepare us for work ahead. Each of us will need to take a different path in the wilderness, as our faith requires. Ultimately, if we submit to his training program, He will work through us. We will become the “*good ground*” that will “*bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.*” (Mark 4:20).

After the wilderness experience, Jesus “*returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee.*” (Luke 4:14). Immediately after the wilderness, our Lord went right to work.

May we each travel through the harsh and perilous times we face, not feeling fear or loneliness. Our compassionate Lord is with us, bringing us through our trials. Let’s submit to his leadership, for if we do, we, too, will surely bear fruit from the Master working through us. He has called us to “*yield ourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.*” (Rom 6:13). He knows our names. He washed us. He clothed us. He has given us the mind of Christ, which brings us great peace.

Dave Jennings

PSALMS FOR THE NIGHT SEASONS

By Nathan Badger

DO you feel you had enough sleep last night? When was the last time you woke up, decided you didn't need a cup of coffee or tea, and just proceeded through the day refreshed and reinvigorated as though you'd slept for a week? If you answered, "I can't remember," you are not alone.

Despite the importance of sleep, restless nights have always tormented humankind. A verse in the Psalms confirms that David wrestled on his bed at night: *"O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent."* (Psa 22:2).¹

David expresses desperate feelings, emotions, and inner turmoil on his bed. He cries out to God during the day and even during the night when he wishes he could sleep.

Can you put yourself in David's sandals? Many things plague us and keep us up at night. In this series of articles, we will examine several reasons why the Psalmists struggled to sleep at night. Perhaps they are our reasons too? We will also explore solutions the Psalmists and other Bible characters employed to help calm the night storms and eventually find sleep and peace with God.²

The Night Seasons

The “night seasons” is an interesting expression. Job also uses it: “My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no rest.” (Job 30:17 KJV). What does it mean? Strong’s reveals this can literally mean the night, but it is also used figuratively for a period of dark adversity or a season of trial. David’s use of this expression in Psalms 22 suggests he is dealing with both: a night of turmoil fueled by a long season of trouble.

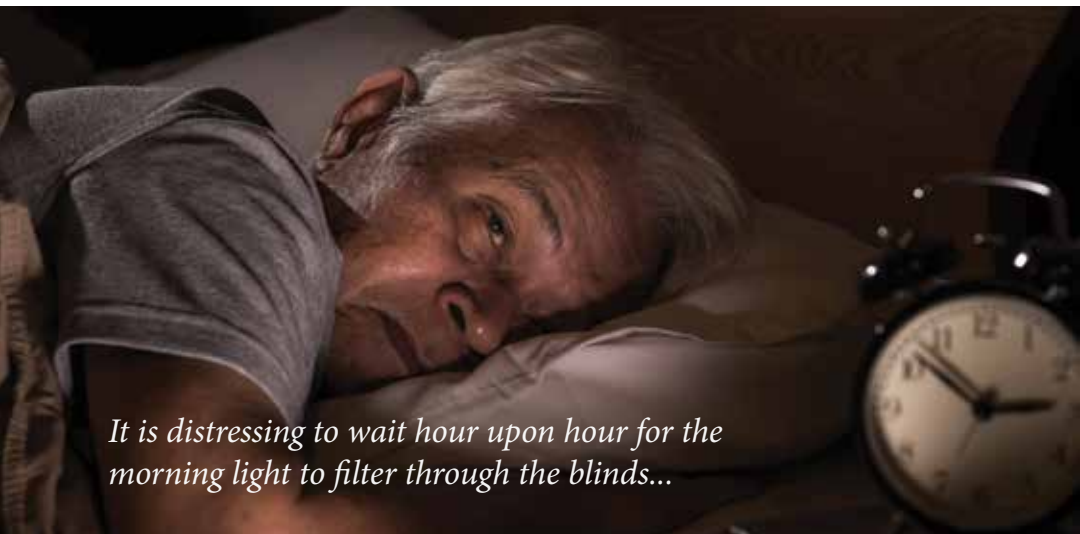
David uses the term again in Psalms 16 where he says, “I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons.” (v. 7). In this verse, he is meditating and mulling over counsel he has received from God by night, perhaps through prayer, reading or meditation. As he tosses and turns, he tries to find answers and rationalize his plight with God’s principles or just radically accept the confusion of his life.

Asaph, the chief musician at the Temple, describes similar experiences during the night:

In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted ... You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. I have considered the days of old ... I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search. (Psa 77:2-6).

Asaph paints the picture of a man on his bed with hands outstretched in petition and pleas. He was overwhelmed with his distress. He tried music, musing, and meditation, and still, his eyelids would not close.

Can you relate to these scenarios? As we stare at the ceiling or repeatedly glance at the night clock, we may find ourselves in prayer or tears, crying out to God as we share our anguish. Or we may just ruminate on our troubles,



It is distressing to wait hour upon hour for the morning light to filter through the blinds...

ponder our dreams, rehearse verses, or attempt to view our lives from God's perspective. This is not a fun experience. It is distressing to wait hour upon hour for the morning light to filter through the blinds.

What caused David to writhe on his bed at night? Perhaps it was Saul's endless pursuit of David's life? Or wars and threats from other nations? At times, we can be sure it was the same things that worry us: our children (Absalom), our marriage (Bathsheba, Michal), our job, or lack thereof, or even the loss of loved ones (the death of David's baby, or Ahithophel's suicide). There are so many things that wreak havoc in our minds at night. And they were all shared by Godly men and women years ago.

The Problem—Psalm 3 and 4

What solutions did David find for sleep during these night seasons? In Psalms 3 and 4, a paired set of Psalms, David shares several. But their historical context helps reveal the depth of their meaning.

The superscription for Psalm 3 reads, "*A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.*" This tragedy is described in 2 Samuel 15-17, where we learn how Absalom seduces the nation of Israel (15:1-6), plans a coup against his father David (v. 10), convinces innocent individuals to join (v. 11), and even recruits Ahithophel, David's friend and chief counselor to join this

large conspiracy (v. 12). Horrified, David realizes that he and his family will have to hotfoot it from the palace in Jerusalem (vv. 13-14). They all passed through the Brook Kidron, escape over the Mt of Olives barefoot and weeping (vv. 23, 30), and eventually flee over the Jordan River by night (17:15-16, 22).

Do these Psalms describe a happy time in David's life? On the contrary—it was deeply distressing. Many of us can relate to losing a close friend, being disappointed by family, having to flee our house, being innocent victims in a wayward plan, or having our lives threatened. When Ahithophel offers to "*choose twelve thousand men, and arise and pursue David,*" (2 Sam 17:1), we can feel David's anguish: "*LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me.*" (Psa 3:1). David and his company were terrified!

The Solutions

Curiously, amidst this chaos, David reveals in both Psalms that "*I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me,*" (Psalm 3:5) and "*I will both lie down in peace, and sleep.*" (Psalm 4:8). Do these sound like the night seasons of a man fleeing for his life? How did David get to a point where the night seasons were bearable? He reveals some solutions in these Psalms:

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1) Trust and Confidence. Trust is a feeling of belief that we have in someone. It does not necessarily require prior evidence or history, whereas confidence depends on actions from prior history. In Psalm 4:3, David expresses trust that God would someday “*set apart for Himself him who is godly.*” He believed God would not count him with “*the sons of men*” that “*love what is worthless and search for what is deceptive*” (v. 2 NET). This was a future hope based on his belief in God’s promises to him. If we “*trust in the LORD*” (4:5) and in these same promises, He will eventually separate us from the same godless people that keep us awake.

David also expresses great **confidence** in God when he describes Him in military terms: “*You, O LORD, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head.*” (Psa 3:3). David had built this confidence in God when He protected him from Saul, Goliath, and other threatening characters. The word “*shield*” means to surround or hedge about. David knew God was positioned in front, behind, beside, under, and over him. When we struggle or others threaten us, do we picture God as fully around us? May God open our eyes, as he did for Gehazi, and reveal that God’s horses and chariots of fire are “*all around*” us. (2 Kgs 6:17).

2) Prayer. Do we truly believe in the power of prayer? David unashamedly admits that he needs help, and so he “*cried to the LORD with my voice.*” (Psa 3:4). Like Hezekiah, when he faced the Assyrian army (2 Kgs 19:14), David spreads out his troubles before God and admits how scared and

overwhelmed he feels. But there is no power if there is no prayer. Sharing with God is therapeutic. And, when we cry out to God, we involve Him in our troubles, admit that we are powerless by ourselves, and acknowledge that God supplies so many more resources for our distress than we can alone. If we pray, David provides us with complete confidence that “*the LORD will hear.*” (Psa 3:4; 4:3).

3) Fear Not. If we were faced with 12,000 men and the charismatic threat of Absalom, would we be afraid? David states unequivocally, “*I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.*” (Psa 3:6). It took David time to progress to this perspective, as it would us. Still, he eventually embraces God’s reassurances: “*Do not fear*” and “*I am with thee.*” God repeats these and similar phrases over forty times in the Bible. Why? Because we naturally fear, and God knows it! Did you notice how David contrasts those who are “*against me all around,*” with God, who **fully surrounds us as a “shield”** (v. 3)? God was with him—there was no reason to fear. Paul exclaims confidently, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Rom 8:31). Do we truly believe this, or do we allow our fears to vex us on our beds at night?

4) Leave Vengeance to God. As David flees Jerusalem, he encounters the scoundrel Shimei, who defames God’s anointed as a “*man of blood,*” “*evil,*” and a “*worthless man.*” (2 Sam 16:5-8 ESV). He is bold enough to throw rocks and dust at David and the royal entourage. He is typical of some people we face in our life during distress. They hand



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us stones rather than help. People are quick to accuse, bold enough to judge, gossip, and insult without all the details, and forget that God has orchestrated the event. When someone adds insult to our injury, our natural reaction is to fight back and silence this pain. But David's reaction is one of great restraint. Instead of allowing Abishai to lop off Shimei's head, here he frames him as another trial God "*hath bidden.*" (v. 11 KJV). David does not take vengeance. Instead, he believed God would "requite" him or overturn this cursing. When we face similar characters during our trials, are we vindictive, or do our actions profess a firm belief that God has "*struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.*" (Psa 3:7)?

5) Be Angry and Do Not Sin. While we lay on our beds and stew or fret, it is easy to work ourselves into a state of anger or even rage and proceed to act in a harmful way. David instructs us to "*Be angry, and do not sin.*" (Psa 4:4). Anger is a God-given emotion we all experience. What matters is what we do with that anger. Anger can motivate us to act and make positive changes in our life, but if we do not harness or diffuse it quickly and healthily, it can boil over with dire consequences. Paul quotes this verse saying, "*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath.*" (Eph 4:26). In other words, deal with your anger in short order. Don't let it fester through the night and have it explode before dawn. Perhaps it is better to get

up and distract ourselves? It is wise to leave social media alone until a cooler head prevails. Exercising or talking with someone who can validate our feelings may help calm us down. Better yet, have we asked God to help douse the flames burning inside us?

6) Be Still. David's ultimate goal in the night seasons was to: "*Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.*" (Psa 4:4). The word "*still*" means to be silent or at peace. This is a difficult task and does not diminish the benefits of processing our grief, sorrow, or upset. However, after hours or nights, our end goal is to proactively achieve a peaceful state and be still.

When we practice David's solutions above, we are more likely to find peace and "*be still*" on our beds. "Stillness" will also be achieved if we "*Offer the sacrifices of righteousness.*" (Psa 4:5). This means that we respond to our night seasons and foes in a manner that is right in

David's ultimate goal in the night seasons was to: "*Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.*"

God's eyes and that we are willing to suffer wrongfully if this is part of our trial (1 Pet 2:19-23). Winston Churchill allegedly admitted, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles. But most of them never happened." We can worry at night about many things that never come to pass. Instead, Jesus instructs us, "*Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.*" (Matt 6:34 ESV).

7) Friends. Many who fled with David to the wilderness gave up hope that anyone cared about them or would help them. David recounts of his company,

“There are many who say, ‘Who will show us any good?’ LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.” (Psa 4:6). He appeals to God to show them some favor as they languished during their escape. And God answered his prayer! In the historical record, Ziba brings David an enormous supply of food and drink (2 Sam 16:1-2). Later, Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai deliver additional supplies, including grain, drink, and even beds! (17:27-29). David memorializes the kindness of these surprise friends when he exclaims, *“You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and wine increased. I will both lie down in peace, and sleep.”* (Psa 4:7-8). God is also aware of our pleas for help and sleep and will often answer them in the form of unlikely friends.

David’s solutions for the night seasons may seem simple or trite, but they are powerful and profound. If the King of Israel used them to improve his sleep, they would enhance ours. If we cry out to Him in the night, He will bring us to a place where we can *“both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”* (Psa 4:8).

They Went Out By Night

We began our inquiry into David’s night seasons in Psalm 22:2. But did you notice this Psalm has a double application? Psalm 22 describes David’s

experiences, but it is also Messianic. It describes the night seasons of Christ, as evidenced in the first verse: *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (Mat 27:46).

David’s night seasons foreshadowed those of Jesus. Can you imagine being with Christ after the Last Supper as he left Jerusalem with his friends at night? Then traveled across the Brook Kidron and up into the Mount of Olives. Judas, his close friend, betrayed his life. Jesus was threatened and defamed but accepted it as part of God’s trial. His disciples feared and tried to find sleep. But God sent an angel and friend *“to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.”* (Luke 22:43). Just as He had for David and his gathering.

A night season is just that—a season and not an eternity. It is a challenging period that finally gives way to another promising season. God’s love for us is not a love that exempts us from these trials but rather a love that sees us through these trials. If we call out to Him, He will sustain and raise us up from our beds, and even from the grave, as he did for David and Christ: *“I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.”* (Psa 3:5).

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

² The reader may recall a set of talks from the 1990s by my father, Bro. Colin Badger, with the same title: “Psalms for the Night Seasons.” They have helped me and many others through our personal Night Seasons. These classes inspired the theme of these articles.

THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD

By Darren Tappouras

Our Life Now

Understanding prayer within God's purpose will have a lot to do with what we believe is happening in God's plan right "Now," today.

The Holding Pattern View

This is the idea many of us hold about our life today. I certainly absorbed this view in my early years in Christ, and it continued to shape my thinking for decades.

It goes like this—we have found the Truth, the pearl of great price, and we are now part of God's chosen people. God continues to work in the world's affairs to bring things to fruition, as predicted in prophecy, and which will ultimately usher in His Kingdom.

In the meantime, I "Now" wait. I live a good life, learn more about God from His word, and try to manifest the characteristics of God in my life. I work in God's service and patiently wait. "Now" is not important; it is transient, temporary, and will soon be replaced by the Kingdom.

How does petitionary prayer factor into this view? Well, God is there to help. He provides for us, and we can go to Him when things go wrong and ask for His help to resolve problems or assist us in life. Sometimes He helps, sometimes he doesn't—"according to His will." Regardless of His response, all the problems and issues will be resolved when Christ returns. For "Now," I hunker down and wait for the Kingdom. Petitionary prayer within this view could sound a bit mercenary. God can seem to be something of a genie, granting us a middle-class lifestyle and keeping us safe while we wait for the Kingdom to come.

The New Creation View

Although nothing about the above view is particularly wrong, it's just that I now believe there is far more happening in the "Now." "Now" is not a passive waiting period in which God's people hunker down or tread water.

The New Creation has already begun. It began with the resurrection of Jesus. God is working and active in the lives of His people and is right "Now," building something, creating something. The "Now" is a vital component of His purpose, and we are part of that. "Now" is a phase in God's plan as significant as the Millennium itself and without which the Millennium would not happen. The apostle Paul identifies the stages of God's activity in our lives:

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6)—"for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Phil 2:13 NKJV).

Prayer within this view is seen as something resembling cooperation with God, working with God as He works in us to make His New Creation. Once we identify where God is at work, we can align our prayers with His activities, and the lavish and extravagant prayer guarantees that are cataloged in previous articles make absolute sense. Of course, He will give us what we pray for—we are praying for help to achieve the exact same things He is also working on.

A lot of "New" began with the resurrection—we will consider the New Creation, the New Man (or New Being), and in later articles, the New

Covenant to highlight where God is at work “Now” and how this can integrate with our prayer life.

Has the New Creation Started Already?

Absolutely! Therefore, Jesus is called “*the Beginning of the creation of God.*” (Rev 3:14) and “*firstborn of all creation.*” (Col 1:15). It all started with him. But this was just the beginning; new creation continued, and others were added.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor 5:17 ESV).

If we accept the consensus view that 2 Corinthians was written about AD 55, then it is without question that this new Creation began over 2000 years ago and centers around individuals. The Greek of this verse reads—If anyone is In Christ—New Creation!

Note the rhetorical flourish at the end of the verse, “*Behold, the new has come.*” Remember, this is written in AD 55; the “New” had come already. One can’t help but notice the connection with another rhetorical flourish “*Behold I*

make all things new.” (Rev 21:5). These two “New” pronouncements link the ongoing work of God in His New Creation, both in AD 55 and today, with its finale and consummation depicted in Revelation 21 and 22.

Paul illustrates New Creation as a divine priority in our lives in Galatians 6:15, where he declares that physical controversies such as circumcision count for nothing when compared to what God is doing in His “New Creation.”

Where Is New Creation Happening?

Looking around our world, we see very little evidence God is involved in a New Creation project, but this creative work is being carried out beneath the surface. “*For we are his workmanship [the thing that is made], created in Christ Jesus.*” (Eph 2:10).

The Greek word translated “created” in these passages, “*ktizo*,” is the same word used to describe God’s physical creation (Mark 13:19, 1 Cor 11:9, Rev 4:11).

*And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the **image** of Him who **created** him.* (Col 3:10).

Looking around our world, we see very little evidence God is involved in a New Creation project, but this creative work is being carried out beneath the surface.

*And to put on the new self, **created** after the **likeness** of God in true righteousness and holiness.* (Eph 4:24 ESV).

Just as man in the original creation was made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27), so too in the New Creation. The potential squandered in Eden because of sin is now being renewed and brought to life in a New Creation that is taking place “Now.”

so that anything achieved within it can only be attributable to God Himself.

What has this “*all-surpassing*” (Greek: “*hyperbole*”) power achieved? Has it removed pain and suffering from the lives of its recipients? Well, yes and no.

As noted earlier in our series, God’s power does not remove the physical trials but allows us to transcend them in a non-material way. This passage goes on to say: (*See table below*)

v. 8	Afflicted in every way	BUT	Not Crushed
	Perplexed	BUT	Not Driven to Despair
v. 9	Persecuted	BUT	Not Forsaken
	Struck down	BUT	Not Destroyed

Old Creation and New Creation

The New Testament sometimes uses concepts and terminology from the original physical creation and applies them to what God is doing in His New Creation. Such a case is 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 (ESV) :

*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone 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 jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*

Notice the arena of operations here—“*our hearts*,” our inner being. This spiritual illumination is contained however in “*jars of clay*,” in which our flawed human body, made of the dust or mud of the earth (Physical Creation—Gen 2:7) has within it the “*all-surpassing*” (NIV) power of God

The physical affliction in the last column was not removed, but the power of God ensured it did not overwhelm.

The Internal/External—Material/Non-Material paradox is taken up again. (2 Cor 4:16 NKJV).

*Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our **outward man** is perishing, yet the **inward man** is being renewed day by day.*

The two exist together, and maybe an inverse relationship can be read into this phrase. The “*heart*,” the Inner Being, is protected and renewed while at the same time, the physical body is perishing.

The next section further informs us about the arena of God’s operations.

As we look not to the things that are seen [physical and material] but to the things that are unseen

[God's work in the Inner Being]. *For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* (2 Cor 4:18 NKJV).

Both At the Same Time

In our earlier articles, we emphasized that God could still be working in our lives and providing us comfort, wisdom, and courage. At the same time, we may be experiencing negative life circumstances. This is further illustrated in a well-known passage that is often quoted in the context of God helping us in our lives: *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* (Phil 4:13 ESV).

Obviously, the *"all things"* referred to must be restricted and qualified in some way. For example, God will not strengthen me to run the four-minute mile at the Olympics. The context provides the scope of *"all things"* in a way that harmonizes with the schema presented in this series.

Paul here acknowledges that by God's strength, he can experience two things at the same time:

- Contentment (v. 11); and
- Trouble or distress (v. 14).

Again, we notice God's strength in Paul's life does not remove the "Trouble" but provides the wisdom to experience the "Contentment" that enables him to prosper. A careful reading of the context defines *"all things"*: *"I know how to be brought low, and I know*

We notice God's strength in Paul's life does not remove the "Trouble" but provides the wisdom to experience the "Contentment" that enables him to prosper.

how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." (Phil 4:12 ESV).

Paul can endure *"any and every"* of life's circumstances (*"all things"*), not by having them removed or solved but by God's strength and wisdom in his life. In fact, strength from God is particularly seen

when things are going wrong in Paul's life. Remember his request to God in II Corinthians 12:8-9 to remove the negative physical issue in his life and remember God's response, *"My strength [spiritual] is made perfect in weakness [physical]."*

Prayer—Cooperation With God

I trust this brief overview highlighting God's area of operations (*"Inner Being"*) in the *"Now"* of our lives helps us to see where and why prayer works in conjunction with God's priorities.

The references to God actively working in our Inner Being are too numerous, too profound, too intense, and too essential to ignore or casually read over. Any model of prayer or of God's interaction with His people that do not include and hold these facts in the very forefront will be lacking in explanatory power.

*Darren Tappouras,
Gosford Ecclesia, NSW*

THE BRETHREN OF CHRIST ARE THOSE WHO DO THE WILL OF THE FATHER

By Islip Collyer



Editor's Note: This month's exhortation was written nearly 100 years ago. First printed in *The Christadelphian Magazine* in May 1924, it was later re-published as Chapter 8 of *Principles and Proverbs* in 1945. The exhortation and counsel of Bro. Collyer has never been more needed. As we contest for Truth, how we do this is as important as the contested issue. Will we look for the "LORD's side?"

THERE are many writers, and perhaps even some thinkers, who would readily fall into error if asked to describe the true Christadelphian. In the Brotherhood there has been a very natural tendency to put the emphasis upon the subject that is to the front at the moment; in times of controversy the true Christadelphian is known by being on "our side". The word, however, means brother of Christ. As the Lord

gave us an explicit definition, we should experience no difficulty recognizing a much fuller meaning. "*Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.*"

This is a principle of first importance. It is so fundamental and so simple that it is continually ignored. There is nothing like paradox in this statement. It has long since been recognized as a

truism that men rarely think seriously of principles that are fundamental and obvious. Such truths are accepted as a matter of course. Every man wants to have truth on his side, and it becomes quite natural to assume that it is there, especially when feeling is strong. In the same way men can readily persuade themselves that God is on their side, even while they are violating every command He has ever given. The warring nations and churches all cry "God is with us," even though they could not advance a single argument to show that they are with God. Individuals are just the same. A man will profess his firm belief in Providence and relate a remarkable experience to prove the fact of divine intervention in human affairs. He tells us how a series of extraordinary mishaps prevented him from sailing in a boat in which he had booked a passage. After full details of how others were helped by circumstance to catch the boat while he was prevented, we reach the rich conclusion that the boat went down with all on board. We should be accounted rude if we inquired how such selection could be regarded as evidence of providential intervention. He takes it for granted that if God interferes in human affairs at all, a special care for him will inevitably be a first charge to the angels, while the lives of other men will be a matter of comparative indifference.

In similar manner, men assume that God will come into line with their feelings in time of controversy. Their differences are stimulated by opposition; they work themselves up to passionate attack or defense. Then if they think of God at all they assume that He will be angry

with those who oppose them. They are falling into just the error of the striving nations. They are not trying to be on the Lord's side but rather assuming that the Lord will be with them. We do well, then, so far as we are able, to break away from human passions and prejudices and test ourselves by this first principle. What is the will of the Father in heaven? We who believe the Bible have plenty of instructions to guide us in life. We must get the answer from the "Word" and not from our own hearts. In some respects, ecclesial life is sure to resemble the political or commercial world, for we find the same elemental facts of human nature; but, as we value God's offer of life, we must find a much higher standard of conduct.

If we venture to criticize brethren and urge them to take a course contrary to their inclination, we are sure to get some hard knocks. That is a matter of universal experience. It is equally natural that we shall receive commendation and support from those who are still more critical. In such circumstances, there is a great danger that we may run to extremes, just on the lines of political parties. A man's estimate of any situation is so easily biased by personal feelings. Resentment of harsh and unfair words will often play a potent though entirely hidden part in framing a policy. Then, when a party has been formed, when once a decision has been taken, the natural tendency will be to support the party and attack all opposing parties by fair means or foul.

Possibly some readers will exclaim, "On what a low plane you put the matter! Political parties are doubtless

developed in this manner; but in the Truth it is different!" Certainly it ought to be quite different; but we are dealing with the same human nature, the worst of which nearly always comes to the front in time of strife. We can only make ourselves different from the world by taking heed to the words of Scripture. They are plain enough. We must not suppose that the words regarding the evil human heart and the worthlessness of flesh only apply to other people. We are all of the same nature. The most dangerous men are those who are never conscious of being on a low plane. They can mistake the motions of sheer diabolism for a righteous and worthy zeal. The elements of diabolism are in us all. Often, they may be aroused into activity, and they will blend with ideals in the most complete manner. There is enough of the genuine to hide the spurious, and unless we apply the acid test base metal will pass off as gold.

Are we doing the will of the Father in heaven? That is the real test. It is not a question of doing what we assume ought to be His will. It is not enough to find in our heart's general desires and aspirations in the right direction. Is the work we are doing now in accordance with the revealed will of God? Are we engaged in the works of love, dispensing the bread and water of life, doing good to all men, especially those of the

household of faith? Are we crucifying the flesh by enduring evil treatment without retaliation, leaving vengeance of all degrees to the Lord?

It is so easy to be self-deceived in these matters. If men revile us, they are doing harm to the Truth. We can soon persuade ourselves that an effort to crush them and make them appear contemptible is simply in the interests of the Truth and not a matter of retaliation at all. This is simply one of the familiar disguises of the heart. Its shallowness is revealed by the fact that sometimes we

If men revile us, they are doing harm to the Truth. We can soon persuade ourselves that an effort to crush them and make them appear contemptible is simply in the interests of the Truth and not a matter of retaliation at all.

have such a personal and enduring affection for certain men that when they are unfair to us, we have no desire to retaliate or to say anything that would wound. We never feel then that there is any command in Scripture to make us more severe as a matter of duty. A simple statement of the Truth as we understand it does not need the personal hits so dear to

the old man of the flesh. If men watch for iniquity in us and make us offenders for a word, or for a possible inflection they choose to put on a word, we must not retaliate by watching for iniquity in them. Sometimes brethren who criticize us lay themselves open to attack by the most amazing inconsistency. It would be easy to raise an agitation which would cause the critics trouble and perhaps even make them appear contemptible. By all worldly standards

such retaliation would be right; but would it do any good to the cause of the Truth? Would such work please our Father in heaven? That is the only test that matters.

In these days of divine silence, and in the absence of visible authority, we have to choose for ourselves what course we shall take and to what manner of work we shall devote our strength. We must try to be honest and free from self-deception in making the decision. Shall we best do the will of our Father in heaven by building up those who have found the saving faith, but who need the helping, sympathetic hand as sorely as we need it ourselves; or would the Father be better pleased if we devoted our energies towards pulling down that which once we built?

There are thousands of brethren and sisters who need exhortation, there are millions of fellow creatures who have never heard the Gospel. There are some hundreds who are separated from us by points of disagreement, although if taken individually we should all alike pass the most severe examination devised by any brother of a generation ago. Here we have a choice of fields in which to labor. It might be possible, even easy, to attack the last-named class and skillfully raise such agitation that strife would rage where now there is peace, and we might gain a few adherents out of the wreckage. We may feel that something would be gained even though a few babes should be slain in the struggle. We might easily be tempted to such a course by the natural instinct of retaliation, disguised and out of sight. Sometimes drastic ways may be legitimate, and we

can soon persuade ourselves that as we are convinced of the soundness of our position, the possible gain of a few will justify the means. What is the revealed will of our Father in heaven? Would He desire us to raise strife in such quarters, to expose the naked inconsistency of some zealous but mistaken men in order that a few who already hold and practice the One Faith might obtain a better knowledge of human values? The Word condemns such strife and places the sower of discord among brethren as the apex of abomination. It tells us to preach the Word, to be instant in season and out of season; to reprove, rebuke and exhort with long-suffering. It presents us with a series of letters to the churches showing where responsibility lies, and how we should trust each other. It gives us a picture of the judgment seat, with the whole emphasis put on positive and constructive work. It warns us repeatedly against judging and condemning each other, and of the danger that we may be guilty of greater errors than those we condemn. It lays down the principle that men may be doing good work even though they "*walk not with us*". It tells us that the servant of the Lord must not strive but be patient, long-suffering and apt to teach.

There is an immense field of constructive work before us. Every pound [dollar] we can spare and every talent we can muster can be devoted to working that we know is right. Truly it is easy to find out the revealed will of God, and the one who shall do the will of the Father in heaven is the true Christadelphian.

Islip Collyer

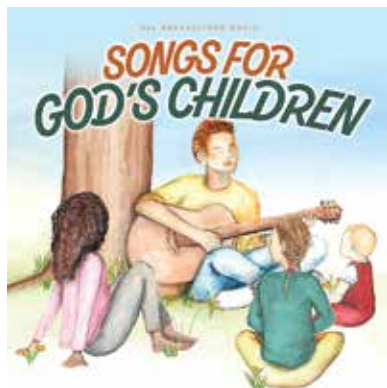
SONGS FOR GOD'S CHILDREN

THE MAKING OF AN ALBUM

By Jessica Gelineau

THE following conversation was recorded on January 21, 2023, by Bro. Levi Myers (Cambridge, Ontario), who talks with Bro. José Bevia and Sis. Jessica Gelineau about the recently released Christadelphian music album from *All Generations Music*. About Psalm 89:1, *All Generations Music* believes in the power of passing down messages about God's faithfulness through music from generation to generation. The making of this first project involved multiple iterations, and it is hoped the music will appeal to listeners of all ages—all of God's children! The full interview is featured in the Spring 2023 episode of the

Good Christadelphian Music podcast, available on all major streaming platforms.



Album artwork created by Sis. Lindsay
Kitchen of the Randolph, NJ Ecclesia

Levi: I am super interested to hear more about your project, *Songs for God's Children*. To get started, I'll give you both a chance to introduce yourself and your background in music within Christadelphia. Maybe Jess, if you want to start?

Jess: I attend the Simi Hills, California, ecclesia, and I've loved music for as long as I can remember. As a teenager, I was learning piano, and singing at CYC was important to me. I see it as a big part of my spiritual development, becoming closer to God and understanding who God is a bit more through the medium of music. I write a little music—mostly short songs, little praise songs. I love singing with kids. I love their enthusiasm.

Levi: That's awesome. And José, how about you?

José: I've been playing the piano since I was probably three years old. I came to the US from Spain twenty-three years ago. I am a music professor, teaching at two colleges. I am married to the lovely Sis. Maggie Schlageter and we attend the Schooley's Mountain, New Jersey meeting. Since the pandemic, I've been doing many of the WCF recordings, Hymns for Sunday.

Levi: I enjoyed the Hymns for Sunday collections that have come out. So definitely, thanks for your work on that. Jess, maybe you can give us a rundown of the project, *Songs for God's Children*. I'm excited to hear more about that and how you guys have come to collaborate.

Jess: Since we were just talking about Hymns for Sunday, this seems like a good time to mention that this album, *Songs for God's Children*, was made possible by the Williamsburg

Christadelphian Foundation (WCF). We are grateful to the WCF donors and the directors for making that happen. When you access Hymns for Sunday on Spotify, Pandora, or other services, you will also find the *Songs for God's Children* album, under the WCF Music page. Hopefully, there will be others in the future.

Levi: Having listened to the songs, I think they were extremely well produced. And it's funny they're called *Songs for God's Children* because I enjoyed them as an adult.

Jess: That was intentional! We wanted to pick a name that hinted that the music would be great for kids; yet we also wanted the album, the art, and just the way we were presenting the collection to not be so "kiddish" that adults would be turned off from listening to it. And really, we're all God's children, right?

I'll share what the experience was like on my end. On the album, there are thirteen songs; six of them are original, written by me. And then the others are either traditional or from what we called the "Little Red Sunday School Book" We tried to pull in some of those "oldies" that were important songs to us growing up to build out a whole collection. So, this album is something I've wanted to put together for a long time, but it either wasn't quite the right time, or I didn't have the resources for it. Finally, everything kind of came together.

José: We started in June 2021. And you, Jessica, were pregnant with Mattea.

Jess: That's right! So it was funny timing. My husband, daughter, and I were taking a road trip to New Jersey (where I grew up) in the summer of—

well, we actually did it twice, in 2020 and 2021, both right in the middle of the COVID-19 experience. In 2021 we wanted to drive there again and spend time with family and friends. Maggie, José's wife, is the music programs director at WCF, and she's also one of my best friends. So it was very natural for us to all be having these conversations, and she was the one that eventually said, "Hey, you should just record the songs while you're here this summer," because we were planning on being in New Jersey for about five weeks. So we knew we would have some time to get together, and José offered to do the recording. We obtained a new microphone to use for that. And at Maggie and José's apartment at the time, they already had a fairly good setup for recording.

It was a blessing that we could get through as much as we were in that short window of time. Honestly, I felt like God was just giving us the strength and the resources to get through it, because I don't know how we got

everything done for 13 tracks within the couple of days that we had set aside. I'm so thankful for that.

José: Levi, thank you for saying that the quality was good because, while our equipment was very good, it was pretty minimal. We had just the piano and the new microphone at home, and I had a couple of older microphones. So all the recording was done at our old apartment, and we started from there, recording the piano parts and the guitars. I think that's what we did first, right?

Jess: Yeah. Piano, guitar, and some vocal tracks. We were focused on June because that was when I would be there. We also got my daughter, Pippa, who turned three that month, on some of the vocals! We had a lot of participation from Bro. Mike and Sis. Sarah Robinson and their family. They have four kids, from oldest to youngest: Melody, Noah, Esther, and Lydia. They were ages 10 down to 2 at the time, and all their voices are featured on



Sis. Sarah Robinson, Sis. Maggie Schlageter, Bro. José Beviá, Bro. Mike Robinson recording a session.

the album, as well as Sarah and Mike's vocals and Mike's guitar playing.

José: Our apartment was not that big, and we had everything set up with about eight people just recording and participating, and it was a lot of fun!

Levi: Wow, I love that so much—the fact that the technology we have access to today, with such minimal equipment, can get us these amazing productions.

José: You're absolutely right. It was very minimal, but as you said, technology these days is to the point that you can do it at home, and it sounds professional.

Levi: I'm curious, did much of the songwriting happen during recording or had you already completed all of the music, Jess?

Jess: I had already written the tunes; many of them were from 2012, and 2013. I would just write little things for Bible Schools. Listeners will notice that many of the songs are on specific topics you might not easily find another song about. For example, there was a California Kids' Camp one year where the topic was Elisha, and a friend needed a song to teach young children. And I couldn't think of anything off the top of my head. I was like, "You know, I don't know that I've ever heard of a kid's Bible song about Elisha!" So I wrote the song Elisha, "God is My Salvation" for her. So many of the songs are like that—written to meet a specific need, or to help kids memorize a verse, a couple of them are taken straight from Scripture. You'll see that when you start listening to the original tracks. They tend to be very subject-specific. And I've just been collecting them.



*One of the youngest members of
All Generations Music!*

José: We went to the Robinsons' house to capture most of the kids' vocals. That was a lot of fun. We did that in one of their bedrooms and it was a little challenging because that's when I had to work a lot with the children specifically. Obviously, children don't

***An empty jar,
an angry man,
A proud Syrian captain
with white and blotchy skin,
These problems are not
big for God,
Elisha,
God is my salvation!***

*An excerpt from
"Elisha, God is my Salvation!"*

understand the cost of equipment, right?

Levi: Oh no.

José: We were recording together, and I was just telling them, “Kids, we need to be careful with the microphones because they’re very expensive.” And I told them about this one microphone that’s a few thousand dollars. Just sing, try not to touch it. While I’m working on the computer, the next thing I see is they’re pulling on the cables. So yeah, things like that will happen. And then with children, they can’t do that much. They can record a few times, and then it might be good or might not be good. And then when you tell them, let’s do it again, they get moody.

Levi: And you’re starting to question, why are we doing this? I can only imagine trying to record kids. But it all turned out in the end. Looking back, what do you both feel are some things you’ve learned in putting together an album? You go through this process and make mistakes, so what are some of the things you’ve learned that might help you next time?

Jess: That’s a good question. One thing that was important to me about the project was the collaborative aspect. This is something I could never have done on my own. It was just so much more fun to do it with a

team and to be able to bounce ideas off of people. Even determining the right order the songs should go to have a good flow. There was a whole group of us that were involved in those decisions. Going forward, I’d like to bring people in sooner for a future project on all the planning and organization, which I did most of this time.

Levi: I think that’s a great point. The collaboration that goes on can be so helpful and productive. Allowing yourself to lean into that and be open to it is something I think is important. I also would suggest that the more people you involve, the better the quality of the end product. That doesn’t mean you take all of the advice or suggestions you might get. You still have your vision for the project, but allowing that feedback and creativity can help.



Capturing the children's voices were an important part of the vision for the project.

José: We didn't bring this to the conversation, but once we started mixing, and I'm cleaning up things, we did three or maybe four rounds. So the first one was just Maggie and me. I was mixing upstairs, and then Maggie would listen and tell me, do this or do that. Then Jess was part of the conversation, and we did another round with Bro. James DiLiberto and Sis. Aletheia Burney from Australia. They had some great ideas. Because we were listening to the songs regularly it got to a point where I had them memorized.

Those two listened to the song with a fresh perspective. They would find things I could not hear in the mix. For instance, they would say, "Somebody knocked the microphone there. You need to take that off the mix." They were instrumental in the final mix, cleaning up things that were not quite there.

Another thing for next time, maybe I'll create more scores because I'm very much used to reading music. We didn't have any scores for the original tunes, just chord charts. For me, it's easier to have a score to follow and read. Then with the score, if we need to add an instrument, it's a little easier for me to directly tell them, play this chord here or do it there.

Levi: I think that's good advice from both of you. It's a really beautiful piece of art for our community, and we're all very thankful you and your team have put it together. I'm excited to see what's next for this little team.

*Jessica Gelineau,
Simi Hills Ecclesia, CA*

If anyone is interested in participating in future WCF Music initiatives, please reach out to Maggie Schlageter at mschlageter@wcfoundation.org

You can listen to the *Songs for God's Children* album on all major streaming platforms like Spotify, Pandora and YouTube.

Feel free to reach out to Jessica Gelineau at jessica.r.gelineau@gmail.com for more information about the album, songs, or accompanying resources.

PART 3

GOD IS NOT A MONSTER

GOD AND WOMEN

By Chris Sales

In our last article, we looked at the topic of slavery in the Bible and found that, in most cases, it was more like indentured service than stereotypical slavery. The so-called “slavery laws” of the Old Testament were there to control and regulate a fallen human problem, not idealize it or condone it. In this article, we will examine the topic of God and women.

Many New Atheists say that the God of the Old Testament is misogynistic, that

is, He hates women. Nothing could be further from the truth. We can start at the very beginning, where Genesis 1 records in verse 27 that both men and women were created in the image of God:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Gen 1:27).

Image and likeness are not just about the physical shape but also moral and

intellectual qualities. So, by creating male **and** female in God's image and likeness, we are shown that God intended **both** men and women to manifest His characteristics of kindness, mercy, compassion, and love—each in their unique way. It is only when we consider both sexes that God's full self can be revealed since He is shown in the Bible to be both a nourisher—like a nursing mother and a protector—as well as like a jealous father!

Jacob, while blessing Joseph, says by "*the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty [shaddai], who shall bless thee with... blessings of the breasts [shad], and of the womb.*" (Gen 49:25).

The Hebrew word *Shaddai* is consistently associated with fruitfulness and protection in Scripture (For example, Gen 28:3; 35:11). Although it is always translated "*almighty*," the word means "to bulge," and is a reference to the breast bulging with muscle to protect or destroy, or bulging with milk to nourish and feed! So, while we most often think of God as a father (Mal 1:6), a king (Psa 47:7), or a man of war (Exod 15:3), the Biblical writers also used language that describes God in roles that may be considered more traditionally female. For example, God says to his people, "*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*" (Isa 66:13). Describing God's care for the people in the wilderness, it says, "As

an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings." (Deut 32:11).

In fact, God can relate to the part of womanhood that is unique and completely outside the experience of men. "*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.*" (Isa 49:15). Certainly, God cannot be accused of being misogynistic if He, in fact, identifies with being

Certainly, God cannot be accused of being misogynistic if He, in fact, identifies with being female, and associates his qualities with that of women.

female, and associates his qualities with that of women.

It is also interesting to note that the **only** thing in God's creation He deemed to not be good was that the man was alone before God created Eve. This is an acknowledgment that man was incomplete without the woman and that God created male and female to be complimentary and compatible. The LORD God said,

It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him... Then the Lord God made a woman from the part he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. (Gen 2:18, 22 NET).

Another clear example that God is not misogynistic is His extreme care for widows and His admonition for His people to do likewise. Deuteronomy 24:19 (NIV) says, "*When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook*

a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

This theme is repeated several times in Scripture. For example, Psalm 68:5 states that God is "*a judge [or defender] of widows;*" and Deuteronomy 10:18 says God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, giving them food and clothing.


Far from allowing or condoning abuse, God reveals Himself to be the one who defends and cares for the most vulnerable of society. It is God who warns those who might use their status or power to take advantage of others that He will judge them and hold them accountable for such abuse. God sternly warns would-be oppressors that He is on the side of the weak and defenseless.

You must not wrong a resident foreigner nor oppress him, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. You must not afflict any widow or

orphan. If you afflict them in any way and they cry to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my anger will burn [against you]. (Exod 22:21-24 NET).

An interesting test case is found in Numbers 27. The daughters of Zelophehad appeal to Moses because they have no brothers, and their father is now dead. They do not want the inheritance of their father to pass to other men just because he has no direct male descendants. God acknowledges their request and has the Law changed so that in all future cases of men with only daughters, the daughters would be allowed to inherit his land and other earthly possessions. This ruling hardly sounds like a God who hates women and denies them equal rights with men! And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying,

The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance



God meant for men to use their strength to protect and nurture their wives and children.

among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter...it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment. (Num 27:6-11).

It is true that in our fallen human state, many men take advantage of women and mistreat them in ways God never intended. This does not make it acceptable, nor was it God's intention in Creation—far from it! So, although, in most cases, men are physically stronger than women or may have power over them in other ways (for example, financially), and this can lead to abuse, God meant for men to use their strength to protect and nurture their wives and children. Abuse of any kind is wrong. God always encouraged men to honor their marriage vows and respect the wife of their youth:

Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. (Mal 2:15).

The example set for the behavior of men is a high one. God intends men to be caregivers and providers, not self-centered and selfish. The Lord Jesus Christ himself is set forward as the model to follow. *"Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her."* (Eph 5:25 NIV). In the next chapter, the Spirit directs Paul to write, *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* (Eph 6:4 NET).

Do we see examples of oppressed women in the Old Testament? Yes, and we see lots of examples of oppressed men as well! Are there instances in the Bible where women are treated terribly or abused? Certainly. But these examples are not an endorsement of oppression and abuse, but rather just a sad commentary on the fallenness of humankind.

A common complaint is that God allows for, or condones, the rape of women. This is often referenced as proof by the New Atheists of God's misogyny.

However, a good principle to remember is that God does not condone or allow for sin. Rather, He **defines** it! The Bible shows us what is right and what is wrong. We are given the knowledge of good and evil. When sin and wickedness are revealed, God then helps us to overcome sin, find forgiveness and regulate our behavior based on His divine principles.

For example, the so-called rape laws of Exodus 22 and Deuteronomy 22 demonstrate God's protection for and love of women. Note the following:

When adultery is between consenting adults, the man and the woman suffer the consequences of their sin. There is no double standard. Men bring a woman *"taken in adultery"* and ask Jesus to render judgment upon her, with no reference to the man who was obviously involved but not brought to judgment by them. And what does Jesus say to them? *"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."* And to the woman? *"Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."* (John 8:7, 11).

The forcible rape of a married or engaged woman results in the punishment of only the man, and in Bible times, this was capital punishment. The woman, as the victim, was not held responsible in any way.

When a man seduced an unengaged woman, the Law required the perpetrator to provide for her. If it was acceptable to the woman and her father, the man had to marry the woman and provide for her, with no option of divorce. But she did not have to marry him if she found it unacceptable or repulsive. Regardless of her choice, she was to be provided for, and the crime against her would not go unpunished. We should note that the man is **guilty** in all cases, without exception. Taking advantage of women is never condoned or encouraged by God.

Finally, we see that Proverbs 31 extols the virtues of a wife and acknowledges that a man who finds a good wife has received a blessing from the LORD. God appreciates, values, and highlights women's contributions to a successful society.

Give her credit for what she has accomplished, and let her works praise her in the city gates. (Prov 31:31 NET).

Many examples of faithful women demonstrate the Messianic qualities of bravery, self-sacrifice, and love. For example, to name a few, there were Miriam, Sarah, Rahab, Esther, Ruth, Deborah, the many Marys in the life of Jesus, and Priscilla.

In summary, we can see that the laws surrounding the treatment of women in the Old Testament were there to control and regulate a fallen human problem—not idealize it or condone it. God is not misogynistic but rather loves and values women greatly!

In our next article, we hope to look at the topic of God's jealousy.

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PART 6 A TEMPLE FILLED WITH UNSEARCHABLE RICHES

By George Booker

Some Concluding Thoughts, For Now

*This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles
the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Eph 3:8).¹*

ADMITTEDLY, there are some questions which have been left unanswered at this point:

1. Doesn't the Law speak of "perpetual" sacrifices, that is, sacrifices that will go on forever?
2. Isn't the "house of prayer for all nations" (Isa 56:7; Mark 11:17) a great Millennial Temple to be built along the lines of Bro. Sulley's exposition?
3. Won't all nations come to Jerusalem during the Kingdom Age to keep the "Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech 14:16)?

4. In the Kingdom, won't many peoples, kings included, bring their offerings to sacrifice on the great altar in Jerusalem (Isa 19:21; 57:6; 60:7; 66:20)?

5. Doesn't Jeremiah 33:18 say that the priests and the Levites will always have someone to offer sacrifices to the Lord?

The above are a few examples, but other Old Testament prophecies do appear to require a literal Jewish temple in Jerusalem—with sacrifices—during the Kingdom. What do we do with

them? This writer believes there are reasonable Scriptural answers to such questions, but at this point, he can only make a general suggestion and leave the details to a later time.

The Passover Paradigm

Moses, when instituting the Passover for the children of Israel, promised them that special day of deliverance would be celebrated annually as "*a lasting ordinance*" (Exod 12:14, NIV)—or even "*perpetually as a lasting ordinance*." (NET).

The question then is: How will this promise be fulfilled?

We find the answer In the gospels. There Jesus—very shortly before his death—took some of the elements of the Passover and repurposed them into what he called "*this Passover*" (Luke 22:15), which is to say: "my own unique Passover." In other words, he took the separate parts of the Passover, leaving off the lamb (because he knew that, within hours, he would become the true lamb of God): "This bread is my body...this wine is my blood."

Thus Jesus set himself forth as the "*Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29), "*our Passover lamb [who] has been sacrificed*." (1 Cor 5:7). Simply (by which I intend no irony, for his death was anything **but** simple), Jesus demonstrated the true meaning and purpose of the original Passover, while shedding new light on every Old Testament passage about the Passover. After his death and resurrection, every Passover reference in the Law and the Prophets might be viewed from a new perspective and

interpreted afresh with Jesus taking the place of the Lamb.

I suggest this is a case study of how we need to read and understand every other Old Testament passage that speaks of the Law of Moses and sacrifice as being fulfilled (or possibly fulfilled) in the Kingdom Age. If we study the matter a bit further, then we begin to understand that our Lord Jesus Christ has shown us the true and complete purpose of the Law of Moses, not only in his life and teachings but also in his sacrifice and his resurrection and his ascension to heaven:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Matt 5:17).

When you were dead in your sins... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled ['blotted out'] the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. (Col 2:13-14).

Christ is the end [Greek "telos": finish or completion] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Rom 10:4 NRSV).

In satisfying and fulfilling every aspect of the Law of Moses, Jesus has become, not just our Passover sacrifice, but also our:

- sin-offering;
- trespass offering;
- firstfruits;

- covenant victim, or sacrifice;
- atonement sacrifice;
- offerings for “purification;”
- thanksgiving, or free-will offering;
- peace offering;
- burnt offering;
- incense offering, or praise offering;
- priest;
- altar;
- “Sabbath day;”
- tabernacle; and especially to the point here,
- true and eternal “temple.”

Truly, the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ have changed everything in the past, retroactively, and everything in the future, prospectively. And in situations where we see this clearly (such as the Passover being supplanted by Christ’s memorial service), then there is no problem in explaining what would otherwise be a difficult passage. To take our example, it is not the Mosaic Passover itself, which is a “*lasting ordinance*” “*forever*”—but rather it is the new special “*Passover*,” initiated by Christ, to remember forever!

And so, I suggest it is quite possible to find simple answers to all the other questions stated at the beginning and others that may arise. The solution is to step outside the Law of Moses and look at its details as being fulfilled and given new life, and perhaps eternal significance, in the person and the office of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“A House of Prayer for all Nations” (Isaiah 56:7)

For now, I will offer one more example of how to interpret the Law of Moses

in light of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only has the resurrected and glorified Jesus become our eternal “*Temple*,” both now and in the Kingdom Age—but also all those who are “*in Christ*” (again, both now and in the Kingdom Age) will constitute the Lord’s “*house of prayer for all nations*.”

No matter where they may live, throughout the world, no matter their nation, tribe, people, or language (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6), wherever they may be at any given moment, those who love the Lord may combine their prayers to the Almighty through the one perfect mediator. This one is also the “*chief cornerstone*” (Eph 2:20; 1Pet 2:6) of their one house and their united body and family.

Surely this picture of God being all in all (1 Cor 15:28) and His glory filling the earth as the waters cover the sea helps us see an inspired vision more powerful than any single building. When the LORD God and His Son may be everywhere by the power of the Holy Spirit, and when all believers in the world may instantly approach them in prayer, what is the purpose of one single building of gigantic dimensions?

Filling Up What is Lacking

Whatever else we make of other passages, the Hebrews passages cited earlier (especially Hebrews 10) should be conclusive. After the death and resurrection of Christ, we can appreciate that all temple sacrifices, and all animal sacrifices, have ceased to have any beneficial effect.

Nevertheless, one "Temple," a quite unique one, is still essential for all believers. In the words of Paul, our lives of faith, lived in the aftermath of the death and resurrection of our Savior, help us to become "living stones" integrated into the spiritual temple, of which Christ is the chief cornerstone. And such lives give us the means by which we may contribute our part to **complete** the work of our Lord in us. Paul writes:

*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles **the glorious riches** of this mystery, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory. (Col 1:24-27).*

What is lacking even after Christ's death and resurrection, Paul says, is our **completion** of his redemptive work in our own lives and in our own ecclesias. We are, collectively, the temple of the living God. Following Paul's example, we do our part to finish his work by following him and encouraging others to do the same, to make known "*the glorious riches*" (Eph 3:16; Phil 4:19) of "*Christ in you*," the "*riches*" which, as we have already shown, consist, not of gold and silver and beautiful structures, but of grace, mercy, and eternal life.

Becoming a Miniature Tabernacle

Meanwhile, we might mention this also. Bro. Roberts did accept Bro. Sulley's ideas about a Millennial Temple. Nevertheless, he knew full well that every individual believer ought to be what he called "a miniature tabernacle." This adds weight to our premise here, that the true tabernacle (or temple) for all believers has its beginnings in the life of every believer in Christ. In *The Law of Moses*, page 99, he wrote:

Every true son and daughter of the Lord God Almighty is a miniature tabernacle or temple, as saith Paul, "*Ye are the temple of the living God. If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy.*" (1 Cor 3:17). Our minds should be a holy place lined with the gold of a tried faith, in which the one Christ-sacrifice for sins is continually offered, and the smoke of grateful incense, kindled by the fire of the altar, continually ascending, while deeply secreted in the innermost ark of the heart is the law of God in its remembrance, the scriptures in their affectionate study, the institutions of divine appointment in continual reverence, and the bread of God in its continual eating. Thus shall we be the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, misunderstood by all, hated by many, despised and rejected of men, persevering in a bitter probation that will end at last in life and light and joy everlasting,

when *"the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people... and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."* (Rev 21:3, 4).

The One Temple That is Still Necessary

New Testament passages, many of which we have examined in these articles, point conclusively to a Spiritual Temple being continually built up today. This new temple, being built right now, dwarfs any past temple and any proposed future temple altogether in every way: in extent, importance, grandeur, longevity, purpose, and effect.

At this point, we might ask ourselves this simple question. Have we slighted the undeniably grand and glorious spiritual temple being built all around us, in which we play a part? Have we pushed it aside as practically an afterthought in favor of a prospective wood-and-stone construct?

This Spiritual Temple, which seems to be practically unnoticed by us today, is nevertheless described at length in the New Testament. We are told it will be filled with *"the unsearchable riches of Christ."* It will be the treasury, or repository, of God's amazing grace. It will be a never-failing spring of faith, hope, love, and endless blessings to all the people of the earth, even in the days of God's Kingdom.

Christ himself, the chief cornerstone, will dwell in the midst of this "Temple." It will be a living, breathing organism that knows no limits and no boundaries. The "body" of this Temple will fill the earth with the glory of God's love. This glory will go everywhere and be a beacon to every mortal who draws breath. Wherever they live, the citizens of God's Kingdom will have immediate access to this Temple and all it offers.

Meanwhile, right now and every day until God and His Son declare it complete, the construction of this Temple is going forward everywhere we live and as we work and play, have children, and even grow old and die.

God's *"Spiritual House"* is the New Testament Temple of God. Therefore, in the apostles' day and even now, it is the true place of worship. We worship, right now, in God's true and eternal Temple. Around us, even now, this new Temple is still taking shape, in families and congregations being built up week by week. Here, in this glorious Temple of the Spirit, we have full access to the Father, full grace and mercy, and a sure inheritance in the fullness of God's *"unsearchable riches in Christ."* (Eph 3:8).

Year by year, believer by believer, we add to this Temple, joined together with Christ and growing together, till one day we will all be filled with the fullness of the glory of the LORD.

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



CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THE GOSPEL RECORDS?

By Shawn Moynihan

IN His wisdom, God provided four Divinely inspired narratives of Jesus' life. There could have been many more; one gospel writer acknowledges this: *"And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."* (John 22:25).¹ Rather than embrace the richness of multiple perspectives on Jesus' life, some critics (sadly, even some ostensibly in the

household of faith), use what they perceive to be contradictions amongst the four accounts as a springboard to assert that some aspects of the gospel accounts are factually wrong.

Such assertions have no place in our community of faith. The very first doctrine we reject is: "That the Bible is only partly the work of inspiration—or if wholly so, contains errors which inspiration has allowed." Faith can only be built on the foundation of complete

trust that the Bible is inspired by God, factually true, and essential for salvation:

The Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:15-17).

In short, we don't get to pick and choose what is true about the Bible.

Before we examine claims that the gospels contradict each other, it's important to define what Bible critics mean by "contradiction." Critics mean that information is either true or false. In this context, Hobbes provides a succinct definition: "Both parts of a contradiction cannot possibly be true." Therefore, claim the critics, if Jesus cleansed the temple at the start of his ministry (as recorded in John 2), then he can't have cleansed it at the end of his ministry (as documented in Matt 21).

These critics reason that one account must be true and the other false.

This kind of illogical reasoning is memorialized in the well-known poem "The Blind Man And The Elephant." In the poem, six blind men encounter an elephant, yet none of them recognize it as such. One says it's a wall, another a tree, another a spear, etc. If the blind men had compared their accounts to develop a complete picture, they would have understood there wasn't a contradiction. So it is with the gospel accounts. If we compare

the four narratives in an intellectually honest manner, then we see there is no contradiction. If we diligently study the four gospels with an eye of faith, then we are rewarded with a deepened connection to God and His Son: "*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*" (Prov 25:2).

Jesus' Temptations

Critics question the reliability of the gospel accounts by pointing out that Matthew and Luke have different accounts of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness:

Matthew	Luke
Stone to Bread	Stone to Bread
Down from the Pinnacle	Kingdoms of the World
Kingdoms of the World	Down from the Pinnacle

How can we trust the accounts, critics say if they can't even agree on the order of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness? Such critics fail to understand that Jesus' temptations in the wilderness were both cyclical and repeated.

Jesus didn't face three temptations experienced once; he faced three temptations repeated again and again, in different sequential order. We know this because Luke tells us the temptations continued even after the wilderness: "*Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.*" (Luke 4:13). The sequence of temptation that Jesus faced was dictated by his struggles with the flesh (i.e., "*opportune time*"). Both Matthew's sequence, and Luke's sequence, occurred as recorded.

The Lord's Prayer

Critics have assailed the model prayer that Jesus gave as an example of a gospel contradiction. Matthew's account (6:9-13) and Luke's account (11:2-4) are different. "There can be only one true version," say the critics. The purpose and timing of the model prayer are plainly different for each account. In Matthew, the model prayer was part of the Sermon on the Mount and was a rebuke to the Pharisees' prayer practices. Conversely, in Luke, it is part of the later Galilean ministry, given in response to his disciples' request. The conflict lies solely in the critics' imaginations.

Manufactured Contradictions

As John points out, every gospel writer had a mountain of material with which to work. Although Divinely inspired,

each writer decided what details to include and what to omit. Rather than acknowledge that the gospel writers paint different parts of the same picture, critics create contradictions where none exist. Three examples are illustrative:

- Were there two demon-possessed men (Matt 8:28) or one (Mark 5:2)?
- Were there two blind men (Matt 20:30) or one (Mark 10:46)?
- Were there two angels at the tomb (Luke 24:4) or one (Mark 16:5)?

Although critics frame the question as a binary choice, the real answer is that Mark, for the purposes of his narrative, chose to focus on only one.

Even when there are two explicitly different accounts, critics create contradictions where they don't exist. Perhaps the best example is the account of Jesus' feet being anointed (Luke 7:36-50 compared to Matt 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-8). Here, critics base their reasoning on the premise that it must be only one event. This contradiction is easily resolved once the context of the narratives is understood.

The same woman—Mary of Bethany—anoins Jesus twice, earlier in his ministry and later in the last week of his life. In Luke, Mary was in her family home in Galilee and anointed Jesus in grateful celebration for her new life as a forgiven disciple. Jesus had forgiven Mary, while her father, Simon, had not. In the other accounts, Mary is in her family's second home in Bethany. Like many wealthy Galilean families, Mary's family had a second residence

near Jerusalem,² and here she anoints Jesus because she—alone amongst the disciples—understands that Jesus must die. Jesus’ responses to the two events show they were different occurrences:

- “*You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her **many sins have been forgiven.***” (Luke 7:46-47).
- “*When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to **prepare me for burial.***” (Matt 26:12).

Similarly, critics point to the apparent contradiction between the accounts of Jesus’ cleansing the temple. Matthew (21:12-17) and Mark (11:15-18) place Jesus’ actions in the last week of his life. John places Jesus’ actions at the beginning of his ministry. Rather than acknowledge the simple fact that both accounts are accurate—that Jesus began and ended his ministry by cleansing the temple—critics arbitrarily assert that only one account must be true.

Critics also take the opposite approach, using differing descriptions of the same event to manufacture a contradiction between gospels. For example, a critic asks: “The gospels also disagree about where Jesus taught his most famous sermon. Was it on a mount or on a plain?” A close look at the texts demonstrates that there is no conflict. Matthew says the teaching takes place on an *oros*, a Greek word that can mean both mountain (e.g., Matt 4:8) and hill

(Matt 5:14). Luke describes the setting using a unique word; the word that’s translated “*plain*” occurs only here. The word simply means a flat place. Taken together, we understand that Jesus used a setting that resembled a natural amphitheater—seating for the crowd and an elevated place for the teacher.

Not Recognizing That Details Are Different Parts of the Same Process

Rather than acknowledging that gospel writers emphasize different parts of a process, critics set one event against another in a binary way. Crucifixion was a process, and Jesus was on the cross for several hours. During that time, several comments were made to Jesus and about Jesus. Both Matthew and Mark quote the centurion as saying, “*Surely this man was the Son of God!*”

(Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39); however, Luke records the centurion as saying, “*Surely this was a righteous man.*” (Luke 23:47). Rather than insisting on only one account being correct, surely it makes more sense to believe that over the course of several hours, the centurion would have been moved to say many things about Jesus and that Matthew and Mark focused on one saying and that Luke focused on another.

A centurion figures in another example. Luke (7:1-10) records the centurion sending Jewish elders to ask Jesus to heal his servant, but Matthew (8:5-13) states that the centurion went to Jesus directly. We infer that a process unfolded:

Critics also take the opposite approach, using differing descriptions of the same event to manufacture a contradiction between gospels.

- The centurion asked the Jewish leaders to intervene on his behalf.
- Jesus agreed and made his way to the centurion's home.
- The centurion met Jesus on the way and entreated Jesus personally.

We can see that Luke, a gospel to the Gentiles, would want to highlight the action of Jews on behalf of Gentiles. Similarly, Matthew, a gospel to the Jews, would want to underscore the faith of a Gentile. Both actions happened as part of the process that resulted in Jesus' healing the centurion's servant.

A similar incident regards the accounts of the women at the tomb. Mark says the women ran from the tomb and told no

one (Mark 16:8). In Matthew's version, the women run to tell the disciples (Matt 28:8). The simple explanation is that Mark is emphasizing that the women did not speak inside the tomb (because they were afraid), not that they never reported the good news to others. Taken as a whole, the gospels support this explanation; Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John agree the women did not speak inside the tomb.

The call of the disciples is another process critics mistakenly understand as a singular event. John (1: 35-42) records Andrew and Peter responding to Jesus' call in the context of John the Baptist's preaching. Matthew (4:18-22) and Mark (1:16-20) place the setting of Jesus' call as fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Luke (5:1-11) sets the calling against the backdrop of a miraculous haul of fish. Rather than viewing the disciples' calling as a singular event, we can see that the gospels record an iterative process that resulted in Andrew, Peter, James, and John becoming closer and closer to Jesus, finally becoming his "full-time" disciples. John documents the initial contact, Matthew and Mark portray the next step, and Luke records the final step.

Jesus' Last Passover

Let's be clear. Matthew, Mark, and Luke state that Jesus ate a Passover meal with the Twelve. However, John's gospel makes no direct mention of Christ's last meal being a Passover and appears to state that the Passover meal occurred after Christ was arrested. There are three ways this apparent contradiction can be resolved.



1. Jesus ate the Passover meal with the twelve. John's use of the term "Passover" doesn't mean only the Passover meal but rather the events of Passover week. Although John doesn't explicitly identify Jesus' last meal as a Passover, there are many clues in his account that identify the meal as a Passover.³
2. Jesus ate an early Passover meal ahead of the actual Passover date.
3. The synoptic gospels use the Galilean calendar of the Pharisees; however, John uses the Judean/Roman calendar used by the Sadducees.

Each of the three explanations above is a plausible way of understanding the apparent contradiction between the Synoptics and John.

Our Foundation

The foundation of our belief is clear:

THE FOUNDATION.—That the book currently known as the Bible, consisting of the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles, is the only source of knowledge concerning God and His purposes at present extant or available in the earth, and that the same were wholly given by

inspiration of God in the writers, and are consequently without error in all parts of them, except such as may be due to errors of transcription or translation.—2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Hebrews 1:1; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Nehemiah 9:30; John 10:35.

The gospels are four narratives of Jesus' life, providing factually correct information derived from eyewitnesses. Peter tells us we can rely on them to be the foundation of our faith:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet 1:16-18).

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

² We know Mary's family was wealthy because of Lazarus' tomb. To be buried in a tomb was a mark of the wealthy, as the fulfillment of Isa 53:9 demonstrates.

³ Joachim Jeremias's book *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* provides fourteen distinct details that identify the Last Supper as the Passover Seder.



PART 2

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

By Richard Morgan

ONE of the most fundamental doctrines outlined in Scripture is that God counts our faith as righteousness, and we can't be righteous by following a list of rules or laws. Think of David—condemned twice over by the Law because of his adultery and murder. He had to have

faith in the compassion and patience of God and God's ability to save him; otherwise, he was doomed.

So, righteousness is **not** something that comes from attending ecclesial meetings and functions, reading, and studying the Bible, saying prayers, believing in the inspiration of

Scripture, or accepting first principle teachings. Without forming a trusting relationship and allegiance to God, understanding the spirit behind the things God asks us to do, accepting God working in our lives as good for our eternal well-being, and developing godly character, all the activities we engage in are meaningless.

To further understand the implication that the righteous shall live by faith, let's consider the origin of the phrase found in the book of Habakkuk:

Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. (Hab 2:4).¹

Notice this verse contains two classes of people, like in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. On the one hand, we have someone so puffed up in pride he is blind to his failings, and on the other hand, despite his sinfulness, someone who goes to his home justified because of his faith in God.

Habakkuk is a rather obscure book tucked away at the end of the Old Testament, so it's worth spending some time in the context to understand why the prophet wrote this foundational verse. The whole prophecy deals with theodicy, how a righteous and benevolent God can allow evil, wickedness and suffering. Habakkuk struggled with this question when he surveyed the situation in Jerusalem. He wrote in the first four verses of the book:

The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will

not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted. (Hab 1:1-4).

The prophet can't understand what is happening because he sees iniquity and injustice in God's people. Chapter 2 then highlights the details of their iniquity in a series of five woes:

1. Greed (2:6-8)
2. Exploitation (2:9-11)
3. Violence (2:12-14)
4. Immorality (2:15-17)
5. Idolatry (2:18-20)

If you had to come up with a list of sins that illustrate how to break the law of God, this would work perfectly. It's a summary of what the Law of Moses prescribed **against**, and yet the people are guilty of each one. Habakkuk doesn't understand how people under the law of God are breaking it in every aspect. Instead of righteousness, there is wickedness.

Having aired his complaint in 1:1-4, God answers him in the next few verses. Verse 5 probably encouraged the prophet when Yahweh told him, *"Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told."* So, God is at work. He tells the prophet. But then He goes on to explain that He is *"raising up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, who march through the breadth*

of the earth, to seize dwellings not their own.” (v. 6).

This answer does not solve the conundrum from the prophet’s point-of-view. How can raising up an even more unrighteous nation solve the problem?

Unsatisfied, Habakkuk complains against God in the rest of the chapter. In verse 13, he asks, *“You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?”* Why is unrighteousness dealt with by even more unrighteousness? It doesn’t make sense to the prophet, and in exasperation, he closes his complaint with the words, *“Is he then to keep on emptying his net and mercilessly killing nations forever?”* (v. 17).

What are we to make of Habakkuk’s complaint? God did the same thing years later when He brought the Romans against Jerusalem in the first century. Paul alluded to that event in the chapter we looked at last month, Acts 13. Quoting Habakkuk 1:5 in verse 41, he tells the Jews to *“Beware”* (v. 40) that the same thing that happened in Habakkuk’s day will happen again.

Amid unrighteousness in the ecclesia and even more unrighteousness in

the world around us, we can become as bewildered as Habakkuk. What are we meant to do when faced with iniquity? God’s second answer solves the conundrum. At the beginning of chapter 2, God answered Habakkuk with the following words:

And the Lord answered me: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith. (Hab 2:2-4).

God tells the prophet that He knows what He’s doing, and we simply have to trust that He is right. This is the essence of faith: trusting in the righteousness of God despite the paradoxes of life. Faith trusts God will save us, and we can depend on Him no matter what the tangible things around us seem to say.

The paradox for Habakkuk is summarized in 1:4, where he says, *“the law is paralyzed.”* Here were a people living under God’s law and yet unrighteous. The gospel message tells us we need to be freed from law to become righteous. That doesn’t make

Amid unrighteousness in the ecclesia and even more unrighteousness in the world around us, we can become as bewildered as Habakkuk. What are we meant to do when faced with iniquity?

sense to the natural mind. Surely, if you have a law, you will do the right thing as prescribed by its rules and statutes. If you're not under a law, how will you do what is right? However, all the prophet had to do was look around him and see the Law was indeed paralyzed; despite what it commanded, people were doing the exact opposite.

We have another conundrum to solve. In 2:2, God tells Habakkuk concerning the vision to *"make it plain on tablets."* The only other times the word for *"plain"* is used in the Old Testament are both in Deuteronomy. First, in chapter 1, where *"Moses undertook to explain"* (v. 5) the Law, and then in chapter 27 in the context of the blessings and curses of the Law expounded from Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. The people were told to *"write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly."* (v. 8). The word for *"tablets"* used by Habakkuk is also the word used for the Law written on tablets in such places as Deuteronomy 4:13.

So, Habakkuk used the same medium to write his vision as Moses used to write the Law. We might think this means the Law can produce faith if we follow it. After all, in Habakkuk,

what was written plainly on tablets was so the people might live by faith.

However, despite the medium being the same, the difference is seen in how one approaches the written word. We, too, have words written on a medium. Not tablets of stone but paper and ink, but really, it's no different—they are still words written down. The question is, how do we read the Word of God? As a list of rules to make us righteous, or the words of a caring Heavenly Father that we take on faith and obey because we are developing a loving relationship with Him? Our acceptance of the Word of God in the right spirit is key. Look at what Paul says about the Law in Romans 7:

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. 5 For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. (Rom 7:4-5).

The implication of these words is that we cannot *"bear fruit for God"* if we are living under a law, that is, if we take the Word of God in the wrong way. In fact, despite the commandments of the Law being *"holy and righteous and good"* (v. 12), if we read the Word of God just as a list of rules to follow to make us righteous, it has a detrimental effect— *"our sinful passions, aroused by the law."*

Remember, Habakkuk said, *"the law is paralyzed,"* and the five woes of chapter 2 illustrate

they were doing the opposite of what the law prescribed, despite being under the Law. The people of Habakkuk's day were a witness to the truth of what Paul says about the law here in Romans.

Paul continues in verse 8, *"But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness,"* and in verse 11, *"For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me."* These words echo ones spoken in Eden, where the serpent (sin) seized his opportunity through the commandment—*"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* (Gen. 3:1)—to deceive Eve and brought death into the world.

What Paul describes, and what Habakkuk witnessed, is how human nature works in the context of law. In the next chapter, Paul says, *"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do."* (Rom 8:3). It is not that the Law was a problem in and of itself. The Law was right, but what it did was illustrate what sin looks like. In Romans 7, Paul effectively explains that when the Law says, "Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," that tree suddenly becomes very intriguing to the flesh. And then, because of the weakness of the flesh,

instead of obeying the commandment, we disobey.

God's solution in Habakkuk's day was not to change the medium by which he transmitted His word but

If we read the Word of God just as a list of rules to follow to make us righteous, it has a detrimental effect— "our sinful passions, aroused by the law."

to set up a scenario in which people who had faith in Him would live. When the prophet wrote the vision plainly on tablets, everyone now had a choice. They could either believe what God, through Habakkuk, was saying or not. The righteous would literally, live if they read the vision, had faith in its truthfulness, and ran for

their lives from the Chaldeans. The Law could not save the people. As Habakkuk said, it **was** paralyzed. Its only effect was for the people to do the exact opposite. In vain, the prophet could have kept telling the people, "Obey these laws!" They would still have been greedy, exploitive, violent, immoral, and idolatrous. The only way to divide the wheat from the chaff was to bring a test of faith into their lives through the Chaldean invasion. The question now was not how good the people were at keeping laws but whether they had faith in the living God.

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

THE BIBLE IN CONTEXT

BY JASON HENSLEY

Reviewed by Caleb Osborn

ONE Bible; millions of interpretations. The original Christianity of the first century has splintered into thousands of denominations with their own varied beliefs, all claiming to be based on Scripture. How did this happen? How can a book, supposed to be the definitive source of light and moral direction, be subject to such a wide spectrum of interpretation? In *The Bible In Context*, Bro. Jason Hensley argues that flawed approaches to understanding the intent of the Bible's Divine Author lie at the root of this extreme fracturing of beliefs. Bro. Jason identifies a need for a more robust approach to Bible understanding in the whole community of Bible readers. He proposes a framework for Biblical interpretation—a methodology for Bible Study.

Throughout his book, Bro. Jason marshals compelling examples to show how our preconceptions, natural biases, and cultural experiences can shade our interpretation of the Bible. Too often, reading ourselves and our experiences into a passage can lead us away from an accurate understanding. This approach may be an easy way to come up with a quick lesson or encouraging thought, but it frequently results in misconstrued interpretations or misapplied principles. Escaping one's biases is hard!

How can we ensure we aren't superimposing our own culture and experience onto the Biblical stories we read? What can we do to prevent ourselves from developing interpretations that depart from the Divine Author's meaning in His Word?

Bro. Jason proposes that the solution lies in developing and following a consistent, robust methodology for Biblical interpretation. This methodology forms the core of his book.

Many of the concepts Bro. Jason introduces and discusses as part of this methodology will be familiar to most Christadelphians: read in context, find the facts, establish the principle, apply the exhortation, and discuss your findings with others in the community. Our community's culture has always valued committed Bible reading, and there are many individuals and groups who have cultivated rigorous Bible study habits. *The Bible In Context* is not attempting to reinvent the wheel. Still, it has gathered some of the best study techniques and approaches and organized them into a clearly articulated methodology. The approach outlined in this book is accessible enough for the most inexperienced Bible student while still offering the more established, specified advice and practical tools to enhance their study practices.

In the middle chapters of *The Bible In Context*, Bro. Jason explores three key contexts the careful Bible student should be aware of: historical, literary, and Biblical. The historical context requires an understanding of the cultural, contemporary, and geographic background of a particular Bible passage. Unfortunately, context is one of the hardest to familiarize oneself with, as reliable primary sources for large swaths of Biblical history are

few and far between. On the other hand, literary context is much more accessible (and more important)—it just requires careful consideration of the surrounding passages to establish the true flow of thought through the relevant sections of verses, paragraphs, and collections of topically related passages. The third type of context, Biblical context, recognizes that the entire Bible is the expression of a singular, Divine mind. It will always be internally consistent. Put simply, the Bible interprets itself. We should always remember the totality of God's revelation when trying to understand a tricky passage. If our interpretation of a passage seems historically consistent, but if in its immediate context, it contradicts clear principles expressed throughout the rest of Scripture, we should reevaluate our thought process.

In the final chapters, as Bro. Jason concludes the more granular sections on the mechanics of the methodology, two essential principles are convincingly highlighted. The first is the importance of maintaining a steady diet of God's word. Because the Bible does interpret itself, those who desire to interpret it accurately need to be constantly engaged in accumulating familiarity with the entirety of Scripture. The second principle is also a practice that needs consistent implementation: engaging with a community of other Bible enthusiasts pursuing an increasingly accurate understanding of the Bible. Discussions with other committed Bible students will help to identify flaws in our interpretations and fill in gaps in our understanding.

In other words, Bro. Jason makes meaningful fellowship an essential component of his methodology for Biblical interpretation!

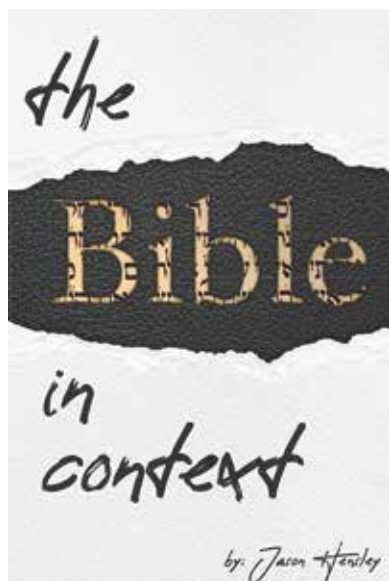
In addition to outlining a straightforward and robust framework for interpreting the Bible, the strengths of *The Bible In Context* include,

- A variety of compelling and fascinating mini-case studies of commonly misinterpreted passages used throughout the book to illustrate the necessity of various components of the methodology.
- End-of-chapter “practice” questions that allow the reader to experiment with how reading in light of the components discussed in the section can change your perspective.

- An accessible writing style that deftly balances readability with academic rigor.

Everyone interested in trying to understand God more closely through His word should consider reading *The Bible In Context*. Although this book presents the details of a Bible study methodology, it is far more important than a mere academic exercise. Our approach to interpreting God’s word affects our understanding of His will, which then directly affects the impact He can have in our daily life.

*Caleb Osborn,
Thousand Oaks Ecclesia, CA*



The Bible in Context

by Jason Hensley
2023, pp. 174

\$9.99

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LESSONS FROM A SISTER

By Shauna Chin Sang



SIS. Enid Hall, of Port Antonio in Jamaica, has fallen asleep in the LORD at the end of a long and faithful life. She would have been 100 years old on February 18. She was baptized in 1985.

I met dear Sis. Enid at Easter Camp in 1990. She was one of the dorm mothers, making certain all the children and teenagers got to specific areas on time for Meeting and recreational activities. She was like a lady with eyes behind her to guide us when we stepped out of line! She often had to look for us. We would try and hide from exercising in the early mornings. Sometimes we would hide in the dorm or classrooms to avoid Bible classes. At the time, they seemed so boring to us children. Sis. Enid was a lady of patience. She would never yell or curse at us, no matter how often she had to repeat herself to get us to hurry and get to where we needed to be on time.

She was also such a gentle soul. Over the last few years, several other sisters and

I would travel whenever possible from Port Maria to Port Antonio to visit her. She was such a bright spark. She loved reading her Bible and singing from the Christadelphian songbook. She knew every word of so many hymns!

And she loved to hug her brothers and sisters. She always encouraged us and somehow, with her wise words and bright smile, would brighten us for weeks to come.

As she lost her sight over the pandemic period, she became bedridden. However, she never lost her passion for the Word of God, and she loved hearing us sing her favorite hymns. She was never grumpy, even when she could no longer move around on her own.

During our final visit to see Sis. Enid last October, her caregiver described her as “the nicest old lady in the whole world.”

*Shauna Chin Sang,
Port Maria Ecclesia, Jamaica*

OCTOBER 29 - DECEMBER 7, 2022 IN ST. LUCIA

By Mike LeDuke

I arrived at the House to find it spotless, thanks to the efforts of Sis. Julie Gonzaque. Sis. Dawn Hutchinson ensured there were staples and a couple of prepared meals for me.

The Mission House serves as the ecclesia's meeting place and the residence for visiting missionaries. When no missionaries are present, Sis. Dawn coordinates the Memorial Meeting at the Mission House via ZOOM with the Kitchener-Waterloo Ecclesia in Ontario. She uses her laptop and a large screen monitor. We also conduct Bible classes there, usually on Tuesday mornings.

Bible reading and discussions were conducted during the week with seven responsive contacts attending eight or more sessions per week. One of our long-term contacts is studying for baptism.

Responses to phone calls and email messages were very poor. I sent out regular email advertisements to our contacts (about 80 of them), inviting them to chat on the phone, via ZOOM,

or face-to-face. I had one response; she is now taking the "Exploring the Bible" course and meeting with me from time to time on ZOOM and WhatsApp chat.

The weather did not permit an ecclesial outing on this trip. God willing, Bro. Martin and Sis. Lois Webster will be able to arrange something this January when they go, as will I in March when conditions are more suitable.

While in St. Lucia, I investigated the possibility of spending time in St. Vincent to look up contacts (over 120 of them from thisisyourbible.com) and perhaps conduct a public lecture or two. However, the cost was prohibitive. I will continue to monitor the interest in our contacts there.

I returned home on December 7, 2022, but remain in touch via WhatsApp and ZOOM with our members and friends. God willing, I will return at the end of February for another five-week visit.

*Mike LeDuke,
Kitchener-Waterloo Ecclesia, ON
CBMC Link to St. Lucia*

JANUARY 13 - FEBRUARY 5, 2023 IN ST. LUCIA

By Martin and Lois Webster



JANUARY 15 was our first Sunday at the Mission House. Attendance at the Breaking of Bread meeting was a bit disappointing. But between our contacts and those members who could attend, we had a very good time of fellowship with lunch and “a cappella” singing (there was a power outage, and the keyboard is electric) after the formal portion of the meeting.

Subsequent Sunday morning services were much better attended.

During our three-week stay, besides the Breaking of Bread meetings, we conducted Bible classes with interested friends and continued a daily (with some exceptions) series of readings with our elderly landlady and two of her caregivers. We read from Bro.

Bob Lloyd's "*Minute Meditations*" and discussed its contents.

On Tuesdays, a ZOOM pre-baptismal class is held with our contact, Julian Jackson. Bro. Benji and Sis. Laretta also attend when there is a discussion on the devil and demon possession and the doctrine of the "pre-existence of Christ." The sessions extend into lunchtime, so we served sandwiches and cold drinks and discussed the topics informally. Bro. Mike LeDuke makes these presentations quite interactive, and Julian responds really well. His understanding of the first principles is good, and it might be well said: "He is not far from the Kingdom of God."

We have had two visits from a Jehovah's Witness elder and some of his companions. He had first contacted Bro. Mike by phone, but they had never met. The first meeting was not very satisfying, as a man named Prochorus Martelly of the Jehovah's Witnesses terminated the session abruptly, claiming a prior appointment. However, he did return the following week, and we spent productive time with him and two companions discussing the

Kingdom of God and the role of Israel in prophecy. Bro. Mike will follow up with Prochorus when he returns, God willing, at the end of February.

We have had regular visits from our members. We did the readings, shared a meal, and discussed any issues they had. We also had several meetings with a brother who is currently out of fellowship, with a view to potentially bringing him back.

Sunday, February 5, was the day for our departure. We had impressed the members to come by 10:45, so we could have a relaxed Breaking of Bread and visit over lunch before our driver, Keith Phillip, arrived at 1:00 p.m. They all obliged and were all in attendance, including Julian. We had some singing with the early arrivals, then a full meeting with Bro. Martin exhorting on the abrupt departure of the Hebrews from Egypt and the institution of the Passover.

*Martin and Lois Webster,
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SCRIPTURE SCRIBE

We are happy to announce that the ***christadelphianvideo.org*** network has just launched a new audio website, ***scripturescribe.com***. This website includes exhortations, Bible classes, studies, lectures, audiobooks from various ecclesial libraries, and *christadelphianvideo.org*.

The website *scripturescribe.com* requires a login to listen to talks and use other functions on the site. Brothers and sisters who already have an account with *christadelphianvideo.org* can use their *christadelphianvideo.org* username and password to access *scripturescribe.com*.

Some features of *scripturescribe.com* include:

- Online Bible with multiple versions with the ability to use cross-references and look up Strong's Concordance numbers
- Audio Bible (KJV)
- Daily readings planner
- Daily readings quiz questions. Brothers and sisters can submit quiz

questions to be added to the site

- Comment functionality for daily readings
- Bible chapters will list related hymns (2002 hymn book) and classes
- Bible dictionary
- Bookmark functionality so you can bookmark a series or class you would like to listen to later

We are very thankful to the brothers and sisters who have assisted us in uploading thousands of talks to date; the library continues to grow daily. If you would like to submit an audio talk or series or have any questions, please use the contact form on *scripturescribe.com* or *christadelphianvideo.org* or email either hello@scripturescribe.com or email mp3@cdvideo.org

We are hopeful this website is a helpful tool that will provide material to encourage us all as we wait for the Lord's return.

*Matt Eggington,
christadelphianvideo.org*

Thoughts on the Way

Let There Be LIGHT

IN the last couple of weeks here in Texas, most of us have experienced a blackout, or two or three. We might have been reading or watching television or just sitting around and talking when, without any warning, the electricity went off, and we found ourselves in almost total darkness. Maybe we had a flashback to the first time we visited one of the caverns in the Hill Country and held Dad or Mom's hand while our guide turned off every bit of lighting. And we wondered how deep we were under the ground. We tried not to think of the great mass of solid rock and earth above us. We stared wide-eyed into the void all around us and knew for a moment what absolute blindness felt like.

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void. And the Spirit of God moved upon the waters. And God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. (Gen 1:1, 2).¹

The Hebrew words for "*moved upon*" may be translated "*hovered over*." Like a mother bird brooding over her chicks and keeping them safe and warm, the Almighty God of all creation lavished His love upon His newborn world. Out of the chaos and emptiness, He

created valleys and mountains, oceans and rivers, trees and plants for food, all manner of animals, and a beautiful paradise or garden, into which He placed a man and a woman.

The world as we know it began with a divine command: "*Let there be light*." As long as Adam and Eve obeyed the heavenly Father, they lived in that divine light. The Garden of Eden was a bright place, where the Father's Spirit was ever-present, walking with them, and where they were taught by His angels. But then the tragedy occurred. Eve listened to the wrong advisor, and Adam became a companion in her disobedience. The couple tried to hide from God, but, as they learned, that was impossible.

Sadly, they were expelled from the Garden and sent into a dark wilderness, where fears and troubles followed them, where Adam coaxed food out of the ground by the sweat of his brow, and where Eve gave birth to children in severe labor pains. And the cycle would continue for them and their descendants until everyone died and returned to the dust.

Nevertheless, in the beginning, the LORD God had a plan. In Genesis 3, we are told that a woman would give birth to a unique child who would be

the Son of God. In the fullness of time that “seed of the woman,” having grown to manhood, would be known as the “light of the world.” He would destroy the serpent-power of sin, which lingered in all the dark and dangerous corners of the earth.

The God of Israel put that plan into action when Jesus was born. In the first chapter of his Gospel, John introduced Jesus Christ in an extraordinary manner (John 1:9): *“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world... To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* (v. 12 NIV).

Then, in John 1:14, John says, *“the Word became flesh.”* In the very beginning of the world, God had hovered over the darkness of the earth and commanded, *“Let there be light.”* Now, once more, God hovered over another world of darkness, this time spiritual darkness, and commanded: *“Let there be light.”*

one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14).

The prophet Isaiah saw this future: *“The people walking in darkness will see a great light; and on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”* (Isa 9:2).

Today, we live in a world which is under the shadow of death—a world which could explode at any moment. But we must not sit in the darkness of constant fear and must not let ourselves be distracted by each new event. We do not know exactly what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future. It is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of this world. In Revelation 5:7, we read, *“He [that is, Jesus Christ] went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”* Then the host of worshippers gathered around God’s throne and sang a new song:

*You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals, because you*

Today, we live in a world which is under the shadow of death—a world which could explode at any moment. But we must not sit in the darkness of constant fear and must not let ourselves be distracted by each new event.

In response to His commanding Word, a child was conceived in the womb of Mary, a “child of light” who would grow up to walk among men and women. As John says, *“He [Jesus, the Word made flesh] made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the*

were slain, and with your blood you purchased persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. (Rev 5:9-10).

Jesus himself told his followers: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12).

The psalmists wrote: *"The Lord is our light and salvation—whom shall we fear? The Lord is the stronghold of our lives—of whom shall we be afraid?"* (Psa 27:1). *"The LORD is our God, and He has made His light to shine on us."* (Psa 118:27).

Each day, God's Word *"is a lamp for our feet, and a light for our path."* (Psa 119:105). God has delivered us from death, and our feet from stumbling, so that we may walk before God in the light of life. (Psa 56:13).

Paul wrote: *"You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."* (1 Thess 5:5). And in another place, he wrote: *"God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light to shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."* (2 Cor 4:6).

The glory in the face of Christ was shown to some of the apostles on the Mount of the Transfiguration. But the most important glory of Christ is not to be found in a shining face. Instead, it is found in what Paul called *"the gift of God's grace."* (Eph 3:7). He wrote: *"This grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ."* (v. 8).

Paul's *"riches"* are not gold and silver. Peter wrote that *"[We] are not redeemed with perishable things such as silver and gold, but...with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish."* (1 Pet 1:18, 19). So Paul adds:

I pray that out of his glorious riches, [God] may strengthen you... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... 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 passes knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19).

All through human history, a single, continuous war has been underway. It is a war between light and darkness, between love and hate, and between hope and fear. Light, love, and hope will win—it has been promised! But they will not win without a fierce struggle. *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning."* (Psa 30:5). In hope, we turn our eyes toward the east every morning, hoping that this will be the Day when Christ comes. *"For you who revere my Name," says the LORD Almighty, "the Sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his rays."* (Mal 4:2).

That day will come; we know not when. But we hope it will be soon. While we wait, we are told to *"occupy"* until Christ comes. (Luke 19:11-13). That word *"occupy"* means, simply, *"Be busy doing all the right things, such as preaching, teaching, encouraging, and helping those in need."* The list could go on.

During the last days when Christ was with his disciples on this earth (Acts 1), they asked him, *"Is now the time for us to restore the kingdom?"* Jesus answered, *"No, it is not the time. And by the way, you do not need to know the times or*

All through human history, a single, continuous war has been underway. It is a war between light and darkness, between love and hate, and between hope and fear. Light, love and hope will win—it has been promised! But they will not win without a fierce struggle.

dates, which only the Father sets in His power. Your business is to go and preach the gospel wherever anyone will listen.”

A short time later, as the apostles watched, Jesus ascended to heaven. Suddenly there were two angels dressed in white standing beside them. They said, *“Men of Galilee, why are you standing here gazing up into the sky. This same Jesus will come again in the same way in which he went into heaven.”* Their implication was obvious: “Don’t waste your time looking up and waiting to see what happens next. You have plenty of work to do, and the best thing you can do is get on with your job.”

In other words, as John said, *“walk in the light”* (1 John 1:7), that is, the light which Jesus has given us. Notice that John does not say, “Sit in the light”—he says, *“Walk in the light!”* In other words, “follow in Christ’s footsteps. Do what Christ did; he talked to people, he was kind to children, he loved all people, and he cared for all of them.

When the disciples met with Jesus in the Upper Room (John 13), it was already evening. Outside, there was only darkness. But inside, there was the light of candles and the man who was the *“Light of the World.”* Jesus told his friends that one of them would betray him. They all were astonished and asked, *“Lord, is it I?”*

All the disciples stayed in the room as the Passover was celebrated. It was Christ’s special “Passover,” in which he showed himself to be the Lamb of God, destined to take away the sin of the world. During the course of that evening, all the disciples participated in the full meal—that is, all but one. After receiving the bread, Judas Iscariot made his excuses and left that room for the last time.

A room where Jesus is found is a room filled with light and fellowship, and love. Judas, the traitor, abandoned that room and that Light and went out into the terrible night of jealousy, greed, and hatred, where secret deals were made as men bought and sold the lives of others. Many years later, John, remembering that very moment, wrote curtly: *“It was night.”*

It seems that John never forgot the cold finality of that moment: *“It... was... night!”*

In a dark world where Christ is the *“Light,”* there is only one place to be, and that is by his side. The choice is ours, and we make that choice every day. And each Sunday, we renew our commitment to that choice by participating in the memorial feast. *“Do this,”* Christ said, *“in remembrance of me.”*

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

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

is published monthly, except bimonthly in July-August, by The **Christadelphian Tidings**,

567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065-5941.

FIRST CLASS POSTAGE PAID at Simi Valley, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Christadelphian Tidings, 567 Astorian Dr., Simi Valley, CA 93065.

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