

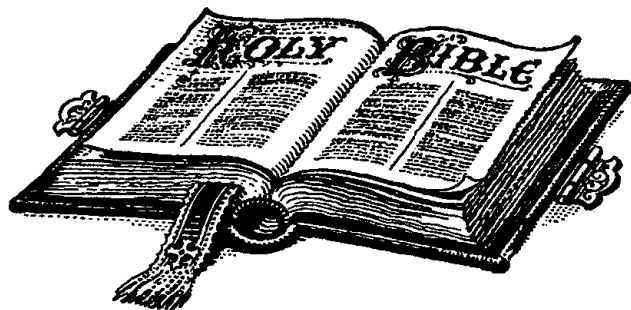
The Sword AND Staff

"Preach the Word" (II Timothy 4:2) • "Feed the Flock" (I Peter 5:2)

Perfecting and Exercising Faith—No. 3

HOW FAITH IS...

Acquired, Increased and Perfected



By JAMES E. GIBBONS—1535 Fairfield Drive
Mount Airy, NC 27030 USA

THE IMPORTANCE of faith and the need of our faith being increased, enhanced and perfected is seen several times in happenings in connection with our Lord. The apostle Paul recognized this and emphasized it.

**"Lord, I Believe;
Help Thou My Unbelief"**

The Lord had been on the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James and John. (Mark 9:2-29). These men had the wonderful experience of witnessing the transfiguration. Momentarily the eternal glory of Christ, along with Elijah and Moses, was unveiled before them. Later the next day when they came down from the mountain, they found the other disciples confronted with a problem that they couldn't handle. It was a pitiful situation. In vain they had tried to cast the demon out of the poor boy, the demon that had wrecked havoc in his life. The father of the lad pleadingly besought the Lord for help. Addressing everyone, Jesus said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you?" Then to the father Jesus said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, *Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.*"

"Increase Our Faith"

Another interesting account is recorded in Luke 17:3-5. It is all about forgiveness. Our Lord taught, "If thy brother trespass...against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." This teaching really came down heavy on his disciples. It seemed to be demanding beyond their level of commitment at this time. Thus we read, "And the apostles said unto the Lord, *Increase our faith.*" They felt that they needed a stronger faith in order to put this teaching into practice.

Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians

It was the deep concern of the apostle Paul that new converts get off to a good start and faith was the determining factor in this. In the context of persecution, his hasty departure from Thessalonica left Paul with much anxiety about the new Christians there. Later when Timothy joined him at Athens, he was sent back, as Paul said, "to establish you [the Thessalonians], and to comfort you, concerning your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:1,2). Also, Paul said, "I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the temper have tempted you, and our labour be in vain" (3:5). On his return from this trip, Timothy brought "good tidings" concerning their faith (3:6). With this Paul was much comforted and encouraged (3:7); yet he was still earnestly praying for them, and as he said, "that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (3:10).

Need for Perfecting Our Faith

Yes, faith is all-important in becoming and being a Christian. And, inasmuch as Christianity is called "THE FAITH" (Jude 3; 1 Timothy 4:1) and everything in Christianity hinges on faith (we are

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THE SWORD AND STAFF

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—THANK YOU—

Proverbially *SPEAKING...*

JESUS not only is the Son of God, He is God the Son.

It is hard for the person who has not made peace with himself to be at peace with others.

We must recognize defeat before we can find the victory in Christ.

Christ loves the world because he loves the individual, and aside from the individual love would be meaningless.

Life is not as threadbare when we are clothed with Christ.

As a Christian you are nice to other people not because of who they are, but because of who you are.

We have no interest in that which we have not invested.

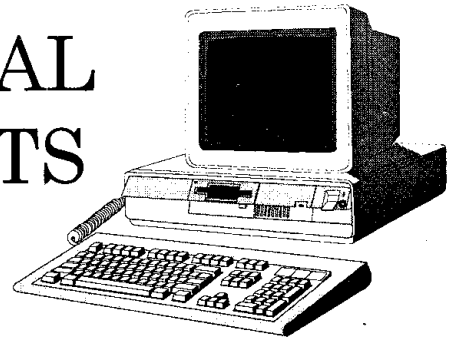
Daniel chose to spend a night in a lion's den before he would go through the day without praying.

Sometimes you have to go out on a limb to get the best fruit.

Always do what is right and you won't have to worry about the consequences of doing wrong.

It is good to think twice before doing anything once. □

EDITORIAL COMMENTS



IMPATIENT, IMPATIENCE AND PATIENCE

SEVERAL YEARS AGO while this writer was in Puerto Rico he was impressed by the beautiful wild flowers along the roadsides (and in the rain forest). They were what is commonly seen in the States in flower beds and known as *impatiens* (or "impatients"). As he was taking pictures of the flowers, jokingly this writer said to the person with him, "Stand in front of the flowers so I can remember their name."

Impatient! Perhaps all of us have been that way at times in our lives. But some people seem to be blessed less with patience than others. The man hasty with words is an impatient man. Young people have a tendency to be less patient because they have a limited concept of time, not having lived as long. Although many older people have learned patience, some of them are very impatient (and especially with young people). They think that others should know what it has taken them a lifetime to learn. Someone said, "I get very impatient with impatient people" (but what does that say about the person who said this?).

Many in the Bible have left us an example of patience. In them the meaning of the word translated "patience" (and sometimes "endure") is exemplified. The two corresponding stems of the word thus rendered mean under + to stay. Job comes to the forefront as an example of patience. James wrote, "Ye have heard of *the patience of Job...*" (James 5:11). The writer of the book of Hebrews admonishes his readers to be "followers of them who through faith and *patience* inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12-15). Then he tells them that Abraham "after he had *patiently endured...* obtained the promise." When we mention Moses, it brings to mind a man of meekness (Numbers 12:3). But he surely must have been a man of patience in being able to "put up" with the children of Israel all those years in the wilderness.

Preachers and leaders in the Lord's church must be men of patience (and especially in dealing with church problems). Paul told Timothy that "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, *patient...*" (2 Timothy 2:24). Later in this epistle Timothy was charged in no uncertain terms to "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort..." But how was this to be done? With "*all longsuffering and doctrine*" (4:2). To the Corinthians in asserting how he and his fellow workers were "in all things approving ourselves [themselves] as the ministers of God," "in *much patience*" heads the long list that follows. When patience is absent, it can cause problems in human relations. The church is full of all kinds of people with all kinds of backgrounds at different levels of spiritual

development. Then most church problems didn't get that way over night, and they are not going to be solved that fast either (but they need to be dealt with). A child's tooth that is loose can be pulled easily without any problems, but to pull it before it is ready may cause complications.

Patience is an absolute necessity in being a successful Christian. The farmer must have patience to wait for the fruit of his labors (James 5:7). The Lord explained the parable of the sower, saying "the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with *patience*" (Luke 8:15). The writer of Hebrews admonished his readers, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of *patience*, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:35,36). Likewise Hebrews 12:1 continues the admonition, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with *patience* the race that is set before us." The Christian race is not a sprint, but is a cross-country race that covers a lifetime. We must patiently condition and gauge ourselves. Otherwise we will burn out and drop by the wayside.

The great underlying impetus of patience is hope. That is what sustained Abraham as he patiently endured to finally inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12-20). It is the track that the Christian life runs upon. It is the anchor of the soul. We can "put up" with about anything, if we know things are going to get better (and they are for the Christian, eternally better). We are in a world that "groaneth and travaileth in pain," and being a part of it, we also "groan within ourselves, waiting for...the redemption of our body." We are presently trapped in this body of sin and death, and how nice it will be to be clothed with the new and eternal body that is not subject to pain and death! Our present imperfect situation actually makes hope become alive and helps us patiently endure. Read Romans 8:18-25. The Thessalonians had experienced this "patience of hope" in their tribulations (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Read Romans 5:1-5. We are conditioned for the long pull. And patience, tapped into this great hope, finds its outworkings in all of our human relationships. □

Ladies (and Men), Read This...

Guidelines on How to Dress Modestly from a Prison Handbook
THERE ARE some religious people who are reluctant to take the Bible seriously when it speaks of modest apparel (1 Timothy 2:8,9). And if you suggest that the Christian's body is to be decently covered, they tend to look upon you as a prude. They disregard

the fact that immodest dress is a contributing factor in producing immodest and improper thoughts (and actions). Jesus warned, "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-30). Even in times more ancient, Job mused the same question, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1). King David was less fortunate. The lust of the eye led him into the overt act of adultery (2 Samuel 11:2-4). His story is tragic history.

It seems at times some people of the world are wiser than the supposed children of light. The following comes from a handbook for visitors to the prison system of the state of Florida. Read it and realize the truthfulness of this article. God will hold you accountable, as well as the other person, if you are a stumbling block to others. This is a serious matter.

From the handbook:

WHAT TO WEAR WHEN YOU VISIT

It is not our purpose to pass judgment of any kind in limiting the kinds of clothing that may be allowed in the visitation area. These limits are designed to prevent harassment, discomfort and embarrassing incidents that may spoil your visit. Some examples of clothing that are not appropriate for the visitation are:

- 1. Mini or micro skirts
- 2. Shorts or cutoffs
- 3. Halter tops and tank tops
- 4. Fishnet jerseys
- 5. Excessively tight fitting pants or jeans
- 6. Any clothing with suggestive slogans or illustrations.

We also ask that men wear shirts at all times and that ladies wear bras [under her clothes] or other suitable garments. If for comfort's sake you find it necessary to travel to the center mentioned above as not appropriate, we invite you to bring a change of clothing and use the restroom in the waiting area to change before entering visitation. □

"I Was Just Loving Jesus"

WALKING down the street one day a lady noticed a little girl leaving the church building by herself. When the child passed her, the lady inquired where she had been.

"In there," replied the little girl, pointing to the building.

"And what were you doing in there?" the woman asked.

"Praying," was the prompt reply.

Thinking the child was bothered with some problem, the lady inquired, "What were you praying for, dear?"

"Nothing," the little girl replied. "I was just loving Jesus."—*Selected* □

HOW FAITH IS...

Acquired, Increased and Perfected

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justified by faith, we walk by faith, and we are to be faithful until death), we need to be always increasing, enhancing and perfecting our faith. That is what this article is all about, how faith is acquired and perfected.

I. "SO THEN FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD" (ROMANS 10:17)

God is real. He has spoken unto us. He became incarnate in Christ to become our Savior. The Bible tells us all about it, and the gospel vocalizes the good news of these great truths.

A. Initial Faith

Initial faith that produces salvation "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). It is centered in Jesus Christ. The apostle John in reflecting on why he wrote his gospel account, said, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30,31). In the Great Commission, after the command to preach the gospel was given, the Lord said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mark 16:16).

This sequence of hearing, believing and being baptized is seen throughout the book of Acts. In response to Peter's concluding words on the Day of Pentecost, "Then they that gladly received the Word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Notice Acts 8:12, "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Then Acts 18:8 tells us that "many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." Preaching God's Word brought about faith, conviction and surrender to God.

B. "From Faith to Faith"

Paul, after saying he was ready to preach the gospel at Rome also, largely summed it up in Romans 1:16 and 17 when he said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every man that believeth: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed *from faith to faith*: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." This ties initial faith in with what follows, "from faith to faith." These words raise the possibility of several different explanations, but the faith that brought

salvation through the imputed righteousness of God is still the driving force that continues throughout the Christian's life. It is faith from beginning to end ("The just shall live by faith"). And as we go "*from faith to faith*" in our walk of faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), we find *grace piled upon grace* (John 1:16), and as we look to the Lord, we "are changed into the same image *from glory to glory*, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The Word of God and the resultant faith that comes from it are what bring all of this about. Paul, as he was about to leave the Ephesians elders, strongly besought them, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The Colossians to counter the threat of philosophy and the traditions of men were admonished to be "Rooted and built up in him [Christ], and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught [the Word], abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:7). The same Scriptures that make us wise unto salvation through faith are what continue to increase our faith and sustain us in being faithful to the Lord (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

An Admonition

So, we point you to the Word of God. If you want to become a believer, read the Bible. Sit under faithful gospel preaching. God is not going to artificially and arbitrarily impose faith and Himself upon you aside from His Word. This is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to convict you. Then having become a Christian, make God's Word your companion for life. Learn all you can about the object of our faith (keep your eyes on Christ). Read the Bible daily. Increase your understanding of God, His plan, and things eternal. You will thereby perfect and enhance your faith and become strong in the Lord.

II. OUR FAITH IS MADE STRONGER AND PERFECTED BY ASSOCIATING WITH THOSE STRONG IN FAITH

It has been said that water seeks its own level and birds of a feather flock together. It is common knowledge that we are influenced by our associations, whether good or bad. Before noticing the good impact of positive association, let us take a look at the negative.

A. The Bad Impact of Negative Association

With decided moral overtones, Paul warned the Corinthians, "Be not deceived: evil communications [companionships] corrupt good manners [good morals]" (1 Corinthians 15:33). The writer of Proverbs had much the same thought in mind when he wrote, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou

learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul" (Proverbs 22:24,25). Paul also had in mind the influence of association, and the Judaizers especially in his eye, when he said, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Galatians 5:9). Recognizing the dangers involved in association, the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament stated: "Ephraim is joined to idols: *let him alone*" (Hosea 4:17). Likewise, Jesus in warning about the scribes and Pharisees and their traditions said, "*Let them alone*: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14). And, carrying these thoughts a step further, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?... *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord...*" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).



B. Good Comes from Positive Association

With these things said, let us notice the other side of the coin. If negative associations are not good for us spiritually, it is obvious that positive associations are in our best interests and from such good will come. Proverbs 13:20 verifies this, which reads, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise..."

**Admonitions to Associate
And to Admonish One Another**

The apostle Peter identified those to whom he wrote as having "obtained like precious faith" (2 Peter 1:1). That precious faith is revitalized and made stronger in the fellowship of other believers. With that in mind, the writer of the book of Hebrews warns and admonishes his readers, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But *exhort one another daily*, while it is called To day; lest

any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:12-14). This thought is expanded further in Hebrews 10:23-25, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And *let us consider one another* to provoke unto love and to good works: *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*, as the manner of some is; *but exhorting one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." These admonitions highlight the good that can come from association. That is what the public assembly is all about, as well as being in the community of believers.

**Circumstantial and
Happenstance Association**

The above admonitions are in the category of command. But there are associations that are circumstantial and even happenstance, which contribute greatly in shaping a person's faith and making it stronger. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul said, "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." Timothy's faith came natural, coming from a family of believers. Then the very example of what he saw in the apostle Paul would ever be in his memory. Paul reminded and admonished him, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith...continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (2 Timothy 3:10,14). Then the writer of the book of Hebrews admonished his readers, "Remember them which have the rule over you [elders, leaders], who have spoken unto you the word of God: *whose faith follow*, considering the end of their conversation [their manner of life]" (Hebrews 13:7). When we live and rub shoulders with people who are strong in faith, it makes our faith become stronger. In a sense, it rubs off on us. We see the reality of what they believe as it is lived out day by day.

Problems in Having Association

It is great when we can have someone older and stronger in faith with whom we can associate. But that is not always the case today. There is an absence of Bible believing churches in the land (in the complete sense of the word), and they are even fewer in number who are really trying to put New Testament Christianity into practice. Sometimes we might only find a handful of people, or just an individual. It reminds us of one of the churches of Asia mentioned in the book of Revelation wherein only a "few names" were found to be faithful (Revelation

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HOW FAITH IS...

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3:4). Many times association with those strong in faith must be sought elsewhere. Some find strength in attending gospel rallies and meetings where brethren of like minds have gathered together. Spiritual strength and encouragement also can be found by correspondence with those strong in the faith, thereby increasing one's faith.

When there is no one personally to look to and with whom to associate, we are not totally at a loss. We can associate indirectly with the great men of faith through the Scriptures who have lived long ago. To get the full message of the 11th chapter of Hebrews, the last few verses of the 10th chapter and the first few of the 12th should be read. The writer calls his reader's attention to faith and the great men of faith in days gone by to increase their faith so they could withstand the trials they were going through. He sums it up by saying, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses [the heroes of faith just mentioned in the 11th chapter], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..." When you feel like you are alone, just remember that you really are not alone. Enhance your faith and derive spiritual strength by indirectly associating with those of faith who have lived long ago. Read your Bible.

III. THE CONTRIBUTION OF POSITIVE THINGS AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES TO FAITH

A. Positive Things

Faith is positive in nature and thrives in a positive atmosphere with other positive things. Paul makes it plain to the Galatians that the Law of Moses avails us nothing now. What really matters is "faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). Can anything be more positive than love? And Paul says faith "worketh [is energized] by love". Read Philippians 4:6-9. When we pray, and our minds are set on the positive and wholesome things named here, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [guard] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." All of the things mentioned here are mutually supportive, along with faith, being positive in nature. In such an atmosphere they thrive together.

Therefore, to have a healthy, vibrant faith, we need to eliminate the negative things in our lives. Negative thoughts produce negative results. Doubt, sin, ill will, questionable things, filthy literature, the negative garbage of TV, etc.—all of these things need to go. (Remember Hebrews 12:1 and 2; also 2

Corinthians 7:1). Their negative impact stifles faith, if not making shipwreck of it altogether. Faith is positive in nature and thrives in a positive atmosphere. Sin will keep us from the Bible, and the Bible will keep us from sin. Let us accent the positive and get positive results.



B. Negative Experiences

Although faith is positive in nature, and usually thrives in a positive atmosphere (as we have just pointed out), sometimes it takes the trials of a negative atmosphere to perfect it. James plainly makes a statement about this. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [various trials]; Knowing this, that the *trying of your faith* worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4). The epistle of 1st Peter has much to say about suffering and trials. As his readers went through these experiences, Peter desired this in reference to them: "That the *trial of your faith*, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6,7). A grindstone will sharpen an axe and put a cutting edge on the blade. This is likewise true regarding suffering (if we let it). Dry weather with a limited amount of rain, being a less desirable season, will make the corn take root deeper and then it can better withstand the wind and violent storms when they do come.

IV. THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH AND SPIRITUAL EXERCISE ENHANCE FAITH

A. The Good Fight of Faith

Paul admonished Timothy to, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12). As the end of his life was nearing, Paul could declare, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). There is something about having been engaged in a spiritual battle, and winning the victory, that equips you with more strength and experience for the next go around. Your faith is made stronger. You learn to trust the Lord. As the hymn goes, "Each victory will help you some other to win."

B. Exercise

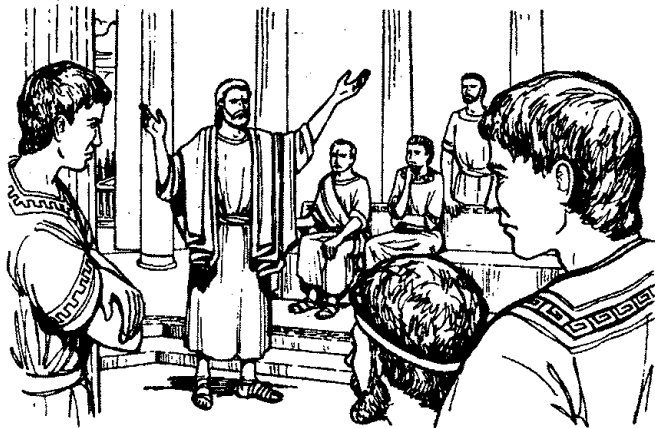
Timothy was also admonished to “exercise” himself unto godliness (1 Timothy 4:7,8). Then Paul said, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Perhaps in a sense this is parallel to fighting the “good fight of faith,” yet it is different. Exercise is a very important part in getting our bodies in shape physically. Likewise by faithfully practicing our religion (exercising ourselves unto godliness), the spiritual man is made stronger. It is like a child learning to walk. The exercise is good to tone the muscles, and the experience of taking a few steps gives confidence to take some more.

V. PRAY FOR A GREATER FAITH

This may seem to be contradictory (James 1:6), praying for a greater faith, but it is not. In essence that is what the disciples did when they responded to the Lord, saying, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). The same is true of the father of the boy possessed with a demon when he said, “Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). We believe, but it may be a very imperfect faith, lacking trust. But it is enough faith with which to cry out to God. We can go from there to become stronger and enhance the faith that we do have. Jude admonished his readers, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost [Spirit]” (Jude, verse 20). □

A Series Involving the Bible and Prophecy...

Kingdom Arrives in Acts



● By DAVID VAUGHN ELLIOTT
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HADES could not stop Jesus’ plans. He had promised: “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Neither the Jews nor the Romans nor Hades could stop Jesus’ plans. The gates of Hades would burst open to let Jesus out. Jesus would prevail and build His church!

Immediately following this promise to build His church, Jesus told Peter: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.” The kingdom is “of heaven.” But Peter was to “bind on earth,” thus during his lifetime. This is in complete harmony with another promise Jesus made to His followers: “there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27).

The Church and the Kingdom

Upon considering everything the New Testament says about both the kingdom of heaven and the church of Jesus, one finds it extremely difficult to differentiate between the two—what is affirmed of the kingdom is also affirmed of the church.

Very early in His ministry, “Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14,15). Jesus, affirming that the kingdom was just around the corner, interconnected four vital elements: 1) the gospel, 2) the kingdom, 3) repentance and 4) faith. And is not the church of Jesus Christ precisely involved with the same gospel, repentance and faith? Most assuredly.

The gospel, of course, is the Good News of salvation based on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Therefore, the gospel of the kingdom could not be transformed from prophecy into reality until after Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Matthew 16, Jesus said the same about the church: Hades would not stop Him from building the church. In other words, He would indeed die, go to Hades, come out victorious, and then build His church. Thus, the church and the kingdom are equally predicted to commence following Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Everyone knows that no physical kingdom of God was set up in the first (or second) century. On the other hand, many recognize that in the first century, a spiritual kingdom of God was set up! Also, everyone knows that a church was set up. There simply is no escaping the reality that the church of Jesus Christ is that kingdom of heaven which Jesus promised would soon arrive.

Uniqueness of the Book of Acts

The book of Acts is unique. To ignore it is to miss a vital link in God’s dealings with the human race. Acts is the only book in the New Testament dedicated to the history of Jesus’ apostles after the ascension. After studying the Gospels, a student of the Word should turn to the book of Acts, confidently expecting to find the historical fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecies of the kingdom and the church. It was time for their arrival.

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Kingdom Arrives in Acts

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The Importance of Pentecost

Religious people often talk longingly of a return to Pentecost. They usually are referring either to speaking in tongues or to great multitudes being converted. I dare say that neither concern is of chief importance when evaluating what transpired on that particular Jewish Pentecost.

It was the year 30 A.D., less than two months since Jesus' death and resurrection. But before Jesus left for heaven, He gave His apostles a very important command: "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait" (Acts 1:4. Except where otherwise noted, all quotes in this article will be from the book of Acts).

Remember that Jesus had promised Peter "the keys of the kingdom." It is no coincidence, therefore, that Peter was the leading spokesman on the day of Pentecost. Keys open doors. Peter was chosen by God to initiate the kingdom of heaven, to inform people how they could enter. How did Peter unlock the doors? It was he who answered the anguished cry of the Israelites, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (2:37). "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' " (2:38).

Most have no difficulty in recognizing this as the beginning of the Lord's church. But we should equally recognize that Peter's statement is a variation and divine explanation of what Jesus told Nicodemus: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Notice the parallelism between, "born of water and the Spirit" on the one hand and "repent...be baptized...receive...the Holy Spirit" on the other. Entering the kingdom and entering the church are one and the same.

Attention has been called to Mark 1:14,15, where Jesus interconnected four vital elements: 1) the gospel, 2) the kingdom, 3) repentance and 4) faith. On the day of Pentecost, Peter clearly preached the gospel, based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. In his entire message, he clearly called the Jews to faith in Jesus. Then in 2:38 he calls them to repentance. The gospel, faith and repentance are three things that Jesus connected with the kingdom. Certainly the kingdom of heaven was making its appearance as Peter spoke.

Power of the Kingdom: the Holy Spirit

In Mark 9:1, Jesus prophesied that the kingdom of God would come with *power* during the lifetime of His listeners. After His resurrection, He told the apostles: "I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are

endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Before Jesus ascended, he further clarified the matter: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (1:8). That happened exactly ten days later, on the day of Pentecost. So the power of the kingdom was provided by the Holy Spirit.

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus had explained to the Apostles: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you

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BIBLE QUESTIONS

(Random Questions Over the Bible)

1. Who is called "a mighty hunter before the Lord" in the Bible?
2. What was the ancient name of Bethel, and how did it come to be called Bethel?
3. Which was the only one of the twelve sons of Jacob born in Canaan?
4. Whose job was it to embalm the dead among the ancient Egyptians?
5. How many days were involved in the process of embalming the dead by the Egyptians?
6. When Aaron and Moses died, how many days did the people mourn for them?
7. What became a saying in reference to Saul shortly after he was anointed king of Israel?
8. What did the women sing about David that highly displeased king Saul?
9. How long did it take Solomon to build the temple and to build his own house?
10. Why did Jonah flee on a ship to Tarshish when God told him to go to Nineveh and preach?
11. How extensive was the call for fasting by the king of Nineveh in response to the preaching of Jonah?
12. Where in the Bible does it say, "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears," and where does it say, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks"?
13. How old was Jesus when he began his earthly ministry?
14. On what two occasions is it recorded that angels ministered to Jesus?
15. Why did Jesus teach in parables?
16. Jesus loved all of his disciples, but who especially is spoken of as the one "whom Jesus loved"?
17. Of whom did a rumor get started that he (this disciple) would not die?
18. What are four different occasions that the apostle Paul is mentioned in the Scriptures in connection with the city of Troas?
19. Where was Paul, it seems, when he first met Aquila and Priscilla?
20. When Paul was taken prisoner the last time by the Romans, who does it say forsook him, "having loved this present world"?

(NOTE: Answers found elsewhere in this issue of the paper)

READERS'

...Response

APOLOGY: Please accept our humble apology for slowness in getting correspondence answered. "We" have no staff of secretaries, etc. to handle such, and this is done by the "editor" as time allows. Be it known that you are sincerely appreciated. □

FLORIDA:

■ *"I was wondering if you could give me some insight on our churches' reluctance to deal with the issue of Freemasonry and it's influence on our churches..."*

■ *"Enclosed find help for THE SWORD AND STAFF. I pray for you and those who work with you. The paper is much needed to encourage the saints and add knowledge. Thank you for the work you do for Him."*

■ *"Please forgive me for my being so late in my help..."*

"May God bless you for a long time to come, and when He takes you home, may He raise up someone who can do as well as you in explaining His Word."

"Thank you and may you keep on keeping on. We need many more like you to combat the false doctrine that is going on."

SOUTH CAROLINA:

■ *"I want to thank you for THE SWORD AND STAFF. I have truly learned a lot from it..."*

NORTH CAROLINA:

■ *"My husband is a...minister. A few weeks ago a lady gave us THE SWORD AND STAFF...The ones she gave us were 1996-1998. We would like to start getting them...Because we really enjoyed reading them. It is hard to find a magazine as truthful as yours is."*

TENNESSEE:

■ *"A friend of mine gave me two copies of THE SWORD AND STAFF. I find these copies to be exactly according to the Bible. It is a very good paper, and I appreciate very much what you are doing in teaching the Truth. Please put me on your mailing list..."*

KENTUCKY:

■ *"Please send a complimentary copy of THE SWORD AND STAFF..." (E-mail, web page response)*

VIRGINIA:

■ *"Thank you so much for keeping on keeping on and for the truths printed in your little paper (which, really, is a big, big paper)..."*

WEST VIRGINIA:

■ *"Just a note to let you know how much I enjoy receiving THE SWORD AND STAFF. Your articles are good and easy to understand. Most of all, they are Truth! I look forward to each paper. May our God continue to bless and keep you. Also, brother D. Vaughn Elliott's series on the kingdom are good. Look forward to the next one."*

PENNSYLVANIA:

■ *"...I would like to continue to receive this much needed publication/bulletin. May God bless your work as you continue to preach, teach, persuade and publish God's glorious truth..."*

■ *"What a blessing to know there is a staff writing and disseminating the Truth as you do. Our prayers at... church are in continued support of you. Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!"*

■ *"I thank God that...you write THE SWORD AND STAFF. It is so truthful and helpful. You really are working for our Lord. We should all share THE SWORD AND STAFF with others, striving to win souls to Christ. Please continue your work. It gives us encouragement! And material to go forward."*

Flags In Church Buildings?

■ *"I had someone ask the question, 'Why don't you have flags (US Flag and the Christian Flag) in the church buildings?"*

"This started me thinking: Why should we not display the two flags?"

"1. The US Flag is symbolic of the United States only. Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples of ALL the nations' (Matthew 28:19). Would not a person from another country feel uncomfortable seeing ONLY the Stars and Stripes displayed?"

"2. Some reason that 'The Christian Flag is non-denominational and we can unite under this flag.'"

a. Jesus did not ask us to make a flag, or any other symbol to unite religious people.

b. We are to be united on the WORD of God. The New Testament speaks of 'One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God,' (Ephesians 4) but not one flag.

"I wonder if anyone else has thought on the use of flags?"

MASSACHUSETTS:

■ *"Do not send any more."*

OHIO:

■ *"Picked up a copy of THE SWORD AND STAFF the other day and it's great. Please start sending it to me."*

■ *"Please send me a complimentary copy of your newsletter THE SWORD AND STAFF." (E-mail, web page response)*

■ *"Please update your mailing list with my name. I want to continue to receive the publication. Enclosed is a dona-*

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READERS'...Response

(Continued from Previous Page)

tion. I will try to send as often as I can. The teaching gives me wisdom and strength."

■ "Thank you, thank you, thank you for sending me your publication of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* all these years. It has been and continues to be an inspiration and I look forward to each new issue."

ILLINOIS:

■ "...Thank you. We enjoy *THE SWORD AND STAFF* very much and wish you many more years in the LORD'S work." (E-mail)

■ "We receive *THE SWORD AND STAFF* regularly and would like to order the bound copies for 1999-2000. Also, would like to receive 12 extra copies of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* (2001, Volume 39, Number 2)...*THE SWORD AND STAFF* has been a real help in my teaching ministry..." (E-mail)

MINNESOTA:

■ "Yes, please send me the bound volume of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* 1999-2000. It's good to have Scriptural material in the house and being able to read it whenever. Please keep up the good work."

ARKANSAS:

■ "Enclosed please find check for...to cover charge for bound book 1999-2000. I have them all and really enjoy them. Thank you."

■ "Your publication *THE SWORD AND STAFF* is received with appreciation and sincere interest. The brotherhood desperately needs more such plain and sound teachings from God's inspired Word such as found in your publication..."

TEXAS:

■ "...I love *THE SWORD AND STAFF* and also your web site. Keep up the good work."

■ "Please send me a complimentary copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. Thank you." (E-mail, web page response)

WYOMING:

■ "Thank you so much for keeping *THE SWORD AND STAFF* coming...It is gratifying to have someone excitedly point out an article and exclaim, "Did you see this?!"...Sending this paper with its written sermons home with the members of the congregation is one way of increasing exposure to the application of the principles of God's Word...Thank you. May our Lord continue to bless this service of yours."

CALIFORNIA:

■ "Here is a little check for the wonderful paper you publish. I really enjoy reading it. Keep up the good work."

UNITED STATES:

■ "How wonderful to find a web site like yours! I am writing to let you know how much I appreciated your web site, and also to ask if you ever gave permission to use some of your short articles (to be used for our

church member based newsletter not on the Internet). I certainly would give your work full recognition..." (E-mail, Web page response)

■ "My name is...and I come to your site quite often. It is a great site for the Christian person to come and read about several topics on the Bible. Recently I went to [another] web site...and was reading their Bible studies. But on this lesson I found them to be teaching predestination. I have always believed that it is not true based on the Bible. Here they used several Scriptures in Romans and I am not sure what to think... But I would love to hear your thoughts on this topic. Thanks for any help you can give." (E-mail, Web page response)

Question About Predestination Answered

Answer: Yes, I believe that predestination is taught in the Scriptures. But it is not a fatalistic predestination that infringes upon the free will of man (as many times seen in Calvinism). Both predestination and free will are found in the Word of God. (Read on). Bible predestination is all tied up in the foreknowledge of God, what and then whom God foreknew. God didn't predestinate, then foreknow. The foreknowledge came before the predestination. Romans 8:28 through the remainder of that chapter is a great section of Scripture to read. Verses 29 and 30 read, "**For whom he [God] did foreknow, he also did predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." The foreknowledge came before the predestination. There is a difference. God did not decide to create man and arbitrarily, individually and irrevocably assign a segment to hell and another to heaven from all eternity (just for the sake of doing it). But, being God, He knew and knows everything. He knows everything that was, everything that is, and everything that will be (He even knows what might have been). Acts 15:18 states, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." That being the case, He could foresee that man He would create would sin and need a Savior. Thus Peter speaks of Christ, and our redemption, as "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: **Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world...**" (1 Peter 1:19,20). Paul told the Ephesian Christians that God had "**chosen us IN HIM [in Christ] before the foundation of the world... Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ** to himself, according to the good pleasure of **his will**" (Ephesians 1:4,5). We all know what John 3:16 says and perhaps equally the complementary Scripture, Revelation 22:17. It says, "**whosoever will**" may come. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:4 speaks of God "**who will** have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." In the same vein, 2 Peter 3:9 tells us, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise [of judgment], as some men

count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing** that **any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**" So, we see the "good pleasure of his will" is *in Christ*, that "whosoever will" may be saved *in him*. We were chosen and predestinated *in him*. God looked down throughout all eternity and saw all who would have good and honest hearts and of their own free will and volition accept Christ as their Savior. He knew who they would be, and in accepting Christ, God designated them as the saved ones to be conformed to the image of His Son. They were thus predestinated *in Christ*. In the foreknowledge of God it is almost like everything has already taken place, since He knows everything in advance, but it hasn't happened yet. According to Romans, God sees the end from the beginning. In one panoramic sweep of the mind of God, foreknowledge, predestination, the calling, the justification, and the ultimate glorification of the saved flashes before Him. God knows how it will all end. It is mind-boggling to think about, or to fully grasp, but that is the way it is. Yes, in true Bible predestination man is a responsible free moral agent, and 2 Peter 1:10-11 strongly admonishes us, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, **give diligence to make your calling and election sure:** for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—**J.E.G.**

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC:

■ "...Thank you, beloved brother, for your valuable co-operation in sending us a copy of your valuable work entitled *LA ESPADA Y EL CAYADO [THE SWORD AND STAFF]*...that literature has served me to also teach others...I repeat my thanks and always pray asking God for you that the Lord may always have you in His grace."



**The Sun Will
Soon Shine Through**

Dear one, look up when all seems down.
It's time to smile instead of frown.
Take heart and know that God loves you.
Look up! The sun will soon shine through.

—By James E. Gibbons

COLUMBIA:

■ "Please, subscribe me to the Spanish Edition of your magazine" (E-mail, web page response).

SINGAPORE:

■ "Please send me a complimentary copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*..." (E-mail, web page response)

PHILIPPINES:

■ "I have been receiving *THE SWORD AND STAFF* since 1999 and I enjoy it very much. I really love the poems and the *Proverbially Speaking*..."

■ "A warm greetings to you from a fellow Christian from the far away land of the Philippines. Also extending greetings to your good family and to all our faithful brethren in the faith there.

"I am a brother preacher, and was so glad to have a copy of your very informative magazine *THE SWORD AND STAFF* from a fellow preacher that was blessed to receive your magazine...Reading your magazine has brought me added information for my studies and preaching...I hope I could also receive even old issues of your very informative magazine. I am lacking of reading materials, and I think the good articles of your magazine can supply additional information that will also help my studies and preaching of the Word.

"Thank you in the good Lord for giving time to read this letter of mine. May the good Lord continue to bless you and yours." □

Kingdom Arrives in Acts

(Continued from Page 8)

into all truth" (John 16:12,13). These words are extremely important for understanding the relationship between the four Gospels and the Book of Acts. Red letter Bibles make a grave mistake. Jesus said that He did **not** reveal all the truth during His earthly ministry. He said all truth would be revealed when the Holy Spirit came to the Apostles.

Thus, the Gospels cannot be fully appreciated nor understood unless they are connected to the Book of Acts. It is in the book of Acts that the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon the Apostles. It is in the Book of Acts that the kingdom of God comes with this power of the Holy Spirit. It is on the day of Pentecost following Jesus' ascension that the real meaning of the cross and the empty tomb is made known to the world.

Speaking in tongues, of itself, was not the important thing. Rather, the tongues were proof of the important thing—that Peter was not preaching his own ideas, but that he was infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit to interpret the Old Testament prophecies, to explain the meaning of the cross and the empty tomb and to offer to the Jews the divine means of entering the kingdom of God!

Power of the Kingdom: Miracles

The kingdom also arrived with the power of miracles. Peter and John were instruments of God to heal a 40-year-old man who had been lame from birth. The healing was immediate and sent the man leaping. As the crowd gathered, Peter and John used the opportunity to preach salvation from sin through the very Jesus whom the mobs had killed.

This miracle was a demonstration of a power that no human has. Peter told the crowd: "Why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or

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Kingdom Arrives in Acts

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godliness we had made this man walk?" (3:12). Peter and John were arrested. The next day, when the council assembled, they wanted to know, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" (4:7). When they later conferred among themselves, they admitted, "Indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*" (4:16). The kingdom had arrived with the power of miracles.

Soon afterward, Luke records that "with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (4:33). Not a little power. Great power. This might refer to the continuance of the signs and wonders done by them in connection with their preaching. It could equally refer to the manner in which the Holy Spirit spoke through them. Later, the same type of statement is made regarding Stephen, "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8).

Meanwhile, in Samaria, Simon the sorcerer was considered by the masses to be "the great power of God" (8:10). But when he saw the real power of God, Simon was converted to Christ. Peter and John then came to Samaria and laid hands on the brethren to impart to them the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Simon was not only astonished; he thought there was something in it for him personally. He offered to buy this power, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (8:19). There was power, but it was not for sale. "Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!' " (8:20). Truly, the kingdom had arrived with miraculous power.

The King on His Throne

On Pentecost, Peter dwelt at length on the resurrection and ascension. In that context, he referred to the prophecy that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter said that this prophecy had already been fulfilled! How? Notice carefully what Peter says in relation to David and Jesus. "David...being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would **raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection** of the Christ... Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God" (2:29-33; bold emphasis supplied).

David, foreseeing that the Messiah would sit on his throne, spoke of the resurrection. Since His ascension, Jesus has been seated at the right hand of

God. He is on His throne. According to the way Peter expressed it, the throne in heaven is the fulfillment of Jesus sitting on the throne of David.

Peter's climax is recorded in verse 36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Accomplished fact. The Jews had crucified Him; but God had made Him Lord and Christ. "Lord" is Ruler, Sovereign. "Christ" is Messiah, anointed One, Prophet, Priest and King. Peter was declaring that Jesus of Nazareth is King *now*! He is exalted. He is at the right hand of the Father. He is on the throne of David.

Jesus reigns! And no one reigns unless they have a kingdom to reign over. So, the kingdom came on that day of Pentecost. It had been called "the kingdom of heaven." The King was ruling from heaven. As promised, He had sent the power of the Holy Spirit so that the kingdom would arrive with power.

Years later in Thessalonica, the Jews accused the Christians of "saying there is another king—Jesus" (17:7). There *is* another king. Present tense. The accusation was true. This is exactly what the Christians were preaching since Pentecost: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (2:36). Jesus *is* Christ—Messiah—King. The kingdom of heaven is here now.

The Rejected Stone Crushing the Opposition

Peter and John were arrested and brought before the "Supreme Court" of the Jews. Peter said that the risen Messiah had healed the lame man. Then he charged, "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone' " (4:11). The Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus, the stone, but that had not stopped God's plans with the Jews nor with the Messiah.

Notice the difference between Jesus and Peter's use of Psalm 118:22. Jesus asked if they had never read that Scripture and proceeded to quote it. Peter, on the other hand, via paraphrase, said, "This is the stone which was **rejected by you builders**, which has become the chief cornerstone" (bold emphasis supplied). Peter thus affirms that the prophecy had been fulfilled.

Jesus had quoted this "stone" prophecy when He explained the parable of the vineyard: "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder" (Matthew 21:42-44).

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The Bottom Line to Worry

THERE ARE only two things to worry about: Either you are well or you are sick.

If you are well, there's nothing to worry about. But if you are sick, there are only two things to worry about: Either you get well, or you die.

If you get well, there's nothing to worry about. But if you die, there are only two things to worry about: Either you will go to heaven or to hell.

If you go to heaven, there's nothing to worry about. But if you go to hell, there is all eternity to worry about.



BARBS... with a Point

ARE YOU a stepping stone or a stumbling block?

If you don't love the truth, you don't know all of the truth about love.

Our society has deified education, and the kind of education that is deified has turned our society away from Deity.

It is easier for things to go wrong when all that we are interested in is things.

It seems the more serious you are about spiritual matters the less people will listen to you, but be frivolous and lighthearted and you have an audience.

Sectarianism in the guise of truth is the most deceptive kind.

It is easy to become a little negative when you have deep and sincere convictions about right and wrong, and not many others seem all that concerned.

If the church is full of the world, how can it be recognized as the kingdom of heaven?

If you put your children before God, your children will never put God first (they will think they are more important than God).

People who are afraid to get their hands dirty won't (and don't) get much done.

If we preach much about the commands of God, but little about the God who gave the commands, those who hear may know what is expected of them, but will find themselves powerless in carrying it out.

If you don't "blink your eye" religiously like some people, they don't even think that you can see.

On the things that really matter the Bible is not all that hard to understand, but with a little bit of denominational help it can be done.

Preachers preoccupied with their own worth diminish the worth of the gospel they supposedly preach.

If we keep "babying" people who are childish just to keep them in the church, they will never grow up.

The cross of Christ is to be spiritually borne (Luke 9:23; 14:27), not physically worn in superstitious fetish or tacky jewelry (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3).

If you make everything a "WOW!" where will you put an exclamation mark when it is needed?

When I came out of denominationalism, it was not to accept and to accommodate myself to a "Restoration Movement" that had fizzled out and solidified into denominational molds of its own, but to identify myself with the church of the New Testament and wherever this led me.

You must make a clear-cut break with sin if you would have the Lord live within.

Mixed swimming does not mix well with New Testament Christianity (Matthew 5:28; 1 Timothy 2:9; Genesis 3:21; Revelation 3:18).

We don't love the truth when we use "love" as a cloak for compromise.

The New Testament is preoccupied with saving the world, but many times today we find ourselves preoccupied with just saving the "church."

Beware! When we become upset, it can easily become a setup for the devil (Ephesians 5:26,27).

To believe that Christ came to save us in our sins is not grace, but a disgrace (Matthew 1:21; Romans 6:1-6).

If you are highminded, it didn't come from on high. □

Sonnet on Marriage (Sonnet 116)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
Oh no! It is an ever fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never
shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown although his
height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips
and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and
weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

—By William Shakespeare

Kingdom Arrives in Acts

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First notice: "kingdom...taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits." That is practically an outline of the book of Acts. Over and over Paul is rejected by the Jews and turns to the Gentiles. "Behold, we turn to the Gentiles" (13:46). This is a clear fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.

Notice secondly: "Grind him to powder." That calls to mind Daniel's stone prophecy: "A stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms" (Daniel 2:34,44). (For more details on Daniel's prophecy, see first article in series: "Daniel Foretells Indestructible Kingdom.")

This breaking process was already starting in the first century (though not completed until much later). In Thessalonica great numbers of Greeks were being converted. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the populace and the mob cried out: "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (17:6). The followers of the humble Carpenter were turning the world upside down. Later, in Ephesus, so many people were being converted and leaving their idolatry that the bottom was falling out of the idol market. See chapter 19. The Stone was conquering.

Church Age Predicted by Amos

Probably the biggest doctrinal disturbance in the early church was the question of the salvation of the Gentiles. God had to work several miracles to convince the apostles that Cornelius' household could be saved through the same gospel that saved the Jews. However, there continued an element in the church, especially among converted Pharisees, who believed Gentiles had to become Jews before they could become Christians. Hence the consultation in Jerusalem recorded in the 15th chapter of Acts.

On that memorable occasion, Peter told the brethren: "So God...made no distinction between us [Jews] and them [Gentiles]...through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they"(15:8-11).

Soon, James took the floor, and quoted a prophecy of Amos. Introducing the quote, he said: "Simon [Peter] has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this *the words of the prophets agree*, just as it is written" (15:14,15; bold emphasis supplied). Then he quotes Amos 9:11,12, which in part says, "So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles." Thus, the Gospel Age, the Church Age, the salvation of Gentiles were in direct fulfillment of O.T. prophecy.

Before the portion already quoted, Amos had said (as quoted by James) "After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down" (15:16). All of this in the context of accepting the Gentiles into the Church. Now the only other text in the Bible which uses the expression "tabernacle of David" is Isaiah 16:5: "In mercy the throne will be established; And One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David."

Amazing! It prophetically speaks of someone sitting on the throne in the tabernacle of David. But neither the literal tabernacle of David nor the literal temple of Solomon had a throne. The tabernacle-temple was one thing; the palace was another. The altar was one thing; the throne another. The priest was one thing; the king another. But this prophecy combines the two! What other fulfillment can it have than that of our Prophet, Priest and King Jesus? And James indicates that it was already being fulfilled. The tabernacle of David, the throne, the Priest, the King, the Savior not only of the Jews but also of the Gentiles was a present reality. Truly the kingdom of heaven had arrived.

They Preached the Kingdom

The summary of Philip's preaching in Samaria is this: "he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (8:12). The summation of Paul's three months of preaching in Ephesus is this: "reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God" (19:8). Paul's two years of preaching in Rome is summarized thus: "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:31).

These three accounts—Philip in Samaria and Paul in Ephesus and Rome—are remarkable. Here we have 3 instances in which days and even years of preaching are summed up to consist of two elements: the kingdom and Christ. Yet, in all the book of Acts, there is no record of Philip or Paul ever mentioning anything about a future Jewish 1000-year earthly reign headquartered in Jerusalem. Therefore, such a millennium concept must not be what Luke had in mind when he recorded that Philip and Paul preached the kingdom of God.

Yes, there is one time in the book of Acts, where Paul clearly speaks of the kingdom in a future sense. In 14:22, he told the brethren, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Even so, the kingdom here is a promise to faithful Christians—certainly not to the Jews who were the *cause* of their tribulations (see 14:19-23).

The kingdom in the present sense can be seen by examining the details of what Paul did teach and preach. A detailed example is given in Acts 13:

—that Jesus was the descendent of David and the Savior, according to the promises (vss. 22,23);
—that there are glad tidings, namely that God raised Jesus from the dead in fulfillment of the promise made to the fathers (vss. 30-37);
—that faith in Jesus can do what the Law of Moses could not do, namely cleanse from sin (vss. 38,39);
—that since the Jews rejected eternal life through Jesus, the message was sent to the Gentiles in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (vss. 46,47).

Paul preached the kingdom by declaring Jesus as the Son of David—that involves Jesus being King. Paul preached the gospel of the kingdom by proclaiming that the promises to Israel were being fulfilled—they include the King's kingdom. Assuredly, in the first century, a spiritual gospel and a spiritual kingdom appeared on the world stage—exactly within the timeframe prophesied by Daniel and Jesus. The kingdom of heaven is a present reality. □

Note by author: *This is the fourth article regarding prophecies of the Messianic kingdom and their fulfillment. Look for more in future issues.*

(Scripture in the preceding article is taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.)

“Is the Jar Full Yet?”

THERE WAS a philosophy professor who stood before his class with some items in front of him. When class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks, rocks about 2 inches in diameter. He then asked the students if the jar was full?

They agreed that it was.
So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked the students again if the jar was full.

They agreed it was. The students laughed.
The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else. “Now,” said the professor, “I want you to recognize that this is your life.

“The rocks are the important things—your family, your partner, your health, your children—anything that is so important to you that if it were lost, you would be nearly destroyed.

“The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else. The small stuff.

“If you put the sand into the jar first, there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all of your energy and time on the small stuff, you will never have room for the

things that are important to you.
“Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Do things with your partner.
“There will always be time to go to work, to clean the house, to give a dinner party or to fix the disposal.
“Take care of the rocks first—the things that really matter. Set your priorities, the rest is just sand.”—*Selected* □

A STORY:

New Treasurer Does His Job

THE TREASURER of a local congregation was disgusted and resigned. The church asked another person to take his place. He managed a local grain elevator. He agreed to take the position on two conditions. One, that no report from the treasurer be given for a whole year, and two, that no one ask him any questions concerning the finances of the church during that time. The church members gulped, but finally agreed, since he was a very trustworthy man in the community and well known, because most of them did business with him at the elevator.

At the end of the year he gave a report as follows: “The indebtedness of \$250,000 on the building had been paid, what they gave the preacher had been sharply increased, the mission work of the church was raised by 200% and all outstanding bills retired. Besides a rather large cash balance was on hand of some \$12,000, a building fund had been established and money set aside for renovating the auditorium.”

The congregation was shocked and perplexed. They could not account for it and immediately asked for an explanation. Quietly the treasurer answered, “Most of you bring your grain to my elevator. As you did business with me, I simply withheld ten percent on your behalf and gave it to the church in your name. You never missed it.”—*Selected* □

God's Perfect Judgment

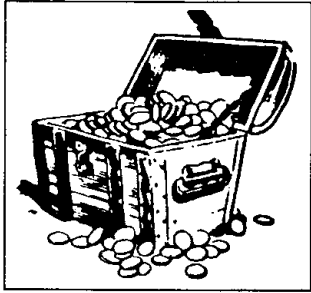
WHEN THE DAY of Judgment has come, and all of mankind has been judged, no one will doubt the wisdom of God's judgment in one way or another. God is perfect, and likewise His judgment will be perfect and beyond question as to why one is lost or saved. □

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”—Proverbs 20:1

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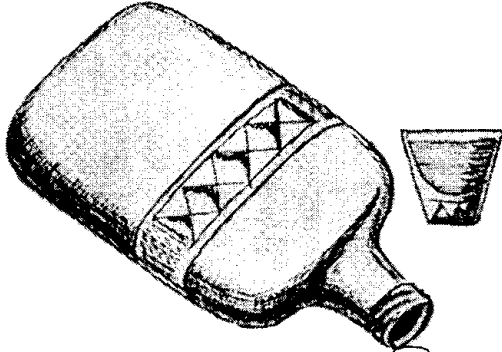
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1. Genesis 10:8,9; 2. Genesis 28:10-19; 3. Genesis 35:16-20;
4. Genesis 50:2; 5. Genesis 50:23; 6. Numbers 20:29; Deuteronomy 34:8; 7. I Samuel 10:1-13 (10:1); 8. I Samuel 18:7,8 (21:11; 29:5); 9. I Kings 6:38; 7:1; 10. Jonah 4:1-3; 11. Jonah 3:5-10;
12. Joel 3:10; Isaiah 2:4 (Micah 4:3); 13. Luke 3:23; 14. Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 22:39-43; 15. To reveal and to conceal, Matthew 13:10-16; 16. JOHN—John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20 (John 13:33,34; 15:12); 17. John 21:23; 18. (1) Acts 16:8-10; (2) 2 Corinthians 2:12,13; (3) Acts 20:6-12; (4) 2 Timothy 4:13; 19. Acts 18:1,2; 20. 2 Timothy 4:10. □

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