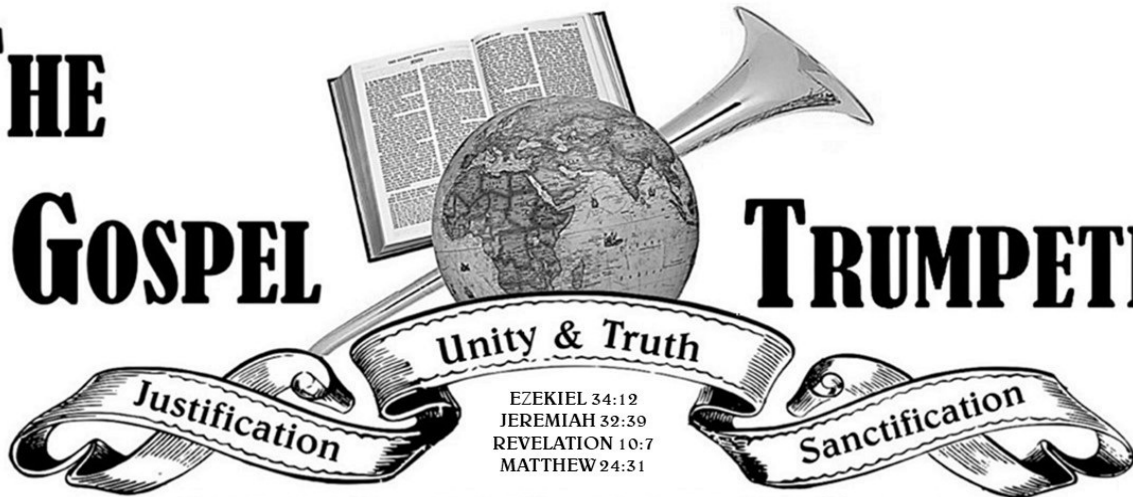


THE

GOSPEL

TRUMPETER



SOUNDING FORTH THE SEVENTH AND LAST TRUMPET

Vol. 56 February 2026 No. 2

"Casting
ALL YOUR
care
UPON HIM;
FOR HE
careth
FOR YOU."

1 PETER 5:7



"For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

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This monthly religious journal is published for the benefit of the Church of God universally. It is our supreme purpose to reach the world for Christ through the printed page. Our burden is to reveal the truth of God's Word to all mankind, to expose sin and error, war against apostasy, and to eradicate the longstanding traditions of men that have no Biblical foundations.

THE CHURCH OF GOD BELIEVES IN

- A personal God (John 4:24)
- A divine Christ (John 1:1, 14)
- An infallibly inspired Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- Salvation from sin (Matthew 1:21)
- The new birth (John 3:3, 5-7)
- A holy life (Luke 1:73-75; Titus 2:12)
- Sanctification (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
- Unity of God's people (John 17:21; Ephesians 4:3)
- Divine, physical healing (James 5:14-16)
- The ordinances (Matthew 28:19-20; John 13:1-17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34)
- Eternal life (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:43)
- The Trinity (1 John 5:7-8)

**SOME SPIRITUAL FACTS
PERTAINING TO THE CHURCH**

- Jesus organized it (Matthew 16:18)
- It is built on a good foundation (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:11)
- Christ governs it (Ephesians 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6)
- God admits the members (1 Corinthians 12:13-18)
- Sin puts you out of it (Romans 11:22; Exodus 32:33)
- Only the saved are members (John 15:2-6)
- Membership is offered to all (Revelation 22:17)
- There are final rewards (Revelation 20:12-15; 21:3-4; 22:14)
- The Bible name is the Church of God (Acts 20:28; Galatians 1:13; John 17:11)

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LESSONS FROM THE BURNING BUSH

Exodus 3:1 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.

2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

I am continually amazed by the greatness of God. Again and again, I discover how intimately He understands every individual and knows precisely what is needed to draw our attention to Him. God's plan is divine. It goes beyond our human understanding. Who knew that a burning bush would be a turning point for Moses? God, in His infinite wisdom, chose "this great sight"—the burning bush that was not consumed—to set on course His divine plan of redemption.

Moses could have remained in the comfort of a royal household. But Hebrews 11:24-26 tells us: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of

the reward."

After fleeing Egypt, Moses found refuge in the land of Midian and settled there. He married, had children, and devoted himself to tending his father-in-law's flocks. This simple life likely gave Moses a sense of contentment and stability.

However, God had prepared a greater calling for him—one that required a monumental experience to set him on the path of fulfilling God's divine plan. "When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him." God was waiting for Moses to draw near and shift his sole attention toward this "great sight." When he did, it was then that God called him by name, "Moses, Moses."

What a beautiful picture we have of God calling out to Moses, and Moses' simple reply, "Here am I." God continues to set forth a "great sight" to everyone who will draw near to Him with a willing heart. Moses' reply to God changed his life forever. He followed God's will, and as a result, many other lives were changed forever as well!

When we choose to draw near to God and set aside the distractions and concerns of life, something extraordinary will take place. Just as in Moses' encounter, there is a bush that burns with fire today. God is continually watching and waiting for souls who are willing to turn aside and focus fully on Him. In doing so, dear one, you too can hear God call your name, just as He called out to Moses. May God bless.

Sister Gerri Lynn Bremer

Sister Gerri Lynn Bremer attends the Church of God in Newark, OH.



Brother Roger L. Decker

Jeremiah 5:26 For among my people are found wicked men: they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men.

27 As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich.

28 They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge.

29 Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

30 A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land;

31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

The expression, "What will ye do in the end thereof?" simply means life will come to an end. All through the fifth chapter of Jeremiah, God spoke through the prophet, warning Israel of their true condition and of His wrath to come. Warning after warning is infiltrated throughout the chapter. Verse 29 of our text reads, "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

All things pertaining to this world are coming to an end. Great kingdoms and rulers who reigned over pagan kingdoms, regardless of their power and splendor, no matter how elevated, came to an end. Those who have left the truth and enjoy worldly pleasures need to be reminded that it will all come to an end someday.

Hebrews 11:24-25 says, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the

son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." There is pleasure in sin, or there would be no temptation to sin. The pleasure in sin only lasts for a season or a period of time.

Psalm 22:2 states, "O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season [or the time of darkness], and am not silent." It may be fun to throw away your salvation and go to the bars, dress the way you want, and throw away all the constraints. However, it will all come crashing down on you one of these days.

The Prophet Jeremiah asked the question, "What will ye do in the end thereof?" Some people leave Church of God congregations and find a preacher who lightens their yoke, who puts salve on their wounds, but the end is coming. What will you tell God at the Judgment if you have

left? How will you justify your move? Do you feel He will accept you because of who you are? First Peter 4:7 tells us, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

Fit for Destruction

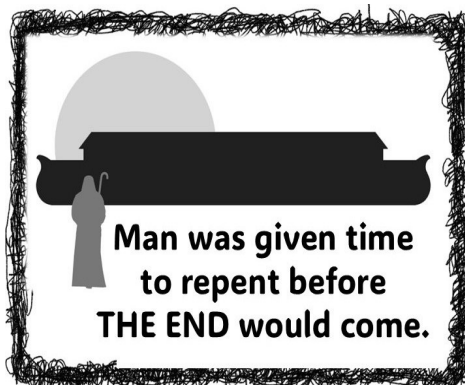
People were enjoying themselves before the Flood. Genesis 6:1-4 reads: "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."

"It came to pass"—time had moved on to the next happenings. The population had multiplied, and so had the sin. Again, verse 2 reveals, "That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." Commentaries differ in their explanations of this verse. It is *not* talking about angels, or heavenly beings, marrying earthly women.

In Matthew 22:30, Jesus said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." Mark 12:25 states, "For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven [angels do not marry]." Luke 20:35 says, "But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resur-

rection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage." Since the angels do not marry, their number remains the same.

Some generations of people came from Seth. Genesis 4:26 says, "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." Another generation came from Cain. Verse 19 reads, "And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah." Here was the first mention of polygamy in the Bible. Again, Genesis 6:2 tells us men "took them wives of all which they chose." Mixed beliefs produce something. Out of those marriages came wickedness to the place where the people became fit for destruction. Think about that.



Genesis 6:5-6 states: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." The earth was being replenished with violence and sin. God repented, or was sorry, because men had changed and become very wicked. (God did not change.) Men apostatized from the right way. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (verse 8). God used Noah to warn the people. Man was

given time to repent before the end would come. Only eight people were saved from the Flood because of the righteousness of one man.

A Spirit of Strong Delusion

It is dangerous to know the Lord and then turn away from Him. Second Peter 2:20 reads, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."

Have you noticed how sin works? It always works contrary to what the Scriptures tell you, saying: "Maybe I'm not serving God as I should, but I'm not going back to the way I was before. I'm not going to do the same things I did then." I had that in mind once when I backslid, but I did worse. Once you have tasted the good things of God, the world will never satisfy if you turn back to it.

In Luke 17:26-27, Jesus said: "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all." What was happening in Noah's day? The Book of Genesis says wickedness was great, but the Book of Luke says they were eating, drinking, and marrying.

Wickedness had so overtaken the people in Noah's day that they felt secure. They were living what they thought was an everyday life. Today, ones feel secure and untroubled about their lifestyles. They continue working, eating, drinking, and having a good time. The end came to those in Noah's day, just like it will any day now when the Lord says it is

enough.

Many so-called Christians have no problem dressing like the world and going to worldly events. They feel they are as secure as the Christian who has denied himself those things. What has happened? Where did all their fervor for the work of God go? Why do some people so easily divide today? They can leave a Church of God congregation and still consider themselves members of God's church in good standing.

At funeral services, many look into the casket unmoved. Their spirits have changed. They can fake it, but something is different about them. The Bible tells us in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth [it means more than just not loving the Bible], that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

Some people become deceived, thinking they are right when they are wrong. Others can see it, but they cannot. It is happening to many people today. We read in 1 Timothy 4:1, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed [attention] to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." When ones leave a congregation, often they work overtime to get others to leave too because they are under a spirit of strong delusion. People give heed to seducing spirits first before they change their beliefs about certain doctrines.

In Noah's day, the people were secure in their wickedness. They went right on eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage. The Bible says *all* their thoughts and imaginations were wicked. Yet when their condition was revealed, it did not faze

them. Second Peter 2:5 says, "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly." The people in Noah's day were considered ungodly. They refused divine protection, and the door to the ark was shut. Noah did not shut it; his sons did not shut it; God shut it!

Genesis 7:13-16 reads: "In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the LORD shut him in."

In Revelation 3:8, Jesus said, "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Jesus has control of the door. People were very busy before the Flood. They continued to live their normal lifestyles while wickedness controlled their hearts to the point that they were unfit to remain on the earth. When the end came, they perished without God. They were lost forever. The faithfulness of God sent a preacher to turn them back to righteousness, but they refused.

The Sin of Sodom

We can read about other people who were unprepared when the end came. In Luke 17:28-30, Jesus said: "Likewise also as it

was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

Luke penned something about both Noah's day and Lot's day. Some things they were involved in were necessary, such as eating, drinking, buying, selling, and marrying. We are engaged in the same things while on this earth. Yet they were so wrapped up in living that they had no time for God. Luke did not say they were in the bar-rooms, but he did say they were overwhelmed with necessary things.

Ezekiel 16:49 reads, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." The city of Sodom had everything it needed. Genesis 13:10 says, "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar."

Sodom was well off. They had "fulness of bread" but were not about to share it with others. Sodom was also filled with pride, which always leads to destruction. All these attributes led to other sins that were prevalent in Sodom. Whatever was going on in Sodom got God's attention. Genesis 18:20-21 states, "And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." The Lord said

their sin was "very grievous."

Genesis 19:1-11 states: "And there came two angels [representing the Word and the Spirit] to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

"And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

"And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied them-



selves to find the door."

They were eating, drinking, buying, selling, and building, but they had no time for God, which can lead to grievous sins. The sin of homosexuality was prevalent in Sodom. Today, we have an organization called the LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual). They got their start in Sodom. It is nothing new. "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Our nation is full of these sexual sins, but just like Sodom, it will come to an end. These sins are widely accepted and labeled as another lifestyle. The newspapers and tabloids call adultery an affair, but the Bible calls it adultery. What happened to Sodom, the land with "fullness of bread"?

The Bible tells us in Genesis 19:27-29: "And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD: And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt."

Will You Be Ready?

An end is coming for every earthly life. We know not when the end will be for us, but death is on our trail. Second Peter 3:9-12 reads: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" God took out the inhabitants of this world in the Book of Genesis with water. The next time, everything will be destroyed by fire.

What will you do in the end thereof? The child of God will be ready. There is only one way (not a dozen ways) to prepare. It is through repentance and the forsaking of sin. Some have never publicly displayed repentance. They refuse to bow at an altar to pray because of pride or embarrassment. An altar does not save anyone, but it is a convenient place to kneel and pray. The true Altar is Jesus Christ.

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). Just think: God said He would be ashamed of anyone who is ashamed of Him.

Thank God, there is forgiveness for every sin, whether it be the sin of Sodom, the sin of drunkenness, or the sin of using drugs. A change can take place in an individual's life. "The end is coming" does not always move people. It did not move the people before the Flood or the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is nothing new for people to be unmoved by the message today. Many cannot see the extreme wickedness in our country. Something is wrong with their discernment.

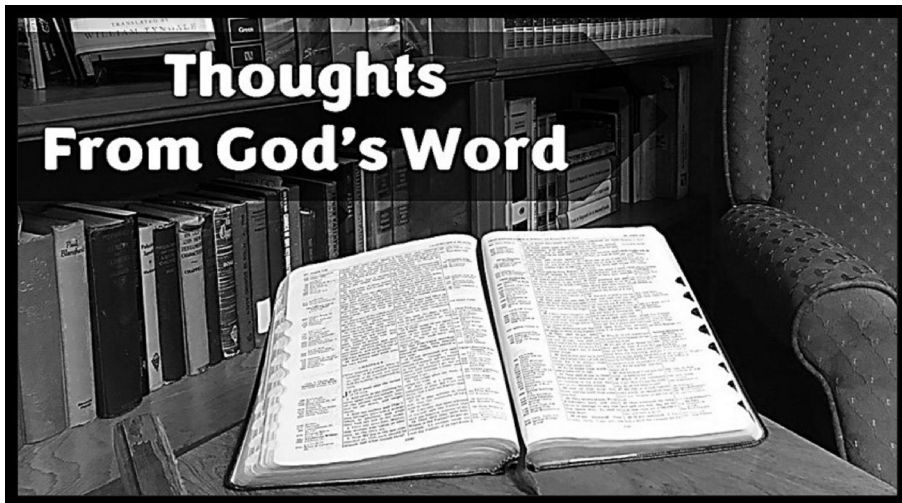
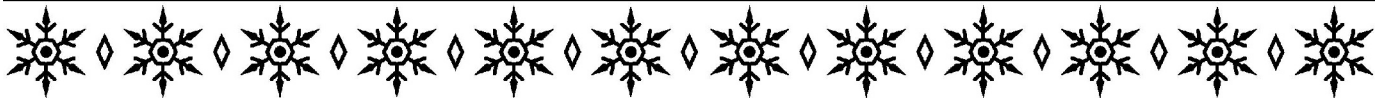
Jeremiah asked a question, and we will all answer it someday. "What will ye do in the end thereof?" Noah's preaching only moved his family. The angels delivered Lot out of Sodom because he was akin to Abraham. His daughters came with him, but his wife "looked back" and "became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26). The cry went out that God would destroy Sodom, but it moved no one.

Ministers preach about the end of time today, but the fear of God has been lifted from people,

as it was in Sodom's day and in the days of Noah. They were too busy with the cares of this life, and the day of destruction overtook them. You would be wise to be honest and ask God to search your heart to see if anything could cause you to be unprepared for the end of your life.

(Compact Disc TR-3120)

Brother Roger L. Decker is the pastor of the Church of God in Newark, OH.



Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

1 Peter 5:7

Have you ever woke up in the morning, looked out your window, and seen the sky covered in a mass of clouds so thick that even the sun's rays could not pierce through? You knew the sun was there even though you could not see it. Sometimes, our lives are covered with clouds of doubts and fears, but we know

the Son of God is still there, even though we cannot see Him. Our faith pierces through those clouds of doubts and fears, and we see the Lord is still with us, He has not forgotten us, and He cares about what is going on in our lives—the things that affect us.

There is a song entitled "Does Jesus Care?" The devil would have you believe that if Jesus cares for you, you would not be going through all these trials,

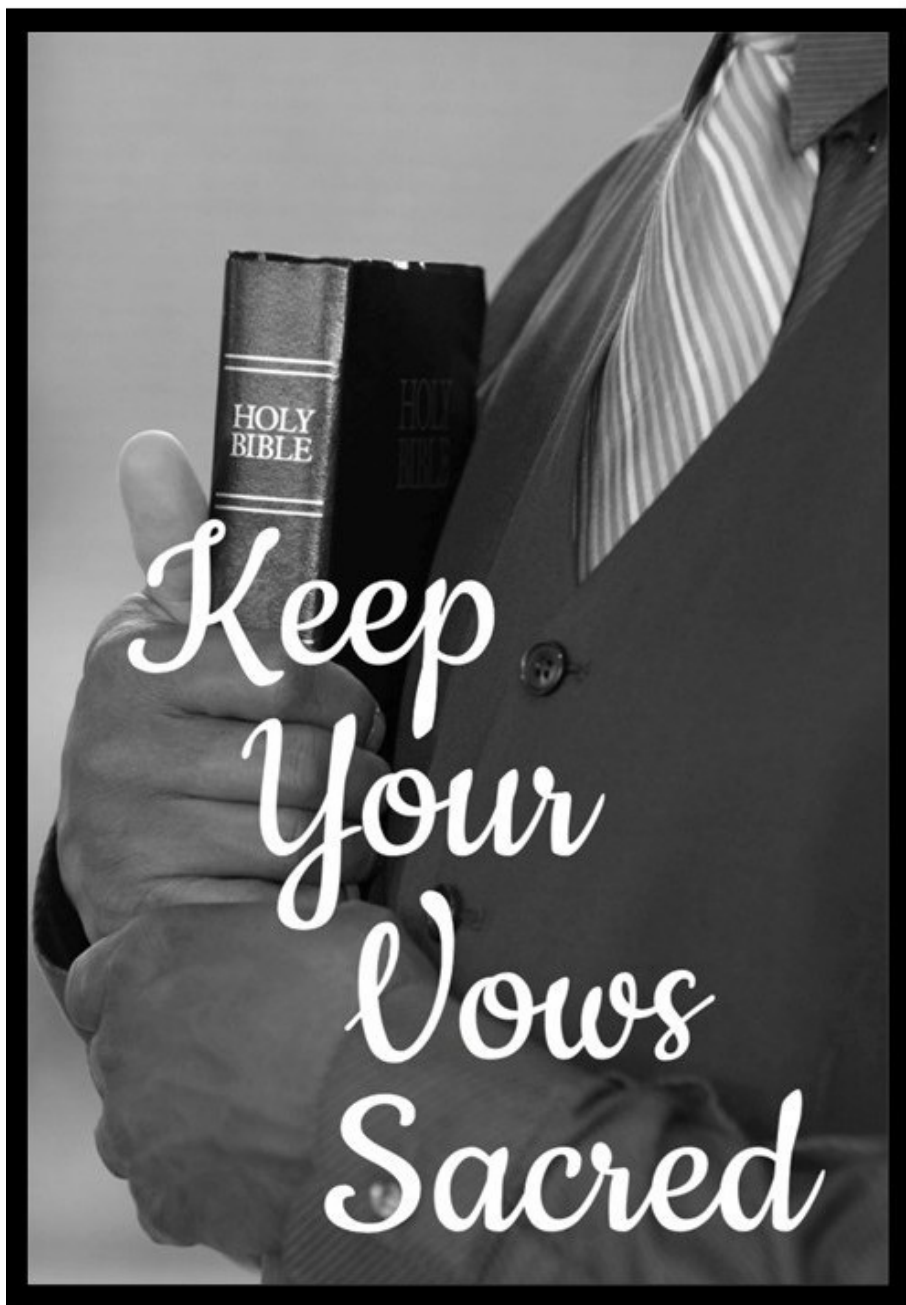
tests, sicknesses, and afflictions. Yes, Jesus does care! We need not go through these things alone. Jesus is right there giving us the grace to go through and come out with victory.

There are three ways God works when you are in an affliction: (1) He will heal you, (2) He will give you the grace to go through whatever comes your way, or (3) He will use the affliction to bring you closer to Him. Whichever way He chooses, we are winners!

Our job is to believe He can heal us, trust He will bring us through whatever comes our way, and have confidence that we have lived a holy life and are ready to meet Him if He calls us home. Psalm 84:11 says, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

Sister Susan Hogan

Sister Susan Hogan attends the Church of God in Newark, OH.



Brother E. David Stegmeier

1 Ecclesiastes 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a

fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

As I studied for this message, I recalled the second verse to the song, "Is Not This the Land of Beulah."

The songwriter said, "I can see far down the mountain, Where I wandered weary years. Often hindered in my journey By the ghosts of doubts and fears; Broken vows and disappointments Thickly sprinkled all the way, But the Spirit led, unerring, To the land I hold today." There is no reason to flounder, make mistakes, or go to a dead end if you listen and are cognizant of the Spirit of God. Sometimes He speaks so softly, we have to ponder, deliberate, stop, and listen carefully.

Matthew 26:30-35 states: "And when they [Jesus and His eleven disciples] had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples."

Peter's Presumptuous Promise

In Matthew 11:6, Jesus said, "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Many things about Christ, His ways, and the church are offensive to people. We must walk a lowly, humble path to follow Christ. One beautiful song says, "Humble thyself to walk with God." Too many people are unwilling to humble themselves at an altar of prayer. The flesh must be crucified. Too many people want to live after the flesh and make all their decisions based on what pleases the flesh.

The Lord's teachings are strict. They require implicit obedience in all areas of our lives. Many people think they are getting by. They may do everything right but neglect one point. James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." If you are not one hundred percent obedient, you are disobedient. We may have to undergo some suffering, and that is offensive to some people. We must be willing to endure and suffer hardships. Parents, do not make life too easy for your children because they will expect things and become unhappy if they do not receive them. You will do them a great injustice.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus told His disciples about His mission and the suffering He would undergo. Because of fear and to avoid any suffering, His disciples would all forsake Him. However, He did not forsake them. What a friend! Could you ask for a better friend than Jesus? Peter hastily promised the Lord that even though others might forsake Him, he would never desert Him. Jesus warned Peter that the "never" would be very short-lived. That night, before the "cock crow," Peter denied the Lord three times. In his vow, Peter said, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." All the disciples promised the same.

I realize Peter and the disciples lacked the grace of God, but sometimes promises are made too quickly; vows are exchanged impetuously or impulsively, without thinking them through. The marriage vows are very serious, yet people want to water them down. *Impetuously* means "done in impulse; made hastily or rashly." Often, promises and vows are made without sincere thought or great deliberation. In our lifetimes, most of us have made promises and exchanged

vows. Some have made promises that have cost them dearly. Have you ever made a promise that you regretted?

The Cost of a Vow

Years ago, in my zeal to build a congregation, I did something foolish. A young couple came to our congregation with five children. The father had been delivered from drugs, alcohol, and deep sin. He said: "I have no credit, Pastor Stegmeier. Would you sign for me on a loan to get a car?" I signed the loan, and he paid for the car. He was an excellent carpenter.

Then, the young man said: "Brother Stegmeier, I would like to buy a new car, but I have no credit. Would you sign for a loan again for me?" I signed again. He backslid, left his wife and five children, and I was left paying for that new car. I had more zeal than wisdom, but God helped me. I had given my word, and I followed through. Sometimes, vows cost us something.

Proverbs 6:1-2 says, "My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, Thou art snared [trapped] with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth." That is good practical wisdom. Verses 1-5 in the *New Living Translation* state: "My child, if you have put up security for a friend's debt or agreed to guarantee the debt of a stranger—if you have trapped yourself by your agreement and are caught by what you said—follow my advice and save yourself, for you have placed yourself at your friend's mercy. Now swallow your pride; go and beg to have your name erased. Don't put it off; do it now! Don't rest until you do. Save yourself like a gazelle escaping from a hunter, like a bird fleeing from a net."

Judges 11:30-31 reads, "And

Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." God delivered Israel, and the first thing that came out of Jephthah's house was his only daughter.

Verses 34-36 state: "And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth." God hears our promises. Once you make a vow to God, you cannot go back on it.

Before making a vow, promise, or strong statement, look to God for help and direction. "God, if it be Your will, by Your grace." In James 4:15, James instructed, "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." It is unwise to make rash promises and bold statements. It is dangerous to make yourself liable for someone else's debt. If the other person is unable to pay, you must assume his debt. By making rash promises, you may fall into a trap of your own making. We must be completely sincere when we make a promise or vow, realizing we are responsible. We, as the Church of God, above all people on the earth, are the most responsible.

In Numbers 30:2, Moses wrote, "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." Psalm 76:11 says, "Vow, and pay unto the LORD your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared."

A Commitment to God

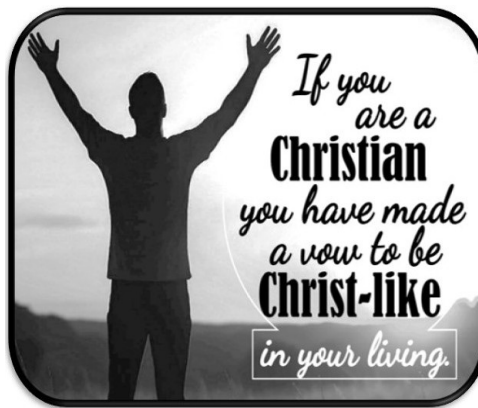
Psalm 61:5 and 8 reads: "For thou, O God, hast heard my vows So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows." As Christians, we have made a solemn promise, pledge, and commitment to God to follow Him wherever He leads. We have chosen to surrender our lives to God. If you are a Christian, your life is not your own. You have made a vow to be Christ-like in your living.

In 1 Peter 1:15-16, Peter said, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." Moses told God's people of that day that it was a sin to make a vow and then fail to perform it. Some feel tempted to smoke, drink, and carry on. Neglecting the house of worship is a sin. Making promises, flippantly, impetuously, thoughtlessly, and hurriedly can become a sin.

In Deuteronomy 23:21-23, Moses said: "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with

thy mouth."

Hannah made a vow to give her little child to the Lord. (All our children should be given to the Lord. God gave them to us, and we should give them back to Him.) First Samuel 1:11 states, "And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head." Hannah kept her promise.



When I was a child growing up in the Church of God, I listened to people, and I remembered many who said: "I am serving God no matter what. I will never go back on the Lord." An old Sunday school teacher I had would quietly say, "By the grace of God." B. E. Warren wrote a song in our hymnal called "By the Grace of God."

*By the grace of God I am saved today,
I will walk by faith in the narrow way;
I will trust His grace to preserve my soul,
I will rest secure while the billows roll.*

*By the grace of God I will live for Him,
I will trust His power to keep from sin;*

*I will never doubt, but resist the foe,
I will grow in grace as I onward go.*

*By the grace of God I will never yield
To the tempter's pow'r, but with sword and shield
I'll defeat the foe with an ardor strong,
In the name of Christ sing the victor's song.*

*By the grace of God I will testify,
I will watch and pray as the moments fly,
I will live for Him in despite of all,
I will hear and heed the Redeemer's call.*

*By the grace of God I will never fear;
What can harm my soul when the Lord is near?
If I keep low down in humility,
If I walk by faith He'll abide with me.*

*By the grace of God I will keep my eyes
On the Lord alone and the promised prize,
I will bear all things in His precious name,
I will trust His grace and His promise claim.*

The chorus of another song says, "I will follow Thee, my Savior, Thou didst shed Thy blood for me; And tho' all men should forsake Thee, By Thy grace I'll follow Thee." We should be careful and keep from making rash, hasty vows in our prayers or in our speech. We should use caution when making promises to God, our children, and others. We should be careful to refrain from compulsive, irrational talk.

In Ecclesiastes 5:3, Solomon wrote, "A fool's voice is known by multitude of words." If you are quiet, you learn more. Brother Emerson Wilson said, "God gave you one tongue and two ears so you could listen twice as much as you speak." Someone said, "Just as a hyperactive mind

often produces wild dreams, so a hyperactive mouth produces a torrent of foolish words." Our Scripture text says, "Let thy words be few." Alexander Pope said, "Words are like leaves, and where they most abound, much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found." People who have much to say usually have little sense of what they say.

The Danger of Broken Vows

Have you ever been in a tight spot or difficult place and made a promise to God: "Lord, if You heal me, I will testify"; "Lord, if You send me a thousand dollars, I will pay the debt I owe"; or "Lord, if You help me out of this difficult problem, I will serve You the rest of my life"? Some men say to a woman, "If you marry me, I will be the best husband I can be." However, when the vows have been consummated, the tendency is to ignore and forget them.

The psalmist emphasized the importance of making good on our vows as quickly as possible, lest we forget them. If we delay, there is a danger we may never fulfill them. Psalm 66:13-14 reads, "I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows, Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble."

The men on the ship with Jonah were tossed and driven by the winds and the storm. When they threw Jonah overboard, the sea became calm, and they made solemn promises to God. Jonah 1:16 says, "Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows." It is not wrong to make a vow when you are in trouble, but be sure to do your best to fulfill it. Vows are serious.

In the belly of the whale, Jonah remembered the vows he had made to God. In Jonah 2:9, he said: "But I will sacrifice unto

thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." After you make promises and pledges to God, you need to hasten to fulfill them. If not, you may forget and suffer for it. Broken promises and unpaid vows may haunt you someday. Jonah got out of the whale's belly and fulfilled his promise to God. Through him, God saved a condemned city because they repented.

God reminded Jacob of a vow he had made earlier in his life when he fled from his angry brother, Esau. Genesis 31:13 states, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred."

Our financial obligations are vows that should be kept. If you sign a contract for a loan or an account, you are making a vow to pay that bill, whether it is for electricity, water, gas, or a house. Obeying the vow of giving God the tenth of all we have will bless and reward us. Malachi 3:10 says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

The seriousness of breaking a vow is recorded in the life history of Ananias and Sapphira. They promised to give the disciples the entire price of the land they sold, but they kept back a portion of it for themselves. They lied about their vow, and as a result, they died (Acts, Chapter 5).

Second Timothy 3:1-5 reads: "This know also, that in the last days perilous [dangerous] times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves [I want

what I want— me, myself, and I], covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent [no self-control], fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." Paul said "trucebreakers." A *truce* is "an agreement or contract." As Christians, we are to keep our word.

The Marriage Vows

Many people do not want to exchange marriage vows today. If they do, they want the vows watered down or omitted. I have performed many marriages. Some couples ask me: "What is included in the vows? Can we write our own?" Edward Gibbon, who wrote *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, said the main contributor to the demise [fall] of the Roman Empire was the loss of the sacredness of marriage and the divorces that resulted.

We desire to please God and establish a strong witness for God; therefore, we need to take our marriage covenant seriously. I can honestly say I have never sinned against my wife, mentally or physically. Did you know you can sin against your companion in your mind? I fear God. I want a strong relationship with Him, and that takes a lot of discipline.

Frank Keating, a governor of Oklahoma, once said, "It's easier to get out of a marriage contract with children than it is to get out of a Tupperware contract." That is frightening. Where are our values? What do we value above our marriage? I read that the divorce rate in the church [not the true congregations of the Church of God] now exceeds that of the secular culture. Mormons

boast that they have the secret to solid marriages, but they have the greatest number of divorces. Our marriage vows should be taken seriously.

I preach a lot on the home because if our homes are weak, the church will become weak. The responsibilities that go along with marriage should be enumerated. We must keep our minds on what God requires of us. Before I perform a marriage, I give a charge. I want to read our wedding vows that my wife and I repeated from an old marriage manual. Brother Emerson Wilson married us, and this was said.

"David Stegmeier, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together after God's holy ordinance, in the holy state of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor her, and keep her in sickness and in health, forsaking all others, keeping only unto her for as long as you both shall live?"

I said, "I will."

"Millie Prior, wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together after God's holy ordinance, in the holy state of matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honor him, and keep him in sickness and health, forsaking all others, keeping only unto him for as long as you both shall live?"

She said, "I will."

Brother Wilson said to me: "Repeat after me. I, David Stegmeier, take thee, Millie Prior, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, to love and to cherish till death do us part according to God's holy ordinances, and thereto I pledge thee my troth [or I promise you]."

Brother Wilson turned to my wife and said: "Repeat after me. I, Millie Prior, take thee, David Stegmeier, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold



from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, to love and to cherish till death do us part according to God's holy ordinances, and thereto I pledge thee my troth [or I promise you]."

We often quote the words Ruth spoke to her mother-in-law, Naomi, in Ruth 1:16-17, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

Marriage vows are made in the sight of Heaven. If annulled, there will be grave consequences. You may lose the soul of a child because of it. Parents have a responsibility. Sin has a price to pay. We may plead and cry out to God for mercy, but God may take vengeance. We must keep our vows. The rule is to be very careful about allowing our words to lead us into sin by failing to follow through with a promise we made to God or others. Some try to excuse themselves by saying, "Oh, I did not really mean what I said." If you said it, God will hold you responsible.

Faithfully Keeping the Charge

I thought about the vows I made to preach the Gospel. Sometimes, it has been extremely difficult. Ezekiel 3:17 says, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." I have had to deal strongly with people because I have a responsibility to warn them.

Isaiah 62:6 reads, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence." My children sometimes said, "Dad, you have told me that before." Sometimes we have to repeat ourselves. Jeremiah 6:17 states: "Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken."

You have a responsibility to attend the worship services if you are able. Some say, "If I do not come, I will not be held responsible for what I do not hear." You are responsible! Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." The house of worship helps us to grow. We can see what we need to work on to better ourselves. Jeremiah 3:15 reads, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

First Peter 5:2 says, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." The *New Living Translation* says: "Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly – not

for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God."

I faithfully do my best to keep the charge God has given me. When life is over, I will testify with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

By the grace of God, my wife

and I try to be good witnesses in our community. You need to be a good witness in your community. Our sentiments should be found in Psalm 22:25. David wrote, "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him." Is there a vow you have left unpaid or unmade? Ask God to help you. Psalm 116:18-19 says, "I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD."

Job 22:27 states, "Thou shalt

make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows." Have you been faithful in keeping your promises to God? Have you been faithful in keeping your promises to others, such as your children, spouse, or coworkers? If you need help in any of these areas, now is a good time to pray.

(Compact Disc TR-738M)

Brother E. David Stegmeier was the pastor of the Church of God in Canby, OR. He went to be with the Lord on March 13, 2024.



- *What makes your prayer life more consistent?*
- *How do you keep your thoughts from wandering?*
- *How do you remember who or what to pray for?*
- *What is the purpose of prayer when God already knows what you need?*
- *What happens when you skip praying?*

SISTER CARLEIGH DECKER

Philippians 4:6 says, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything" (*New Living Translation*). I struggle with this in my personal prayer life for various reasons. I procrastinate a lot. If I do not want to do something now, I wait and

might never get to it that day. I love music, so I almost always listen to it in my room. I do not want to pray and listen to music at the same time because that is distracting. If I do not want to stop listening to music, I keep it playing and wait to pray. Or, I may look at my phone, and an hour will go by.

Even though we may struggle with our prayer life, it is still important to maintain and keep it consistent. During an August camp meeting, Sister Almeda Cummings spoke about her calling. One thing she said that stuck out to me was, "You need to pray every day to stay saved." So how can you make your prayer life more consistent? First Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without

ceasing." Romans 12:12 says, "Pray at all times" (*International Children's Bible*). These Scriptures tell us to never stop praying.

There are ways we can make our prayer life more consistent. We should pray at least once a day. It takes forty-five days to build a habit. So, praying at least once a day for forty-five days will make you more consistent. I pray in the morning when I get ready for school or as I go to bed. I have Bible apps to remind me. Even if I do not stop at that moment and pray, it still reminds me to pray. I also pray a lot in my head, especially at school.

One Friday night, my friend and I had a little situation at a football game. Our team won, so we were all excited. The whole

student section ran onto the field for the alma mater, and my friend said, "I lost my car keys." So, to make a long story short, we spent thirty minutes after the game looking for her car keys. We checked the concession booth and the press box and asked everybody if they had seen them, but we could not find her car keys. So I told her I would check the field one more time, and by then everyone was leaving.

My friend asked this guy, who was running laps around the football field, "Can you help us find my car keys?" and he ended up finding them. My friend and I were both praying in our heads. We did not kneel in the middle of the field to pray. We could have, but we prayed in our heads. I have learned that many prayers I pray in my head are answered. Prayers in your head can be just as effective as verbal prayers.

It can also be hard to remember who and what to pray for. We have such a big congregation. I like to visualize the church when I pray. "This person and that person, who sit in various sections of the congregation, need help." Visualizing the whole church helps me.

What is the purpose of prayer when God already knows what you need? It gives you a deeper personal relationship with God. It gives me peace when I pray for something. If something is bothering me, and I pray about it, I feel better because now I know God knows and will work it out. It takes a load off my mind. When I skip praying, my first thought when I wake up is, "I didn't pray last night." I feel bad and dread it. Eventually, the fear of, "Am I even saved anymore?" starts working on me.

Sometimes, it feels like our prayers are not being answered, but God always answers—He either says yes, no, or not yet. A few years ago, I prayed for my

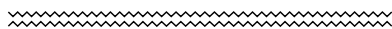
hearing to improve, and it did, a little bit, but it did not rule out the need for a hearing aid. I thought I would have to accept it, but God answered my prayer. God still answers prayer, but He answers it according to His timing. So, it is important to keep praying, and in His time, He will answer in His way.

The three main things I want you to get are:

(1) Struggling in your life is not uncommon. If you are struggling, you can get the help you need through prayer.

(2) It is important to say at least one prayer throughout the day. If you start your day with a prayer, you will become more consistent and better at praying.

(3) God answers prayer.



SISTER PERSEUS DECKER

Philippians 4:6 reads, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Prayer is how we communicate with God. It is like talking to your best friend. God gives us good thoughts, songs, Scriptures, and so many other things to think about. When we are down, praying is how we can ask Him to help us through it. When we are sick or injured, we can ask God to heal us or give us the grace to go through it.

Praying every day is how we can have a consistent prayer life. One children's song has these words: "*Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll have more power.*" Every day brings new challenges or things to consider. It may bring sickness, injuries (minor or severe), bad weather,

or power outages.

When you do not know what to pray about each day, think about what is happening or what just happened. Did your computer stop working? Have you lost something very important to you? Have you gotten sick? Are your grades failing? These questions and many more are things you can pray about each day.

Here are some examples of what we can pray about. Once, my mom and I were driving home, and it was a forty-minute drive. We almost had an accident in our new van, but God protected us. Protection is something we should pray for. Without His protection, where would we be today?

A few years ago, we were running out of food and could not afford to go to the grocery store. One day, we came home, and Mom was crying. We did not know why she was crying until we learned someone sent an encouraging note, then wrote, "Open the shed." They had put food in Dad's wagon in the shed near our house. I believe God visited us and provided us with food. I imagine God taking His heavenly truck or van, with some Gospel music playing, to the grocery store and buying us food. It is important to thank God for our food and to continue praying for Him to provide for our needs.

When I play the piano at church, I can get pretty nervous. My dad and I pray for no mistakes and that it will be for the glory of God, not for myself. First Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." When we pray every day, we are showing God that we really love Him. Praying to Him is like talking to a very close friend. He understands what we go through each day.

How can we keep our thoughts from wandering? There are definitely many distractions as we go about the day, such as technology and the internet. We

can end up on our phones for longer than we should, and I struggle with this too. We should make sure we keep every device off or close out anything that might send notifications, so we do not get distracted.

It would be good to find a quiet place to pray, which may be hard when you live in a house full of kids. The appropriate time to read your Bible and pray is in the morning (even though you may not feel like it) because you are more likely to focus. During the day, there can be more noise and distractions in the house. The best place to go could be a closet or room where you can shut the door. You can go outside. It may help you focus on praying without being distracted by what is going on inside the house.

How can we remember who or what to pray for? Not everyone can memorize every prayer

request shared in the church services or in chat groups. We can write them down. We can use a prayer journal, a piece of paper, a chalkboard, or any other writing surface.

What is the purpose of praying when God knows our needs and wants? God wants us to tell Him what we need or want because He wants to hear from us, kind of like our best friends. Our friends want to hear from us. God is a spiritual friend. We cannot physically see Him, but we can feel Him in our hearts.

What happens when you skip prayer? Imagine that you have been talking to your best friend ever since you met them. Then, you decide not to speak to that friend. Maybe you got busy or no longer wanted to talk to them. Your friend might wonder why and ask you, "Hey, what is going on?" That happens when you skip praying. Prayer is talking to

God. If you fail to pray, you will get weak in your faith and your experience with God, and eventually, you will backslide.

God wants us to continue talking to Him. You can talk to Him about anything—good things, what you want to do today, or your desires. He can help you with an instrument you want to play. You can ask Him for advice or help in finding something you lost.

God can do anything. One song says, "*God can do anything but fail.*" So, we should not skip praying. Take note of all the essentials in your prayer life. Talk to God about anything. Another song says, "*Nothing is too difficult for God.*" It is like talking to a friend who knows what is best.

Sister Carleigh Decker and Sister Perseus Decker are members of the Church of God youth group in Newark, OH.

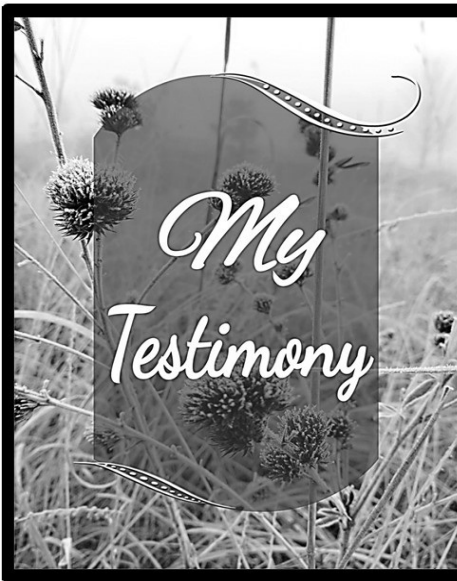
Heart-Seekers

The amount of loafing practiced by the average Christian in spiritual things would ruin a concert pianist if he allowed himself to do the same thing in the field of music. The idle puttering around that we see in church circles would end the career of a big-league pitcher in one week. No scientist could solve his exacting problem if he took as little interest in it as the rank and file of Christians take in the art of being holy. The nation whose soldiers were as soft and undisciplined as the soldiers of the churches would be conquered by the first enemy that attacked it.

Triumphs are not won by men in easy chairs. Success is costly. If we would progress spiritually, we must separate ourselves unto the things of God and concentrate upon them to the exclusion of a thousand things the worldly man considers important. We must cultivate God in the solitudes and the silence; we must make the Kingdom of God the sphere of our activity and labor in it like a farmer in his field, like a miner in the earth.



A. W. Tozer



Beauty for Ashes

Sister Genny Gonzalez

I love listening to stories, and I listen to a particular podcast a lot. It features talks by Elisabeth Elliott, who was a missionary, writer, radio host, and mother. She often told stories from her own life and the lives of other missionaries. Basically, in every show, Elisabeth would start with the same phrase, and I want to share it with you: "You are loved with an everlasting love, that's what the Bible says, and underneath are the everlasting arms." I hope you remember that, even if you forget everything else.

This quote of Elisabeth's was derived from two Scriptures. The first is Jeremiah 31:3, which says, "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." The second is Deuteronomy 33:27, which says, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them."

As Elisabeth did, I want to take some time to talk with you about what I know best: my life. I want to share with you how God's mercy, grace, and love have kept me and how I became who I am today. In 2016, I came

to the Lord with a repentant heart, and I have been serving Him ever since. I am thankful for how He has kept me. Of course, there have been struggles.

To sum it up, as a child, I wanted to serve God. I remember sitting in the pew at my parents' church, thinking, "Man, all this Jesus stuff is really cool," and wanting to be part of it. That church taught you could sin more or less every day and once you were saved, you were always saved. As a little girl, I tried to be good and prayed every day. I would basically say, "Lord, I don't know what I did to sin, but whatever it was, forgive me for it." I knew in my heart there had to be something more than just saying a prayer and going on with your life as it was.

In my senior year of high school, someone invited me to the Church of God in Medina, Ohio, and, having nothing better to do, I went. I had never seen or felt anything like that service before and almost instantly fell in love with the congregation there. They really showed me a lot of compassion. Even in the short time I was with them, whenever I was not there, they would ask Sister Jen (who had initially invited me) "Hey, when's your friend coming back?" and she

would relay that message to me, which made me want to come back because I knew there were people who wanted me there.

After five months of attending services at the Medina Church of God, I learned my true spiritual condition, thanks to the preaching of the Gospel. I heard some ministers use the word "backslider." I thought, "What is a backslider?" I do not really remember them saying what a backslider is, but God showed me that, even though I did my best, it was not enough. He gave me a repentant heart, and I am thankful for how He moved on me, showing me the truth and leading me to it. I learned I was a sinner, I had lost my salvation, and I needed to repent; and I did just that.

About a year later, the Lord prompted me to move to Newark, Ohio. People would ask me, "What brought you to Newark?" and I would say, "For church; God brought me here to be a part of the Newark congregation." I found lots of love and support in Newark and had the luxury of learning from some of the absolute best teachers in the world (in my opinion). For that, I am extremely thankful. I have learned the truth and have come to understand it. As I grow and learn, God has really moved in my life, and I am thankful for that.

If my life were a book, it would bring us up to the chapter I am writing about, and if I were to title that chapter, I would call it "Beauty for Ashes." Isaiah 61:3 says, "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified." These few years have housed some of the greatest trials of my life, but also the absolute greatest joys. I am thankful for some

amazing friends who have been by my side. God gave me a special friend who always encourages me through trials by reminding me there will be "beauty for ashes."

Before I moved to Newark, I lived in a house with eight other people, and I was so grateful to be there. The family was absolutely wonderful to me. They were patient with me and helped me learn how to handle my emotions. Before, I only knew anger, happiness, and fear. But I started to learn frustration, peace, contentment, and all the essential emotions that happen in life.

When I moved to Newark, I went from living with eight other people to living absolutely by myself. So, I thought: "I have all this free space. I can do whatever I want." It was also really hard because I was alone for much of the time. It did not help that many of my friends were much younger. Some of my friends who were my age were at a point where they were getting married, leaving the church, or just caught up in their own world and not thinking too much about others.

I did have a few good friends, and I am thankful for Sister Helen Henry, who definitely kept me busy. She encouraged me to stay involved in what was happening in the congregation. I worked with her in the bus ministry. Before I moved, Brother Decker, the pastor, told me I should join the choir. I am thankful for those two things because involvement has kept me going. Otherwise, it would have been so easy for me to disappear in the crowd. I encourage you to get involved in some manner. Many beautiful blessings come from taking part in the work of God and can only be experienced through that.

Moving forward, my younger friends got older, and I slowly became involved with different people. Many friends came and

went, as often happens in our lives. With some, we grew apart, but others cut me off without warning. Through these difficult times, God helped me learn to encourage myself in the Lord, as David did in 1 Samuel 30:6.

I clung to the Scripture in Philippians 4:7, which says, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." I look at that Scripture and stand in awe. It says "the peace of God," not just the peace God can give us, but the peace He has. That is so beautiful, and it helped me through some very difficult times.

The way God works is absolutely beautiful. In 2021, I endured a series of very challenging trials. It was one thing after another. I do not remember when it happened, but at some point, I reached out to a sister to encourage her, and she turned around and encouraged me by referencing James 1:2-3, which says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."

So, for the sake of perspective, I will share that this series of trials included me losing one of my best friends, having to take an indefinite break from the man I was courting, enduring physical ailments, and then seeing one of my very dear friends (who was like family to me) pass away. It was extremely challenging. The series of trials I went through also holds some of my most precious memories.

I became depressed after the first wave in the series. To encourage myself in the Lord, I began to journal. I would take a sheet of paper and write one positive affirmation to myself every day, then list the people I was praying for. Through journaling, I found beauty both in encouraging myself and in reminding myself of others' afflictions.

After the second wave hit, I could no longer journal. Upon expressing that to one of my very dear friends, she told me to pick up a pencil and write this down: "To the bestest person in the world, [insert her name], to the other bestest person in the world, Genny. You have a big heart. You're not afraid to use it. You are kind and compassionate."

During camp meeting that year, I worked in the barn with Sister Karen Wilks every morning with the children. She would look at me because she knew what had happened, and she would ask me how it was going. I would hang my head, shake it, and start crying. I sat beside her, and she consoled me as I cried. It is absolutely beautiful how God allowed me to find comfort in the love these two friends shared with me.

Eventually, I got to the point where I was ready to throw in the towel. I was in tears as I was driving to a friend's house. Before going in, I tried to pull myself together. I wiped my eyes, took a breath, and then I went in. She looked at me and asked if I was okay. I told her I was fine. We talked for a moment, then she looked at me again and said, "Are you sure you're okay, because you look to me like you have been crying?"

I sat down in the chair and said, "That's because I have been crying." So naturally, she asked me what was wrong. I could only utter the words to express how the devil was trying to get me, then I flopped on the floor, saying, "I just need to pray." She got out of her chair, and we were both just sitting there on the floor, crying and praying. That is one of my most precious memories. We prayed and pulled ourselves together.

One of the most beautiful things in this life is having friends who will pray with you in the hard times and encourage

you in the good times. Christ is that friend who would do that for us. He would pray with us, encourage us, and help us along. These moments I shared exemplify Galatians 6:2. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Throughout this time of discouragement, I found strength and hope in going on what I would call a "Date with Dad." I did this often. I set aside time to sit and be in the presence of God, just as if He were sitting across the table from me. One of my favorite places to do this was in Buckeye Lake, Ohio. I would ride my bike, do a little exercise, and get rid of all the negative emotions, or at least some of them. Then I would find a good place to stop (which was almost always the same spot) and pull out a blanket, my Bible, notebook, and put in my earbuds to listen to Gospel music. I would sit and be with God and let Him lead me in my studies. There, He taught me what it is like to be in the palm of His hand. He taught me about love and compassion, and so many other things. It was in those beautiful moments that I really came to understand God's love for me.

When we get caught up in our day-to-day tasks, we can get distracted. It is essential for our spiritual health to spend time with God. If you cannot drive to

a local coffee shop or to the lake, you can find a quiet corner in your house and shut everything else out. Find a place without distractions, where you can just exist. I had to leave my apartment to be free from distractions.

It reminds me of the story of Mary and Martha. Martha was laboring while her sister Mary "sat at Jesus' feet" (Luke 10:39). Martha complained to Jesus about how Mary did not help her, and she was working so hard. Mary was just existing. In verse 42, Jesus said, "But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." The "good part" of our lives is when we spend time sitting at the feet of Jesus.

In my bedroom, I have a little mural I painted that says, "Sitting at the feet of Jesus, oh what peace I often find." It serves as a constant reminder to me. I cannot help but think about the second verse to the song, "Sitting at the Feet of Jesus." It says: "*Sitting at the feet of Jesus, Where can mortal be more blest? There I lay my sins and sorrows, And, when weary, find sweet rest: Sitting at the feet of Jesus, There I love to weep and pray; While I from His fullness gather Grace and comfort ev'ry day.*"

The most beautiful thing of all is that hindsight is 20/20. I have gone through a lot of hurt and heartache, as I am sure we

all have experienced, because life brings trials. The Bible says we will be persecuted for His name's sake. I can look back and see the greater picture. One day, we will have a greater understanding.

We can all look back and thank God for having used the trials of our lives to bring us closer to Him. I stand and marvel at the beauty of what my life has become, not because of what I have done, but because I have done nothing. I just existed and let God guide me every step of the way. He brought some wonderful people into my life, some awesome cheerleaders, who are not afraid to chastise me when I am wrong, and who stand by me and hold my hand.

I still have trials, temptations, and tribulations. They will never end until we make it over to the other side. However, I have a greater sense of the Comforter who dwells within my soul. He has blessed me, strengthened me, and given me some of the absolute best friends I could ask for. He can do the same for every one of you. I can certainly say that God has given me beauty for ashes, and He can do the same for you.

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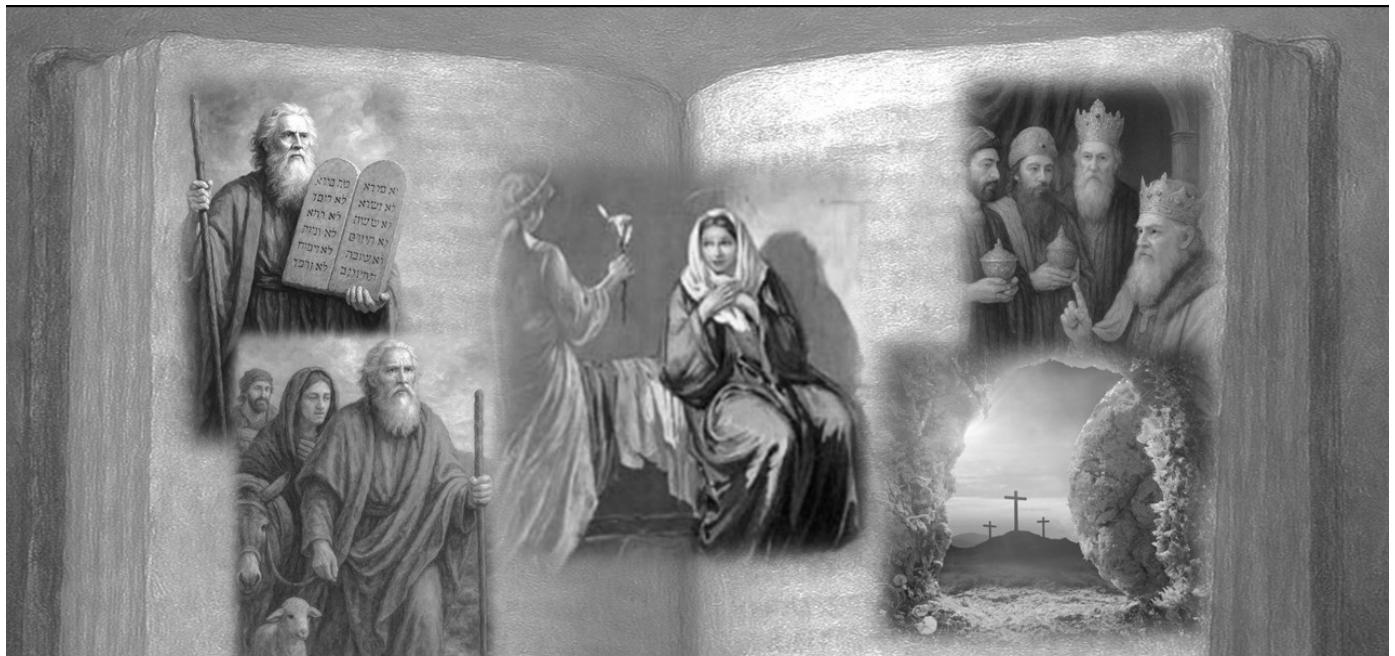


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The Gospel Effect

Brother Mike Wilks

Exodus 34:29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.

30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.

31 And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them.

32 And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai.

33 And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face.

34 But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and

spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded.

35 And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Matthew 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

The story of our Savior is the greatest story that has ever been told. You cannot wear it out because it is a reality. As a door cracks open to reveal light from the other side, Jesus came as a great light that streamed out into the darkness. God had a plan, and He wanted

mankind to know His Son had arrived. King Herod was troubled because he was a foreigner, an Edomite, and was not born a Jew. Yet he knew about the prophecies of the coming Messiah. Friend, all prophecies in the Bible will be fulfilled. One day, Jesus will split the clouds; that is a surety. I cannot tell you when. No man knows the day or the hour, but Jesus told us to watch, pray, and be ready.

As I was driving by a local high school one Sunday afternoon, I saw children playing football. I wondered, if Jesus were to come back right now, how many of those parents who took their children to play football instead of to Sunday school would be ready to meet Him? Sadly, many children are not being taught the things of God. I am so thankful I know God and was taught right from wrong. Children who have been raised in the truth ought to be thankful. If you are saved, you need to appreciate your knowledge of

Jesus Christ.

Knowledge can be either a blessing or a curse. When I was a sinner sitting in barrooms, my knowledge of God was a curse to me. I could not enjoy myself because I knew I should not have been there. Sometimes, I would look at the people around me who seemed to be having a good time. I thought, "How could they be having such a good time?" It was because they did not have the knowledge I had. We will all answer to God for our deeds. The people who carry on in sin will be held accountable for their actions.

The Importance of the Holy Spirit



Much controversy surrounds the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin. The Bible plainly states the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and overshadowed her, according to Luke 1:35. It was the greatest conception. First Corinthians 3:18 reads: "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

Many people read the Bible and try to explain it, but the carnal mind cannot interpret this Book. They think that because the Bible is translated into English, they can read it and know what God thinks, but first, they must have the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God must be dwelling within you to give you understanding. First Corinthians 2:14 states, "But the natural man receiveth not the

things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." A person can study the Word, but only the Spirit of God can bring knowledge and understanding.

When I study the Word of God, I can learn nothing on my own. God has to give me the understanding. Every minister has to be supplied with thoughts from God to preach an anointed message. Otherwise, they are mere words with no power. When God is in the message, it leaves sinners trembling, especially in the face of eternity.

Many people do not want to think about the things of God and their eternity-bound souls. They would rather watch a football game. That was me before I was saved because I wanted to have a good time. People do not think about eternity when they watch football games. When they go to the house of God, God begins to reason with them. He meets with His people and works with them, pointing out ways we need to measure up. The Gospel is the most important message anyone will ever hear.

First Corinthians 14:33 says, "God is not the author of confusion." He is the Author of power, unity, and everything else in this great Book called the Bible. He is not in division, and He will not change for anyone. In Malachi 3:6, God said, "I am the LORD, I change not." When you come into my house, you abide by my rules. I will not allow you to bring things into my home that I disapprove of. Likewise, when we come into God's house, we cannot bring things in that He disapproves of. He has the final say.

Some people ask: "What is wrong with this? Why can't I do that?" Have you talked to the Author of the Book? He is ready to give you an answer if you hon-

estly want to know. When you go before God with an honest and open heart, He will give the answers you seek. There are commandments in the Bible we need to abide by.

Many people want their own interpretations of the Bible. I am thankful for the truth. The Church of God does not live like the world and accept the world's standards. We live on a higher plane according to the Bible.

An Invitation From God

People out in the community are watching you if you profess to be a Christian. They may know where you go to church. What do they see from the way you live? Often, when people believe a certain way, you are wasting your time trying to convince them of the truth. You can present all the facts, but if Grandma told them something different, they will often ignore what you say. Living right before them and praying is the only way they will open their minds to the Gospel.

At the appointed time, God delivered His Son to the world. He is the greatest gift this world has ever known. The angels appeared to Israel's shepherds, and the star was an invitation to the "wise men from the east," who were Gentiles. God had an invitation to all from the beginning. Friend, if you are wise, you will seek God. You will look into what He desires for your life. God Almighty hung a special star in the heavens, and it caused the wise men to seek the Son of God.

Often, when a new baby is born, there are baby showers to celebrate the birth. Babies are a gift, and God's Son was a gift. God hung a star in the tapestry of heaven, unlike any other, to celebrate the birth of His Son, as if to say: "Here is My Son! Take heed to Him!" The wise men were

studying the heavens, and they saw the star. I once had a Bushnell four-hundred-power telescope. I woke up at all hours of the night to look at the stars, galaxies, and planets because they fascinated me. The "wise men from the east" were fascinated by the stars. They studied the sky and saw a very bright star. It stood out to them.

As every man and woman travels through life, something will stand out to them at some point. The truth will be revealed to them, and they will either accept it or reject it. All will be presented with a choice. You will not want to miss this wonderful star. Friend, there is only one, and it is the Church of the Living God. Some people want no part of the church. They want the world in one hand and the Scriptures in the other, but it does not work that way.

Revelation 1:20 reads: "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." The wise men addressed Jesus as a king. In Matthew 2:2, they said, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" God had revealed His truth to the Gentiles.

All Jerusalem had "the lively oracles" of God (Acts 7:38), yet they were so involved with their own rituals that they failed to observe the great star hung above them. Friend, you can get so caught up with rules and regulations that you lose the true meaning of living for God. The heart must be righteous before God will accept you as His own. Many religions today are filled with works, but they want to hold on to their sin.

What a declaration the wise men made. "We have seen his star in the east, and are come to

worship him" (Matthew 2:2). They already had it settled. A spiritual awakening had taken place, and they could sense something great was happening. Oh, how we need a spiritual awakening today!

The Gospel Cannot Be Contained

Many people are asleep spiritually. Not everyone will accept the Gospel, but we are living in a dangerous age. Many people are ignorantly blind, just drifting along, and they need to be awakened to their true condition. They seem to be unaffected by the Gospel. When I was in sin, I knew I was wrong, and it troubled me. Many people have taken in certain beliefs, and they cannot see the light of the Gospel of God.



The wise men first came to King Herod, who was called "Herod the Great." The Roman emperor Augustus was said to have made the statement, "It is better to be Herod's pig than his son." King Herod was a ruthless murderer. After the visit with the wise men, he tried to destroy the young child, Jesus. Zion was at ease when Jesus came on the scene, but the wise men wanted to worship Him. The immediate effect of the Gospel for the Jews was indifference, for Herod it was hatred, and for the wise men it was worship.

Many people today could not care less about the Gospel, or they hate it. Often, those who

hate the Church of God the most were raised in the truth or once had the glorious light of the Gospel. Now, they do all they can to tear it down. It is scary.



God set the stage a long time ago when He called Abraham. Genesis 12:1 reads, "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." Just as quietly as Christ came on the scene, Abraham left his homeland. God was working. He put a man who was called out in the midst of all the nations so they could observe God and His laws. It was no coincidence that Jerusalem was in the center of the then-known world. The heathen nations that had no knowledge of God were watching. God wanted His people to be seen as separate and holy.

The nation of Israel was planted, and when something comes from God, it cannot be contained. In 2 Timothy 2:9, Paul said, "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound." Psalm 19:4 says, "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

Friend, you cannot contain the things of God. You can try to put out the sun all you want, but it will still shine whether you like it or not. I read a myth about a hero who shot arrows at the sun to save his people from scorching heat and protect their crops from

burning. You may say, "That's ignorant." Do you know what is more ignorant? Knowing about the Living God but refusing to serve Him. The heathens had no knowledge of the true God, but we do.

We have a great responsibility. Everyone needs Jesus Christ. When you stand at the Judgment, you will be glad you served Him. People who refuse Him will be weeping and wailing because it will be too late. It behooves us to be ready for Judgment Day. Our lives can be taken from us at any time. With all the uncertainty in the world and the threat of natural disasters like volcanoes and earthquakes, why do people live so carelessly? It is almost as if they feel they will live forever.

Behind the veil of the sky, the Master Creator operates all things with precision. The sun comes up at the appointed time. Man can predict all these natural things God has placed in perfect order. It makes people feel at ease. We all take some things for granted that the Master Creator has set in motion. Our universe runs so perfectly that we do not worry about certain things. Do you worry about taking your next breath? Breathing is automatic, as is our heartbeat. We do not need to tell our hearts to beat.

The Ripple Effect

Stopping the downward spiral of mankind seems impossible, "but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). The Gospel will affect people. Water is a fluid. It has to be boiled to have heat. Gravity moves water, but by itself, water has no power—it is still. From Malachi to Matthew, the world was still. God had not publicly spoken to mankind for more than four hundred years. Envision God throwing a stone into a body of still water. That is what He did when He placed His Son on the Earth. It had a ripple



effect.

Acts 4:11 reads, "This [Jesus] is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Jesus had an impact, and the Gospel rapidly conquered the then-known world. Romans 1:8 says, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." What a statement! The Gospel rippled out because God was in it. The Apostles had power with God, and they preached in unity until the church became a great mountain on fire.

It is our responsibility to cast the Stone daily where we live so our lives can affect those in our sphere of influence. You will go places where I cannot go, and I will go places where you cannot go. When we cast the Stone daily, it will trouble the water and make people think about their souls. We are building up the kingdom or tearing it down.

Isaiah 57:20 reads, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." How do we stir the waters? There are many ways, but the best way is through prayer and fasting. We need to talk to God because we have no power within ourselves, but through the power of God. People need to be awakened. They need the waters of their lives troubled. I cannot do it in your sphere of influence, and you cannot do it in mine, but

daily we must cast this Stone in our sphere of influence to trouble the waters.

Visitation is effective. Eating a good meal with someone, showing hospitality, or taking time to visit someone who is down are all wonderful ways to work for the Lord. We must be as steady and unchangeable as our God. A strong metal like iron appears indestructible, but elements such as sunlight and moisture can oxidize it, weaken it, and break it down. More than ever in this day and age, we need the power of the Holy Ghost working in our hearts. People need to be under the oxidizing power of the Holy Spirit.

Once people feel a yearning for God, it works on them. When they see people living godly lives, a desire within them compels them to want to live the same way. They want to obtain peace in their hearts. Oh, the infinite worth of peace! Before you were saved, do you remember lying down at night and the worm of your conscience working on you? It worked on me. I would think, "If I should die tonight, I will be lost forever."

A Life Without Christ

There is nothing as epic as preaching the Gospel, for there is no greater topic in the world. Our main focus should be on the Gospel, not politics or other worldly things. Galatians 5:4 states, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." A life without Christ will have no positive effect. The Gospel was never intended to be served cold. It should be warm and inviting. After a long, hard day, a cold sandwich does not sound as good as a warm meal. If the Gospel is not served with love, it will not come across as God intended.

A diluted Gospel has no

positive effects and is dangerous. Once you dilute the Gospel, you lose everything. Many ministers preach love without judgment. Judgment preaching keeps people alive and holy. At my place of employment, there is a judgment side. If I fail to follow their rules, I could be terminated. The company I work for does not allow me to do or say anything I want while in the store. They have a protocol, and the same goes for the Gospel. When ministers dilute the Gospel, they have problems.

Neglect can dampen the effect of the Gospel. If you fail to mow your yard, it will soon be-

come evident that you are neglecting it, as it will become overgrown with weeds. The same is true spiritually. If you neglect this great salvation, you will lose your effectiveness with the people who are watching you. It sometimes takes years for people to gain confidence in you. They might disagree with what you are doing, but they will know when you are living right. Neglect can tear down your good reputation.

Time can make you sloppy in your living if you are not careful. It can cause you to get in a rut and be caught off guard. Dust can settle in your heart. If your

experience with God is not up to date, it can congest your spiritual heart. Remember the great effect of the Gospel. You can be part of something grand and wonderful. Are you concerned about your family, co-workers, and others? This world is heading towards eternity, and the majority are not ready. We all need to have a greater effect. If you see your need, God can help you. May the Lord bless you.

(Compact Disc TR-1054E)

*Brother Mike Wilks attends the
Church of God in Newark, OH.*

The Gospel According to You

There's a sweet old story
translated for me
But writ in the long, long ago,
The Gospel according to
Mark, Luke, and John
Of Christ and His mission below

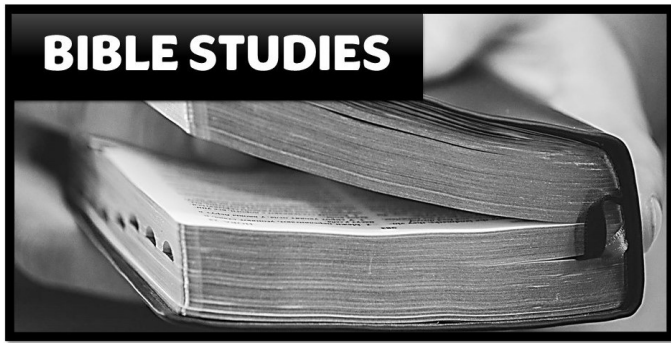
Men read and admire the Gospel
of Christ,
With its love so un failing and
true;
But what do they say and what
do they think,
Of the Gospel according to you?

'Tis a wonderful story, that
Gospel of love,
And it shines in the Christ-life
divine;
And, oh, that its truth might be
told again
In the story of your life and
mine!

Unselfishness mirrors in every
scene;
Love blossoms on every sod;
And back from its vision
The heart comes back to tell
The wonderful goodness of God.

You are writing each day a
letter to men;
Take care that the writing is true;
'Tis the only Gospel that some
men will read
The Gospel according to you.

Author Unknown



A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF THE "TWO THOUSAND AND THREE HUNDRED DAYS" (DANIEL 8:14)

Daniel 8:14 And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.

To properly understand this prophetic passage and be "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), we must view its greater context. Daniel, Chapter 8, begins with Daniel writing, "In the third year of . . . Belshazzar a vision appeared unto me." "Belshazzar [was] king of Babylon" (Daniel 7:1). Being a prophet (Matthew 24:15), the Lord especially gifted and used "Daniel [who] had understanding in all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17) to set forth several prophetic timelines. As this "vision" began (Daniel 8:1), the prophet wrote it was "after that which appeared unto me at the first." So, there is an element of repetition in the "vision" of Chapter 8.

THE MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE

In Daniel 8:3, through different representations than used previously (Daniel 2:31-40; 7:1-7), Daniel envisioned "a ram which had two horns . . . but one was higher than the other." This is reminiscent of the metallic image Nebuchadnezzar saw (Daniel, Chapter 2). That dream portrayed the "image" as having a common "breast" but two "arms" (Daniel 2:32). When Daniel related the "dream and visions of his head" (Daniel 7:1), he mentioned the "second" "beast" he saw "raised up itself on one side" (Daniel 7:5). Daniel 7:17 says, "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings [kingdoms]; as rendered by the *Septuagint*], which shall arise out of the earth."

The second kingdom that "raised up itself on one side" represents the Medo-Persian Empire, but the Persians became the kingdom that "raised up" and became more dominant. This is why Daniel 8:3 says one of the "two horns" "was higher than the other" (more dominant). Daniel 8:20 proclaims, "The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings [or 'kingdoms'] of Media and Persia."

THE GRECIAN EMPIRE

Daniel's "vision" progresses and portrays "an he goat" (Daniel 8:5) that "came from the west" (the direction from which this kingdom arose). Notice how this "he goat" is described: "touched not the ground"—this denotes swiftness. This kingdom is described in Daniel 7:6 as having the characteristic of "a leopard," which is known for its swiftness. This is because "the first king" (Daniel 8:21) of this world empire (represented by "an he goat"; Daniel 8:5) conquered the then-known world in the space of five years. It has been said that afterwards he set down and wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. Daniel 8:5 tells us the "he goat" "had a notable horn between his eyes." Daniel 8:21 says, "The rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king," or Alexander the Great, "who overthrew the Persian empire" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Daniel 11:3 refers to Alexander as "a mighty king." However, he died as a drunken sot at the age of thirty-three, proving the words of Proverbs 16:32, which say that better is "he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Alexander conquered the world, but he could not conquer himself. Upon his death, Alexander divided his Grecian Empire amongst his four generals. Daniel 8:8 informs us that "the great horn [Alexander the Great] was broken; and for it came up four notable ones." Daniel 8:22 tells us "that being broken [the 'notable horn'; Alexander] whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation." Daniel 7:6 proclaims this Grecian Empire proceeded to have "four heads." These represent Alexander's four generals: Ptolemy, Cassander, Seleucus, and Antigonus.

ANTIOCHUS IV

Daniel 8:9 declares, "And out of one of them [the 'four kingdoms' divided amongst the generals; verse 22] came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great." Sadly, here is where this passage begins to be misunderstood. The "little horn" of Chapter 8 is not related AT ALL to the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8. The "little horn" of Daniel 7:8 came up among the beast with "ten horns," representing the Roman Empire (Revelation 12:3). The "little horn" of Daniel 8:9 came out of the Grecian Empire; its origin was Grecian. The Grecian Empire preceded the Roman Empire.

Daniel 8:9 says this particular "little horn" "came" out of one of them, one of the "four kingdoms" (Daniel 8:22) that succeeded Alexander the Great. Seleucus, one of the generals and successors, established his portion of the Grecian Empire as the Seleucid Empire. This "little horn" was one of his successors—Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes. Epiphanes means "God Manifest. . . . Antiochus claimed to be Zeus incarnate" (*Biblical Archaeology Society*). Concerning the "little horn" of

Daniel 8:9, *The Daily Study Bible Series, Daniel Volume*, says, "The little horn which clearly refers to the notorious Antiochus Epiphanes." *The Biblical Archaeology Society* styles him as "The Bible's Most Notoriously Forgotten Villain."

HEATHEN ATROCITIES PUT ON THE JEWS

In general terms, Daniel 8:10-13 describes some of the heathen atrocities Antiochus Epiphanes foisted upon the people of Jerusalem and Judah. Daniel 8:11 speaks of the fact that "the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down." The writing of the First Book of Maccabees (though non-canonical and uninspired as sacred Scripture) does provide some accurate historical record. It reveals some of what occurred in what is commonly known as the Intertestamental Period, or the Maccabean Era. The famous Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, also related what occurred during this period of time. These historical accounts merely provide additional details concerning what is spoken of in Daniel 8:10-13.

Josephus wrote in *The Wars of the Jews, Book I*, "Antiochus . . . compelled the Jews to dissolve the laws of their country, and to keep their infants uncircumcised, and to sacrifice swine's flesh upon the altar." Failure to comply caused the offender to be "put to death." This was just the beginning of what verse 12 describes of when Antiochus "cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered." This may be typical of what papalism did during the Dark Ages of this Gospel Day, but *only typical* because this "little horn" (Daniel 7:8) was Grecian.

History explicitly details the barbaric atrocities perpetrated upon Jerusalem and Judah. This conquest is the beginning of the "two thousand and three hundred days" (Daniel 8:14) under consideration. Let us examine these "days" and see what they convey. First Maccabees 1:20-24 speaks of what Daniel called "the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down" (Daniel 8:11). First Maccabees 1:20 tells, "After that Antiochus had smitten Egypt, he returned again in the hundred forty and third year, and went up against Israel and Jerusalem with a great multitude." This "hundred forty and third year" begins the measurement of the "two thousand and three hundred days" (Daniel 8:14).

The following verses in 1 Maccabees 1:21-24 detail some of what occurred. Verse 21 describes the desecration that took place, stating, "And entered proudly into the sanctuary [this portrays the terrible position a people place themselves in through disobedience and rebellion and the consequences of losing God's presence out of their midst], and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof." Verses 22-24 provide more detail, but this suffices to show that this "little horn" (Daniel 8:9)—Antiochus Epiphanes—is prophetically being referred to in Daniel's writing.

COMMONALITY OF EXPRESSIONS

Daniel 8:13 speaks of "the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot." Here, another point of confusion arises because of the commonality of expressions. Daniel 7:8 tells of a "little horn" (that which came out of the Roman beast and represents the rise of papalism), and Daniel 8:9 speaks of "a little horn" (representing the rise of the Grecian Antiochus Epiphanes). These two "horns" are totally different things, with totally separate origins, operating at two different and distinct times.

Just as those expressions have a commonality, expressions mentioned in other Scriptures that are similar to the expression in Daniel 8:13 are confused and mistakenly associated with this verse in Daniel. Daniel 8:13 mentions "the transgression of desolation." In Matthew 24:15, Jesus spoke of "the abomination of desolation." The prophecy referred to by Jesus was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when, as in Luke 21:20 warns, "Ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies [Roman armies], then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." According to Josephus, this occurred "in the second year of the reign of Vespasian" (*The War of the Jews, Book VI, Chapter X*), which was A.D. 70. This tragic event differs totally from the one spoken of in Daniel 8:10-14.

"ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION UPON THE ALTAR"

"The transgression of desolation" (Daniel 8:13) speaks of another aspect of this horrible time in Israelite history. This depiction of the judgments of God being poured out upon a people was when Antiochus, according to 1 Maccabees 1:54, "set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar." Many other vile acts are mentioned in the following verses (1 Maccabees 1:55-64). This "desolation" under Antiochus Epiphanes took place in the Intertestamental Maccabean Era.

I trust we can see the prophecies of Daniel, Chapter 8, have distinct differences, yet similarities, from what is declared in Chapter 7. This time measurement in Chapter 8 has reference to what occurred during the reign of the Grecian "little horn" (Daniel 8:9), Antiochus Epiphanes. This time expression was prophetic (at the time it was given to Daniel in 460 B.C., according to the Anstey-Mauro Chronological System), but it occurred *prior* to the New Testament dispensation. These "two thousand and three hundred days" (Daniel 8:14) are NOT symbolic, as are the time expressions in other portions of the Book of Daniel, such as Daniel 7:25.

THE "TWO THOUSAND AND THREE HUNDRED DAYS" ARE LITERAL DAYS

We must always be reminded, "Every word of God is pure" (Proverbs 30:5), or several renderings say "flawless." This verse reveals there is divine design, intent, and

A SPIRITUAL LESSON

import behind every word incorporated in the sacred Scriptures. I mention this because one distinction of Daniel 8:14 is that both the Hebrew and the *Septuagint* render the original as "evenings and mornings." Thus, these are literal, natural days with a literal measurement. (The same type of expression was used concerning the account of Creation; Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31. They each offer the time measurement as "the evening and the morning.") This establishes the truth that when Daniel 8:14 speaks of the "two thousand and three hundred days" (KJV), or "evenings and mornings" (the Hebrew and the *Septuagint*), it validates the fact that these "days" are literal, natural, days.

These "two thousand and three hundred days" prophetically portray the length of time this "little horn" (Daniel 8:9) would dominate and desecrate in Jerusalem. It began, according to 1 Maccabees 1:20, "in the hundred forty and third year." According to 1 Maccabees 6:16, the one referred to as "a little horn" (Daniel 8:9)—Antiochus Epiphanes—"died there in the hundred and forty and ninth year." One source delineates the "two thousand and three hundred days" (Daniel 8:14) as "2,300 days [that] amounts to about 6 years 4 months."

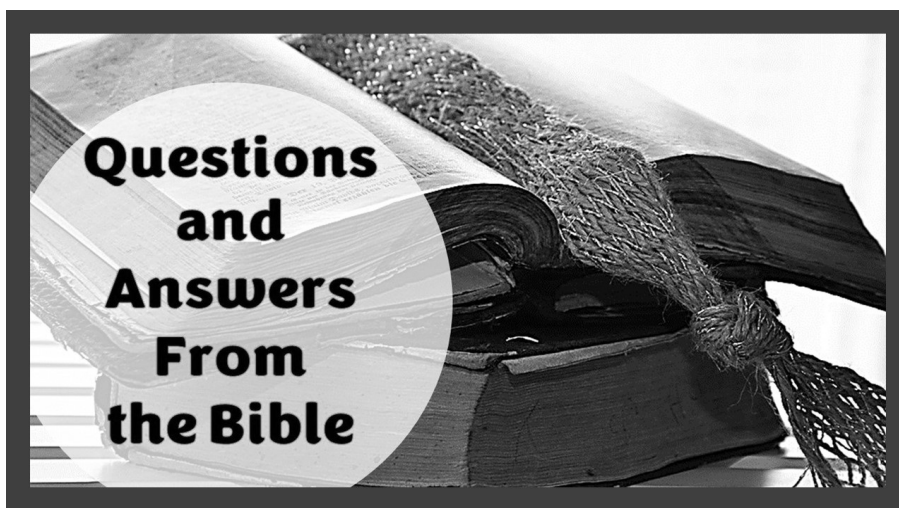
In dealing with Daniel 8:14, this was written: "If we measure back from the 30th day of the 5th month of the 149th year 2,300 days, we find their beginning on the 10th day of the 1st month of the 143rd year, which is the year specified as the time when Antiochus marched against Israel in 1 Maccabees 1:20" (*Cleansing of the Sanctuary*, D.S. Warner and H.M. Riggle). These measurements come to 6 years, 4 months, and 20 days ("two thousand and three hundred days"; Daniel 8:14), the length of the time of Antiochus' reign against Jerusalem.

What a sad picture this depicts of the terrible consequences of unfaithfulness and rebellion! Whenever God's presence departs from an individual's life, or from a people, the result is always tragic. The word of the Lord given to Joshua still rings true, resounding throughout the ages, when he was told, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe TO DO according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8). The people of Jerusalem and Israel who suffered this terrible time of "desolation" (Daniel 8:13) failed, after many warnings and appeals, to follow the divine instruction given to Joshua. Thus, tragic and terrible consequences were the result of their rebellion.

In Malachi 3:6, the Lord proclaims, "For I am the LORD, I change not." We are not under the old Mosaic Law today, but the Moral Law set forth in that instruction is timeless and is still in force today. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 the only ones who "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" are they "that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." May God help us be those "that doeth the will" and never fall prey to the terrible consequences of those who engage in rebellion as those who terribly suffered those "two thousand and three hundred days" (Daniel 8:14).

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WAS THERE SOMEWHAT OF A TRANSITION PERIOD BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS?

Sadly, this question has engendered confusion over the years. In the truest, most absolute sense, the Scriptures speak of

"that first covenant [the Old Testament]" and "the second [the New Testament]" (Hebrews 8:7). So, there are only two Testamental Dispensations.

The Hebrew writer penned: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead" (Hebrews 9:16-17). So, in reality, the New Testament was not in force until Christ died.

Many times, confusion arises because our understanding is deficient in some manner. Certainly, the Lord does not want us confused, and He certainly never gave us His Word to confuse us ("God is not the author of confusion"; 1 Corinthians 14:33). We

are instructed to "study" to be "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). This requires us to do as Isaiah 28:13 admonishes and lay "precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." Every Scripture must be compatible with the entire harmony and scheme of the Scriptures.

To properly understand there was a time of transition, we must recognize some truths concerning the ministry of the one styled in Matthew 3:1 as "John the Baptist" ("Baptizer"; *Wuest's Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament*) and of Christ. John was a unique man who was a definite fulfillment of prophecy.

In Malachi 4:5, the prophet wrote, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." Concerning John in Matthew 11:14, Jesus proclaimed, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias [Greek for the Hebrew Elijah], which was for to come." John was designated as "my messenger," who "shall prepare the way before me" (Malachi 3:1). In Matthew 11:10, Jesus said this was fulfilled in John.

Notice the curious statement Jesus made concerning John. Matthew 11:11 states, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist ['baptizer'; *Wuest's*]: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." How can these expressions be so? It is because John was one who was "born of women," and the "least in the kingdom" is "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6).

In Matthew 11:9, Jesus was speaking of John when He said, "A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet." John occupied the position as the last of the Old Testament prophets, and he came "in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah]" (Luke

1:17). There had not been a public message from God since Malachi, 434 years earlier. (These 434 years were the "threescore and two weeks" the Prophet Daniel prophesied of in Daniel 9:25.)

John's role was unique. He was "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Jesus said John was "more than a prophet" because of the special position he occupied. He came "in the spirit and power of Elias [Elijah]," and he was "saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

John was preaching "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). All this was "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

One truth that must be recognized – the doctrine of repentance is not solely a New Testament doctrine. Ezekiel 14:6 records, "Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols." Ezekiel 18:30 says, "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions." The repentance aspect of John's message was the same as the Old Testament message. The distinction was what followed his message of repentance – "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For people to be made ready (Luke 1:17) required sin to be dealt with. Thus, it was necessary to "preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4).

Israel was covenantally still under the Old Testament. When Jesus healed the ten lepers (subsequent to John's ministry), He said, "Go shew yourselves unto the priests" (Luke 17:14), in compliance with the Law (Leviticus 14:2).

However, the ministry and message of John were unique; no other prophet had that message. This aspect of "remission" was a precursor to a new dispensation

that was "at hand" (Matthew 3:2). It was John's message concerning "remission," "prepare," and "the kingdom" that was transitory, and Christ continued this message concerning "the kingdom" (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43).

Prior to John's ministry, access into "the kingdom of God" (Luke 16:16) was not an availability. However, "since that time [John] the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). Thus, at that juncture, a positive response to the message enabled people to enter "into it." *The Emphatic Greek Diaglott* renders it as, "Every one into her presses."

Repentance and remission were necessary, and the result was the ability to enter the kingdom. However, "the kingdom of God" did not "come with power" (Mark 9:1) during John's ministry, nor during the earthly ministry of Christ.

Christ said in Mark 9:1, "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." It came "with power" on the Day of Pentecost (A.D. 33), as Christ told them in Acts 1:8, when He said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." The experience the people had (with repentance and remission) also had a preparation component.

Acts 19:4 reads, "That they should believe on him which should come after him [John], that is, on Christ Jesus." They had to have an operation of faith. When they exercised that faith, they became "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1).

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