

Building faith in the
Christadelphian community.

TIDINGS

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EDITORIAL

I Will Be With Thee, Dave Jennings..... 2

LIFE APPLICATION

Our Relationship With Sports, John Perks..... 8

yanyo.org Announcement, 14

EXHORTATION AND CONSOLATION

A Friendly Reminder, Jim Sullivan..... 16

SPECIAL SECTION: PROPHECY

Judaism Between the Testaments, Jason Hensley..... 20

SPECIAL SECTION: MOTHERS IN ISRAEL

A Final Commandment Kept, Alan Markwith..... 24

BIBLE STUDIES

Hidden Treasures in the Titles of the Psalms (2), Leen Ritmeyer..... 30

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Kings and Priests, Dave Jennings 38

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Political Involvement..... 44

PREACHING AND TEACHING

Conflict in the DRC, Emil Mukambilwa..... 46

Trinidad and Tobago, Ben Drepaul 52

South Africa Summer Bible School, Travis Sinclair..... 54

THOUGHTS ON THE WAY

The Fox and the Hedgehog, George Booker..... 58

I WILL BE WITH THEE

Whatever we encounter in the wilderness of life,
our God is there with us, providing for our needs
and bringing us safely to the promised land.

THERE have been countless theological debates about God's name. Often, these discussions seem extremely deep, even technical, as we attempt to understand what the original Hebrew indicated or how to pronounce the memorial name. But what is the context of God's memorial name? What did it mean to Israel as they were about to be freed from the shackles of slavery in Egypt? What does it teach believers today about His name's fundamental message and purpose?

Revealed to Israel

The God declared to Moses was primarily intended to carry meaning and purpose. Did God, who is eternal, have a specific "name" like we do in the present creation? When Manoah, the father of Samson, asked the angel that appeared to him what his name was, the angel replied, "*It is beyond understanding.*" (Judges 13:18 NIV). The name Yahweh, which we show reverence to, is intended for mortal minds to capture the purpose of God rather than to limit his identity.

The context of "I AM THAT I AM" in Exodus 3:14 is critical. Moses is in Midian, where he has been for forty years. As a shepherd, Moses must have had long periods to wonder about God's purpose in his life. Instead, he had left the "riches of Egypt" to live a very unexceptional life in relative obscurity. Was God done with him? Would he ever reunite with his siblings? Would God hear the groaning of His people, Israel?

Out of a bush, the angel of the LORD appears to Moses through a flame of fire. The bush itself was not

consumed. It is here that God, through the angel, reveals Himself to Moses. God was manifested in this destitute, unpopulated area, where life was hardly apparent. God tells Moses He had heard the cry of Israel and was now "*come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians.*" (Exodus 3:7-8).

The angel told Moses about God's enormous plan to deliver the people from Egypt. He wondered if he was up to the task as the leader. "*Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt.*" (Exodus 3:11). We might also be overwhelmed by such an assignment. Pharaoh was the most powerful man on earth, with a standing army and great riches.

God's answer to him is the context for the memorial name. "*And he said, Certainly I will be with thee.*" (Exodus 3:12). That's it, what Israel needed to know about the name of God. It is to communicate that God would be with them. He would be with Moses, putting His words into Moses' mouth. God would bring great plagues against Egypt. He would harden Pharaoh's heart.

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments. (Exodus 6:6).

God understood what Israel needed to have confidence in as they escaped bondage and entered the wilderness. Every time they repeated the memorial name it was a reminder He would be with them.

This theme is further developed in Exodus 3:15.

And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

By being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He reminded them of the covenant He had made with the patriarchs. But the theme of “*I will be with thee*” is a common thread through the lives of the patriarchs. God told Abraham when he left his family in Haran:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee. (Genesis 12:2-3).

Each time God extended the covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, “*I will*” is prominently spoken. It is said to Isaac in Genesis 26:3-4 and repeated to Jacob.

And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. (Genesis 28:13-14).

Therefore, what they were to remember about the name of God was the same lesson that their fathers had learned. Despite the adversaries and giants they would face wherever they were, God would be with them.

During their pilgrimage, the patriarchs of Israel learned that God was with them. They needed not to establish fenced cities for defense, for God encamped around them. He would bring them through all the hardships and fears. This promise is precisely the lesson Israel needed to learn and depend on during the wilderness journey. It remains so for believers today.

Therefore, what they were to remember about the name of God was the same lesson that their fathers had learned. Despite the adversaries and giants they would face wherever they were, God would be with them.

As Moses prepared to give way to his successor, Joshua, his last words called to mind the importance of the memorial name.

And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt

bring the children of Israel into the land which I swear unto them: and I will be with thee. (Deuteronomy 31:23).

As Israel entered the promised land, they would encounter adversaries who would challenge their faith. But Joshua reminded them of the meaning of the memorial name.

Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. (Joshua 1:9).

What, then, did the name of God convey to His people? “Surely, I will be with thee.” The memorial name In Hebrew is ehyeh asher ehyeh—I will be.

God Manifested

As we follow Israel through the conquest of the land, the times of the Judges, and later the kings, we see the assurance that if Israel would turn to God, He would be with them and prosper their ways.

Isaiah introduces the Immanuel prophecy.

And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:13-14).

Understanding the significance and context of God’s memorial name, we now learn of a promised son to be conceived of a virgin. This

son, Immanuel, will refuse evil and choose the good. We know this to be a prophecy of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 1:23, we read the angel’s message to Joseph of the child to be born to his espoused wife, Mary, as well as the translation of Emmanuel.

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Israel would know that God’s memorial name was “I will be.” But a son was to be born that would be the manifestation of “God with us.” As Hebrews states:

Who being in the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus, then, demonstrated to all men and women of faith what life governed by “I will be with thee” looked like. It was manifest in his flesh.

Make Our Abode

The life of Jesus is undoubtedly a demonstration of “God with us.” From birth, his Father kept him safe (Psalm 22:9-10). No man knew the depth of comfort and assurance our Lord knew in his relationship with the Father. When Lazarus was raised, Jesus thanked God for hearing him. But he clarifies this by saying,

And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people

which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 11:42).

The presence of Jesus to the disciples in the days of his flesh was hugely important. They leaned on him. He fed them the precious words of the gospel message. He demonstrated the character of his Father. They followed him, and he led.

But Jesus was soon to be taken from them. He knew that if he were to abandon them, they could potentially become scattered sheep. But just as the Father was to be with Israel, so the Lord Jesus assured his disciples that he, too, would be with them.

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. (John 14:18-20 ESV).

The boldness of Jesus's words in John 14-15 reassures us of an intimate, enduring relationship with the Father and the Son. Jesus said he would make a "place" (Hebrew: *mone*) for them, an abiding place where they could find refuge. Later in John 14, he speaks of what God requires to be with us.

*He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will **manifest** myself to him.* (John 14:21).

Jesus continues through John 17, reminding the disciples that though he would depart physically from them,

he would remain with them spiritually. Jesus told his disciples to "Abide in me, and I in you." (John 15:4).

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:21).

Through the work of Jesus, we who were far off can now draw nigh. Those who were once residents of the darkness of Egypt are changing into God's children. Jesus left his disciples on the Mount of Olives with this promise:

Lo, I am with you *always, even unto the end of the world.* (Matthew 28:20).

Ultimate Fulfillment

The strength this provides for our mortal journey is always knowing God is with us through Christ. Whatever we encounter in the wilderness of life, our God is there with us, providing for our needs and bringing us safely to the promised land. This scenario is the very essence of faith.

But the work of Jesus is far from over. His return will bring about transformational change in the world. He will rule in the presence of all flesh, and all will glorify him. The Lord's ultimate purpose is to deliver the world to his Father, where all rule, authority, and power will be put under his feet. When sin and death are finally eliminated from this earth, God's plan and purpose for a world filled with people who manifest His righteousness will finally be realized. Revelation 21 speaks of that wonderful day.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven

and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. 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. (Revelation 21:1-4).

Understanding the context of God's name to Israel helps us understand our Lord's role and place in that plan. Glory be to God for His love and this unspeakable gift. He will be with us. We will not be left as orphans.

Dave Jennings



OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SPORTS

Is it really only a game?

By John Perks



IN 2000, at the inaugural Laureus World Sports Awards, Nelson Mandela declared the following about sports:

Sport has the power to **change the world**. It has the power to **inspire**. It has the power to **unite** people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. **Sport can create hope where once there was only despair.**¹

It would be difficult to argue against this statement, especially in the context of our world. However, I also suggest that Nelson Mandela identified sports as a significant idol for much of the world. Consider its claims of changing the world, uniting, inspiring, and providing hope to a hopeless world. Are these not the promises of the one true God?

How should I, as a disciple of Christ, interact with the culture I am surrounded by, especially when it can make such bold claims? This has been an ever-present challenge throughout every generation since the time of Jesus. Should I fight against cultural influences or just dabble in them occasionally? Is it okay to be immersed in them, or should I run and hide from them? Where are the lines between what is destructive, what is lawful, and what edifies? These types of discussions often stir up conflicts and lead to legalistic thinking.

We should all agree, though, that if we are unwilling to be critical of our behaviors and habits, we will very likely end up journeying down a road that leads to idolatry.

Why Are We Enamored with Sport?

Let us examine our complex relationship with sports with a willing spirit of self-criticism. Amid all our culture's trappings, sports must be one of the most captivating. Let's begin by examining why we are so enamored with sports.

First and foremost, we have been created with an innate sense of play. We enjoy running, jumping, playful wrestling, kicking, and throwing a ball from a very early age. We began to play passed-down games with a more developed set of rules and purpose, like hide and seek, tag, and capture the flag. Eventually, we may participate in even more organized sports and leagues. Community or school sports participation can provide many physical, mental, and social benefits. Under the right circumstances, we can learn to work with others towards a common goal, appreciate the need for rules, and learn the importance of winning and losing with grace and respect. The Apostle Paul was able to pull various vivid lessons from the world of sport. (e.g., 1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:8; Philippians 3:13-14; Galatians 5:7; Hebrews 12:1-3).

The following chart from an organization called "National Institute for Play" compiled significant research on the importance of play in our lives. This organization details specific attributes developed or neglected depending on whether we play as a child.²

	WHEN LIFE IS PLAY-FILLED	WHEN LIFE IS PLAY-DEPRIVED
TRUST	Life is experienced as a playground filled with chances to learn.	Life is experienced as a proving ground—and often a battleground.
FLEXIBILITY	Change brings exploration and new possibilities.	Change creates fear and resistance.
OPTIMISM	Well-being and pleasure are expected.	Discomfort and disappointment are expected.
PROBLEM SOLVING	Problems are acknowledged and often foster skill development	Problems are hidden, denied, or avoided
EMOTIONAL REGULATION	Stress is handled with resilience; the response is most often stability.	Stress responses are often anger, rage, or withdrawal caused by low self-efficacy.
PERSEVERANCE	Motivation is sustained from internal drive, mastery is sought.	Motivation dissipates; equivocation, procrastination, and apathy arise.
EMPATHY	Others' feelings are recognized; support is often offered.	Others' feelings are not recognized; discord occurs.
OPENNESS	Life is vital; a strong sense of belonging fosters social cooperation.	Life is dull; people become socially withdrawn, often with mild depression.
BELONGING	Behaviors are altruistic, leading to teamwork, community creation, and participation.	Behaviors are callous, uncooperative, bullying, and self-centered.

Play and sport can be viewed as a tremendous gift from God that provides us with many physical, social, and mental benefits. But why does this ingrained love of play continue when we simply observe others participating in the play?

I suggest that we stand in awe of the athletes themselves. We are astonished at their speed, agility, coordination, endurance, strength, and control. Their mastery of skills is often beyond comprehension. We then add to this awe the intrigue of the unknown. Every season, every game, every play builds our anticipation as we eagerly await the outcome.

In addition to this, we are fascinated by the endless storylines that crisscross the teams and the players' lives. The quest of the underdog, battling through injury, a mid-season blockbuster trade, or the veteran seeking his or her first championship. Our interest intensifies as we mix in city or national pride, and the teams or players become a part of our identity. We wear their jerseys, imitate their moves, and memorize their statistics. We rejoice when they rejoice and weep when they weep. We create communities of fellow fans and believers and enjoy fellowship around the staffroom lunch table, talking about our team and their performance.

Some people join fantasy leagues and become even more immersed in the sport of choice. Others lose themselves in the world of gambling in sports, which takes the level of interest and investment to a whole new level. Sometimes, our captivation brings out other emotions that demonstrate a

deeper emotional investment, such as our lust for violence or our desire for retribution when perceived injustice has occurred. Deeply entwined in all of this is the gigantic multimedia complex that inundates us with spectacle after spectacle and advertisement after advertisement.

When Does Interest Become An Idol?

As you can see, the world of sports draws us in. But where are the lines that should not be crossed? When does interest become an idol? Of course, every person must ask this question of themselves, but I would like to provide guidance for our self-critique.

1. What do we talk about most?

Jesus told us, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* (Matthew 6:21). Then he also observes, *“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart.”* (Matthew 15:18). We should all know from experience that when we fall in love with something or someone, we can't stop talking about it. When I was a kid, and someone was ever caught going on and on about a topic, they would soon be mocked by a peer who would say, “If you love it so much, why don't you marry it!”

So, how often and with how much intensity do we converse about sports? Of course, this is not to say we need to avoid all sports-related exchanges, but perhaps we could do some accounting of our topics of conversation and consider how we could make some changes so that we speak more regularly of things that hold real value.

2. What do we pay attention to most?

The stoic philosopher Epictetus said, “You become what you give your attention to,” and “If you yourself don’t choose what thoughts and images you expose yourself to, someone else will.” Jesus put it this way:

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness.
(Matthew 6:22-23 NKJV).

We know this teaching has many layers, but a practical lesson is that what we pay attention to brings either light or darkness into our bodies. Our attention and what we decide to attune it to are some of our most valuable resources.

Yet how often do we allow ourselves to be coerced into flitting it away on sports without even realizing it? Or even worse, we are willing to give away our attention without a second thought. Once again, this is not to say we should completely abandon all viewing of sports. But, at the very least, we should be open to the idea of being more diligent in the management of our attention.

Consider how often Jesus reprimanded the careless steward who mishandled the master’s resources. Although none of the parables speak directly to the topic of our attention, they all demand that the steward be faithful to what they have been entrusted with. Perhaps it is time to do the accounting and ask ourselves if we are faithful with our attention. Is there better guidance

than what Paul instructs the ecclesia at Philippi:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8).

3. Which would be easier to explain?

What do you think you would have an easier time explaining to a friend or colleague? Why does your favorite team have a good chance of winning the championship this year, or why the content in the Sermon on the Mount is something we should be building our lives on?

We can easily become versed in the statistics, trends, and commentaries of our sports teams and heroes to the detriment of our knowledge of the word of God. We are clearly directed by the Apostle Peter:

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and **be ready always to give an answer** to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.* (1 Peter 3:15).

If we test ourselves in this area and find ourselves lacking, then perhaps it’s time to rethink our engagement with sports.

4. Where is it easier to spend your money?

Imagine one morning you wake up and you find you have two texts waiting for you. The first is to explain how the CBMA is requesting funds for a

variety of needs in the mission fields. The second text tells you there are two tickets available for your favorite team's next home game. Which would be easier to spend your money on?

Much like the topics of our conversations, the things we spend our money on can be a good gauge of what we treasure. So, let's ask ourselves, "Where does my money go?" As the Apostle John wrote, "*But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?*" (1 John 3:17 ESV; see also James 3:15-17).

An even more acute danger exists if we decide to begin gambling on the sports we view. One of our mandates as disciples is to live with self-control. Paul very fittingly uses sport as a metaphor for the discipline we must display:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ESV).

Gambling is one way to relinquish that control with the consequences of

being as serious and devastating as an addiction to a substance.

So, let's be honest with ourselves. Are we on the road to idolatry? Has sport become a greater love in our life, or in our kids or family, than God and His Son?

Self-Reflection

I encourage us to take some time and carefully inspect our relationship with sport. If we recognize that changes need to occur, I pray that we have the strength and courage to implement them.

We must remember that, in the end, it is not sports that provide the power to change the world, to truly inspire, to deeply unite, or to create hope where once there was only despair. These are the blessings provided by a life devoted to the great call of our heavenly Father. It is Paul who, ironically, by means of a sporting analogy, reminds us of this:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

*John Perks,
Ottawa Ecclesia, ON*

1 Fraser, Adam. "Sport has the power to change the world." *The Global Goals*. April 6, 2021. <https://www.globalgoals.org/news/sport-for-development-and-peace/>

2 *National Institute for Play*. "The Science is clear: play is critical for children and improves well-being for adults." *Play Science: What We Know So Far*." Accessed February 2025. <https://nifplay.org/play-science/summary-of-key-findings/#babies-attunement-play>

YANYO.ORG

YANYO stands for “You Are Not Your Own” taken from 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (RSV) “*You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.*”

This website recognizes throughout that we are not our own and seeks to help each viewer glorify God and our Lord Jesus Christ in our bodies. Having received our bodies as a gift from God, we are to use them to honor Him.

As members of God’s family and as followers of our Lord Jesus, believers are helped by a good understanding of human sexuality based on the following three principles:

- God has a loving purpose in creating us male and female,
- Human sexuality was designed for the powerful purpose of helping to bond together individuals into families and bringing new life into the world,
- As part of God’s special creation, our bodies are not our own. We are created in the image of God, not in an image of our own design.

YANYO.org was designed to help viewers gain greater insight into these principles, allowing them to work through the applications with discernment in their own lives.

The site is a work-in-progress. Additions and changes are planned as we progress in this venture. Presently this website deals with the following topics:

Biblical Worldview: The Creator’s Purpose

The Biblical worldview provides a framework, or lens, for looking at life in this world. Acting as a map for how we see reality, it shapes how we answer life’s biggest questions based on our reading and understanding of the Bible. It is the Bible that teaches us concerning the Creator and his purpose in creating us. In the Bible we learn of God’s power, love, and authority. All these things help us to know and understand the worldview of our Father, i.e. the Biblical worldview.

Building Strong God-Centered Families: The Foundation Of A Healthy World

Research has revealed two things that those concerned about raising a God-Centered family need to be fully aware of: By the age of 13 a child’s worldview is almost completely in place and secondly, four major influences on a child’s worldview are: public schools, media, arts and entertainment, and “the laws of the land.” The many and varied resources posted in this section can help you deal with the lies and false information a child is exposed to at a very early age.

Special Challenges To Living In The Framework Of A Biblical Worldview And Building God-Centered Families

Social Media

Many of us are deeply concerned but feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped

to deal with the far-ranging problems that social media has unleashed on our families and the world around us. Some may know full well that we need to act, but we don't know where or how to begin. Let the articles in this section give you some insight and guidance into dealing with this overwhelming intrusion into our lives.

Pornography

The "pornification" of society has had devastating impacts on individuals and families, as well as those used to create it. Pornography dishonors God's image in ourselves and in others. As with any addiction, help is needed in overcoming the addiction to pornography.

Homosexuality

Current societally accepted teachings have drastically changed in the past one hundred years on both sexual mores in general and concerning homosexuality specifically. Articles and resources are presented with the hope that they will be of some help in finding biblical, God-centered answers for those facing these issues and to those who care about them.

Transgenderism

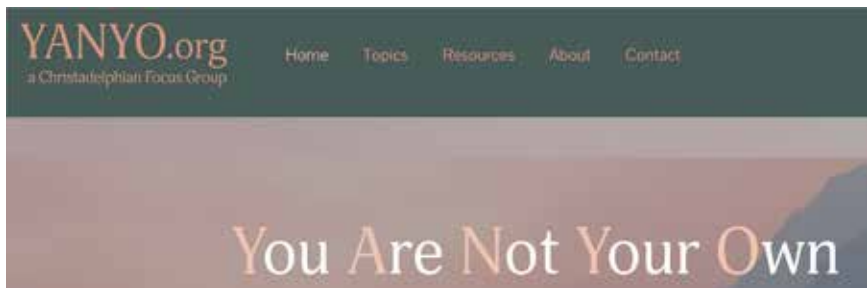
Transgender issues are becoming a greater concern for many today. Articles

and essays reviewing these issues along with a list of resources are presented to help gain a deeper understanding of the transgender issues themselves and the challenges an individual or family may face when these questions arise.

This website is presented by the YANYO Christadelphian Focus Group. More about us can be found on the About page of the website. The essays and articles provided, and resources listed, are not intended to foster debate with those inside or outside the community. Our intent is to give friends and family who face any of these issues, and who value teaching about God's purpose regarding the human family and sexuality, a reason and a hope for living in keeping with that purpose.

We are asking for help in the process of writing or gathering resource materials. If you are aware of useful resources that will add significantly and positively to this website, or if you could contribute by drafting an article to help build our content, please contact us on the website at: yanyo.org/contact. We also welcome suggestions or recommendations.

YANYO Christadelphian Focus Group



EDITOR'S NOTE: The *Tidings* has not reviewed all the material available on this website. We are introducing it to the community as a potential resource for personal study.

A FRIENDLY REMINDER

By the grace of God, you and me, brothers, and sisters,
are the LORD's possession.

By Jim Sullivan



AS a child, I was absent-minded. From time to time, my mother would send me to the convenience store to pick up some essentials like milk, bread, and cigarettes (back then kids could buy cigarettes). It wasn't a difficult trip, just down the small hill we lived on, across the main street of our neighborhood, over the brook and the railroad tracks, a shortcut between the local pub and the beauty salon then around the corner and I was there. A trip of no more than ten minutes but, invariably I would lose track of what I was supposed to do and would eventually come strolling back into the house without any milk, bread or, most egregiously, cigarettes! Understandably, my mother would be frustrated but she was never angry because she knew what type of kid I was. She would simply turn me around, remind me of the task at hand and send me back again.

We all forget sometimes, don't we? We've all had the experience of going into a room to get something only to immediately forget what it was you were looking for, or running into an old friend and forgetting their name.

But our heavenly father understands this and, like a loving mother, lovingly assists us in our walk by placing reminders along the way. When our Lord instituted the breaking of bread, he was insistent that we do this as often as we are able, in **remembrance** of him. Yet still, even with this weekly reminder, we can often forget what it means our Lord has died so that we might live. We may remember the words but forget the transforming power of this truth in our daily actions and attitude. So, in addition to these

reminders, the Lord puts trials in our path so we might remember to “*deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.*”

There are in Scripture some great examples of trials in the lives of the otherwise faithful brethren that they might remember their calling. We could consider the trials of Job or Jonah, or Peter or Paul. These trials are well documented and serve as great lessons for us. But I'd like to consider a similar trial in the life of Issac that might not come so readily to mind. Isaac was given a wonderful reminder of his special calling in the LORD and as so often happens, that reminder came from a friend.

The story starts with a famine and Isaac is told to “*Sojourn in this land [Gerar], and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father.*” (Genesis 26:3).

So, Isaac dwelt in Gerar. When he arrived, Isaac told the men of Gerar the same lie about his wife Rebekah that Abraham had told the Philistines about Sarah, that she was his sister instead of his wife, and once again the lie was exposed. Genesis 26:8 reads: “*And it came to pass, **when he had been there a long time**, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.*”

Why are we specifically told that he had been there a long time, as opposed to saying that he had “dwelled there” a long time? Because by this time they would have known Isaac very well. They would have seen Issac as

a dedicated man of faith who lived among them but was not a part of them. So, not surprisingly, Abimelech would have been shocked to find out that Isaac had been lying to him.

We know that Abimelech had profound respect for Isaac's faith because of the magnitude of what he says about the ruse:

*And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? one of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, **and thou shouldst have brought guiltiness upon us.** And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death. (Genesis 26:10-11).*

Had they not known of Isaac's faith they would never have worried about "guiltiness" being upon them, these were Philistines after all.

The record goes on to tell us that Isaac "sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great." (vs. 12-13).

Isaac's wealth became so great that in Genesis 26:16 Abimelech tells Isaac to leave "for thou art much mightier than we." So, Isaac left and wandered toward Beersheba. At each point along the way, the LORD continued to bless him as he dug well after well in a dry and parched land, each time striking water. Each time, however, the Philistines came and seized the wells, driving Isaac further and further away until he finally ended up all the way back to Beersheba where, once again he dug a well that initially did not

produce water. And it is here that Isaac, with help, rediscovered what all this was about.

On the surface, the account of Abimelech's encounter with Isaac seems to mirror a very similar encounter that Abraham had with Abimelech at Beersheba many, many years before. In both encounters Abraham and Isaac appear initially to be quite upset at how the Philistines had treated them. At the encounter with Abraham, Abimelech and Phicol come to Abraham and make peace with him because they say: "God is with thee in all that thou doest." (Genesis 21:22).

It had been so many years before that these two representatives, Abimelech and Phicol, had come to Abraham that these are unlikely to be the same individuals, but men who carried the same titles of "king" and "captain of the host." But it is the addition of a third representative, a man named Ahuzzath, that made this a very different encounter. Genesis 26:26 reads: "Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phicol the chief captain of his army."

Why is this man Ahuzzath mentioned? The record seems to suggest that he was a friend of Abimelech, but what possible purpose would that piece of information serve? The key to understanding this comes in remembering Isaac's time in Gerar and his relationship with the Philistines. In Gerar, Isaac had made himself known and who he served, and now Ahuzzath had come to remind him of that truth. When they first arrived, Isaac was clearly upset saying, "Wherefore

come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?" (Genesis 26:27). Their response was to recognize that the LORD was with Isaac saying, "We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee." (v. 28). They could see that because Isaac kept striking water in such a parched land that the LORD was clearly with him. But what they said to Isaac next is what grabbed Isaac.

*Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: **thou art now the blessed of the LORD.*** (Genesis 26:27-29).

This was the message that Ahuzzath brought with him to Beersheba. To be blessed by God is one thing, to be the blessed "of the LORD" is something else entirely. One blessed by God receives favor from the LORD. The blessed of God is a servant of The LORD. In his anger, Isaac had forgotten that his life was fully in the hands of the Father, and it took Ahuzzath to remind him of this. Why Ahuzzath? Because Ahuzzath was not just Abimelech's friend, he was Isaac's friend as well and had been his friend since Isaac had made himself known in Gerar. We can be sure of this because of what his unusual name means. It means "possession," and that's exactly the lesson Ahuzzath brings to Isaac. "My friend," he was telling him, "you have forgotten that

you are the possession of the LORD." This "friendly reminder" immediately transformed Isaac as we can see from the record that immediately follows:

And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water. (Genesis 26:30-32).

Lesson learned and "the same day" the water of God's word began to flow once again.

By the grace of God, you and me, brothers, and sisters, are the LORD's possession. Sometimes, we forget this. After all, we're only flesh. Though we may forget, we can be assured the LORD has not forgotten. He reminds us of this again and again in our walk of faith.

And let us be an Ahuzzath as well for others. Let's continually remind those we love of the wonderful life we have serving the LORD.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." (Proverbs 25:11)

What a nice thought!

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JUDAISM BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

By Jason Hensley

HAVE you ever opened up the New Testament and wondered what happened? Whereas the Old Testament discusses prophets, priests, and kings, the New Testament looks completely different. While the New Testament still references priests, it also references Pharisees and Sadducees. Who were these people? Where did they come from? And how are they relevant to the story of the Lord Jesus? In considering each of these two groups, this article will then discuss how these groups impacted the message of the gospel in the days of the Lord Jesus and, ultimately, again, how

an understanding of Israel's history supports our understanding of the Biblical text.

The Pharisees

Historically, most Jews in the first century fell into one of three categories: Pharisees, Sadducees, or Essenes.¹ While we won't cover the Essenes in this article, we'll see how the Pharisees and Sadducees developed at similar times.

The Pharisees appear to have developed near the end of the Old Testament. Imagine this: in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple,

and suddenly, the entire Jewish system of worship changed. What would it have been like to have been Jewish at the time? Sacrifices were to be offered in Jerusalem, at the temple (Deuteronomy 12:5–6). The people gathered at the temple three times a year for the major festivals (Deuteronomy 16:16). Even more, once a year, the high priest confessed the sins of the people at the temple (Leviticus 16:21). Everything about worship revolved around this place. And yet, by the end of 586, there was no temple.

What did that mean? How was worship supposed to happen? How could the Jews follow the commandments?

The community struggled to understand how to continue worshipping God. Some adapted their practices. Daniel, for instance, continued to pray toward the temple, even though it no longer existed (Daniel 6:10). He also, in some ways, continued trying to keep the kosher laws—or at least the principles beneath those laws (Daniel 1:8). In this way, Daniel saw through the letter of the law and into what God truly wanted. Other groups, however, took different approaches.

The Pharisees were one of these groups. While they also looked for the principle beneath the commandments, they still held onto the importance of law for spiritual development. Thus, instead of simply developing the principles and trying to apply those principles in their new situation, like Daniel, the Pharisees developed the principles and used those principles to create new laws. They called these new laws the “Oral Torah.” Conveniently,

they claimed that these laws had been passed from God to Moses at Mount Sinai, but unlike the written Torah, Moses didn’t write them down. Instead, he passed them down to the next generation, which then passed them down to the next generation, and finally, they ended up with the Pharisees, who realized that the Babylonian exile was the time to reveal them. Eventually, after the destruction of the second temple in AD 70, the rabbis recorded the Oral Torah in a document called the *Mishnah*, and the *Mishnah* eventually formed the basis for the *Talmud*, a major source of Jewish tradition and ideas.

The historical origins of the Pharisees unveil a major theological challenge: essentially, this group of people claimed that their traditions, which had simply been invented at some point, came from God. In fact, the *Talmud* still makes this claim: “Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be patient in [the administration of] justice, raise many disciples and make a fence round the Torah.” (Pirkei Avot 1:1). While it’s difficult to identify the “Men of the Great Assembly” with certainty, some believe that this group refers to the Pharisees. Regardless, can you hear the approach of the Pharisees here? “Raise many disciples.” The Lord Jesus noted that the Pharisees “travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte.” (Matthew 23:15).² “Make a fence around the Torah.” Rather than

using the principles beneath the law to draw nearer to God's way of thinking, the Pharisees consistently created more laws (Matthew 23:4).

The Oral Torah and its exaltation of the status of God's word gives a major insight into the Pharisees. In response to the crisis of exile, the Pharisees developed around a desire to understand the principle beneath the law but continue to follow the law, and thus, created their own law, which they made equal to the word of God or, in some cases, even more important. As Christ said, "*You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!*" (Mark 7:9).

In addition to developing their own ideas and holding those ideas as divinely inspired, the Pharisees also believed in outside influences. In some ways, this was positive, as the New Testament notes that they believed in angels (Acts 23:8). In other ways, however, this development also led to false ideas. For instance, while Acts states that they believed in angels, it also mentions that they believed in "spirits." What does that mean?

In reading the New Testament, you've maybe noticed some of the times that it references spirits. Oftentimes, we don't necessarily register the term just because we personally don't believe in spirits. Yet, the gospels refer to them often. Jesus regularly heals those who have a malignant "spirit" (Mark 1:23; 9:17; Luke 13:11). After his resurrection, when Jesus appeared to the disciples, they believed him to be a "spirit" (Luke 24:37). Generally, these spirits connect to demons (Luke 4:33). Thus, the Pharisees believed in these

demonic spirits, most likely taking these ideas from the Zoroastrianism they experienced in the Persian Empire.

Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, gives interesting insight into both the Pharisees and Sadducees: he was born a Sadducee and yet chose to become a Pharisee. In particular, he notes that while the Sadducees were somewhat elite, most of the people followed the Pharisees, largely due to their teachings.³ These teachings included oral traditions, the belief in spirits, and also the belief in the resurrection. The Pharisees essentially had what was true but corrupted. They had taken the word of God, added to it, and blended it with other religious beliefs.

The Sadducees

In many ways, the Sadducees stood as the opposite of the Pharisees. Just as the Pharisees developed during the Babylonian exile, the Sadducees did as well--yet instead of looking to the principles of the Torah and developing further rules, the Sadducees simply chose to follow what they could follow and wait to rebuild the temple. While the Pharisees added to the Torah, the Sadducees subtracted from the word of God. Instead of accepting the entire corpus of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Sadducees only considered the Torah divine. They did not believe in a resurrection (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27) but taught that at death, the soul died entirely, never to be revived.⁴ Not only did they nix any kind of afterlife, but they also rejected providence. The Torah taught one how to live a good life, but God didn't actually work in one's life.

If one sought to become a Pharisee, they simply needed to acknowledge Pharisaic teaching. This, however, wasn't an option with the Sadducees. The Sadducees were connected to the priesthood (Acts 4:1; 5:17). Most Sadducees were therefore born as Sadducees. In terms of size, the Pharisees continued to grow and exercise influence among the people, whereas the Sadducees remained a small but influential elite.

How, though, did the Sadducees remain influential if the people followed the Pharisees? Because they were the priests. Therefore, if anyone wanted to worship, they had to approach a Saddusaic system. Further, the high priest was the final decision-maker in the Jewish community. Though they were small, the Sadducees wielded immense power.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, when the second temple was destroyed in AD 70, the Sadducees lost their power and eventually faded away into obscurity. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were somewhat prepared—they had their Oral Torah and a previous history of adapting the law to their circumstances. Thus, even though the temple, the focal point of their religion, disappeared, they continued their influence on the people and eventually developed into rabbinic Judaism.

While this history creates a context for the New Testament, it also underscores the loss of the gospel in the first century. When the Lord Jesus came, both the Pharisees and the Sadducees had lost the good news. Though the Pharisees still held onto the hope of a resurrection, they burdened this hope with teaching about demons and additional invented words of God. The Sadducees abandoned hope altogether.

Ultimately, perhaps this survey of Judaism between the Testaments really shows how easily humanity can miss the point. God didn't want additional laws, nor did He want those who continued to follow the Torah without any hope. God wanted a relationship. He wanted His people to know Him. And thus, the Lord Jesus was sent in the first century to groups of Judaism that had forgotten who God really was—so that he might make Him known (John 14:7).

Therefore, the questions remain for us. Centuries have passed since the Lord Jesus walked in Jerusalem. Have we built up additional laws? Have we allowed the culture around us to change what we believe? Have we lost sight of hope? Or have we devoted ourselves to really coming to know Him?

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¹ Flavius Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 2.10.

² All Scriptural citations are taken from the English Standard Version unless specifically noted.

³ Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 2.8.14.

⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 18.1.4.

A FINAL COMMANDMENT KEPT

Although he was dying under the most excruciating kind of anguish, Jesus, the king of love, selflessly turned aside from his personal pain and anguish to care for the earthly needs of those who stood by his side.

By Alan Markwith



THIS month, many in the world will celebrate Mother's Day, a day set aside to remember and honor our mothers. Did you know more phone calls are made on Mother's Day than any other day of the year? These holiday chats with Mom often cause phone traffic to spike by as much as 37 percent.

The origins of Mother's Day, as celebrated in North America, date to the 19th century. In the years before the U.S. Civil War, Ann Reeves Jarvis of West Virginia helped start "Mothers' Day Work Clubs" to teach local women how to properly care for their children. These clubs later became a unifying force in a region of the country still divided over the Civil War. In 1868, Jarvis organized "Mothers' Friendship Day," at which mothers gathered with former Union and Confederate soldiers to promote reconciliation.

Wow! What a concept, getting older and younger mothers to teach their children to get along with each other and be reconciled. Mothers, if you are looking for something to do in the community today, do I have a job for you!

I know many whose mothers have fallen asleep, and that loss is still there. We put our hope in our merciful heavenly Father for a better day to come, when his mercy and wisdom will be revealed, and times of sorrow and sighing will flee away.

It is a painful time when one's mother dies, no matter what the situation, no matter what the age. No matter whether that mother was in Christ or not, the feeling of loss is still there. I feel for those whose mothers have fallen asleep

in the Lord. I feel for those who did not have a loving mother or perhaps a painful relationship. Whether there be loss or past pain in a relationship, we all need to know that in the Lord, there are **mothers in Israel, our spiritual Israel**, that abound that one could and should seek out.

We need mothers like Naomi, who took Ruth, a daughter-in-law, with her back home. But Naomi didn't just see her as a daughter-in-law; she viewed herself as a mother to Ruth. If you experience loss, pain, or disappointment, let another mother in the faith into your heart to help be there for you in your time of need. And sisters, make yourselves available to those who have such a need.

Then there is Deborah.

Villages were deserted, they were deserted in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, a mother in Israel. (Judges 5:7).¹

Notice how Deborah refers to herself first as a **mother**. Yes, Chapter 4 does say she was a Judge and a prophetess. But for her, she was first and foremost a mother to children who were leaderless and needed guidance and nurturing.

As a mother, Deborah was there for everyone, to increase the faith of many by example and word, encouraging the fainthearted. Sisters, each of you has that wonderful opportunity to be that comforting and encouraging mother in the faith. This is no trivial role. This is a vital role. A mother in the faith can impact the lives of others beyond measure. There are ways a mother deals with things that are far different than a father or a brother in the ecclesia. It is, for the most part, a unique type

of nurturing. Both mother and father have a necessary role to play in the natural and ecclesial family. Never underestimate the powerful influence a believing mother can and should have.

To those whose mothers are still alive, make each day count. If there is some unresolved conflict, address it now. If you hold some hurt, then forgive. If there is love to be shown, show it— not just today, but each day forward. Never take for granted the one who bore you.

I was down for a visit with my mother in Florida early last year. She turned 92 in October the year before. She had become bedridden but was hoping in time she would be able to get into a wheelchair with help. However, we all knew it was unlikely. Her body was weak, and her eyes and ears were failing. Her mind and memory were sharp for a time, and she maintained a certain stubbornness that, I guess, at her age, allowed her a bit more grace. It's hard for a son to be patient sometimes, but nevertheless, showing respect and love should never be hard. We do not know what time any of us have. My mother fell asleep in the Lord last year on September 1.

And for those who are mothers or grandmothers now, no matter how young or old your children are, I commend the simple message Paul sent to Timothy about his upbringing. Paul saw the impact that a mother and grandmother can have. It wasn't just the natural things of daily living, but in particular, the spiritual influence and impact.

For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelled in your grandmother Lois and your

mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. (2 Timothy 1:5).

There is one more mother-and-son relationship and event we need to consider.

In the midst of his greatest anguish, Jesus' attention was not on himself and his needs. We know this from the wonderful instruction he gave to his disciples, which is recorded in John 14-16, and then in his prayer for them and us in John 17. Take the time to read through all these chapters and appreciate and heed his instruction and prayer for us. Read the account again and again. Jesus was thinking of others. In the Garden, his prayer was for his Father's will to be done, not his own. And even as he hung on that cross, beaten and bleeding and in pain, his focus was on all his Father was accomplishing in him in this way. We see illustrated in his last sayings some of his final words to the Apostle John. We want to focus on one of his final acts of obedience to see how he made provision for his mother.

A Scene No Mother Wants to See

Jesus' enemies were not the only spectators at the cross. As word got around Jerusalem that Jesus was under arrest and had been condemned to death by the Sanhedrin and then by Pilate, some of his closest loved ones came to be near him. Besides John it was women, some being mothers sharing the pain along with Jesus' mother.

*Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, **Mary** the wife of Cleopas, and **Mary** Magdalene. (John 19:25).*

John also indicates in verse 26 that he was present, referring to himself the way he always did in his gospel some five times, as “*the disciple whom [Jesus] loved.*” (John 21:20–24). I realize some have concluded that it was someone other than the Apostle John; however, for now we will go with John as that will not affect the point we wish to make.

The pain of watching Jesus die was no doubt agonizing for his loved ones. But for no one was it more difficult than for his mother, Mary. Years before, at his birth, the elderly prophet Simeon told her:

Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end, that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. (Luke 2:34–35 NASB).

John records at the end of Jesus’ life:

When they came to Jesus, they did not break His legs since they saw that He was already dead. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (John 19:33–34).

One can imagine the fulfillment at that moment of Simeon’s words to Mary. As that sword pierced Jesus’ side, it was now piercing her heart as she watched her firstborn son die.

She had raised him since childhood. She knew his utter perfection better than anyone. Yet as she watched, crowds of people poured contempt on her son, cruelly mocking and abusing him. His bleeding, brutalized body

hung helplessly on the cross, and all she could do was watch his agony. The sorrow and pain such a sight would cause his mother is unfathomable. Instead of shrieking and crumpling in hysteria, turning and fleeing in terror, or collapsing or fainting at the horrible sight, she stood. She is a model of courage in faith. She knew who he was and understood his mission. Nevertheless, it was hard to witness.

Jesus had little energy left as he hung there. Any word he uttered would be strenuous and painful, so the few words he was able to say were very telling. He saw her standing and grieving there, and what he said from the cross reflects the tender love of a son for his mother.

When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own household. (John 19:26–27 NASB).

When Jesus said, “**Behold, your son,**” it could have been referring to himself or possibly John. Now, you may disagree, but it would seem by the context he probably nodded at John. Regardless, he was making a gracious, loving provision for his mother in the years to come. He was delegating to John the responsibility to care for Mary in her old age.

A Unique Relationship

This was a beautiful moment and more than just a gesture. It says a lot about

the personal nature of Jesus' love. Although he was dying under the most excruciating kind of anguish, Jesus, the king of love, selflessly turned aside from his personal pain and anguish to care for the earthly needs of those who stood by his side. **Although he was occupied with the most important event in history, that of redemption, he remembered to make provision for the needs of one woman, his mother.** (cp. Exodus 20:12).

Paul repeats the words of Exodus 20, with emphasis.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may turn out well for you, and that you may live long on the earth. (Ephesians 6:1-3 NASB).

He addresses her as “woman.” Nowhere in the gospels does he ever call her “mother,” only “woman.” The expression conveys no disrespect, although, in current society, it has been used as a condescending expression toward women. It may be that by using “woman” he had intent to draw our minds back to Genesis 3, where the woman is promised “a seed” that would crush the serpent’s head (sin). Here, it underscores that Christ was much more to Mary than a Son. He was also her Saviour. Mary expressed in her prayer, **“And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”** (Luke 1:47). She understood God was in Christ, in her son, reconciling the world unto Himself.

Mary was no sinless co-redeemer. She knew redemption was in her son, who was also the son of God, the Messiah,

the Christ. She was as dependent on divine grace as the lowliest of sinners. After Jesus reached adulthood, her relationship with him was the same as that of any obedient believer in the Lord. She was a disciple; he was the Master.

Christ Himself rebuked those who wanted to elevate Mary to a place of extraordinary reverence:

As He was saying these things, a woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, “The womb that bore You and the one who nursed You are blessed!” He said, “Even more, those who hear the word of God and keep it are blessed!” (Luke 11:27–28).

Mary was blessed because she was obedient to the Word of God, the same as other faithful believers. Her position as Christ’s mother did not carry with it any special titles, such as co-mediator, queen of heaven, or any of the other forms of deification that medieval superstition has attached to the popular misconception of Mary. Let’s be perfectly clear: it is a form of idolatry to bestow on Mary honor, titles, or attributes that, in effect, give her a coequal status in the redemptive work of her son or that elevate her as a special object of veneration. None of what we have said is intended to diminish what the angel declared to her, recorded in Luke 1:28 (KJV), *“Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”*

Mary knew she had been blessed by God, but certainly not in those other ways mentioned above. Being a true mother, she neither sought

out nor needed any public praise or recognition. It is one of the highest callings a woman can have. For the most part, only God really sees all that a true mother does and will honor in His way, not man's way.

Nonetheless, Christ loved and honored his mother as a mother should be honored. He fulfilled the fifth commandment, this final commandment, as perfectly as he fulfilled them all. And part of the responsibility of honoring one's parents is the duty to see that they are cared for in their old age. Christ did not neglect that duty.

Just a couple of final thoughts. It is perhaps significant that Jesus did not commit Mary to the care of His own half-brothers. Mary was evidently a widow by now. Nothing is said of Joseph after the gospel narratives about Jesus' birth and childhood. Apparently, he had died sometime before Jesus began His public ministry. But Scripture shows that after Jesus' birth, Mary and Joseph had a marital relationship that was in every sense normal (Matthew 1:24-25). Despite the claims of other denominations, Scripture does not allow us to believe Mary remained perpetually a virgin. On the contrary, the gospels clearly state that Jesus had brothers (Mark 3:31-35; John 2:12; Luke 8:19-21). Matthew even names them: "*James and Joseph and Simon and Judas.*" (Matthew 13:55). They would have in fact been half-brothers, the natural offspring of

Mary and Joseph.

Why didn't Jesus appoint one of his half-brothers to look after Mary? Perhaps because, according to John 7:5 (CSB), "***For not even his brothers believed in him,***" at least at that time. We do see they became believers after Jesus rose from the dead, as Acts 1:14 (NASB) records that they were among the group meeting for prayer in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost: "*These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*"

Isn't it amazing how our Lord Jesus was teaching us things to the very end? Things that perhaps we might have neglected if we had been in a similar suffering situation. As we started this article, the month of May contains a day the world sets aside to remember and honor mothers, and it is a wonderful step. Let it be more than just giving a gift; it shows true love and appreciation. The instruction to honor father and mother was intended by God to be an everyday affair. Let us live on the precious commandment, the first commandment with promise. Jesus fulfilled that commandment right to the very end, and he has also received the promise.

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1 All Scriptural citations are taken from taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible unless specifically noted.

PART 2

HIDDEN TREASURES IN THE TITLES OF THE PSALMS

By Leen Ritmeyer

"HE MAKETH INTERCESSION FOR US"



In our last article, we looked at the meaning of “To The Chief Musician” and noted that it means “To Him that Overcomes.” Now, we would like to look at the original meaning of the word “psalm” and see how it is related to fruit. The word for psalm, *mizmor*, is used in the first verses of fifty-seven psalms and as a verb in forty-three other places in the Psalms.

In Hebrew, most nouns and verbs are derived from a three-letter root. The root of the word for psalm is *zamar*, and it means primarily to prune and later to sing. The best fruits are, of course, obtained by the correct pruning of fruit trees. This is especially true of vines. A similar metaphor is used in Psalm 12:6, but the meaning is equally clear:

The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

The root *zamar* is first used in Genesis 43:11 as *zimrah*, the feminine form of *zamar*, which is translated as “best fruits.”

There was a famine in the land, and Jacob had sent his sons to Egypt to buy corn. Joseph had kept Simeon captive until they would return with Benjamin, their youngest brother. These “best fruits” were the gift of Jacob to the second ruler in Egypt, while he didn’t know yet that it was Joseph, so that “*God Almighty [will] give you mercy before the man.*” We believe that God will also be merciful to us when we offer the best fruits of the psalms to him.

It may seem strange at first to translate the word for psalm as “best fruit.” There is, however, an interesting connection with the New Testament. According to

Hebrews, we must offer praise to God, which is called “*the fruit of lips.*” (“Our” is in italics and should be left out).

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips giving thanks to his name. (Hebrews 13:15).

This does not mean to say that we can offer what **we** think is the best fruit. It does not say in Hebrews 13 “*the fruit of our lips,*” but the “*fruit of lips.*” That proper fruit has been prepared by God Himself, for it is written:

I create the fruit of lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith Yahweh; and I will heal him. (Isaiah 57:19).

If we use the fruit of lips prepared by God, then we will get peace, whether we are near or far away.

Once we realize that prayers and praises are sacrifices, we become more careful about what we offer to God. Under the Law, one couldn’t just sacrifice what one wanted. Sacrifices were strictly proscribed and if one brought strange sacrifices, as did Nadab and Abihu, who “*took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered **strange fire** before Yahweh, which he commanded them not.*” The result was that they died (Leviticus 10:1). It was not so much the fire that was strange, but the incense that was burnt on it. The children of Israel had been warned about this when the altar of incense was being made:

Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon. (Exodus 30:9).

The preparation of incense was strictly proscribed, with a dire warning at the end:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people. (Exodus 30:34-38).

We don't use incense as is done in some churches, but the principle that we can't offer whatever we like still applies to us today.

John Thomas wrote on p.7 of *Elpis Israel*:

It is true that no man has a right to worship God as he pleases. This is a Protestant fallacy. Man has a right to worship God only in the way God has *Himself appointed* [Italics by John Thomas].

Psalm 141:2 teaches us that prayers are like incense:

Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Incense was offered in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple at the time of the evening sacrifice, which is between 2-3 PM, called the ninth hour of the day.

God always hears prayer, but he often chooses this time to answer prayers. Look at these examples:

- God answered Elijah's prayer by fire during the evening sacrifice (1 Kings 18:36-38).
- Zacharias' prayer was heard as he burned incense, although he didn't believe it (Luke 1:9-13).
- Jesus died at the ninth hour after having committed his spirit to God (Mark 15:33-34).
- Peter and John healed the lame man, most likely an answer to their prayers (Acts 3:1-6).
- Peter had a vision during the ninth hour, and Cornelius also saw an angelic vision at the ninth hour (Acts 10:1-5).

These men knew the principles of incense and of prayer and received an answer to their prayer of faith.

We can be sure that when we use the fruit of lips created by God's Holy Spirit that was upon David, our words will be acceptable, too, and that we will have peace with God and that He will heal us, as He promised. If we do this acceptably, and if we really **mean** the words we say with all our heart, then we belong to the holy priesthood described by Peter:

*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*** (1 Peter 2:5).

David was not the first to use psalms. Psalm 90 is a Psalm of Moses, whose earlier words in Exodus 15:2 already reflect the principle of using the best fruits to praise God:

The LORD is my strength and song [psalm], and he is become my salvation.

The Song of Deborah and Barak also falls into the same category:

Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise [psalm] to the LORD God of Israel. (Judges 5:3).

The Israelites were, therefore, used to the concept of psalming from early on in their history. One of the many reasons why Israel's first dispensation came to an end was their refusal to use the psalms.

Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. (Ezekiel 8:17).

Literally, Ezekiel was saying, "Send away the psalms in their anger."

It is only through the mercy of God that a remnant will be saved. This will happen when He will "cleanse them from all their iniquity." (Jeremiah 33:6,8). At the same time, He will also "cure them and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth." This reads in Hebrew: "I will reveal unto them how to intreat [or pray] of peace and truth."

That it means prayer and praise is clear from Genesis 25:21, where Isaac

entreated Yahweh for his wife because she was barren.

Israel will then heed Hosea's instruction:

Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves (fruits) of our lips. (Hosea 14:2).

The result of this will be that:

Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. [God will then say], From me is thy fruit found. (Hosea 14:8).

So far, we have learned that the first verses of the psalms contain a spiritual meaning that relates to the contents of the psalms. We have learned that the word for "psalm" means "best fruits" and that "To the Chief Musician" means "To him that overcomes." The psalms were written to help David and, primarily, Jesus overcome the world in themselves, and they were used for their prayers. We, too, can be helped to overcome this when we use these words in our prayers.

This would explain a rather difficult verse in Romans Chapter 8.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind

of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27).

If we are honest with ourselves, we don't always know what we should pray for as we ought (Greek: must). We also agree that we could never compose such beautiful words as those we find in the psalms. They are superior to any human composition and contain "groanings" that we would find difficult to utter or express ourselves adequately. The Greek verb *stenazo* means to "sigh from grief or misery," as in:

- *And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened.* (Mark 7:34).
- *For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:* (2 Corinthians 5:2).
- *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.* (2 Corinthians 5:4).

This word "groan" doesn't mean to complain because we are fed up, but it expresses a longing for our suffering to be over and an earnest desire to be with Christ in the Kingdom. If we use the words of the psalms, which are the Spirit words of Christ, then those Spirit words (styled: the Spirit itself) make intercession for us, for surely God will

hear the fruit of lips which he himself has created (Isaiah 57:19). However, we must mean the words we say, for God searches the hearts to know if we really mean it.

Selah

"Selah" is a special word used frequently in the psalms. It occurs seventy-one times in the psalms and three times in the prayer of Habakkuk. We had already noted that the last verse of this prayer is a quotation of:

He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. (Psalm 18:33).

As noted, Habakkuk tells us we can only be put victoriously in our high places when we use the stringed instruments, the Spirit-inspired words that David composed on the harp.

We see that Psalm 18:6, "*In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple,*" is very similar to Psalm 3:4. "*I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.*"

The word *Selah* has been added to this verse. In fact, it occurs in three verses of this psalm. Various suggestions have been put forward as to its meaning, such as denoting the lifting up of the voice in song, that it marks a pause. Thirtle suggests that it is a notice to proceed to a new section of the psalm. Conclusive evidence for any of these

This word "groan" doesn't mean to complain because we are fed up, but it expresses a longing for our suffering to be over and an earnest desire to be with Christ in the Kingdom.



theories, however, is not forthcoming. Statements such as “We are left in the domain of surmise regarding the meaning of the term” are frequently encountered under the heading *Selah* in the various commentaries on the psalms.

When dealing with difficult words, it is always best to examine the first time the word is used. In this case, it is in Job 28. The same word, *Selah*, is used twice as a verb (vv. 16, 19) but translated as “valued.” Here, wisdom and understanding (v. 12) are deemed more precious than the gold of Ophir, precious onyx, sapphire, pearls, rubies, topaz, or pure gold. The Spirit’s language here would seem to indicate that those verses of the psalms, which end with *Selah*, are the most precious and valuable of all. They could be used as stand-alone short prayers, only one sentence long. The short prayers of Nehemiah come to mind.

Further consideration of the crucial importance of these verses is found in the prayer of Habakkuk, where the word *Selah* is used three times.

*Thy bow was made quite naked,
according to the oaths of the tribes,*

even thy word. Selah. (Habakkuk 3:9).

The two other *Selah* verses give us the background to this prayer, which is set in the future tense:

*God came [will come] from Teman,
and the Holy One from mount
Paran. Selah.* (Habakkuk 3:3).

*Thou wentest forth for the salvation
of thy people, even for salvation with
thine anointed; thou woundedst the
head out of the house of the wicked,
by discovering the foundation unto
the neck. Selah.* (Habakkuk 3:13).

The coming out of Paran is usually associated with the judgment, as Moses wrote in:

*The LORD came from Sinai, and
rose up from Seir unto them; he
shined forth from mount Paran,
and he came with ten thousands of
saints: from his right hand went a
fiery law for them.* (Deuteronomy 33:2).

After first having saved His people, He will then “wound the head out of the house of the wicked,” reminding us of Psalm 110, where we translate the second half of verse 6 as follows:

He shall wound the head of a great country.

It is possible Jesus will be assisted in this work by the resurrected believers, who have known the importance of these verses in the psalms which end with *Selah*, for that is what the Hebrew tells us in Habakkuk 3:9, “*Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers.*”

Those who understand the significance of the *Selah* verses and whose experience has caused the Holy Spirit words of psalms to become their heartfelt utterance will serve Jesus when he will be King over all the earth:

Thou hast made me the head of the heathen: a people whom I have not known shall serve me. (Psalm 18:43).

An examination of these verses reveals that many of them are a direct appeal to Yahweh:

- *Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help [salvation] for him in God. Selah.* (Psalm 3:2).
- *I cried [will cry] unto Yahweh with my voice, and he heard [will hear] me out of his holy hill. Selah.* (Psalm 3:4).
- *Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah.* (Psalm 20:3).
- *Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.* (Psalm 32:7).
- *I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.* (Psalm 77:3).

- *The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah.* (Psalm 140:5).

These are the people that have come out of great tribulation but have also believed:

- *Salvation belongeth unto Yahweh: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.* (Psalm 3:8).
- *The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaiion. Selah.* (Psalm 9:16).
- *Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah.* (Psalm 9:20).

The wonderful thing about these *Selah* verses is that they are short, easy to remember, and contain all we need to be saved.

It is not difficult to visualize Jesus preparing for the time when he would lay down his life for his friends, with words to which special attention is directed by the Spirit Word of God. As to their benefit for us who desire to be “*changed into the same image from glory to glory,*” (2 Corinthians 3:18) we would do well to commit as many of these verses as possible to memory, to be used at various times and circumstances of life. What better way to begin our night’s rest than with the words of Psalm 4.4:

Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.

Where it appears difficult to understand the reason why a particular note should be made of a verse, such as:

Assur also is joined with them: they

*have holpen the children of Lot.
Selah.* (Psalm 83:8).

It seems to manifest the attitude of humble faith, as expressed in the following:

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter. (Proverbs 25:2).

Indeed, this verse, and others like it, may be of great value to us as we try to understand the events of the Last Days, in which we are undoubtedly living. It is better to meditate on rather than strive about prophecy, as things will become clearer as time goes on. Scripture indeed teaches us that:

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. (Proverbs 4:18).

As an aside, I would like to quote the first and the last paragraph from a rarely read article by John Thomas called “*Psalmody*,” which he wrote in 1836.¹

The word psalmody is compounded of ψαλλω psaloo, to sing, ὠδή oodee, a song, poem, or composition in measure. This is its general signification; in its restricted and scriptural sense, the term is applied to the singing of metres or measures dictated by the Holy Spirit. Psalmody, under this limitation, was the means prescribed by the Apostle to the Ephesians by which to exhilarate

and cheer their hearts. He presents it as the antithesis to wine, and says, “*Be filled with the Spirit: speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.*” (Ephesians 5:18-19). And again he says, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; and with all wisdom teach and admonish each other, by psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs; singing with gratitude in your hearts to the Lord.*” (Colossians 3:16.)

What psalmody extant is it probable Messiah will choose “to praise and glory of God,” when he comes to open the worship of the Millennial age—would he select the rhythmical uninspired traditions of any sect extant; or rather those spiritual odes, so replete with the celebrations of his varied fortunes, as are the psalms, hymns and songs of the Spirit? Doubtless the latter;—let us then resolve to do so too.

In the middle of this article, John Thomes wrote he had made a New Translation of the Psalms in blank verse by a simple transposition of words (pp. 255-6). By that time, he had completed seventy-two psalms and printed Psalm 51 as a specimen.²

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¹ John Thomas (1836), *Psalmody*, in *The Apostolic Advocate*, Vol 2, pp. 246-259.

² To view a copy of pages 246-259 of *Psalmody*, please visit mytidings.org/psalmody

KINGS AND PRIESTS

We have been invited to be part of the
immortal priesthood and kingship
of the order of Melchizedek..

By Dave Jennings



IN recent years, I've heard some confusion among us about the royalty aspect of the saints' roles in the Kingdom of God. Humble souls feel they are more comfortable performing a priestly role but not that of being rulers with authority. There are phrases in the Bible that include "a kingdom of priests" and "kings and priests." What, then, is to be understood about our future role through the grace of God? Let's start with the longstanding teaching of our community. Our Statement of Faith says:

That the **governing body of the Kingdom** so established will be the brethren of Christ, of all generations, developed by resurrection and change, and constituting, with Christ as their head, the collective "Seed of Abraham," in whom all nations will be blessed, and comprising "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets," and all in their age of like faithfulness.

That the unfaithful will be consigned to shame and "the second death," and the faithful, invested with immortality, and **exalted to reign with Jesus** as joint heirs of the Kingdom, co-possessors of the earth, and **joint administrators of God's authority among men in everything.**

So, let's explore the Scriptures to see if we can understand the idea of "kings and priests" versus "a kingdom of priests."

A Kingdom of Priests

Let's begin at the time of Moses. Israel had been called out of Egypt

and required a new identity, one that connected them with Yahweh and His commandments. Following these commands provided a way to live as a secular nation, and the law taught holiness and God's righteousness. By keeping the Law, Israel could differentiate itself among the nations. What nation had laws so just and pure? (Deuteronomy 4:8). God made the high calling of the nation clear to Moses.

*And ye shall be unto me a **kingdom of priests**, and an **holy nation**.*

These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. (Exodus 19:6).

This was always the standard for God's people. Wherever they went, whatever foes they faced, they were to be God's holy people, representatives of His righteousness to a world that could not discern their right hand from their left.

Later, Isaiah spoke of the latter-day restoration of God's people. Israel would be exalted, but they would finally realize their spiritual leadership to the mortal nations.

And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves. (Isaiah 61:4-6).

Zechariah spoke of the Kingdom of God and this elevated role of Israel to the nations.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you. (Zechariah 8:23).

One of the defining doctrines we share as a faith community is the restoration of mortal Israel and its role in the Kingdom age. The center of the Kingdom will be Jerusalem, the throne of the King. The twelve apostles will be ruling over the twelve tribes (Matthew 19:27-28). The “*word of the LORD*” will go from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3). Israel will become the mortal example of what the nations can aspire to. People will want to learn from them because they know that God is with them. The Kingdom Age will feature mortal Israel, fulfilling the role of a “*kingdom of priests*” and living as a holy people, the way God had always planned.

It is remarkable to think about this restoration in terms of what it will mean for both Israel and the Gentile nations. Israel’s history is stained by failures to live up to its calling. In modern times, Israel has primarily a secular existence. Its trust is in iron domes and military strategy. After great tribulation, Israel will be Divinely transformed into global spiritual leadership. Soon, antisemitism will be replaced with admiration and honor, as Israel models for all nations what a holy life looks like.

The Role of the King Priests

We’ve discussed the role of mortal Israel in the Kingdom. They will be a “*kingdom of priests*” to model God’s righteousness to the nations, just as God declared to Moses. However, the role of the immortalized saints differs from that of mortal Israel, though both serve the same King and purpose.

Modern translations of a few passages about the role of the saints in the Kingdom age have created some confusion. Look at the diversity of interpretations by translators for Revelation 1:6.

- *And hath made us **kings and priests unto God** and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (KJV).*
- *And **made us a kingdom, priests to his God** and Father. (ESV).*
- *And **He made us into a kingdom, priests to His God** and Father. (NASB).*
- *And has **appointed us as a kingdom, as priests serving his God** and Father. (NET).*
- *And has **made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God** and Father. (NIV).*
- *And has **made us kings and priests to His God** and Father. (NKJV).*
- *He has **made us a Kingdom of priests for God** his Father. (NLT).*

Translational differences continue as we move further into the Revelation. In Revelation 5:10, we see some translations that continue to refer to the saints as a “*kingdom of priests.*” Note that in each of these translations, there is also a clear declaration of this group “*reigning*” on the earth.

When we move forward to the Kingdom age in Revelation 20, after the dragon, old serpent, the Devil, and Satan have been cast into the bottomless pit, we see additional information on the priesthood's span and the saints' rulership.

*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but **they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*** (Revelation 20:6).

Melchizedek and the Royal Priesthood

The dual role of priests and royalty comes together in the priesthood and kingship of our Lord.

*For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the **likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life.** For it is witnessed of him, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 7:13-17 ESV).*

The priesthood of Jesus exists outside of the frailties and mortality of the flesh. His priesthood does not follow the line of Aaron, whose mortal priests were encumbered by their own sins, and

eventually, their office ended when they closed their eyes in death. The writer to the Hebrews elegantly describes the superiority of this role, as well as how Jesus fulfills it. Of which we are told that Jesus was "*Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*" (Hebrews 5:10).

One of the most incredible expositions in the Bible is what we read about Melchizedek. It demonstrates careful Bible reading skills. To understand Melchizedek, the author draws from **what is said** as well as **what is not**. What is absent in Genesis 14 is anything about the family of Melchizedek. He certainly would not be qualified to be an Aaronic priest based on this. Further, we have no information on his birth or death. We know that Abraham considered Melchizedek greater in that he paid tithes to him. Not the Levitical tithes which were compulsory, but tithes paid by Abraham's own free will. Melchizedek disappears from the Genesis record as a King of Salem and a priest of the most high God. However, this role (king and priest) is what our God has reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for

ever after the order of Melchizedek.
(Psalm 110:1-4).

How This Applies to the Saints

We have been invited to be part of the immortal priesthood and kingship after the order of Melchizedek. Similar to the foreshadowing role of Melchizedek, it incorporates endless life, rulership, and priesthood. It takes our breath away when we consider the magnitude of our calling. We are generally such non-spectacular people. The major news agencies are not interviewing us at our doorstep to get our opinion on world events. We have no controlling interest in this world. Yet, we are called to reign with the Lord as he transforms this earth. Wow!

We may glimpse the work of the king/priests in Isaiah 32. There is clearly one king, the Lord Jesus Christ. But Isaiah refers to the work of “princes.” Undoubtedly, this is the role of the saints, who will rule with the king. Look at the characteristics of these princes. They will:

- Rule in justice.
- Be a hiding place from the wind.
- Be a shelter from the storm.
- Be streams of water in a dry place.
- Be a shade of a great rock in a weary land. (Isaiah 32:1-4 ESV).

Perhaps this is written through the eyes of the mortal nations? The perception of the saints is not fear. Fear destroys love (1 John 4:18). Rather, it is a vision of protection, shielding, and nurturing. It is a role of compassion. The mortal Levitical high priest was regularly faced with the sins of the people, but he “can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset

with weakness.” (Hebrews 5:2 ESV). As immortal saints, by grace we will be given the privilege to help a world learn righteousness and eschew evil. We will do so with compassion and love.

But there remains a role of authority. Perhaps this is alluded to by Jesus in the parable of the pounds, where the faithful are given authority over ten cities, or five cities, based on what they did with the opportunities to serve the nobleman. (Luke 19:12-26). We do not yet know how the Lord Jesus will distribute this authority. However, the power of this combined role is that the saints will teach righteousness and support the mortal nations in their pursuit of righteousness, but **they will also have the ability to ensure justice.**

The control of the “dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan” (Revelation 20:2) falls to the authority of the princes. Runaway sin and rebellion will not be permitted, and the princes will have the authority to ensure this.

This is why Jesus promised faithful believers that they would reign with him.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (Revelation 3:20-21).

It’s why the Apostle Peter referred to first-century believers as destined for royalty.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a

peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9).

Our God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:1-4). He, in His graciousness, has drawn us to Him so that we should be part of this unspeakable transformation of this world. We are called to educate a world that cannot discern between their right hand and their left. Education and encouragement are a huge part of the role of the royal priesthood. But we will also be endowed with authority to ensure justice and equity. We can only begin to imagine the transformational change this will bring to the inhabitants of the cities we are blessed to serve. Rebellion against righteousness, violence, and abuse of the vulnerable will not be permitted. What a different

life experience during that Age.

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. (Isaiah 32:16-17 ESV).

Saints today see a world under the incompetent rule of the flesh. How wonderful it will be to join our Lord in this renovation of the earth. It is the calling we have.

And they that be wise [margin: "teachers"] shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. (Daniel 12:3).

Dave Jennings

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

Daniel 12:3

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I recently read your *Tidings* article (social media post of March 24, 2025) regarding the new political leadership in the world. I wanted to highlight a couple of things. The first is that there are examples in the Bible where Jewish leaders were criticized for their religious and political behavior.

Ancient Israel was primarily a theocratic society, where religious and political leadership were often intertwined. Thus, while Jewish leaders were technically religious leaders, they were also deeply involved in political affairs, law, and governance. One example of this is the “Judgment of Solomon” in 1 Kings 3:16-28, where Solomon had to settle a dispute between two women over the parentage of a son. To the common Jew, their leaders would have been seen as both spiritual authorities and politicians.

There are examples throughout the Bible in which these leaders were criticized, often for their moral failings, but also within the context of their political dealings. In the Old Testament for example, King Ahab was rebuked by the prophet Elijah for his corrupt political and economic actions in seizing Naboth’s vineyard. In the New Testament, John the Baptist criticized Herod Antipas, a Jewish ruler under Roman authority, who had divorced his wife and unlawfully married Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. This was both a moral and political scandal, as it involved power struggles within the Herodian dynasty and opposition from religious leaders. Jesus also referred to Herod Antipas as a fox. As with the other leaders, both the Pharisees and Sadducees held significant political influence in addition to their religious authority. For example, both groups were part of the Sanhedrin, the supreme judicial and legislative body of ancient Israel. Their presence ensured that their interpretations of the law influenced national decisions. Despite their obvious involvement in political matters, Jesus regularly criticized the Pharisees and Sadducees for their behavior, which given their position and stature, was sure to influence the Jewish people.

The Bible repeatedly calls believers to emulate Jesus’ behavior in their daily lives. 1 John 2:6 (NIV) says “*Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.*” If we are to manifest Christ, this would also include being critical of national leaders, whose behavior, philosophies, and dogma set the tone for the nations that they govern. That being said, I do not think it is appropriate that Christadelphians regularly engage in such practices, as they are not edifying.

There are, however, times when such behavior is appropriate. During World War II, Christadelphians were involved in the KinderTransport, which, while not a vocal criticism of Hitler, was certainly an opposition to his political practices. And there is evidence of people who associated with Christadelphians openly criticizing Hitler for his actions. Ludwig von Gerdtehl, although not a Christadelphian himself, was associated with the German Christadelphian community through lectures organized by Albert Maier in Stuttgart during the late 1920s. Gerdtehl was a staunch opponent of Adolf Hitler's policies from the 1920s and spoke increasingly openly against the Nazis. Today, by many accounts, we see similar behavior by world leaders. This behavior is increasingly horrific, and more than that, the very name of Jesus Christ, and his gospel are increasingly being invoked as a justification and excuse for these actions.

The second point is that, even if one subscribes to the idea of avoiding commentary on world leaders, we also most certainly should not support them. One only has to peruse social media to see the alarmingly high number of Christadelphians who openly and staunchly support the abhorrent actions of these leaders, and sometimes gleefully so. I note that your article made little mention of this aspect.

If we truly believe that we are in the last days, then there is a responsibility to highlight the ungodly behavior of world leadership and encourage as many as possible to learn about the true Gospel message and the salvation that it brings.

A brother

CONFLICT IN THE DRC

A Biblical Analysis Of Challenges and Perspectives
in the Democratic Republic of Congo

By Emil Mukambilwa



THE war raging in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a tragedy that deeply affects the lives of millions. The conflict in this region is fueled by complex causes: power struggles, ethnic rivalries, exploitation of natural resources, and foreign interference. To understand the situation in a broader framework, examining how the Bible addresses the themes of war, suffering, and justice is essential. The Bible offers a divine perspective on war, the role

of leaders, and the hope for a future of peace.

The war in the eastern DRC is not just a political or military phenomenon but also a spiritual one. It raises profound questions about human nature, the corruption of the heart, and God's call for reconciliation and justice. By studying war in the light of Scripture, we can grasp the spiritual and moral principles that guide believers in the face of global crises like this one.

But what does the Bible say? How should Christians understand this conflict in light of Scripture?

What has happened with brothers and sisters in this war-torn area?

The suffering of civilians in eastern DRC reflects the human condition as described in the Bible. Isaiah wrote,

Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey (Isaiah 59:14-15 NKJV).¹

The Congolese people endure relentless violence, often caused by power struggles between armed groups but also by deep injustices within the government and the international community. The Bible calls for the restoration of justice and the protection of the oppressed.

One of the greatest Biblical hopes is the promise of a future reign of peace under the authority of the Messiah. This vision of a world without war and suffering is a source of hope for all those who suffer today in the DRC and beyond.

Testimonies and Real-Life Cases Of War In Eastern DRC

The impact of the war in eastern DRC goes beyond numbers and statistics. Behind every attack and every forced displacement, there are human lives, shattered families, and broken souls. The Bible teaches us that God is close to those who suffer (Psalm 34:18).

Here are some testimonies that reveal the deep human tragedy of this war and how faith in God brings hope even in the midst of trials.

Testimony Of Our Late Bro. Junior In Goma

When Goma fell on January 26, 2025, a feeling of terror overwhelmed us. We knew that Bukavu, just 100 km to the south, would be the next target. But amid the panic, an act of courage emerged. Some soldiers of the Congolese army (FARDC) refused to surrender to Goma. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned, they decided to hold their ground. For them, abandoning their city without a fight was unthinkable.

At dawn on Tuesday, January 28, the sound of gunfire shattered the silence. The M23 launched a full-scale assault, determined to take the city. The remaining government troops put up unexpected resistance, a glimmer of hope in the darkness. The fighting spread through the neighborhoods, bullets whistling in the air. We, the civilians, were trapped, desperately seeking shelter. Many found refuge in the Ecclesia Hall of Goma.



Bro. Junior

Bro. Junior, a member of the Goma Ecclesia and a Sunday School teacher lost his life, taken from us by the brutality of war. He was in his shop when M23 fighters ordered him to come out. Frightened, he refused. Without hesitation, they opened fire, hitting him in the leg. He bled profusely, and we lost him.

The death of Bro. Junior is a heartbreaking reminder of the reality of war. He was not a soldier, not a combatant—just a man trying to survive. His death is a tragedy, a war crime, an act of barbarism.

Testimony from Bukavu: Sis. Anifa

After the fall of Goma, we knew the threat was drawing closer, that the shadow of war was stretching toward us. And our fears quickly became a reality. In early February, the M23 seized the territory of Kalehe, then Muyange, and other localities, spreading terror and devastation in its wake.

Many people were forced to flee, including our brothers and sisters from the Kalonge Ecclesia. They had to abandon their homes, belongings, memories, and entire lives in the desperate hope of finding refuge in Bukavu. They left everything behind, driven only by the instinct to survive, their eyes filled with fear and despair.

Then, violence erupted in Kavumu, just 25 km from Bukavu. Instead of providing protection, our own soldiers, desperate and angry, began firing in protest over unpaid salaries. It was in this chaos that our Sis. Anifa was struck. A bullet hit her in the back, leaving her in a pool of blood. Young volunteers, driven by incredible



Sis. Anifa

courage, braved the dangers to rescue her. They transported her to Bukavu, where she received emergency care at the General Hospital, thanks to the intervention of the Red Cross.

This testimony is a call to solidarity, compassion, and action. We cannot remain idle in the face of the suffering of our brothers and sisters. We must offer them our support, our help, our love. We must be their voice, their hope, their light in the darkness.

How should we live in a land of such injustice?

War: A Consequence Of Human Sin

According to the Bible, war is often the consequence of sin and human rebellion against God.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. (James 4:1-2 NKJV).

War stems from an insatiable desire for power, wealth, and domination over others. In the Bible, war is a result of human sin. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the earth has been marked by violence and corruption. In Genesis 4:8, we see the first recorded murder when Cain killed his brother Abel out of jealousy. This story shows that violence is a consequence of the human heart, corrupted by sin.

Genesis 6:11-13 (NKJV) describes the earth before the Flood:

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them."

The DRC, like many nations at war, suffers from this pervasive violence. Armed groups, resource-driven conflicts, massacres, and forced displacements are modern manifestations of this Biblical reality. The world is corrupted by sin, and violence is one of its consequences.

God, War, and Justice

God is a God of justice. He is not indifferent to the suffering of the innocent and the injustices committed by men.

O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more. (Psalm 10:17-18).

God sees the suffering of oppressed peoples, including those in eastern DRC. He promises to intervene on behalf of the victims and to judge the oppressors. This is a comforting truth for those who suffer injustice today.

The Spiritual War Behind Human Conflicts

The Bible teaches us that wars are not only human struggles but also a reflection of a spiritual battle between good and evil. The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

The expression "fight the good fight" is a Biblical metaphor that invites Christians to persevere in their faith and to fight against the forces of evil. The nature of this fight is spiritual because it is not against people but against spiritual powers. It is a struggle against sin, temptations, and the wiles of the devil (sins). It is also a fight for faith because it involves remaining faithful to God and his teachings, even in the face of difficulties (1 Timothy 6:12). It is a fight to keep one's faith intact and not to be discouraged in difficulties, such as wars, diseases, poverty, etc.

Wars In the Old Testament: God and Divine Justice

In the Old Testament, war appears as an unavoidable reality in the history of Israel. God himself sometimes intervenes in conflicts on behalf of

his people, as in the victories won by the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua. However, these wars were often seen as God's judgments against pagan nations (for example, the extermination of the Canaanites, Deuteronomy 9:4-5). War was perceived as a divine test, and God commanded the Israelites to prepare to defend their land.

When you go out to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army larger than yours, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. (Deuteronomy 20:1-2 NIV).

However, war in the Old Testament was not simply a matter of military victory but also of loyalty to God and respect for his commandments. In passages like Psalm 34:14 and Isaiah 2:4, we see that God calls for peace and justice: “*Seek peace and pursue it.*”

In Isaiah 1:15-17, God calls his people to reject violence and practice justice.

When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

War in the New Testament: Jesus, Prince of Peace

The approach to war in the New Testament changes radically. Jesus Christ preaches peace, reconciliation,

and love even for enemies. In Matthew 5:9, he declares, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*” This saying announces a reversal of worldly values. Jesus teaches that the real fight is not against men but against sin.

In John 18:36, Jesus says, “*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews, but my kingdom is not from the world.*”

Jesus did not come to establish the kingdom of God by war but by love and sacrifice. He teaches us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), and in Luke 6:27-28, he reminds us we must love our enemies.

However, this does not mean that Christians should remain passive in the face of injustice. Our response is to appeal to our heavenly Father for intervention and to reflect His character and love of justice to the world around us.

How Do We Prepare for the Coming Kingdom of God?

We know that the Kingdom of God is a certain promise. But while we wait for its fulfillment, what should we do?

1. Pray for peace and justice (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Let us pray for the reconciliation of the DRC.
2. Living according to the principles of the Kingdom of God. This includes forgiving those who have wronged us, loving our enemies, serving others with humility, and practicing justice. Christians must embody the values of the Kingdom of God here on earth. This means

- living according to justice, peace, and reconciliation. Matthew 5:14-16 reminds us that we are the light of the world.
3. Living according to the principles of the Kingdom of God is about outward obedience to God's commandments while reflecting His love and righteousness in our daily lives.
 4. Living according to the values of the Kingdom (Romans 14:17) means having a compassionate heart toward those in need, being humble and grateful for God's blessings, seeking peace and harmony in our relationships, demonstrating patience and perseverance in trials, and having an attitude of unconditional love.
 5. Sharing the gospel message (Matthew 28:19-20).
 6. Placing Our Hope in Christ's return. In the face of war and suffering in the world, we, as Christians, must place our hope in God's promise. Although war is a painful reality today, we know that one day, God will establish a Kingdom of peace, and Jesus Christ will reign as the Prince of Peace. While waiting for that glorious day, we are called to be instruments of peace and justice in a broken world. Involvement of Christians in the pursuit of peace in the DRC (Matthew 5:9).
 7. Being peacemakers.

The Bible calls us to three fundamental actions:

1. Denounce injustice with wisdom (Isaiah 1:17).
2. Love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).
3. Work for reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

This means that Christians must be mediators of peace by following God's commandment of loving one's neighbor and adhering to the teachings of His Word.

Today, in the DRC, the war can be a catalyst for revival, leading people to turn to God with seriousness and reject sin. Although the war in the DRC is a tragedy, it is also an opportunity for the body of Christ to grow in faith and experience a spiritual awakening. Believers are called to persevere, pray, and hope in the promise of the Kingdom of God, where justice and eternal peace will reign.

War should not extinguish our faith. We are called to be lights in the darkness, to pray for peace, and to prepare for the coming of God's Kingdom.

*Emil Mukambilwa,
Bukavu Ecclesia, DRC*

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

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

By Ben Drepaul

IT was wonderful for us to spend the mid-winter recess with the brethren in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). The first stop was Mt. Grace, Tobago, where Bro. Angelo delivered the words of exhortation. Tobago has a fifteen-minute radio program on two Sundays per month and a half-hour TV prime-time program four times monthly.

Coming across to Trinidad, we stayed at the same location where the Caribbean Camp was held. The managers were delighted to have us and are also quite happy to provide one of their lecture

halls for the Arima Ecclesia to have their weekly meetings.

We then drove south to Point Fortin and had a wonderful lunch with Bro. Roland and Sis. Sonai Dhaniram and their two girls, Rebecca and Isabella. The next stop was the Erin Ecclesia, where Bro. Sheriff gave us a tour of the aging building that needs much repair. His grandson, Simeon, also showed us their outback campsite and said he looks forward to having another camp there.



The climax of our visit was the baptisms of Azariah and Josiah, the two sons of Bro. Anil and Sis. Janelle Gobin. We met at 8:45 AM at the Flower Pot Beach. Bro. Sam delivered the baptismal talk, and after the immersion, it was a short drive to the Marabella Ecclesia. The three Trinidad ecclesias came together for the Sunday. After the breaking of bread, a thanksgiving service was sponsored by the Gobin family, with a variety of foods prepared by Sis. Janelle's mom. There was even ice cream for kids of all ages. Seeing our brothers, sisters, and young people again was quite a privilege.

God willing, a preaching campaign is being planned for August 4-7, immediately following the annual Bible School, which is scheduled for July 31-August 3. The plan is to use the campsite for the school and the preaching campaign, for which they are hoping to get some preaching materials, such as colorful booklets and a poster-sized likeness of Daniel's Image.

*Ben Drepaul,
CBMC Link Person*



2024 SOUTH AFRICA SUMMER BIBLE SCHOOL

By Travis Sinclair

LAST year's South African Summer Bible School was held at the beautiful venue of Hebron Haven, in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. It was the 43rd school, which has been held since 1982.

The venue has fully furnished accommodation with supplied bedding. There are also tennis courts, a pool, and a small dam. Hebron Haven's location allows for hikes, walks, birdwatching, and fishing in recreational time. The large conference venue is air-conditioned. Afternoon sports activities are also organized daily at the school. Three meals, as well as morning and afternoon tea, are provided.

Bro. Kitson Reid (Acocks Green Ecclesia, UK) began our Bible School with a two-part talk on the topic "Walking with Kings" (King Amaziah). This was followed by two very well-handled talks on the topic "Before you say, 'I do.'" In these talks Bro. Kitson skillfully handled the sensitive topic of principles and practical applications of courtship and marriage. In Bro. Kitson's last four talks at the school, he spoke on the topic of "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord," where he delved into the Gospel of Luke.

Bro. Kitson also gave us a very entertaining talk on striving for the Kingdom (as opposed to Egypt) and on how he came to the truth. We

kept our brother very busy with a Sisters' Class and an exhortation at the memorial meeting. He also led a very helpful mutual improvement class for the brothers.

Besides the main talks, we also benefited from a variety of discussion sessions each day. Bro. Barry van Heerden (Westville Ecclesia) led a session on "What is real faith?" Bro. Simon Taylor (Pinetown Ecclesia) led a session on "The Holy Spirit—how is it active today?" Bro. Tapiwa Chipunga led a session on the topic "African culture, lobola and Biblical marriage values." On the last full day of the school, Bro. Travis Sinclair led a session on practical gospel proclamation where attendees created short videos to post on social media.

Sunday School classes were held for children aged 2-15, and youth classes were held for those aged 16 and up. There was also a selection of Christadelphian books on sale at bargain prices.

This Summer Bible School is a unique experience for many brothers and sisters to fellowship with other Christadelphians from our worldwide community. It's highly beneficial for young brothers to grow in their understanding of the Truth and to develop skills such as presiding, reading, publicly praying, and leading classes as they learn from other experienced brothers and sisters. The lessons learned at the school place our brothers and sisters in good stead for years to come.

Visit our website:

christadelphian-bibleschoolsa.co.za to see some videos and photos from the school.

Below are some reviews from attendees.

The Christadelphian Summer Bible School held in KwaZulu Natal South Africa brings together brothers and sisters from all over South Africa and neighboring countries such as Zimbabwe. It is a spiritually uplifting experience that prepares us all for the year ahead. It gives opportunities for catching up with friends from afar and making new ones. Young people get to know each other and keep in contact over WhatsApp. The Bible school helps remind us all that we are not alone in our daily struggles. Having a speaker from another country is always very uplifting too. Different languages and cultures are brought together with our common faith and hope. It is a privilege and a blessing to attend the Bible School. We are extremely grateful for it and pray it will continue to be available to us until our Lord's return. (*Sis. Bernice Kassier, Pinetown Ecclesia*).

I would like to thank God for this special time we enjoyed at Hebron Haven as brothers and sisters. It was so beautiful and amazing. It was like a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. We learned a lot from everyone and the love and care shown by the brethren. I feel that this was too special with our Bro. Kitson never rested, ensuring that we were equipped

with different tools to understand what was being taught, giving us practical examples that will forever stay in our hearts. We thank the organizers for their sleepless nights preparing and adding different activities just to name one, the class of the unbaptized on the program that was very thoughtful. We were even guided on how to prepare a video as part of preaching on social media. (*Sis. Zanele Khumalo, Soweto Ecclesia*).

Our population is very diverse and spiritual needs are different from center to center. We have of course “made do” as all brothers and sisters in Christ work together towards the good of the body, but an external voice was SO HELPFUL! In the end, we are all striving for excellence in our Lord, and the help (prayers, financial aid, speakers etc.) has afforded us the opportunity to continue with this endeavor. Every comment was favorable, and to quote just one: “When we sisters spoke together, we all agreed: this was the best Bible school—ever! Perhaps this means Christ is returning this year. SO MANY thanks to ALL who make such opportunities available. To be honest: money (for those who have) is the easier part: support, care, prayers, and commitment ensure that - against all worldly odds - the brotherhood survives. (*Sis. Cheryl Alberts, Pinetown Ecclesia*).

The Summer Bible School of 2024 was for me, one of the most amazing experiences I have ever had. In so many ways It has helped

me to see things differently in the New Year and my spiritual life has been greatly enriched. If it weren't for the Bible School, I would not have appreciated the value of gathering away from the world with other brothers and sisters from far away. This has helped me get another level of understanding of God's Word and with that, I am hoping this will help me inspire others by sharing the good news of our coming King Jesus Christ. (*Bro. John Life Tshosha, Soweto Ecclesia*).

The Soweto Ecclesia was only established officially in 2010. None of our brothers and sisters grew up in the “truth” with that strong Biblical foundation and background nor did they have the sense of a worldwide fellowship. Most spiritual births require a major separation from entrenched beliefs of ancestor worship and the devil with “his demons” and total submission to a pastor. Leaving that environment often meant ostracism by family and neighbors. A serious commitment to the narrow way of Christ requires conviction and courage. The ecclesial meetings and other activities are vital for spiritual growth and help in creating an allegiance to a new eternal family but Bible school is where the joy and wonder of a wider worldwide fellowship can be developed and appreciated, and where faith and deeper insights into God's Word can grow. It has led to marriage and lasting friendships. Was this not also one of the purposes for the three feasts under the Law of

Moses: to build unity and a deeper appreciation of God's high calling? This Bible school in December was again a precious oasis of spiritual encouragement and strengthening of all the above. A wonderful Kingdom spirit was tangible, and Bro. Kitson's infectious enthusiasm for the practical outworking of our faith and "speaking to the heart" rubbed off on everyone. We thank him for going the extra mile and adding valuable sessions in the afternoons. All are greatly appreciated. Visitors are warmly embraced and they, in turn, will leave indelible memories here of our unique worldwide cross-cultural fellowship. Do join us if you can! (*Sis. Leonie Verster, Soweto Ecclesia*).

Unfortunately, many of our attendees come from impoverished communities and can't afford to pay their full fees to attend the school. To address this issue, we have implemented a sponsorship program where for R3,500 (\$190 USD) one person can be sponsored for a week. On our website bibleschool.shop.netcash.co.za, we have opened a page where donations can be made in a very easy way via debit or credit card. The entity is a registered non-profit

company (Reg No 2024/389550/08) and a non-profit organization/charity (registration no 310-873 NPO). Alternatively, electronic bank transfers can be made to:

Christadelphian Projects Fund

South Africa

First National Bank

Branch—221526

Account—63113954978

Swift Code—FIRNZAJJ

Reference— "*Sponsor Bible School*"

We pray the Lord may bless the Summer Bible School so it may continue to take place while our Lord remains away. We would like to re-introduce a mid-year Bible School and also have plans to get more international visitors to attend the school. Accommodation is limited, but anyone who would like to book for the December 26-30 2025 school should please visit our website or contact us via email. We will do our best to assist with accommodation before/after school, as well as address any concerns (such as safety) any brothers or sisters may have. Questions can be addressed to Bro. Travis Sinclair:

trenosinclair@gmail.com

Travis Sinclair,

Summer Bible School Committee



Members enjoyed the Summer Bible School

The Fox and the Hedgehog

THE fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. These enigmatic words were written by the Greek philosopher and poet Archilochus, who lived more than 700 years before Christ. What did the philosopher mean by this? Maybe he intended this saying simply to encourage thought and discussion. Following his lead, I think there's a lesson here for each of us.

Foxes are found almost everywhere. They are members of the canine family, which includes dogs, wolves, and jackals. Foxes are generally smaller than other canines, and they are omnivorous. They eat almost anything, from insects to birds and small mammals. They raid nests for eggs and eat various plants, grasses, and berries. They cover a wide area, as much as ten miles while hunting and foraging. Since early times, foxes have had the reputation of being clever or cunning (cp. Jesus' words in Luke 13:31-32). The philosopher seems to be pointing to this cunning when he writes: "The fox knows many things."

Hedgehogs are small, spiny mammals, like small porcupines. They are found in many parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. They got their English name because they are often found in and around hedges, bushes, and undergrowth around trees. They sleep underground in dens or rocks. Like foxes, hedgehogs are omnivores: their diet includes insects, toads, frogs, and some snakes. They also eat birds' eggs, mushrooms, roots, berries, and fruits. Unlike foxes, they do not forage over large areas but instead remain within a mile or so of their dens. If a hedgehog is attacked by some larger mammal, perhaps even a fox, its defense is to roll up into a tight ball and use its sharp quills to protect its head and belly.

When we consider hedgehogs, we see little creatures who are careful and who simplify their lives. Maybe the philosopher had this in mind also, when he wrote: "The hedgehog knows one big thing."

War and Peace

Scholars who study the works of Archilochus suggest that this proverb

was his way of explaining his decision not to be a soldier. They usually cite another of his poems, where he remembers a warrior's shield that he discarded near a bush before retreating from the battlefield:

Life seemed somehow more precious. It was a beautiful shield, but I know where I can buy another one exactly like it.

In other words, he dropped all pretense of being a soldier and ran for his life. He knew you can always find another war or buy another shield, but you can't find or buy another life once it's gone!

Taking the fox-and-hedgehog proverb, the poet might be saying the smart "foxes" of war know many ways to fight battles and to kill one another, but the "hedgehog" knows one big thing: he lives longer if he chooses not to fight.

Going From "Good" To "Great"

In his book *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins is interested in understanding and communicating what it means to turn a good business into a great business. Among other things, he discusses "the hedgehog concept." He starts with Archilochus' statement that "the hedgehog knows one big thing." Then he suggests that visionary business leaders must be hedgehogs; he writes:

They must know how to simplify a complex world into a single, organizing idea — the kind of basic principle that unifies, organizes, and guides all decisions. That's not to say hedgehogs are simplistic. Like great thinkers, who

take complexities and boil them down into simple, yet profound, ideas... leaders of good-to-great companies develop a Hedgehog Concept that is simple but that reflects penetrating insight and deep understanding.

If you accept this philosophy, then Collins' concept is a simple but profound idea, which may be expressed this way:

- First, figure out what is really important, and then focus on that; in other words, "What is the one big thing?"
- Then, take everything else you know (like the "many things" the fox knows), and understand how all these other things can supplement and strengthen the one big vision of what you want to accomplish.
- Finally, pursue the one big thing with all your resources and all your energy.

It seems that "one big thing" is a unifying and organizing principle that can be applied both to a business and to one's life. Find it, focus on it, and follow it.

What Is The "One Big Thing" In Your Life?

The hedgehog knows one big thing.

The beauty of the poet's statement is that we can all ask ourselves, "Am I a fox or a hedgehog?" Or, to put it another way, "Am I going in too many directions at once? Am I spreading my true self too thin? Do I need to refocus on the one goal which is really important to me?"

Is there one really big thing that I know? And can I make the other things that I know serve the "one big thing?"

Learning "many things" or having much knowledge is beneficial, especially as tools for having a productive, satisfying life. Learning "many things" about the Bible can also be beneficial in search of a spiritually satisfying and ultimately productive life.

However, one of the greatest benefits of learning is to be able to distinguish early on between what is essential and what is not essential, between principal matters and secondary matters. In short, between one big thing and many things.

Bible Examples of The "One Big Thing"

What does the Bible have to say about the "one big thing?" Quite a lot, I think, if we go looking for it.

What is the "one big thing" in your life? What was the "one big thing" to the writers of the Bible? What is the "one big thing," the unifying principle that guides how you live, what you do, and how you treat one another? What was Christ's "one big thing?"

Maybe you already have your own ideas, and that is fine. It might be good to share them with one another. In the meantime, I'll share with you some of the ideas I've had about this question:

Ever learning, but never able. (2 Timothy 3:7 KJV).

In 2 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul writes to Timothy about certain men (and perhaps women too). They had been believers in Christ but had lost sight of what was really important about the gospel. Paul said these men had become

lovers of themselves, proud, conceited, lovers of pleasure, and despisers of good men (vv. 2-4). It is a terrible list of indictments. Then he writes that these men were "*ever learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.*" (v. 7). This sounds a lot like the fox knowing many things, but apparently not being able to grasp the one great thing, the truest and most important piece of knowledge.

Along the way, these believers had become entangled in worldly values and worldly pursuits. And they had lost their clear vision of the "one big thing."

The most important knowledge, which makes sense of any other knowledge, even in the Bible, is the good news of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Some Bible believers may spend too much time chasing the sensational new idea, the extraordinary insight that might set them apart from others. But for what purpose? Along the way, they may be losing sight of the really important things about the gospel, what Jesus called "*the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith.*" (Matthew 23:23 KJV). But one day the foolishness of such men will be made known to all, because in their infatuation with exciting "little things," they have lost sight of the "one big thing," the real gospel.

If, like the hedgehog, we know the "one big thing," then we know that our only security and our only hope is in the promises of God, as guaranteed in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ asked his disciples, in Matthew 16, "*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*", he got a reply from Peter which exemplified the idea of the

"one big thing":

You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16:16).¹

The man Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, the living guarantee of the promises of God, and in the words of Jesus himself:

On this rock I will build my church.
(v. 18).

If we believe this, then we must stand in that place, upon that rock where Christ's ecclesia is found. And we must never stray away from its security.

The One Great Commandment

The critics of Jesus were following him around with the purpose of trapping

neighbor as yourself?" (Matthew 22:37-39; cp. Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18).

This sounds very much like one more facet of the Scriptural answer to my question: "What is the one big thing?" The greatest fact in this universe is that *"the LORD our God, the LORD is one."* And the one commandment, the one overriding goal, the "one big thing" in life must then be: "Love and serve the LORD God with all your devotion, all your strength, all your knowledge, and all your purpose."

"One Thing I Do Know"

In John 9, Jesus healed the man born blind. The Pharisees began to question

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him in his own words. One of them tested him with this question. *"Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"* (Matthew 22:36). Without hesitation, Jesus answered by quoting the *Shema* (from the Hebrew word "Hear!" in Deuteronomy 6:4), the foundation commandment of the Law:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your

the validity of this miracle, even resorting to threatening the young man's parents (with exclusion from the synagogue: v. 22). Finally, they went after the young man himself:

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (vv. 24-25).

In this world, lots of arguments swirl around all the time. Sometimes, like the Pharisees in this story, people put out false reports ("This man Jesus is a sinner!") or use threats to get their own way. The man who was born blind confessed to knowing little about any of these details. But there was "one big thing" this fellow did know: "*I was blind but now I see!*" That was enough. That knowledge brought him to his Savior, who loved him, healed him, and gave him a bright future along with new eyes. That was enough.

Do You Know "One Big Thing"?

Do you know "one big thing"? And is it the gospel of the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ?

Don't be satisfied with saying, "Of course I know the Truth!" That wasn't what I asked. What I asked was: "Do you know the gospel as the "one big thing?" Is it the most important thing in your life?

Call it "the gospel." Call it "the Truth." Call it "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25) or "the way to be saved" (Acts 16:17), if you prefer. But don't just say you know it. Say it is the only thing that really matters to you, and everything else is secondary.

But please don't say it if you don't mean it.

Christ The King is Coming!

There is "one big thing" each of us knows, the "one big thing" which far surpasses in importance the "many things" pertaining to the world around us.

If I were a hedgehog, here is the "one big thing" which I truly know:

Once, I was blind, but now I see there is one true God, and Jesus is His Son. He loved me and died so my sins could be forgiven. I take bread and wine to remind me of that sacrifice. I will do my best to serve God. I will seek forgiveness when I fall short. I will always try to help others. I don't know when Christ is coming, but I do know Christ the King is coming.

Christ the King is coming,

To set up his throne.

Royal son of David,

To the world unknown.

He with might and power

Will return again,

Not as lowly Jesus,

But as king of men.²

It stands to reason that, in God's world, the "one big thing" needs "one big hope" to complete it. And thank the Lord, the Bible supplies it!

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

2 Words taken from Hymn 274 in the Christadelphian Hymn Book.

The hedgehog knows one big thing.

The beauty of the poet's statement is that we can all ask ourselves, “Am I a fox or a hedgehog?” Or, to put it another way, “Am I going in too many directions at once? Am I spreading my true self too thin? Do I need to refocus on the one goal which is really important to me?”



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