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"Put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13)

Fall 2016

Islam—A Prophetic Consideration?—Part IV

Some believe Islam fits the description of the prophesied "man of sin," or beast. Could this be true? Could the man of sin, or perhaps the false prophet, be a Muslim?

by Bill Watson



Bill Watson

The Bible is very clear, the beast, or man of sin, will be considered "antichrist." He will not share in the idea or belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Messiah, or Savior of mankind. Notice what is said by the apostle John: "Little children, it is the last time: and as you have heard that antichrist shall come..." (1 John 2:18). Assuredly, John goes much deeper into the meaning and scope of just what the term "antichrist" includes, but this is a plain implication. Apparently, there were discussions about a *latter day* antichrist within the Christian community at that time. (Request our free publication, *What Does the Bible Really Say About the Antichrist*, for additional details.)

Also, the apostle Paul had a *warning* about this same individual some years before when writing to the Thessalonians. Notice: "Let no man deceive you... and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition [same as the antichrist]: Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God... So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember you not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things" (2 Thessalonians 2:3–5)? Obviously, Paul at the time fully expected this "man of sin"—this antichrist—to appear and set himself up in the *physical* temple of God, still in existence when Paul wrote this, plainly indicating he expected an end-time temple would *facilitate this prophecy*.

The book of Daniel provides additional detail profiling this end-time tyrant the Bible also labels as a "king of fierce countenance." Notice: "And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a *king of fierce countenance*, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power [the dragon, Satan, shall give him power—Revelation 13:4]: and he shall destroy wonderfully [not by force], and shall prosper, and practice, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand: and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace [prosperity] shall destroy many: he shall also stand up *against* the Prince of princes [he will be anti, or *against* Jesus Christ]; but he shall be broken without hand. And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut you up the vision; for it shall be for many days" (Daniel 8:23–26). Daniel goes on to say he didn't understand the vision at that time.

Later, in another visitation from what appears to be Michael, or Gabriel the Archangel, Daniel is told of the latter days and what events will lead up to the final concluding battle with the returning Christ and those in the first resurrection. All this begins in Daniel 10:7, which exclusively was his to hear and receive. The prophecy located right after chapter 10, commencing in chapter 11 through 12, is considered the longest prophecy in your Bible, outside of the book of Revelation, and is also about the latter days, covering major historical points related to Alexander the Great, who is listed as the "mighty king" (Daniel 11:3) right on through and including the first resurrection (Daniel 12:1–3).

Specifically, in Daniel 11:36–45, we gain *additional* insight into the profile of this antichrist autocrat and what he is led to do on a geopolitical level. It's described as a retaliatory invasion into the "glorious" land, Palestine (Daniel 11:41) due to some apparent aggravating provocation from a "king of the south" that allegedly gives him (the beast, this king of the north) cause to exercise military aggression (Daniel 11: 40–43). Ultimately, this stirs up the nations from the east and north (northeast) of Jerusalem to counter this



invasion with a retaliation of biblical proportions, described in both the books of Joel and Revelation—the battle of Armageddon in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Daniel 12:1). It's clear—this is the *final battle*, because the first resurrection occurs at this time (Daniel 12:2–4), a clear indication this happens simultaneously with Christ's second coming to establish the Kingdom of God on earth (Zechariah 14:1–15) at the last trumpet.

Islamic History Demands A Cautious Prophetic Consideration

One thing is clear: the man of sin—or as John labeled him, the "antichrist"—is unique among the long list of tyrants down through world history. He is described as an individual who somehow is able to exercise authority and take control by means of affluence and non-violent advancement, not jihad. He will ingratiate himself and win the hearts and minds of the people and ten kings (Revelation 17:12–15) throughout the world, but at some point becomes dominant and uses military power to counterattack an aggressive, offensive *invasion* from what the Bible calls a "king of the south" (Daniel 11:40–45).

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Open Church Policy

The *Church of God International* is an open church. We have many people attending who are new in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God's laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what *you* do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do. □

God's Holydays 2016

New Testament Passover

April 21, 2016 (Observed at sundown)

Feast of Unleavened Bread

April 23–29, 2016

Pentecost

June 12, 2016

Feast of Trumpets

October 3, 2016

Day of Atonement

October 12, 2016

Feast of Tabernacles

October 17–23, 2016

Last Great Day

October 24, 2016

Holydays are observed beginning sundown the previous evening and end at sundown on the days listed. Passover is observed at sundown on the day listed.

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- With few exceptions, submissions should be from 800–1000 words in either .doc, docx, rtf, or .txt format.
- Submissions may be sent either to vancestinson@cgi.org or lloyd Cary@gmail.com or, preferably, to *both*.



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Obviously, many of these roles are *not yet* clearly identified, nor have the nations, coalitions, or individuals been described and connected to any specifics by *name*. But, there are *patterns* we can look to for some semblance of *sequential order* to clarify some of these crucial events and possible nations. One thing is *clear*: this coming socialistic world combine, with 10 kings working as one, empowering a dictator and false prophet, is called *Mystery Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and the Abominations of the Earth* (Revelation 17:5). It is profiled as a combination of the Babylonian, Greco-Roman Empire (the former king of the north) that was, is not, and yet is, because it will be healed—it will resurrect and come back into the present—and take on its empowerment and authority on into perdition. That's its destiny (Revelation 13:1–18; 17:8–14).

AND THIS BRINGS US TO THE QUESTIONS SOME HAVE: *Is Islam to be blamed for these conditions? Could the Muslims play a part in any of these events and circumstances? Could they be complicit to some degree for what the Bible describes as the end-time tribulation, beast, and false prophet? Some are seriously considering that Islam, at least at first blush, may be a plausible source of these end-time scenarios. Could this actually be possible?*

These questions merit a review of some surprising history that illustrates and confirms this is not the *first* time Islam has been “front and center” as a source of worldwide aggression and suspicion of being the end-time beast power. If we consider some historical facts about the Muslim movement, not the least of which were the Crusades, it goes to this point: we need to consider the prophetic value of Islam's emergence very *cautiously*. But just the same, let's consider Islam's effect on the world, limited to just over the last 500 to 600 years. In so doing, we shall see what is happening today has indeed happened *before*. It's *nothing new* to the geopolitical interplay.

Let me remind us, as was pointed out in Part II, that Islam was an aggressive force to contend with throughout the period preceding and during the Crusades. It was well on its way to expanding throughout Christendom. The Ottoman Turkish Empire was on the rise, subjugating the remaining Byzantine Empire as an all consuming Islamic Caliphate, which included most of Greece, Serbia, and Albania. The Catholic Church had its hands full, trying to battle back the advancing hoards of Muslim invaders throughout the European region.

It was so bad, the historian for Emperor Frederick III, Joseph Grunpeck, stated: “When you perceive the miserable corruption of the whole of Christendom, of all the praiseworthy customs, rules, and laws, the wretchedness of all classes, the many pestilences, the changes in this epoch and all the strange happenings, *you know that the End of the World is near.*” Interestingly enough, we see it was no different some 600 years ago as the Islamic advancements were forging ahead, moving closer to the doorsteps of Vienna. It caused *great fear* and *terror* in the minds and hearts of those throughout Western Europe at the time.

Unquestionably, Islamic Fundamentalism wants to dominate the *world*. That's what Islam means, “submission.” And these same Islamic jihadi fundamentalists are presently causing all kinds of havoc, chaos, and terror among many non-Islamic nations—and this has much of the world's community of nations very disturbed and anxious about how to handle this horrible aggression. It seems almost unthinkable, unimaginable, and astonishing, that what is happening can occur in what many secularists today claim is a civilized world. But, hard as it might be to believe, it is indeed happening!

Yet, as incredibly macabre as conditions are (public beheadings, rapes, drownings in water, and dissolving people in acid while they are alive), it becomes very suitable for many “prophecy prognosticators” to *exploit* the circumstances described in today's headlines, spinning it to their advantage for some kind of personal gain. This is sad, but true!

We see it time and time again, using specific tragedies, or foreboding threats to *headline* an alleged prophetic connection they portray as something currently menacing. We've seen it with Y2K, Harold Camping's prophecies, the Mayan calendar, the *Left Behind* series, and here recently with the lunar tetrads, a.k.a. blood moons. And so it is for some religious leaders today, Islam portends to be the *new apocalyptic threat* that will usher in the return of Christ, or for the Muslim, the return of the “Al Mahdi”—the term for the Islamic messiah.

Historicists have shown Islam has a long connection over the ages of being suspected as the destructive force that ultimately would face off with Christ. It's a known fact according to Peter Toon, Anglican priest, professor, and author, that the Protestants in Europe felt threatened by the Ottoman Empire, especially as it increased in size over the years and took on the profile of a caliphate. Many early Presbyterians, Baptists, Puritans, and other Protestants groups began to identify the Turkish Muslims as the ones John was talking about in the book of Revelation. Mark U. Edwards, Jr., in his book, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–46*, claims Martin Luther believed the papacy was the antichrist, but the Turks comprised the small horn that eliminated the three horns of the beast in Daniel 7. Luther also believed the Turks were Gog and the papacy was Magog. From the book *Luther's View of Church History*, pg 265, Luther wrote: “I believe that we are the last trumpet which prepares for and precedes the advent of Christ.”

Martin Luther wasn't the only one at this time to think Muslims were key players within prophetic events; Calvin also had his own observations. He believed Islam was one of the two horns of the beast—the pope as one, and Islam as the other.

John Gill of the 18th century also portrayed the Muslim Turks a few times in his commentary, identifying Gog in Ezekiel 38 as the Islamic Turks. Also, Thomas Scott of the 19th century had similar beliefs with regard to Islam and their ultimate aim to make war with the Jews. Thomas Newton of the 18th century and James Glasglow in his 1872 commentary both connected Mohammed with the star that fell from heaven, described in Revelation 9:1, the fifth trumpet, or first woe. So, we can see many in the past suspected Islam would have a role in the end-time prophetic events—it *really is nothing new*.

So Where Does This Lead Us?

This information should cause us to recognize, when considering *current* events and headlines, that there is an existing risk they potentially could be *deceiving* if we forget our *history*. We must keep in mind the historical *patterns*—the *framing*! Let me remind us that there remains in the latter day two major forces that face off: the king of the north, formerly *Rome*, and the king of the south, formerly *Egypt* (Daniel 11:40).



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This historical and prophetic pattern remains *unfulfilled* in the latter day, and if Islamic movement continues to develop into an end-time caliphate, it *cannot* play both roles.

We know history tells us that in the 8th century, Islam was thought to be Gog and Magog. It was also taught in the 7th century that Mohammad was the antichrist, but then in the 10th and 11th centuries it changed to the Catholic popes. However, in the 12th century, we find the Muslim leader Saladin considered as the “man of sin.” History has proved time after time many individuals were considered to be the antichrist—even Martin Luther was at one time suspected to be the antichrist. Incredible!

So in all due respect, though Islam may appear to be rather threatening at the moment—and yes, may appear even more so because of the combination of weak leadership from the West conceding certain “enabling policies,” i.e., *weak* immigration enforcement, *mild* military counter attacks with no clearly defined military objectives, and *political correctness* paralyzing lawmakers, allowing Muslim encroachment into the polity, resulting in certain compromises of constitutional law in the hosting nations, changing the hegemony over time—we *must not forget* that presently, the Islamic nations only account for about one percent of the world’s equity markets. By and large, keeping Islam in perspective compared to the West, much of the Muslim world remains in poverty, generally speaking, but with some noted exceptions of course, due to Western money.

However, we plainly know there are active Muslim jihadi fundamentalists advancing a violent *jihad* (violent struggle, or holy war), hoping to achieve dominance and chaos in their pursuit of a resurrected caliphate, as they go about creating the environment for the returning Al Mahdi. This is at the core of their theology: the return of the Al Mahdi, or 12th Imam, who will save humankind from self destruction and restore Islamic law by *sharia*, for all to “enjoy.”

Admittedly, these current jihadi fundamentalists are a comparatively small *fraction* of what is considered to be defined as the greater Islamic population, but that doesn’t dismiss the threat, risk, and danger they impose due to the tactics of *terrorism* and the potential of *additional* jihadists joining the ranks. Keep in mind a recent Pew Research Study revealed there are about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world (23 percent of the global population). At present, there appears to be between 150,000 to 300,000 *jihadist* Muslim fundamentalists *actively engaged* in some sort of violence (less than 0.01 percent), and are actually associated with some terrorist group like ISIS, Hamas, Boko Haram, al Qaeda, etc.—obviously, a small percentage. Nevertheless, a very dangerous Islamic segment of Muslims, along with about 60–70 percent of all Muslims globally are considered to be *Salaf*—the Arabic religious term for “fundamentalist.”

When considering the jihadists as a whole, inclusive of all the groups at the present time, clearly, they are not a large number. Though dangerous and menacing, by comparison they present what should appear to be a *mild* threat to the security of the West; but tragically, the tactics they employ—terrorism and gorilla warfare—make all the difference; and that is generating the motivation for the West to unite against it. If these Muslim jihadi fundamentalists do anything, they may just cause the West to be driven to collectively consolidate their assets and essentially “circle the wagons” to defend against this common enemy that threatens the values and lifestyles of



Western society. That remains a real possibility—the thing lacking from the West is *affirmative leadership*.

With that being said, Islam does indeed have a present role in the prophetic scenarios we are observing here in the West and especially in the United States. The reality is there are many *potential scenarios* that could develop out of what is happening, which continues to thrust world conditions to their prophetic fulfillment. It remains to be seen just how expansive Islam’s role will be as mankind moves into the storm developing on the horizon. In the meantime, we need to be patient as God works toward accomplishing His plan—especially when considering all that is listed within the prophetic script.

However, one *prominent point of prophecy* is playing out right in front of us today. Notice: “The stranger [foreigner] that is within you [in your nation, embedded in the population] shall get up above you very high [exceed in influence and power]; and you shall come down very low [the indigenous people of the nation will lose influence, power, and ultimately control of the country]. He shall lend to you and you shall not lend to him [the nation will be beholden to those we borrow from—our debt will increase—we will be the borrower, not the lender]: he [the foreigner] will be the head, and you shall be the tail [the foreigner will gain the power and influence to control the nation]” (Deuteronomy 28:43–44).

It is *stunning* to see this historical “Israelite” parallel happening in so many areas of the West, especially in Europe, Scandinavia, Britain, and the USA, due to the nations’ laws of freedom and liberty *used against* the hosting country to compromise the standards, values, and conditions of the indigenous. They are being used to *erase* the lifestyles of the West and replace them with other ethnic *foreign* hegemonies—in particular, and presently, Islam!

By means of terrorism, Muslim jihadi fundamentalists are having an influence in *shifting attention* to internal security, which necessitates defensive steps to guard against this onslaught of violence. This naturally results in the loss of certain freedoms. Sadly, *political correctness* has *paralyzed* many Western nations to think in terms of accommodation and appeasement for the sake of peace and cooperation, but in so doing have *compromised* and *conceded* particular liberties and freedoms by the obfuscation of hard decisions against Islamic fundamentalism. And so the price is being paid; risk, danger, and peril is *accelerating* for the populations of countries like France, England, Australia, Scandinavia, and the United States. Terror alerts and the threats of additional attacks are intensifying and only look to become worse in the future.

In the meantime, Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and others in the Middle East continue to saber rattle, taking aggressive political and/or military steps they believe can be won since the West appears to be so preoccupied with their own security and apologetic diplomacy—or as some would describe, *weak leadership* from so many directions.

So What Does This Portend?

The conditions the world finds itself in today are extremely disturbing due to one *major element*—the United States is perceived as weak, indecisive, and without vision, purpose, or a clear objective—a paper tiger *at best*! Its foreign policy and soft approach of trying to be all things to everyone has been detrimental to the perception of America’s strength and influence—it has undermined its own image.

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Tragically, the results have emboldened many potential enemies of the West and bought them time to position themselves into a stronger posture for steering circumstances more favorably for themselves. Some major illustrations of this are China's military presence and build-up in the South China Sea, Russia's invasion of Crimea, and the Iranian nuclear deal that allows Iran to proceed with the development of nuclear technology without pragmatic supervision, which is most certainly going to culminate with nuclear weapons of mass destruction. When that happens, the world will never be the same.

All indications seem to be pointing to a major clash up ahead. Russia and China are growing closer together. Turkey is moving more toward an Islamic state, perhaps a revived caliphate, as it was in the early 20th century. Iran is relentless in its research and development for nuclear technology, now that the United States Treasury has enriched it with billions of dollars from the release and payment of revenue it allowed. And the Israeli state is growing more nervous by the day. So it would appear, unless something drastically changes, the world is fast becoming a more dangerous and volatile place, and doesn't look to be changing for the better any time soon! Instead, it appears circumstances indicate a *collision* of major world powers is becoming more intensely probable that could threaten the fragile peace the world is so desperately trying to maintain.

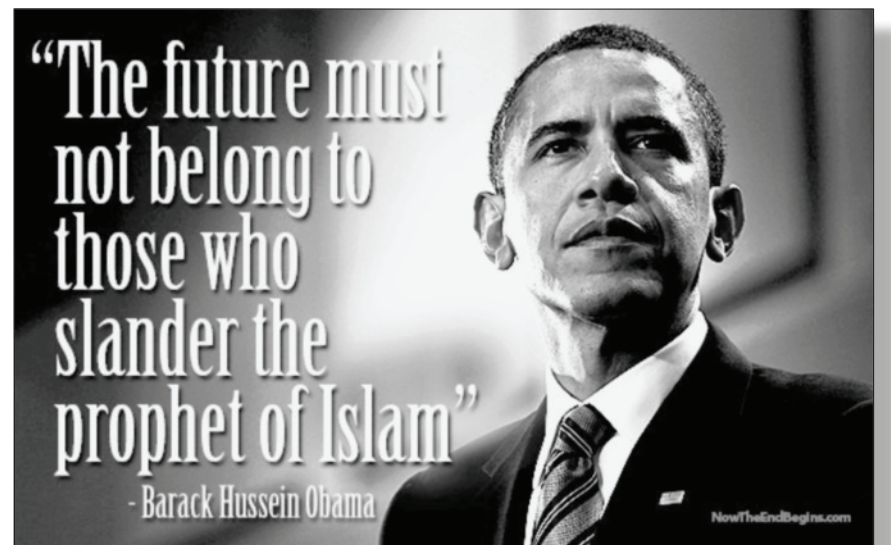


Knowing the Bible clearly describes a Babylonian, Greco-Roman Empire is to resurrect and revisit the present world (it will be healed) and is indeed accelerating toward its destiny with this socialistic system ruled by ten kings, a beast, and false prophet that has the "blood of the saints on its hands," it's important we understand: Islamic fundamentalism is being used to *weaken* the West via terrorism, immigration, refugee asylum, and embedding into the polity of the hosting nations to continue impairing and diluting these cultures to the point that perhaps—just maybe—they will no longer be able to defend themselves. Admittedly, it remains to be seen to what degree this will be allowed before primarily, the United States wakes up to this threat—if at all!

We cannot forget that a major obstacle preventing the Babylonian System from this future resurrection and achieving its destined position, is the last bastion of freedom, liberty, and free market enterprise—the United States! As long as the United States is able to defend itself and is *perceived* able and willing to protect its foreign interests, it will remain a *counter balance* against worldwide aggression.

But when the day comes that it's perceived to be unable and incapable—that is the day the world will change forever, because it will be a world *without* the balance of power the United States and other free market countries like Britain bring to the global community of nations—it will be a *time of the Gentiles*. And sadly, the Bible has a pre-described pattern outlined for those nations that have adopted the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their model, but fail to follow His laws and statutes; and it's *not* a pleasant narrative.

Notice: "...because you hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you [USA culture is morally bankrupt]: ...Because you served not the LORD your God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, from the abundance of all things [the USA is a very corrupted wealthy nation]: ...The LORD shall bring a nation against you from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies [it may be a surprise]; a nation whose tongue you shall not understand: ... and he shall besiege you in all your gates, until your high and fenced walls come down, where in you trusted,



throughout all your land: and he shall besiege you in all your gates throughout all your land, which the LORD your God had given you. ...And you shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God. ... And the LORD shall scatter you among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other..." (Deuteronomy 28:45–64).

This happened to ancient Israel, and will happen to any parallel culture representing the same God. The United States and much of the British Commonwealth nations are in this same mold, representing similar cultural values as ancient Israel, including its worship and belief in the God of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ! *We are accountable to the God of Israel!*

So, Islam is serving a purpose in the prophetic times we currently live in, but when compared to God's Word, it hardly fits the description of this coming socialistic Babylonian, Greco-Roman system destined to reemerge (Revelation 13:1–7) and bear down on the nations of the world. It just doesn't appear to have the historical substance to fit the profile as the king of the north.

But more importantly, it would appear the United States must be neutralized—taken out in some way—where it no longer is an obstacle or deterrent, preventing the world from coalescing into the socialistic system the Bible describes in Revelation 17:11–14.

Something is in the works that will enable this "beast" to rise and come to power and fit the descriptions explained in Daniel and Revelation. There are clouds on the horizon—they are building. Will potential forces and political circumstances, designed by God, afford more time for mankind to repent? To perhaps delay the storm? That remains to be seen—time will tell.

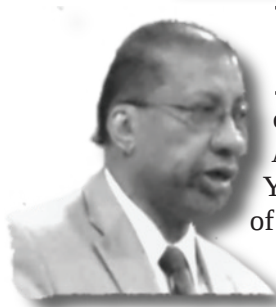
But, John was succinct about a war that will eliminate 25 percent of humanity. Notice: "And when he had opened up the *fourth seal*... I looked and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth [25 percent], to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:7–8). The fifth seal *follows* this enormous war, which is a great Christian martyrdom. I don't have to remind us, much of the Western nations are traditionally considered "Christian."

A major conflict appears to be coming. The European Union is weak and has many problems—it needs to be shaken up. Why? Because it presently does not match the biblical description of the beast. Yet it is clear: the footprint, where this *Babylon the Great* system will sit, based on the historical patterns of Daniel seven, seems to illustrate it's where the European Union *currently* is, and thereby would be considered the king of the north in the last days—or the "healed" ancient Babylonian, Greco-Roman Empire. So, how will it come to be? It would appear through much pain, destruction, death, and heartache. In other words, through much tribulation—perhaps the fourth seal?

In the book of Romans, Paul mentions this: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11–12). This advice is to be taken to heart to assure ourselves we remain engaged—and if we're not, to repent and get right with God by living a life that exemplifies Jesus Christ—without delay!

The Church That Jesus Built

by Bill Russ



Bill Russ

Have you ever looked at the Yellow Pages in a town where you do not reside? If you have, did you notice how many different churches there were, even in a relatively small town? And if you have not, try looking at your town's Yellow Pages; you may be astounded at the number of church organizations listed there. You will see multiple names under the same denominations, such as Baptist, Church of Christ, and Presbyterian, and many will be listed under "Nondenominational."

What is interesting is that all of them claim to be part of the church that Jesus said He would build.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18–19).

All of these churches claim to be part of the true church and, in some instances, make the claim that they are the only true church. None of them lay claim to being part of the apostasy, and they all teach something a little different than the others. Even the ones who belong to the same denomination will usually have differences with one another in their teachings and doctrine.

Have you ever considered how many churches there are in the United States? Over 34,000 and the number is still escalating. There are new churches forming at a reckless pace. And each one, including the church we attend, believes it is the true church or a part of the true church. Some even go so far as to teach they are the only true church, so that would make all other churches false in one way or another. I don't even know the doctrine or the teaching of all the churches in the United States; many of them I have not even heard of. How can I say, without apology, that not a one of them is the true Church of God?

How can I make such a statement? To many, this is a blasphemous statement. Even the church that ordained me a minister and with which I attend worship services every Sabbath is not *the* only true church. When we look for the true church in a man-made organization, we are bound to fail.

The word "church" is frequently used in reference to a building with stained glass windows, a steeple, and immaculately kept lawns. But Jesus hardly had any such thing in mind when He said, "I will build My church."

As often as we use the word church, a casual reader of the Bible might suppose it is used quite regularly in Scripture, but in most translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, the word cannot be found at all. It occurs three times in the Geneva Bible and once in some translations of the Septuagint. In the Douay-Rheims (Catholic) translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the word "church" can be found 26 times. The translators use the words "congregation," "assembly," or "meeting." They all meant the same thing in ancient Israel. The Hebrew term (H6951) is *qahal kaw-hawl*, and is from H6950, assemblage (usually concretely), assembly, company, congregation, multitude. H6950 is *qahal kaw-hal'*, a primitive root; to convoke, assemble (selves) (together), gather (selves) (together).

There are some organizations that we would not join on a dare, like the motorcycle gang "Hell's Angels." I'm sure you could name many others.

Of the Four Gospels, only the Gospel of Matthew uses the word "church." But from Acts to the book of Revelation, it occurs seventy-eight of times. The Greek term (G1577) is *ἐκκλησία (ekklesia)*, and is from a compound of G1537 and a derivative of G2564; a calling out, that is (concretely), a popular meeting, especially a religious congregation (Jewish synagogue, or Christian community); assembly, church. You have to read the context of the verse to determine if the word "church" in the Greek Scriptures is referring to the church that Christ built or just an assembly.

It was not Jesus' intention to build yet another religious sect like the Pharisees and the Sadducees and many others in Judea at that time. The church He was going to build had never existed in the history of mankind.

I believe AD 31 was the year that Christ built His church. In one way, His church is like one of today's social clubs—to be a member of it, you have to meet certain criteria. It was not inclusive like many social organizations are today, but you have to meet certain qualifications. To be considered for membership in Christ's church, you have to be human.

The second chapter of Acts gives the other qualification one must meet to become a member of Christ's church. Listening to Peter's sermon, the people were very troubled and sought to make amends for their participation in the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ. This is the answer that Peter gave them:

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' 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. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call'" (Acts 2:37–39).

You have to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and all who repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was the first time in the history of mankind where the Holy Spirit would be poured out liberally on all who desired it, not just a selected few. We can say that the covenant God had with man had now gone from a physical covenant to a spiritual one.

On that fateful day, the Day of Pentecost, the ones who were to be saved from that perverse generation had to hear the Word of God and believe. They had to repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and they would receive the free gift of the Holy Spirit. And they had to continue to nurture that free gift so it would not become stagnant and depart from them. All this is further affirmed in the following scriptures:

Romans 10:11–17: "For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

1 Thessalonians 5:19–22: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."

I was once asked about what it means to quench the Spirit. We live in a nation of words, and sometimes the words have the same meaning. I would not hesitate to guess that all of you have in your car or home a device that is used to quench something. A fire extinguisher that is designed to extinguish fires could be called a fire quencher, for the two terms mean the same thing. Those still using wood or coal have to continually feed the fire or it will go out. Are we to believe that without feeding the Spirit of God that it will continue to burn bright in our lives? The Spirit of God, once we have it, cannot be neglected. We are to continue to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:30–31: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."

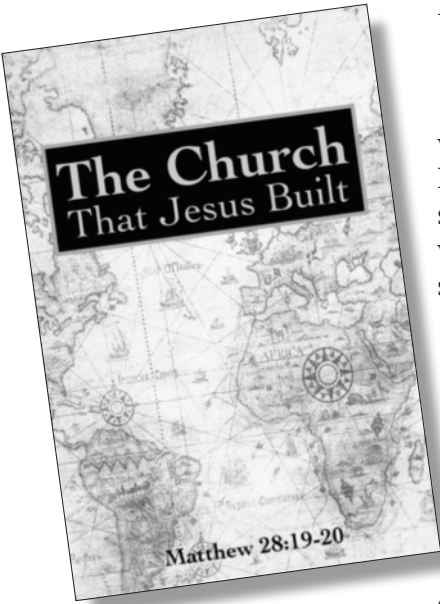
I made a statement earlier that none of the churches, whether Catholic, Protestant, or even a "Church of God" organization is *the* "only" true church. Anyone in the human race who has God's Spirit is in the church that Jesus built. No corporate body or independent group can give you God's Spirit; only God can do that, and only He knows all who have His Spirit. The church that Jesus built is made up of all the called-out ones who have repented of their sins and been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—and this opportunity is open to the world, for God makes no distinction between Jew and Greek.

The church in the wilderness—the congregation of Israel—was a physical organization, and their blessings were physical. All the nations around them, if Israel had been obedient to the Word of God, would have desired the blessings that Israel enjoyed. These blessings would not have been for Israel only, but for all who would worship the God of creation. But Israel did not keep her end of the covenant, but broke it, and God sent them into physical captivity, first to the Assyrians and then the Babylonians. By the time of Jesus, they were under the rule of Rome. But the New Covenant that Jesus instituted the night He was betrayed is spiritual. No longer did man have to be cut in the flesh, for the circumcision that He is under then and now is of the heart. The true Church of God cannot be found exclusively in one country or one corporate body. Ω



If you have access to a computer, be sure to visit our updated web site at: www.cgi.org.

We have hundreds of articles, booklets, and video sermons waiting for you.



Be sure to request our free booklet:
The Church That Jesus Built

Jesus Christ promised that He would build His church, and that His church would never be destroyed. But what did He mean when He said “church?” Was He speaking of an organized entity run by bishops, archbishops, and other prelates? Did He authorize “apostolic succession” to insure that His church would forever be able to trace its origins directly to the apostles? Or has God provided another means whereby one may find the true church? Ω

Testimonials

After watching the web chat between Bill Watson and Wayne Hendrix discussing the subject “What Is the Church?” from a very unique perspective, enthusiastic readers wrote:

Excellent! Straight forward! Honest! Biblically sound!... I am pleased to know of your “organization.” Thank you! R.M. Ω

What a good discussion, this was one of the reasons I took a second look at CGI over 2 years ago. I have never looked back since I have truly found for me personally that Christ has been able to work with me through his word. The CGI organization is a wonderful place for personal development and to grow closer to the “organism, the body of Christ.” P.W. Ω

Bill Watson’s and Wayne Hendrix’s Internet chats on “What Is the Church?” were right on the money! Ω

Double-ditto to the other positive comments on this page! In my early life I had been religiously nothing—zero, zilch, nada. Eventually, in my conceit, I turned myself into a hard-core atheist. The WCG helped open my mind to the fact that God IS and that the Bible is His holy, inspired Word. I was in that organization for 27-½ years. After HWA’s demise, the organization was infiltrated by certain men who crept in unawares (Jude 4) at the TOP of that pyramidal form of church government and began changing virtually every point of doctrine. They are now merely another dwindling Protestant church. Many people followed the new leadership into apostasy. After all, many reasoned since *they* were “the one and only True Church,” would a minister LIE to them? Others drifted here and there. Many were “burned out” on religion altogether. We had BIG decisions to make: either we follow Christ and His Word... or we remain in that organization and “dumb down” to please friends and relatives who unfortunately welcomed those changes. The choice, though temporarily painful, was obvious. We had to follow Christ and where He was leading us. We were quite fortunate in those days in that there was NO United, Philadelphia, Restored, or Living churches to go to; they did not yet exist. The current unnumbered splinter churches are still continually splintering. At that time we looked around and found there appeared to be few, if any, other organizations to flee to who were still teaching doctrinally sound Bible Truth; we found the *Church of God International*. We have attended this organization since 1992 and have been warmly welcomed, accepted, taught, and are very happy there. The congregants truly are our spiritual family. It was as though our former church affiliation had been our “high school” education, and now we were in the university of life. True, there were some disappointments and “bumps in the road” along the way, because men will always let you down, but God NEVER lets you down.

Thank you for a great message. R.L. Ω

THANK YOU CGI, for all you have done and are doing. Keep up the great work. God be with you all. Ω

Note: You can watch the program, *What is the Church?* on your computer at: <http://cgi.org/armor-of-god-web-chat/2015/6/12/what-is-the-church?rq=church>

What is the Church?

The Companion Bible by E. W. Bullinger, Appendix #186, (Page 207) under the heading “CHURCH” (Greek, *EKKLESIA*), adds the following:

1. The Greek word *ekklesia* means *assembly*, or a gathering of *called-out ones*. It is used seventy times in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *kahal* (from which latter we have our word *call*), rendered in Sept. by *sunagoge* and *ekklesia*.¹ This latter word occurs in the New Testament 115 times (36 in plural), and is always translated “church” except in Ac 19:32,39,41 (assembly).

2. *kahal* is used (1) of Israel as a People *called out* from the rest of the nations (Gen. 28:3); (2) of the tribal council of Simeon and Levi, those *called out* from each tribe (Gen. 49:6); (3) of an assembly of Israelites *called out* for worship or any other purpose (Deut. 18:16; 31:30. Josh. 8:35. Judges 21:8); (4) any assembly of worshippers as a congregation (Psalm 22:22,25. *Ekklesia* in Matthew 16:18; 18:17. 1 Corinthians 14:19,35, &c.); (5) the equivalent *ekklesia* of separate assemblies in different localities (Acts 5:11; 8:3. 1 Corinthians 4:17, &c.); (6) of the guild or “union” of Ephesian craftsmen (Acts 19:32,41), and v. 39 (the lawful assembly). Finally, the special Pauline usage of *ekklesia* differs from all these. Other assemblies consisted of *called-out ones* from Jews, or from Gentiles (Acts 18:22), but this new body is of *called-out ones* from both.

3. Our word “church”² has an equally varied usage. It is used (1) of any congregation; (2) of a particular church (England, or Rome, &c); (3) of the ministry of a church; (4) of the building in which the congregation assembles; (5) of Church as distinct from Chapel; (6) of the church as distinct from the world, and lastly, it is used in the Pauline sense, of the body of Christ.

4. It is of profound importance to distinguish the usage of the word in each case, else we may be reading “the church which was in the wilderness” into the Prison Epistles, although we are expressly told that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in the “church which is His body”. And when our Lord said “On this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18), those who heard His words could not connect them with the “mystery” which was “hid in God” and had not then been made known to the sons of men. Confusion follows our reading what refers to Israel in the past or the future into the present dispensation. Readers are referred to the various notes in the connexions.

5. The word where qualified by other terms occurs thus: —

Church of God: Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:16 (pl.), 22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1. Galatians 1:13.

1 Thessalonians 2:14 (pl.), 22; 2 Thessalonians 1:4 (pl). 1 Timothy 3:5,15 (c. of the living God).

Churches of Christ: Romans 16:16.

Church in... house: Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2.

Churches of the Gentiles: Romans 16:4.

Churches of Galatia: 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:2. Of Asia: 1 Colossians 16:19. Of Macedonia: 2 Corinthians 8:1. Of Judaea: Galatians 1:22. Of the Laodiceans: Colossians 4:16. Of the Thessalonians: 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1.

Church of the firstborn: (pl) Hebrews 12:23.

Church in Ephesus, Smyrna, &c. Revelation 2; 3; and Churches: Revelation 22:16.

¹ *kahal* occurs in the Old Testament 123 times; congregation eighty-six, assembly seventeen, company seventeen, and multitude three times. The Sept. uses *sunagoge* and *ekklesia* as practically synonymous terms. But the *sunagoge* concerns the bringing together of the members of an *existing* society or body excluding all others, whereas the *ekklesia* calls and invites all men, including outsiders everywhere, to join it. *Sunagoge* being permanently associated with Jewish worship, was dropped by the early Christians in favor of *ekklesia* as of wider import.

² Is derived from the Gr. *kuriakos*, of or belonging to the Lord, house (Gr. *oikos*) being understood. It comes to us through A.S. *circe* (Scottish *kirk*). Ω

Brainstorming For New Growth Ideas

by Mike James



Mike James

Media—CDs/Videos/Booklets; Evangelism; Open Category (anything new they could come up with). Media—CDs/Videos/Booklets;

The purpose of the session was to find new ideas we could address and maybe try on these church subjects. I broke the room into seven groups and had each group come up with ideas for each category. They moved from topic to topic within a short timeframe. They used sticky notes to write their ideas and stick on a wall, and when they had all gone to each station for each item. they went back to the original item they started with. When they got back to their original station, they had to then consolidate and evaluate the ideas that had been put on the wall. Below are the top 10 ideas for each item. The Ministerial Council will be looking at possibly implementing some of these ideas in the future. If you have any talent or knowledge in regard to some of these ideas, please send me an email or call me, and perhaps you can help us with some of these ideas. Or try some of these ideas out with your local groups and let me know how it goes. My email and phone number are at the end of this article.

1) **Involvement**

- a. Church-wide prayer time: Set up a specific time during the week or month for the entire church to pray about a particular issue.
- b. Interactive Bible Studies: Perhaps online or in your local groups.
- c. Town Hall/Self Assessment: From time to time, the church groups should have a general meeting to address how things are going in the church and what changes they might want to implement.
- d. Cultural and Social Activities.
- e. Everyone has some role at services to fulfill various needs.
- f. Community Service projects.
- g. Congregation-wide campout.
- h. Create/communicate a local congregation vision or roadmap.
- i. Family (congregational) social activities (games).
- j. After-sermon discussions.

Other ideas for this topic included: make phone calls to people church or are going through some issues; voluntary duty list—people in the church group would be responsible for various needs of others in the church and could be called upon to deal with a specific issue when it arose (someone needs a ride, call so and so; need to talk, call so and so); prayer lists given out each week; yearly survey for entire church on how to make the church better; children’s Bible studies; fundraising for charity.

2) **Youth/Young Adult/Children**

- a. Involve them in church by having them read Scriptures.
- b. Online resources for youth—YouTube, Facebook, questions and answers, and the CGI website.
- c. Inter-generational service projects/community projects.

- d. Sex education; Bible-based morality.
- e. Site for youth to post their stuff, monitored by an adult.
- f. Game-ification on web/Bible-based web app.
- g. Bible plays/drama.
- h. Share personal testimonies/talk to them, encourage them.
- i. Group discussions of issues that are important to them.
- j. Weekend activities...dance...sports...camp...Infuse.

Other ideas for this topic included: Join other youth at Winter Family Weekend activities in Kentucky in December; Bible Study series created just for youth; read them Bible stories; part of service directed toward youth.

3) **Scattered Brethren**

- a. Online portal for interactive services/Bible Study
- b. Weekly contact via email, cards, newsletter, etc.
- c. Personal visits for encouragement.
- d. Refer to nearby Church of God groups.
- e. Organize regional family events.
- f. Carpools for transport.
- g. Conference calls.
- h. Face time on Skype.
- i. Blogging on church website.
- j. Individual and group prayer.

Other ideas for this topic include: friend on Facebook.

4) **Media** (CDs, DVDs, Booklets, etc.)

- a. Spot ads (15-60 seconds).
- b. CD Bible Studies on individual books.
- c. Ongoing Bible Study course—add to what we have.
- d. Shorter booklets.
- e. Magazine online.
- f. Audio booklets.
- g. Free bookmarks.
- h. Booklets in nursing homes, prisons, doctors’ offices; drop off for display.
- i. Booklets on social issues and psychology.
- j. PBS free broadcasts, local areas.

Other ideas for this topic include: booklet on the calendar; booklet on Holy Names; postcards with our literature to request; booklet on stress relief; post-abortion outreach through media; more color to booklets.

5) **Evangelism**

- a. Public debate.
- b. Invite family and friends to services.

Conference, continued from previous page

- c. Personal example.
- d. Billboards.
- e. Street preaching.
- f. Public campaigns.
- g. Visit sick in hospitals.
- h. Public service announcements.
- i. Free public TV.
- j. Food banks.

Other ideas for this topic include: Prison or jail outreach; carrying church literature or CDs with you; Bible Study for public with a free meal; flyers; talk to neighbors; Bible Studies so we all know our material better; hats, t-shirts, and business cards; an evangelism coordinator; full-page ad in large newspaper or magazine; bumper sticker; car magnet; posters or ads in barbershops, grocery stores, and restaurants; local newspaper ads; have dinners or parties with literature available; new name for *Armor of God* program.

6) Foreign Field

- a. Translate key resources (booklets, CDs etc.)
- b. Identify brethren with language skills.
- c. Train brethren for simultaneous translation.
- d. Transcribe translation.
- e. Leverage foreign offices (Jamaica, the Philippines, Canada).
- f. Interview a famous foreigner.
- g. Bible for ESL (English Learning Study) course.
- h. Foreign language radio program.
- i. Links to foreign language sites.
- j. Foreign service projects.

Other ideas for this topic include: articles available in foreign languages; teach current church member to enhance their language skills; teach English language classes; send Bibles to foreign countries to establish relationships; missionary work (establish a foreign mission); ministerial trips abroad; contact a vetted CGI group in a foreign country and send a CGI couple or elders to work with locals in that area.

7) Open Category (Anything you can think of not addressed in the other six categories)

- a. Community outreach (hospices, prisons, jails, nursing homes, etc.).
- b. Establishing a presence at colleges (booklets, Bible Studies).
- c. More online educational opportunities.
- d. Inter-organizational social activities (with other Church of God groups).
- e. Local advertising through flyers, banners, and billboards.
- f. Pay and education for ministers.
- g. Shortwave radio.
- h. Online prayer clubs/groups/Skype interaction.
- i. Youth plays.
- j. Establish better communications in church.

Other ideas for this subject include: Infusers visit college campuses to evangelize; used clothing give-away; food bank or soup kitchen; reestablish Imperial Academy to teach evangelists; give away Bibles; flyers on windshields; invite community for breakfast; go door to door to invite to church; Fun Run for Christ; more organized church fasting and prayer; build our own church buildings; warmly greet people; newspaper ads; Spanish radio program.

Use these ideas as a resource for your local church. The Ministerial Council will try to implement some of these ideas moving forward. If you have any other ideas pertaining to these subjects, please email them to Mike James at mhjames6043@yahoo.com or call me at 240-304-6798. Ω

Ministerial Conference

2016

by Wynn Skelton

The Church of God International held its first Ministerial General Conference in more than ten years, May 13–15, at the Holiday Inn, Cincinnati Airport. It was a resounding success in every way and attended by well over 50 ministers, including several ministers from various affiliated groups that CGI has the pleasure of serving together with.

One of the goals of the conference was to create an atmosphere where closer relationships and camaraderie would be encouraged. Another goal was based on 1 Corinthians 1:10, which states, “Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions amongst you.”

The conference kicked off Friday evening with a get acquainted session and introductions to break the ice and get everyone engaged and relaxed. The first session was followed with an interactive session on what CGI is doing in order to build bridges and relationships amongst the greater Body of Christ.

Sabbath morning began with prayer followed by a team building session. After a short break, there was a session on striving for unity and peace in the ministry through servant leadership, followed by discussion on the challenges and responsibilities facing the ministry today.

After lunch, Vance Stinson led a discussion on our core doctrines and how we should manage doctrinal differences when they arise. Other afternoon topics were how to grow the church and how we can accomplish church evangelism. That was followed up with Jeff Reed discussing Internet evangelism with video product example to help explain. Mike James then conducted a workshop session to get everybody thinking and sharing ideas on how to confront specific obstacles we face as a church (see accompanying article, “Brainstorming for New Growth Ideas”). Afterwards, everyone was dismissed for the evening to freshen up for a group dinner and fellowship afterward.

Sunday morning’s meeting included discussion on the Ministerial Apprentice Program, Infuse, and Ignite, followed by an interactive session on Feast of Tabernacles Guidelines and sharing different approaches. Bill Watson and Mike Nolen then guided a session on the duties of the Ministerial Council. The conference ended with closing comments and prayer. Ω

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1)!



Questions and Replies



QUESTION:

There are those that say if you are going to keep the holy days, then why don't you still have animal sacrifices like they did in Jesus's day and even after His death and resurrection.

Where in the Bible does it tell us what is supposed to be kept after Jesus vs. what was done before. I understand about Sabbath because the 4th commandment specifically says it, but it is all the rest that I can't explain. I believe someone on *Bring On the Sabbath* said that the Jews added 600+ laws that should be followed.

If something was going to be changed after Jesus came, then wouldn't the Bible be clear about it? Let me know what you think, or point me in the right direction

REPLY:

You asked, "If you are going to keep the holy days, then why don't you still have animal sacrifices like they did in Jesus's day and even after His death and resurrection." Good question.

First, we must realize there were *three main categories* of laws in the Old Testament:

- 1.) **Civil law:** law of the land such as we have in our societies today.
- 2.) **Ceremonial law:** including the animal sacrifices, washings, and offerings.
- 3.) **The Ten Commandments,** including all the statutes and judgements hanging off them.

People in the Old Testament sacrificed animals because God *instructed* them to do so and accepted them from their hand. Some illustrations include Abel (Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11:4), Noah (Genesis 8:20–21), and Abraham (Genesis 22:12–14). When God gave the nation of Israel a distinct law at Mount Sinai, it contained a great deal of instruction about animal sacrifices (see Exodus 29:38–46 and the book of Leviticus).

One of the central purposes of the animal sacrifices under the so-called Law of Moses was to keep before the eyes and hearts of Israel their sin and the truth that *life* had to be given in order for their sins to be forgiven (Hebrews 9:22; 10:3).

There was a problem, though: "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament Law of Moses were repeated over and over (Hebrews 10:1–3, 11). They were, in effect, a schoolmaster.

This leads to your next question: Was this *only* to be done before Jesus came?

The animal sacrifices were only properly offered to God *before* the death of Jesus on the stake. Once His blood was shed, *it*—Christ's blood—was offered before God, opening the way to salvation for all who believe (Hebrews 9:11–12; 10:19–20).

The religious establishment of Christ's time did not recognize He was the Messiah, Who was the final, ultimate sacrifice, and therefore continued with their Judaistic sacrifices for some time after Christ's death.

The animal sacrifices of the Law of Moses were a *foreshadowing* of the perfect and complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world (see Hebrews 9:13–14; 10:1). If animal sacrifices had perfected the worshipper, no more would have been needed or offered. Yet, there was continual shedding of animal blood under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 10:2–3, 11).

This is not true of the sacrifice of Jesus, who offered Himself *ONCE FOR ALL TIME* for the sins of the world. Hebrews 10:10–14 emphatically states:

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, **after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever**, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. **For by one offering he hath perfected for ever** them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:10–14 KJV).

Note especially verse 12, which says Jesus offered "*one* sacrifice for sins *forever*." It will never be repeated. His one sacrifice on the stake was sufficient to forever pay the price of redemption for sinners (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 2:24).

Animal sacrifices served their purpose well. They taught man of his need to be purified from his sins by the giving of *life* (please see Leviticus 17:11).

But now, the sacrificial law in Judaism, which contained regulations for animal sacrifice, has been rendered obsolete.

It was the *life* of the Son of God, given up freely on the cross *once*, that *forever* has the power to remove sin (Hebrews 9:25–28). The Gospel of Christ, which contains the provisions of the sacrifice of Christ, brings salvation to all who will believe and obey Him (Romans 1:16–17; Hebrews 5:8–9).

Civil laws change as society changes. We establish courts and legal systems to ensure obedience of these laws. For example, we have laws today that we should not run through red lights in traffic. This would have no meaning in Jesus's time.

The Ten Commandments (also known as the Decalogue) have *never* been "done away" and never will. "Think *not* that I am come to destroy the **law**, or the prophets: I am *not* come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17).

"And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the **law** to fail" (Luke 16:17).

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle *shall in no wise* pass from the **law**, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18).

"The **law** of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). See also, Psalm 119:1,44,160; 1 John 2:4,7; 3:4; 5:3; 2 John 6.

You added, "I understand about Sabbath because the 4th commandment specifically says it, but it is all the rest that I can't explain."

Leviticus 23, verse 2 says, "...Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are MY feasts." God then goes on to say, in verse 3: "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings" (Leviticus 23:3). He then goes on to give all seven of God's ANNUAL holy days (verses 4 through 43). GOD'S SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH AND HIS HOLY DAYS STAND OR FALL TOGETHER!

God's holy days are *Feasts of GOD* (Leviticus 23:2), not the "Jews." They were commanded to be observed *FOREVER* (Leviticus 23:31,41). The holy days were ordained during the year *BEFORE* the sacrifices were given to Israel (Exodus 12 and 13), so they were not tied together with the sacrifices until one year *after* coming out of Egypt. There was no place to sacrifice in, and no tabernacle built then. Jesus and the apostles kept the holy days (Luke 2:42–42; Acts 12:3; 20:6; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 16:8).

The Pharisees not only tried to follow the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law, but added literally *thousands* of new commandments called the *Midrash* that were created to refine the original 613 commandments. The original intent of these additions was to clarify the law, but it ended up adding many layers of complicated regulations. It is these *man-made ordinances* that Jesus swept away, not the law of God or His holy days.

For further study, we encourage you to send for our booklets, *Which Old Testament Laws Apply Today?* [OTL] and *Have the O.T. Dietary Laws Been Abolished?* [DLA]. In addition, you would benefit from our CDs, *The Atoning Sacrifice of Christ* [C121] and *Is the Law Only for the Jews?* [C915]. We also invite you to visit our updated web site at www.cgi.org.

Thanks for writing, and may God bless and be with you and yours as you study His Word and follow His leading. Ω

Personal Correspondence Department



In loving memory...



Clara Elkins

The Kingdom of God received a Saint on Sunday May 29, 2016 and the Church of God, International lost a true “Proverbs 31” Virtuous Woman. **Clara Elkins**, age 77, of Norman, Arkansas, passed away after a prolonged illness. Many members of the Church of God will remember Clara as the woman behind her husband and Pastor, Ron Elkins, serving congregations in Texarkana, Texas, Jacksonville-Little Rock, Arkansas, and Shreveport, Louisiana, including at the Feast of Tabernacles in Wagoner, Oklahoma for many years.

Clara was born on February 8, 1939 in DeQueen, Arkansas, the daughter of Luther “Monk” Smith and Luella Coleman Smith.

She was a retired Certified Nursing Assistant. She loved being with family and playing with her grandchildren. She especially enjoyed sitting in her cedar rocker on the deck and looking at nature around her.

She is survived by her husband, Ron Elkins of Norman; two children, Billy Martz of Avery, Texas and Charlotte Vanderhoff of Norman; her brother, Turner Smith of Texarkana, Texas; her sister, Katie Henson of Texarkana, Texas; four grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

Services were held at 2:00 PM, Monday, June 6, 2016, in the Davis-Smith Funeral Home Chapel, Glenwood, Arkansas, with Pastor Charles Groce officiating. Interment was at Liberty Cemetery.

She will be missed by many who knew her, but especially by her husband, Ron, who relied on her for so much.

Ω

David L. Hostetter

A long time member of the CGI, Columbus, Ohio congregation, **David L. Hostetter**, age 72, passed away on Thursday, June 16, 2016. David retired from the Columbus City Schools after 30 years of service. Prior to that, he was a railroad policeman for Penn Central and Conrail Railroads. David was an avid railroad fan and had his scanner radio on whenever he was home. Survivors include two sisters, Catherine Snider and Julie Thompson; nieces; nephews; special friend Danielle; friends at Northgate and Bob Evans; and his brothers and sisters in Christ. Funeral arrangements were handled by Rutherford-Corbin Funeral Home, Worthington, Ohio.

Ω



Bob and Thelma Henry

Robert F. Henry, 82, of California, Kentucky, passed away Monday, June 6, 2016 at Highland Spring of Fort Thomas. He was a retired trouble shooter for Northern Kentucky Water District, a Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War, and a member of the Church of God International for about 20 years. Bob was local leader and host for the Newport, Kentucky congregation for several years. Bob is survived by his wife, Thelma Henry (nee Bihl); children, Roni (Don) Seitz, Teri (Chuck) Carson, Karen Thompson, Robert Henry Jr., Marcus Henry and Kevin (Lisa) Henry; fourteen grandchildren and sixteen great-grandchildren. A memorial service was held at 7:00 PM on June 12 at the Alexandria Funeral Home in Alexandria, Kentucky with Elder Tom Kauffung officiating.

Ω



If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come (Job 14:14).

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

Ω

Choosing a Good Study Bible

by Lloyd Cary



Lloyd W. Cary

Are you looking for another Bible? Have you ever been in a Bible bookstore and were overwhelmed and confounded by overchoice? I have. There are some things we should be aware of before choosing a study Bible. It seems there is a specially tailored Bible for nearly everyone. There are plain text Bibles, devotional, and specialty Bibles. There are Bibles for men, for women, children, pre-teens, stu-

dents, brides, law enforcement, ministers, preachers, Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, firemen, the military, Jehovah's Witnesses, Masonic Bibles, and even a Bible for homosexuals called the *Queen James Bible*.

There are reference Bibles such as the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*, and the *Annotated Reference Bible* by Finis Dake. Other popular study Bibles are the *Scofield Reference Bible* and the *Companion Bible* by E.W. Bullinger. And don't forget the popular Bibles by John MacArthur, Ferrar Fenton, Orville Nave, and Young's, to name a few. There are pros and cons to each.

Then there are "specialty Bibles" for journaling, home schooling, particular denominations, law enforcement, and the idly curious. There are devotional Bibles by Chambers, Gaither, Arthur, Arterburn, MacArthur, Warren W. Wiersbe, Wesley, Tozer, and more! There are commentaries by Matthew Henry, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, Frank Binford Hole, Matthew Poole, Ethelbert Bullinger, C.F. Keil and Franz MacLaren, Delitzsch, Dwight L. Moody, William Burkitt, Coke, Jonathan Edwards, Johnathan Trapp, Robert Young, John Gill, John Darby, John Wesley, Joseph Lightfoot, Clarence Larkin, Charles Spurgeon, David Guzik, Arno Gaebelein, and many, many more. We could go on and on. The competition is fierce.

Why Are There So Many Study Bibles?

The *first* answer is, "They sell!" Bible-making is a *lucrative* multi-billion dollar business today.

The *second* answer is that the scholar's union is busily designing Bibles that please the masses of people so that, ultimately, there will be a politically correct common Bible that, in the end, nearly everyone can embrace for a one-world Bible. Each new version boasts that it is "more accurate," "the latest scholarship," "easiest to read, or understand," or has the "best features." When you listen to the well meaning sales people, it is almost like shopping for a new automobile. *Buyer beware!*

Choosing a new Bible can be really simple or really complicated—it all depends on what you want.

Many are turning their attention to the plethora of new "study Bibles" flooding the markets. What makes "study Bibles" different from other Bibles is the amount of additional information and extra features that are packaged alongside the Scripture text. Most study Bibles generally include notes on nearly every page, usually in the side margins or at the bottom of the page. These notes typically provide additional information, historical context, or cross-references to other Bible passages, explanations of key doctrinal views, *ad nauseam*. Many became so engrossed with all the "helps," they seldom even read the text. These notes, comments, and opinions can influence the reader's thoughts significantly.

There are pros and cons to study Bibles. As mentioned above, the prime benefit of most study Bibles is the extra information and extra features cram-packed into every page. There are times when more information can be *too* much, especially when the footnotes are loaded with false doctrines such as the immortality of the soul, going to heaven or hell when you die, Sunday keeping, the rapture, speaking in tongues, trinity, holy names and calendar issues, and antinomianism (no-law) dogmas. People tend to believe the false doctrines because they are "in the Bible."

There is a Bible designed to suit nearly everybody. Hence the arguments, "My Bible says such and such," "Well, *my* Bible says otherwise." Who is right and who is wrong? And does it really matter as long as you believe *something*? Indeed it *does*! "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of *men*, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

In deciding on a new Bible, one must consider size, weight, cover, and cost. Do you want the proverbial *compact* Bible with *large* print, wide margins, a concordance, an encyclopedia, lots of cross-references, reading plan, index, words of Christ in red, footnotes, maps, and thumb-indexing? Rest assured, *it does not exist!* Make a list. Know what you are looking for *before* you enter the Bible book store, or you may well bring home a Bible you will not really like or believe in short order. Oh well, back to the bookstore! Will your new Bible be handy to carry, yet easy to read? Would you like *one* Bible to *carry* and *another* to study at *home*?

As an added thought, electronic devices cannot replace a hard copy Bible. The Bible is a precious divine book that no electronic device can fully simulate and give the complete perspective view and appreciation of all of its features. As one holds the Book, it becomes a personal friend, and you can easily visualize the pages and columns of your Bible and its personal markings much more easily than on an electronic screen.

Eeny-Meeny-Miny-Mo, To Which Translation Should I Go?

Your first decision must be, which translation do I buy? Aren't they all basically the same? Well, no, they are not. Initially, we should be aware there are different methods of translating. Although they all claim to be "the Word of God," there are major differences. Many modern Bibles leave out hundreds of words and even whole verses. See, for example, "200 Verses Changed in Modern Bibles" at www.achristianspirit.com/200VERSES.HTML. Better, see, *Look What's Missing!* by David Daniels.

Translation-wise, there is, to use their own abbreviations, the AMP, CEV, ESV, GNT, GNV, GWT, HCSB, ICB, JSB, JER, KJV LVB, MSG, NASB, NCV, NET, NIV, NIV, NIV, NKJ, NLT, NRSV, NWT, REB, and RSV. (*Whew!*)

The Sad Part of It All...

The sad part of it all is that nearly all of them *disagree* with one another in part or in whole. Is it any wonder that people are confused? "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do" (Psalm 11:3, KJV)? THINGS DIFFERENT ARE NOT THE SAME! "Can two walk together, except they be agreed" (Amos 3:3)?

Broadly speaking, there are two primary approaches or techniques of Bible translation: *Formal Equivalence* and *Dynamic Equivalence*. Formal Equivalence renders, as much as possible, *word-for-word* from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words into our native tongue. Dynamic Equivalence tends to employ a *thought-for-thought* rendering as the translator *thinks* the Divine Author meant it to be, but with less literal accuracy. Most "modern" translations lean toward the latter method. "Paraphrases" are not Bibles at all, but are rewrites of God's Word as filtered through the ideas of men.

Let's Take a Short Walk Through Choosing a Study Bible. There are Three Basic Rules!

Most people purchase a study Bible because they hope it will enhance their understanding of the Bible. Indeed, many study Bibles can be enlightening and helpful. Unfortunately, many believe that just because something is included in a Bible, it must be so. Not necessarily. Here are three simple rules to help you make a wiser choice:

Rule #1: KNOW your authority! Choose your translation *carefully*. Who, what, is your *ultimate authority*? The words of God... or the words of man? Remember the dire warnings in Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; and

Study Bible, continued on next page

Revelation 22:18:19 about adding to or taking from the words of God. Better read those scriptures again closely.

Beware *the devil’s footnotes* in your study Bible! They are there! One particular Bible, for example, boasts of over 35,000 marginal notes, 9,000 outlines, and 50,000 cross-references! This is a much touted charismatic Bible literally packed with notes, with small printing to boot. Again, *buyer beware!* Many of his notes are right on—and many are dead wrong! There are even multiple pages between Bible books. Page for page, the author has *much* more to say than God does! *Quick!* What did Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; and Revelation 22:18:19 say again?

Rule #2: Know your purpose for using a study Bible. Every study Bible was created for a *purpose*. WHAT do you want it to *teach* you? Doctrine? History? Prophecy? Science? Archaeology? Life application? Entertainment? Expository notes?

Rule #3: Know every author and every translator is BIASED! A *bias* is an author’s own point of view. He is showing *HIS* point of view—what *he* thinks *you* should think. The author will try to persuade you. (Most study Bibles are tricky and deceptive.) It is important to know where GOD’S Word stops—and MAN’S *opinions* begin! Read the introductions CAREFULLY. They often reveal the author’s sources—and biases. What *are* the writer’s BIASES? Do you know him and can you trust him? Ask yourself, would Jesus buy this Bible and trust it?

The bottom line is this: believe EVERYTHING God says—even if you don’t *understand* it! And question EVERYTHING *man* wrote—*no exceptions!* *Read that again!*

We know the *Devil* has a false gospel; we know he has false ministers and false churches. Isn’t it only logical he would also have false or polluted Bibles? Ephesians 6:12 tells us, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against *principalities*, against *powers*, against the *rulers* of the darkness of this world, against *spiritual wickedness* in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13). Verse 17 tells us, “the *Sword* of the Spirit is the Word of God.” Your spiritual sword is your *ONLY* offensive weapon—all that stands between you and spiritual death. Sela.

We are commanded to “STUDY to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

It is this writer’s personal opinion that while study Bibles can offer new and unique information to complement your Bible study, he also believes that God desires to interact with us DIRECTLY THROUGH HIS WORD. For that reason, I feel uncomfortable using many popular study Bibles exclusively during my reading of Scripture. (See 1 Corinthians 1:10). There is a tendency to read the margins and notes and ignore the text. It is important for God’s people to meditate, pray, and think for themselves regarding the truths expressed in the Bible, rather than have all their thoughts about the text come through the filter of others’ study notes and additional content.

In short, you should buy a study Bible if you need to supplement your Bible knowledge, but do not depend on someone else’s thoughts for your salvation. God be with you. Ω

A Partial List of Bible Versions and Abbreviations

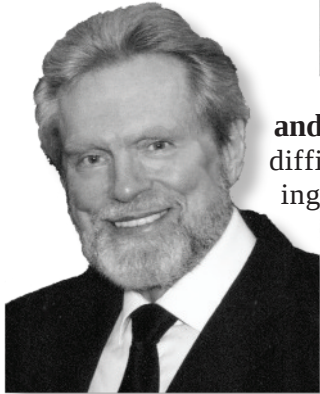
Modern Christian (English) Versions

- AMP The Amplified Bible, The Lockman Foundation (2015).
- AMPC The Amplified Bible: Classic, The Lockman Foundation (1987).
- ASV American Standard Version (1901; Public Domain).
- BBE C. K. Ogden, The Bible in Basic English (1965).
- BLB Berean Literal Bible, Bible Hub and Discovery Bible (2015). Online.
- BRG Blue Red and Gold Letter Edition Bible, BRG Bible Ministries (2012).
- CEB Common English Bible, (2011).
- CEV Contemporary English Version, American Bible Society (1995).
- Darby, DBY J.N. Darby, Darby Bible (1890; Public Domain).
- DHE Franz Delitzsch (1813-1890), The Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels.
- DRA/DRB Douay-Rheims Bible, American Edition (1899; [Catholic]).
- DLNT Disciples Literal New Testament, Michael J. Magill (2011).
- EMTV English Majority Text Version: N.T., trans. Paul W. Esposito.
- ERV Easy-to-Read Version, World Bible Translation Center (2006).
- ESV The English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles (2001).
- EXB The Expanded Bible, Thomas Nelson Inc. (2011).
- GNT/GNB/ TEV Good News Translation, American Bible Society (1992)
- Goodspeed Edgar J. Goodspeed, The N.T. (1923).
- GW God’s Word, God’s Word to the Nations (1995).
- HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible, Holman Bible Publishers (2003).
- HNV Michael Paul Johnson, Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible (2008). [aka Messianic Edition of the World English Bible.] Online.
- ICB The Holy Bible, International Children’s Bible, Thomas Nelson (1986).
- ISV The Holy Bible: International Standard Version, ISV Foundation.
- JB Jerusalem Bible, Darton, Longman & Todd (1966). [Catholic]
- JUB Jubilee Bible, Life Sentence Publishing (2000, 2001, 2010).
- KJ21 21st Century King James Version, Deuel Enterprises, Inc. (1994).
- Knox Knox Bible, Westminster Diocese (2012).
- LB Kenneth Taylor, The Living Bible (1971).
- LEB Lexham English Bible, Logos Bible Software (2012).
- LITV J.P. Green, Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (1976). Online.
- Marshall Alfred Marshall, NASB-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English with Interlinear Translation (Zondervan, 1986).
- ME-WEB Messianic Edition of the World English Bible, Public Domain
- MEV The Holy Bible, Modern English Version, Military Bible Association
- MLB Modern Language Bible: The New Berkeley Version in Modern En.
- MNT, Moffatt James Moffatt, A New Translation of the Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, A New Translation (1926). Online.
- Mounce-NT or MRINT Robert H. Mounce and William D. Mounce,
- MSG The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language, E. H. Peterson
- NAB The New American Bible, USCCB (1986). [Roman Catholic].
- NABRE The New American Bible, Revised Edition, (2011) [Catholic].
- NASB, NAU New American Standard Bible, Lockman Foundation (1960).
- NCV New Century Version, Thomas Nelson, Inc. (2005).
- NEB The New English Bible, Oxford University Press (1970). Online.
- NET The NET Bible/New English Translation, Biblical Studies Press (2005).
- NIRV New International Reader’s Version, Biblica, Inc. (1998, 2014).
- NIV The New International Version, Biblica, Inc. (1984, 2011).
- NJB New Jerusalem Bible, Doubleday Religion (1999). [Roman Catholic]
- NKJV New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, Inc. (1982).
- NLT New Living Translation, Tyndale House Foundation (1996, 2007).
- NLV New Life Version, Christian Literature International (2006).
- NOG The Names of God Bible, Baker Publishing Group (2011).
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.
- Phillips, PNT J. B. Phillips, The New Testament in Modern English (1958).
- REB Revised English Bible, Oxford &Cambridge University Press
- REV Revised English Version, Spirit and Truth Fellowship International.
- RSV Revised Standard Version, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (1952, 1971).
- RSV-CE Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (1966, 2006).
- RV Revised Version, Oxford University Press (1881-1885). [A British revision of KJV.
- TEV See GNT above.
- TLB The Living Bible, Kenneth Taylor (1971).
- TNIV Today’s New International Version, Biblica, Inc. (2005).
- Voice The Voice Bible, Thomas Nelson, Inc.; Ecclesia Bible Society (2012).
- WBT Noah Webster, Webster’s Bible Translation (1833), revision of the KJV. [Original title: The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, in the Common Version, With Amendments of the Language]
- KJV [Original title: The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, in the Common Version, With Amendments of the Language]
- WE Worldwide English New Testament, SOON Educational Publications (1969, 1971, 1996, 1998).
- WEB Michael Paul Johnson, World English Bible (1997).
- WMB Michael Paul Johnson, World Messianic Bible (2014); aka Hebrew Names Version (HNV). Online.
- WNT or Weymouth, Richard Francis Weymouth, Weymouth N.T. (1903). Online.
- YLT Robert Young, Young’s Literal Translation (1898; Public Domain).



Is the Truth Hidden Behind Senseless and Contradictory Scriptural Accounts?

by Vance Stinson



Vance A. Stinson

The following is a revised excerpt from an email exchange between VW (name withheld) and VS (Vance Stinson). It concerns VW's difficulties regarding discerning truth and dealing with seemingly contradictory and hard-to-understand passages of Scripture.

VW: Hebrews 10:30 (Deuteronomy 32:35–36, Psalms 135:14) says concerning anyone who has rejected the Law of Moses and has insulted the Spirit of grace: "VENGEANCE IS FOR ME; I WILL REPAY, SAYS THE LORD." You will no doubt say that this

is JESUS' prerogative, being the Son of God. Is this a case where the commandments do not apply?

VS: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" simply means *justice will be done*. If you gave your son certain privileges, and he abused those privileges, though he gratefully accepted them when you first gave them to him, then you would not be exercising revenge if you suspended his privileges for as long as he continued in rebellion.

VW: Is this (Hebrews 10:31) not anger and unforgiving, which is what we see here?

VS: No, it is not. It's important that we recognize that many of the passages describing God's dealings with humans are anthropomorphic—they ascribe to God human attributes. The Bible is filled with such anthropomorphisms, though we see hints and clues from time to time that indicate the writers of Scripture knew that the nature of God was above our comprehension and that, therefore, many of the descriptions of God's actions in the world were figurative. Scripture also contains accounts that are phenomenological—they are told from the perspective of those seeing or experiencing events in this world. From the limited perspective of people here below, God *causes* armies to invade and kingdoms to fall; however, oftentimes such events were things God simply did not prevent and perhaps would have had conditions changed.

VW: Love thy neighbor and walk away from those who are unbelieving! Teach if they are willing to hear and listen to the word. To seek vengeance does not in any way demonstrate his teachings. Being fearful is once again mentioned (Hebrews 10:31). Threats bring about false resolutions (if brought on by fear of retribution).

VS: Not necessarily. Sometimes, when a person temporarily becomes fearful (or deeply concerned) after he learns of the consequences of his behavior, that fear plays a part in helping the person make needed changes, which in turn leads to genuine resolutions.

VW: It would appear that Islam has something correct in their beliefs according to the Bible that I am reading? Women are to serve men.... They are not our equal and were never meant to be.... Woman was given to man so that he would not be lonely.... I cannot find any reason to accept this prehistoric writing.

VS: That's because of the way you're reading it. The good and perfect will of God can be seen in the biblical accounts of the people of God, but it's important to realize that (1) the societies described in the pages of Scripture displayed the effects of humankind's fall into sin, and (2) the law God gave to Israel through Moses, while reflecting the good and perfect will of God, was not designed to eliminate all sin or reverse the effects of the fall of man. Many of the statutes and judgments of the Law were regulatory in nature. For instance, one statute permitted a man to divorce his wife, but the regulations attached to it were designed to discourage divorce and to provide a measure of security for the woman. This law itself reflected the fallen condition of that society. But the higher law, which expresses God's will more perfectly, had been in place from the beginning. God gave Eve to Adam, not as a mere helper, but as a *companion*. The two were made "one flesh," an expression that speaks not only of the sexual union, but of the spiritual and emotional bond of unity between the two.

VW: Mary gave birth to Jesus, SON OF GOD. Mary claimed that he (her Son JESUS) was not in his right mind. Why was her Son

JESUS not able to convince his earthly parents of his purpose on earth? She gave birth knowing that she was a virgin. She had to have known the Father was God the Father Almighty. Why then did she not accept her Son? Why then was He not able to be a GOOD TEACHER to His OWN PARENTS? His followers meant more to Him than His own parents and brothers and sisters. Not honoring your parents (as commanded in the TEN COMMANDMENTS) is a serious matter, is it not? JESUS rebuked His mother and siblings when they wished to see Him. Why? Matthew 12:46; Mark 3:21; 3:30; 3:31–33; Luke 8:19.

VS: Again, the problem is the way you're reading these texts. In this case, you assume that Mary, who was among family members seeking Jesus, was one of those who said Jesus was out of His mind. The text does not say that every member of Jesus' family said this; and while the text identifies Jesus' mother and brothers, we are not told that they were the extent of His "family." Joseph may have been dead by this time. Mary is consistently presented as one who believes in Her Son, not one who would say, "He's out of His mind." So why would you insist that this passage means that she did say it? The ambiguity here should tell you that this is an unwarranted conclusion. Further, I don't see the rebuke you think you see. Instead, I see Jesus using the statement, "Your mother and brothers are outside, seeking you," as an opportunity to declare that the arrival of the kingdom of God changes human relationships. This cannot be used to support the claim that His physical mother was not to be included among those He considered His family.

VW: We are forgiven our trespasses by Jesus's death on the cross. The Lord's Prayer should leave off (the request for forgiveness of) sins and trespasses, as His sacrifice on the cross gave us that?

VS: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" is an expression of repentance, or the desire to reform one's behavior to bring it into conformity with God's will. Jesus' sacrifice does not provide forgiveness of sins for those who remain unrepentant.

VW: Our LOVE of GOD, our Creator, and his SON JESUS, who forgave us our sins and trespasses (debts?) has been put to print (in the Bible) as though it has been given/directed (as opposed to any questioning).

VS: I'm not sure that I follow your thought here, but the use of prolepsis is not uncommon in Scripture. That means that sometimes things promised for the future are spoken of as if they were already present. God told Abraham He had given the land to him; yet, Abraham never owned it. He told Sarah He had brought nations and kings from her, though that was something that would occur in the future, long after Sarah's death. We see many such statements in Scripture. God calls what shall be as if it already is. It is not surprising, therefore, to find scriptures that speak of Jesus bearing our sins on the cross, though His death occurred centuries before anyone living today was born.

VW: The canon was a human selection (Catholic). [Wouldn't] God...be critical of such a human selection?

VS: The Catholic Church did not formally and officially declare which books belonged to the canon until the 16th century, at the Council of Trent. But the canon was known many centuries before. The Jews, to whom was committed the oracles of God, preserved the Old Testament. Which books and epistles belong to the New Testament can be determined by the information handed down from earliest times. It has been said that the entire New Testament could be assembled from the quotations from it made by the early church fathers. And one would have to twist historical facts to turn the Christianity of that period into Roman Catholicism.

VW: Was Mary, wife of Joseph, committing adultery by giving birth to Jesus Christ, Son of God? One could say that it was God's will with reason that He chose a human virgin (Mary). If you accept the Law (Commandments) of Moses as received from God, [isn't] she an adulteress?

Continued on next page

VS: No one has ever committed adultery by giving birth. If Mary had become pregnant through having sexual relations with a man other than her husband, then she would have been guilty of adultery. But she became pregnant, not through sexual relations, but as a result of a miracle from God. That’s hardly adultery.

VW: I have compiled several examples that have created great uneasiness for me. I am at a point where I believe the Truth is hidden behind biblical writers (great in number as they are) that have portrayed Jesus as a Jew who dishonors His earthly parents and siblings, seeks revenge upon those who fail to follow the teachings offered to them, and did not find Himself until baptized at the River Jordan.

VS: The problem is in the way you’re reading these texts, or with the books you may be reading that tell you these texts are to be understood that way.

VW: I am a believer in God and His LOVE for all that He has created. I want desperately to know that Jesus is my Savior. The Bible has not been of any help and made it even more difficult to accept. This should not be! What am I and who am I to carry this burden? I am one of God’s creatures and extremely upset with those who portray themselves as teachers of what His Kingdom offers by surrendering to man’s will and false input.

VS: Some “teachers” place their own ideas upon the scriptural text. Good teachers, on the other hand, truly exegete the text. They consider the types of textual genres they’re dealing with, and they respect the differences in our journalistic standards and those of the ancients. They read any given passage in its immediate as well as broader context, always striving to understand what the message meant to its first readers. Learning to distinguish between good and bad teachers is not an impossible task. Your belief in the God who loves His creation—including all of us—is biblically true and is a good foundation to work from. When you are confronted with scriptures that seem to suggest God doesn’t love us, remember your foundation, and realize that what the passage *seems* to mean is not what it *actually* means. Ω

Feast Fever, continued from page 16

Plan Several Activities Ahead Of Time

Each Feast site is unique. Each site offers something special—perhaps the beach, water falls, theme parks, amusement rides, skiing, horseback riding, camping, hiking, historical attractions, etc. To find out about activities and restaurants, you can write to the Chamber of Commerce of the festival site city and request information. You could also get on your computer and search out information or contact your automobile association for maps and information. Perhaps the best way is to talk to friends and people who have been there before.

Talk to the family after you receive your information of activities and plan some activities ahead of time. This helps to build excitement in going to the Feast, especially with little children.

Pray For the Best Feast Ever

- Start praying ahead of time that God will bless this year’s Feast of Tabernacles.
- Pray for the sites where God will be putting His name.
- Pray that these sites will be safe havens for God’s people, where they can worship God in peace and harmony, eat good clean food and participate in wholesome activities and recreation.
- Pray that God would inspire the speaking and the hearing.
- Pray that the sermon messages will be positive, uplifting, and beneficial to all the brethren.
- Pray for God’s protection for all of God’s people, while they are traveling to, during, and from the Feast.
- Pray for a positive attitude for yourself, your family, and all of God’s people. It seems that at this time of year, Satan tries to influence us with trials and tests to see if he can get us into a bad attitude. Don’t let little annoyances bother you while you are at the Festival site. Be patient. When you go to a restaurant or a recreational activity, there may be longer lines to wait in due to the influx of people attending the Feast.

James 5:16 says: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Pray for the BEST FEAST EVER. “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

Serve the Best Feast Ever

Plan now to *serve* at the Feast. Volunteers are priceless! There are many ways to serve:

- Make someone new in the church feel welcome.
- Volunteer to be an usher, sing in the choir, or work in the first-aid room or mothers’ room.
- Volunteer to give rides to services.
- Send cards or telephone those at home who were unable to attend.
- Keep your hotel room neat. Plan to leave a generous tip for the maid. Others are observing us.
- Leave generous tips for the servers at restaurants.
- Offer to babysit so a couple can attend special events.
- Plan to have an evening alone.
- Invite fatherless children and their mothers to an activity.
- Include those with nonmember mates in activities.
- Pick up scraps of paper and trash on the floor.
- Serve up a smile. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly.”

The main ingredient in being friendly is to smile. It’s FREE! It does not cost anything to smile. You can use your smile to break the ice in talking with a stranger. Your smile will put both of you at ease so you can begin a conversation with your new friend.

In Summary:

1. Develop a checklist. Pre-pack early.
 2. Plan several activities ahead of time.
 3. Pray for the best Feast ever.
 4. Serve at the Feast.
- If you dilligently apply these four points, you will have the BEST FEAST EVER. Ω

Feast of Tabernacles

For further information about God’s great Feast of Tabernacles, request our free booklet, *God’s Seasonal Plan* and visit our updated web site at:
<http://cgi.org/documentaries/?rq=feast%20of%20tabernacles>



Feast Fever?

Here's How *You* Can Have the Best Feast Ever!

by Lloyd W. Cary

Year by year we hear mention of “the best Feast ever.” How can this be? Does this just “happen”... or is there something you can DO to assure each Feast will be your best Feast ever?

It's coming! It's almost here! Do you find your temperature rising with excitement as you think and plan for this year's Feast of Tabernacles? You may have "FEAST FEVER!"

We hear much talk about "the best Feast ever." How is this possible? How can each Feast be better than the last? Does it just "happen," or is there something you can *do* to assure it? To keep from having an "accidental Feast," some planning is necessary. There is an old saying, "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today."

Let's examine some ways to assure this year's Feast is *your* BEST FEAST EVER.

A Checklist—Plan to Have the BEST FEAST EVER

Begin a small notebook and make a checklist of the things that you need to do *before* leaving for the Feast and the items you want to take:

- ☐ Notify work or school
- ☐ Stop mail and newspaper
- ☐ Make arrangements for pets
- ☐ Motel reservations, clothing, and toiletries
- ☐ Maps, GPS
- ☐ Cash, credit cards, medications
- ☐ Car: tune-up, oil, lube, filter, tires
- ☐ Bible, pen, briefcase, and notebook
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Flashlight

Foresight saves stress. You will have to admit that if you went to the Feast and forgot any of these items, it would have created some stress for yourself at the Feast. Begin your pre-packing early.

Feast Fever, contined on page 15



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