“SEE YOU IN HELL”

I had never seen the young man before. I know nothing about his personal conduct and certainly do not know what he was thinking in his heart. When I saw him a few weeks ago in another country, I witnessed him doing one thing: walking in a mall. It was the printed statement on the back of his shirt which caught my attention: “SEE YOU IN HELL.”

My first thought was, “How sad.” How sad that anyone would end up in eternal torment. How sad that someone would make money by printing clothing which speaks of a rendezvous in hell. How sad that people actually buy and wear shirts that have such language about being in hell inscribed on them.

The New Testament Greek word for “hell” is γέεννα/geenna,” often written in English as “Gehenna.” “This was originally the valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned; a fit symbol of the wicked and their future destruction” [Thayer via e-Sword, word no. 1067].

Know this: what the Bible says about hell portrays it as a place that we should want to avoid at all costs (Mark 9:43-49). Making plans to meet up with someone in hell (as in “See You in Hell”) shows a failure to understand just how horrible hell really is.

Did you realize that in the New Testament message about hell, Jesus said more about it than anyone did? Out of the twelve times that “Gehenna” is found in the New Testament, in every instance except one (James 3:6) we read it in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. And in those three books, the references to hell always came from the mouth of the Christ. Jesus exemplified compassion and love in all that He did and said. The fact that the most caring person ever to walk the earth spoke about Gehenna lets us know that it is not unloving to tell the world what the God of heaven says about hell.

Some have suggested that hell is a fantasy, a concept that Bible-believers imagined and hold over people’s head to try and get them to be good. Not so, my friend. Hell is real. Jesus used its existence and nature to motivate people to think properly and make proper decisions. As Jesus prepared to send His apostles out to preach, He told them in advance about the opposition and persecution that they would face. Even under such circumstances, He did not want them to shrink from living for Him and proclaiming His message: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). No, hell is not a joking matter. Some Christians need to clean up their speech about hell, because there is nothing funny about it or being one of its inhabitants.

Hell is a place of punishment. Jesus asked the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:33). As we noted earlier in the message of Matthew 10:28, hell is a place of destruction. Regarding the destruction that will take place in Gehenna, “The idea is not extinction but ruin; loss, not of being, but of well-being” [Vine, word no. 622; www2.mf.no/bibelprog/vines.pl?tofrom].

Hell is a place of permanence. Jesus called it “the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). In the same breath, so to speak, the Master referred to it as “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46). The punishment in hell never comes to an end. Those who arrive in hell will be permanent residents there! Hell is a place from which not one single person will escape from the awful, unthinkable torment. In hell, there are no doors marked “Exit.”

Hell is a place which will be heavily populated. The everlasting destruction of hell (and from the presence of the Lord) awaits those who do not obey God and who do not obey the gospel of the Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9). In general, Jesus said, “... broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it” (Matthew 7:13).

Many people of our day lack a reverence for the Lord and a healthy fear of the horrors of hell. Let us not be ashamed to tell the world and the church what Almighty Jehovah says about hell. Each person needs to hear that message. At the same time, let us proclaim with tenderness and boldness that because of God’s matchless love, Jesus paid the price for our sins, allowing us to avoid hell and receive eternal life.

-- Roger D. Campbell
In the closing section of the book of Genesis, we read a fascinating statement which Joseph, the son of Jacob, made to his brethren. He talked with them about what would happen to his bones, that is, what he wanted them to do with his body after his passing. Here are the words of Genesis 50:24-26:

(24) And Joseph said to his brethren, ‘I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’ (25) Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’ (26) So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

What lessons can we learn from the Bible’s message about Jacob’s bones?

Joseph’s statement about his bones reminds us of the certainty of death for all. Joseph was a mighty man, second in command in the land of Egypt, yet, he, too, made the transition from “I am dying” to “Joseph died” (50:24,26), leaving his bones behind. Except for those who still will be alive when Jesus comes again, all humans die (Hebrews 9:27), and their bones are left in the hands of others.

Joseph showed faith in God’s promise to visit Israel (50:25). It is not speculation on our part to state that in this regard Joseph demonstrated faith. You see, the Bible says, “By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones” (Hebrews 11:22). Joseph was totally convinced about these matters: (1) The God of heaven is faithful, being true to His word at all times; (2) The God of heaven has the power to fulfill His promises; (3) The God of heaven had promised Joseph’s father, grandfather, and great-grandfather that He would give the land of Canaan to their descendants (Genesis 12:5,7); (4) Since God is faithful and has the power to fulfill His promises, if He pledged to give a land to Jacob’s offspring, the Israelites, then that is exactly what would take place. Thus, Joseph basically said, “When God comes to visit His people and make good on His promise, my bones are going with you.” Now that is buying into what Jehovah says and taking action!

Joseph’s bones lying in that coffin in Egypt sent a powerful message to the enslaved Israelites. Every time they thought about, talked about, or had occasion to pass by the bones of Joseph, they would be reminded of Joseph’s statements about his bones and that the God of heaven, according to His will and time schedule, would fulfill His promise to bring them to the distant land of Canaan. In the same way, when we reflect on our Lord’s promise of an eternal inheritance, we are reminded of the spiritual land of Canaan to which we are headed. When life seems tough, even unfair, and the road seems so long, let us remember our final destination!

What actually transpired with Joseph’s bones after he died? It is common for people to make requests about their funeral and what they would like to be done with their body following their demise. In some cases, the survivors follow those wishes; in other instances, they disregard them and do as they please. What happened with Joseph’s bones? The children of Israel complied with his request. A few hundred years after Joseph’s passing, when the Lord delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, “Moses took the bones of Joseph with him . . .” (Exodus 13:19). That is right: Joseph’s bones were transported from place to place as Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Finally, after the Israelites conquered Canaan, “The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought . . .” and belonged to the land territory of Joseph’s offspring (Joshua 24:32).

Some people go to great lengths to make arrangements for their bones, but they do not do the same with their soul. Joseph did both. That is, he expressed his desires about what he wanted others to do with his physical body, but he also made it his priority in life to walk with the Lord and thereby make proper arrangements for his soul’s eternal well-being. “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). In the same way, what shall it profit a man if his bones are buried or cremated in a memorable fashion, but he loses his own soul? Right-thinking people are those who set their mind “on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2); their number one focus is on eternity in heaven (1 Peter 1:3,4), not a cemetery plot or fancy funeral.

Like Joseph, we might have a say in where our bones will be placed, but the Lord will make the final decision about our soul’s destiny. When you think about it, we choose our own eternal destiny by the choices that we make in life. The Lord simply will be the One who pronounces the final verdict.

-- Roger D. Campbell
LET US USE THOSE TRACTS!

The Christ charged His followers to go teach/make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). It is His will that we preach repentance and remission of sins in His name among all nations (Luke 24:47). He wants all lost people to be saved, so He wants every single person to hear and obey the gospel (Mark 16:15,16). His desire is crystal clear. So is our mission!

Tracts are one means of communicating the Bible’s message to other humans. Whether we place a tract in someone’s hand, leave it in the entrance to their dwelling place, or lay it in some public area, tracts can be an effective, non-confrontational way of introducing people to Jesus and the Bible. Let us use them! We personally have used them extensively and plan to continue to do so.

While it is possible for a tract to be available for reading online, much like one would read an article, normally when we speak of a “tract,” we have in mind a message about a Bible topic or topics which is printed in a not-too-lengthy format. It might be done on a single, folded sheet of paper, or it could be somewhat longer and need to be stapled. We call them “Bible tracts” because they cover Bible-related subjects.

Perhaps we should clear the air on a couple of matters. Yes, printed tracts cost money. Yes, some people throw away the tracts which they receive from us without reading them. And yes, some people read our tracts but do not have the response which we are seeking. Should we conclude from these admissions that printing and distributing tracts is a waste of money, time, and effort? Not at all.

What do tracts do? They put people face to face with some aspect of God’s soul-saving truth. No single tract covers every Bible subject, but when a disciple sows the seed, every little bit can be helpful.

What do tracts do? They send a message to the recipient/reader that says, “We care enough about you and your soul to tell you what the God of heaven says about this subject.”

What do tracts do? They bear fruit. We fondly recall how one hospital patient found a tract in a waiting room, read it, requested a Bible course through the mail, and eventually obeyed the gospel: all because someone left a truth-teaching tract in a visible location. That brother died in the Lord, and he owes his salvation in part to a tract and tract-sharer. Another brother whom we know is an elder in the church – his conversion started when he read a tract.

What are some potential pluses/advantages of using tracts as a teaching tool?

· As with other written materials, they can be read and reread, again and again.
· One can read a tract at his own rate of speed.
· One can read a tract wherever and whenever he desires without pressure from anyone looking over his shoulder.
· They are organized and systematic – if done well, they stay “on topic” and do not ramble.
· They easily can be passed on from one reader to the next. In one scenario, a person was given a tract then passed it to another, and through him contact was made with a third party. It was folks in the third stage of contact who obeyed the gospel, not the first one encountered or the second reader of the tract. Who originally distributed the tract? A four-year old kid.
· Tracts are written on specific topics. That is appealing to one interested in such subjects.
· They can serve as “door openers.” They can be helpful in creating a connection with a person which could lead to a person-to-person study.

Some suggestions and observations on using tracts:

· Carry some with you on more than one topic.
· Some are written better than others. Try to use the best available to you on a given topic.
· Some are so long they lose their effectiveness.
· If using tracts for mass distribution, try to use tracts that introduce the reader to basic topics (such as Jesus is the Son of God or why we believe the Bible is God’s word).
· Some are well-written, but the person whom you want to reach may not be ready to receive the truth presented in it. Use common sense. For instance, each person needs to realize the importance of worshipping God on the first day of the week, however giving a tract which covers that theme to one who does not even believe the Bible is the word of God is not going to be very helpful.
· Try to give appropriate tracts – those which best fit what you know about a person’s background or interest.
· Look for opportunities to get tracts into people’s hands. Do some brainstorming. Be creative.

Some of the tract racks in our church buildings are pitiful. Dust abounds, tracts are mangled, many slots are empty, and the whole setup looks unorganized. In a word, they look neglected, unloved, and unused.

Should we consider using tracts as our one-and-only method of teaching the gospel? We think not. They can be a helpful tool, but they can never take the place of one-on-one instruction with an open Bible.

-- Roger D. Campbell
As you and I study the epistle which we know as 1 John, it is apparent that some of the first-century Christians to whom John wrote had come in contact with untruthful messages about fellowship, love, and sin. What about the concept of knowing God? That, too, was a matter about which the saints needed clarity. Hear the message of 1 John 2:3-6:

(3) Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. (4) He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (5) But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. (6) He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Some questions are in order. First of all, in the context of 1 John 2:3-6, who is the one (“Him”) that John speaks about knowing? In verse five, we read about “the love of God,” so God is in the picture. Also, when we follow the pronoun “Him” from verse three back to the opening statements of the chapter, what we see is a reference to the Father and the Christ (2:1), followed by a reference to Jesus being the propitiation for our sins (2:2). So, in this context, knowing “Him” refers to knowing the Lord.

Is it possible for humans to know God? John’s inspired message gives an affirmative answer, as he spoke of those who legitimately “know Him” (2:3). Paul expressed his personal desire to “know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). In this case, the word “Him” refers to the Christ. At the time Paul wrote that statement, he already had been in the Lord over two decades. The apostle certainly knew the fact that He had risen from the dead and that His resurrection showed Him to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4). What Paul longed for was to know the Lord personally and intimately, being able to understand and appreciate as much as humanly possible everything about His Savior.

Is it possible for humans to know that they know God? Yes. Look again at 1 John 2:3: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if . . . ” John went on to declare, “By this we know that we are in Him” (2:5). Thus, it is possible for one to know “where he is” in his spiritual life. A child of God can know Him (2:3), know that he is in Him (2:5), and know that he has eternal life (5:13).

Why is knowing the Lord such an important matter? When Jesus prayed to the Father about His authority to grant eternal life to those whom the Father gave Him, He said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:2,3). So, a person being granted eternal life is predicated upon that person knowing the Lord. Therefore, knowing or not knowing the Lord will determine a person’s eternal destiny (whether he will receive eternal life or not).

Is there a difference between knowing about God and knowing God? There is a huge difference. Many people believe in God, accepting the evidence for His existence. Yet, some of those folks have no interest in learning or doing God’s will. Such people do not know the Lord in a biblical sense. Even among those who pronounce themselves as believers in Jesus, there are many who do not know the Lord in the way that the Bible describes knowing Him. Paul used strong language to warn Titus about certain individuals, saying: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him . . . ” (Titus 1:16).

What if I claim to know God but do not submit to His instructions? Here is the Bible’s answer: “He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him” (1 John 2:4). Obviously, knowing the Lord involves more than thinking and talking about it. It requires action on our part – action that conforms to His will.

Who is the one who knows God? Here are three Bible descriptions of a God-knowing person:

- He keeps God’s commandments. How do we know this is the case? The Bible says, “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3).
- He “keeps His word,” and in him God’s love is perfected (1 John 2:5).
- He abides in the Lord (1 John 2:5,6).

For one to know the Lord, he does not have to be well-known, well-educated in secular matters, or wealthy in a material sense. What he does have to do is possess a humble heart that is in love with the Lord. If one is going to know the Lord in the way that the Scriptures portray knowing Him, then he will need to prepare his heart to study and learn what God desires, accept what the Lord says, and submit courageously to what the Lord commands. Such a conclusion may not sit well with some folks, but it is a sound conclusion drawn from the clear teachings of 1 John 2:3-6. My friend, do You know the Lord?

-- Roger D. Campbell

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PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY BEFORE GOD

As the prophet Daniel declared to a powerful monarch of the past, “. . . there is a God in heaven” (Daniel 2:28). The God of heaven is called “the Judge of all the earth” (Genesis 18:25). Men may deny, mock, or ignore those truths, but those truths remain unmovable and unchangeable.

Each human is accountable before the Lord. Jehovah is the Creator; we are the created. God is the Potter; we are the clay. By right of creation, He has authority over all flesh. The Lord God is one hundred per cent aware of our earthly activities. He “knows all things” (1 John 3:20). It is written, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). That is a humbling thought, is it not? Let us not try and deceive ourselves: the Lord of heaven and earth sees everything and holds us accountable for our choices – every single one of them.

We must learn to take responsibility for our actions. It is what we sometimes call “growing up,” “maturing,” or “being accountable.” A lot of people who are adults according to their biological age are children when it comes to being reliable and taking responsibility for their choices. They simply refuse to be accountable. What they need to do is grow up!

There are people who, when they must face the reality that they have failed in some area of life, try to shift the blame to someone else. Such an approach seems to be at an epidemic level in the present generation. When people make bad choices or fail to do what needs to be done, they can fall into the trap of trying to blame it on something or someone else. They blame society. They blame the government. They blame the environment in which they were raised or exist currently. They blame the boss/manager. In the home, one spouse blames the other. In the church, in some instances kids blame their parents, parents blame the leaders of the congregation, and the leaders scramble to throw the blame off on someone else. If you and I are the ones who have not taken the right course of action, then we are the ones who must shoulder the responsibility for it. That approach is quite elementary, yet so necessary.

Think about some Bible blamers. I do not refer to those who blame the Bible for something; rather, there are Bible characters whom we see “playing the blame game,” pointing an accusing finger at somebody else instead of taking responsibility for their mistakes. Adam and Eve did it after their transgression in the garden (Genesis 3:12,13). Aaron did it after he led the Israelites in making and worshipping a golden calf (Exodus 32:22). King Saul did the same, blaming the people after he failed to carry out the Lord’s command to wipe out the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:15,20,21). Each of these Old Testament people failed to hold themselves accountable for their actions. It was easier then, as it is now, to try and push the blame off on someone else.

Look again at the first word in our title: “personal.” While we can help one another, exhort one another, and correct each other, at the end of the day, each of us has the personal responsibility to serve the Lord. Neither righteousness nor ungodliness can be transferred from one person to another. “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20). Yes, people can influence the decision making of others, but God holds us accountable as individuals. Personal accountability will translate into individual judgment: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Before God, there is no hiding behind the godliness of others and expecting their good standing with the Lord to blind Him to our sins, nor are we held accountable for the improper choices that others make.

The Lord seeks faithful, reliable servants. That is the kind of folks that the church so badly needs if it is going to be what our Master desires for her to be. Are you and I holding up our part of the bargain? Are we acting in a spiritually mature manner? Are we taking our accountability before the Lord seriously?

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF HOSEA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Dubbed by many Bible students as the “Minor Prophets” because their content is not as long as that which we find in the prophetic books which precede them in the Bible, there is nothing insignificant about the teaching of the last twelve Old Testament books. Their messages were inspired, and we can profit greatly by studying these books (Romans 15:4). Let us begin with a quick look at the book of Hosea.

**Historical setting:** The information which Hosea provides lets us know that he prophesied during the days of “the Divided Kingdom” (“Israel” in the North, “Judah” in the South). Because Hosea identifies the kings who reigned in both kingdoms at the time (Hosea 1:1), we date his writing at about B.C. 750. In addition to calling the Northern Kingdom “Israel,” he also refers to it as “Samaria” (8:5,6; 13:16) as well as “Ephraim” (4:17; 6:10). The dominant power of the Middle East at that time was the Assyrian Empire.

**Some key thoughts:** Some prominent thoughts stand out as we dig into Hosea’s message.

1. Harlotry in Israel – In Hosea’s day, Israel was steeped in idolatry. The prophet uses the words “harlot” and “harlotry” over and over to depict the horribleness of Israel’s rejection of God and her infatuation with lifeless idols (4:10,11,15,18; 5:3,4). “... For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars ...” (4:12,13). “Ephraim is joined to idols” (4:17). The idolatry was of two forms: golden calf worship at Dan and Bethel (8:5,6), plus Baal worship (2:8,13,17).

2. A passionate plea to return to Jehovah – “O Israel, return to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity” (14:1). No foreign power could provide for and protect Israel. The Lord was Israel’s sole Hope and Help: “So you, by the help of your God, return; observe mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually” (12:6). As God told them, “... And you shall know no God but Me; for there is no savior besides Me” (13:4).

3. A grim reality – If the Northern Kingdom did not change its course of action and return to the living God, its destruction was inevitable. God warned, “I will take them away, and no one shall rescue” (5:14). Again, “Woe to them, for they have fled from Me! Destruction to them, because they have transgressed against Me” (7:13). Destruction from God would come when the Assyrians carried Israel into captivity.

4. God’s unchanging love for Israel – Hosea’s relationship with his wife, Gomer, was a symbol of God’s relationship with Israel. Just as Hosea dearly loved Gomer despite her unfaithfulness (1:2,3; 3:1-3), so the Lord God continued to love Israel, even though she was not faithful to Him. God said that He loved Israel when he was a child (slavery in Egypt, 11:1). He had drawn Ephraim/Israel “with bands of love” (11:4), and He proclaimed, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” (14:4). Oh, how the Lord loved His people! And yet, though God’s love for Israel was unwavering, because of His justice He must punish her due to her rebellion against Him.

**Pointers to the Messianic/new covenant era:**

Hosea 3:5 – At a later time, the children of Israel would seek the Lord and “David their king,” language used by the prophet to point to the Christ, Who was the seed of David (Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 37:24,25).

Hosea 1:10; 2:23 – People in the Christ, including Gentiles, would obtain mercy and have God call them “My people” (Romans 9:25,26; 1 Peter 2:9,10).

Hosea 6:6 – “For I desire mercy and not sacrifice. And the knowledge of God more than burn offerings.” Service to the Lord was, and is, of no value if it is done as a ritual and without genuine faith and love on the part of the worshippers (Matthew 9:13; 12:7).

Hosea 11:1 – God calling His Son out of Egypt. It took place when the Lord delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, and it happened when Joseph and Mary brought young Jesus out of Egypt to live in Nazareth (Matthew 2:14,15,19-23).

Hosea 13:14 – Victory over the grave/death. Paul quotes this and applies it to the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:55).

**Additional principles to ponder from Hosea:**

Israel did the unthinkable: she forgot God (2:13). “For Israel has forgotten his Maker and has built temples” (8:14). Casting the Lord aside to turn to anything or anyone else is a spiritual disaster. Israel willingly was ignorant of God’s word, and it really cost them. In a statement addressed specifically to the priests, God said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me...” (4:6). There was no excuse for it, and God’s people pay dearly when their knowledge is inadequate. Israel may have put on the impression of being devoted to the Lord, but she could not fool God (7:2). God sees and knows all, even the deepest thoughts of man’s heart. No one can deceive Him!

Hosea’s message to backsliding, stubborn Israel was a passionate appeal for God’s people to come to their senses, discard their sin, and return to Him. Invest time studying Hosea and you will be blessed!

-- Roger D. Campbell
Honor to the Wives of Gospel Preachers

As we contemplate the Bible instruction for Christians to give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7), one group of people who in some cases do not receive enough credit and appreciation are the loyal wives of gospel preachers. Those who know a particular God-loving, faithful wife of an evangelist, and I mean really know her and what she means to her family and the Lord’s Cause, do this: they “. . . rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her” (Proverbs 31:28).

Just as there are false teachers (2 Peter 2:1), so there are some preachers’ wives who are, to put it kindly, bad apples. It happens. But we are not focusing on such people right now. Our attention is on those God-fearing sisters in the Lord who happen to be married to evangelists.

What do preachers’ wives do? They serve. Unlike their husbands, whose activities often put them in the spotlight, preachers’ wives frequently work in the background, yet they serve and serve and serve.

They love their husband, and if they have kids, they love them dearly and do all within their power to help get them ready to go to heaven (Titus 2:4,5).

They entertain people in their home/show hospitality. They may or may not be good cooks.

They teach. They may not necessarily present lessons for adult women, but in most cases, at some level they will be part of the church’s teaching team.

They “go the extra mile” (Matthew 5:41).

At least in the USA, they often live in places that are not close to their parents, grown kids, and grandkids. Why? Their families move from place to place when dad/husband changes congregations.

Because dad-husband is preaching, she has to take care of all their kids by herself during each sermon. And, she lives every waking hour with the realization that her entire family is under everyone’s microscope.

They listen (to their husband, struggling saints, and complainers). They strive to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16) as they stand up for their husband, yet find it prudent in some situations to bite their tongue and withhold some thoughts when their man is badmouthed.

They pray for strength, pray for their husband and kids, and pray for their role as a preacher’s wife.

They often face unrealistic expectations from members of the church whose concepts of a gospel preacher and his family are based on fantasy or denominational traditions rather than the Scriptures.

They learn to budget their money, make sacrifices, and do without things, all the while not trying to “keep up with the Joneses.”

They are pros at adjusting and adapting. In some cases, they learn to drive on the opposite of the road, do their grocery shopping in foul-smelling markets, or do their best not to sound like a moron when trying to speak a ridiculously difficult language that is not their mother tongue. Why do they do such things? Because they love their husband-preacher and love their Lord. For Him and Him, they live and breathe.

What do preachers’ wives not do? For sure, they do not live flawless lives (1 John 1:8), and their kids are not perfect either. Preachers’ wives know that better than anyone does, so there is no need for mean-spirited people to keep reminding them about it.

They do not serve as the church’s slave.

They do not have the duty of organizing every sisters’ activity or bailing out at the last minute every project which someone forgot or failed to carry out.

They do not need anyone’s approval to have a personal hobby, buy new clothes, or drive a new car.

They do not prepare their husband’s sermons, so if he made a mistake in his lesson or someone does not like the truth he presents, do not tell her about it.

What do preachers’ wives need? They have the same social, physical, spiritual, and psychological needs that others do. That truth should shock no one.

They need brethren to be understanding and patient with them.

They need a sense of being accepted. They long to be treated as equals – just like other sisters are treated.

They need Christian friends.

They need time to relax.

They need opportunities to grow spiritually.

What do evangelists’ wives feel? They possess the same emotions that other sisters in the Lord do. They feel a need for the Lord. They are proud of their husband’s and children’s efforts. They feel lonely when they are isolated. They feel hurt when unkind and untrue words are spoken about her or her family. They rejoice when people make great spiritual choices. They are saddened when faithful children of God pass away; they are sadder when His child dies spiritually. They care most about God’s expectations, yet they feel challenged to live up to other people’s expectations, especially when folks compare her and her abilities to the wives of other preachers.

The saints of God are not in competition with one another, but if I were giving out awards to the wives of evangelists, and I admittedly would do so with unashamed bias, I would give “the best preacher’s wife” award to two great sisters in my life: my wife and my daughter. Those two excel at what they do.

— Roger D. Campbell
Ephesians 4:25-32 – “The Bible’s Teaching Is Just Not Very Practical”

Some individuals are not too keen on reading the Bible or learning what it has to say. Why is that? Because they are persuaded that the Bible’s message does not have any connection with everyday life. As some express it, “The Bible’s teaching is just not very practical.”

Such a conclusion is faulty. To say that something is “practical” means that it is usable; it can be applied. That certainly describes the Bible.

The big-picture view of the Bible is that its message is centered around (1) the God of heaven, (2) what the God of heaven has done on behalf of mankind, and (3) His will/desire for humans. Granted, not every single Bible verse or chapter has direct statements about how to make our choices and what kind of conduct we ought to have, but the sentiment that the Bible’s teaching is “out of touch” with daily life is inaccurate.

There are an abundance of Bible sections which deal extensively with practical matters, giving instruction that needs to be put into use in our lives. To disprove the notion that the Bible is void of any usable material in real-life scenarios, we will take a quick look at one Bible passage – Ephesians 4:25-32.

Is it applicable, something-I-can-use-in-my-daily-life instruction that you are seeking? If so, then the Lord has provided just what you are looking for in Ephesians 4:25-32. Here is a sample of what we find in this down-to-earth message:

- Be honest – “Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor . . .” (4:25). Telling the truth or not telling the truth as we deal with others: is that not a practical issue?

- Keep anger under control – “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (4:26). Have you ever heard of a human struggling to practice self-control, especially his temper?! God’s instruction sounds pretty practical to me.

- Do not allow the tempter to have his way – “nor give place to the devil” (4:27).

- Do not be a thief and take that which belongs to other people – “Let him who stole steal no longer” (4:28).

- Be ready to work to provide for our needs – Rather than steal, “. . . let him labor, working with his hands what is good . . .” (4:28).

- Remove profanity and filth from our speech habits – “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth” (4:29).

- Use our tongues to say things that benefit those who hear our words – “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (4:29).

- Show respect to the Godhead – “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit . . .” (4:30).

- Let our hearts be free from bitter, evil thoughts – “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice” (4:31). Do bitterness, wrath, and evil words disrupt harmony and harm relationships? They certainly do. Does the instruction to put these things away not have a practical application?!

- Be nice to people – “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted . . .” (4:32). Common decency and courtesy in dealing with our fellow man are never outdated and never unneeded.

- Have a forgiving spirit – “. . . forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (4:32). If I have received forgiveness from God the Father through His Son, and if I truly appreciate that forgiveness, then surely I will have a heart that is ready to forgive those who trespass against me.

What we have observed in Ephesians 4:25-32 covers a broad spectrum of instructions which have “practical” written all over them. We read about:

- Proper thinking (get rid of bitterness, 4:31)
- Proper speech (tell the truth, 4:25)
- Proper dealings with others (be kind to one another, 4:21)
- Proper action (work, 4:28)
- Proper respect for God (not grieve His Spirit, 4:30).

The Bible is “running over” with practical instructions. When we hear that someone thinks the Scriptures are “just not very practical,” it makes us wonder how much time such a person has spent examining God’s word and how open-minded he has been when doing so.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE A RIGHTEOUS PERSON?

On the one hand, there is the message of Romans 3:10. We cannot deny it, and we cannot run away from it. It is right there in our Bible. What is the message of that verse? “As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one.” What should we make of the declaration that there is none righteous?

First, look at the context of that statement. It comes immediately after Paul wrote these words: “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin” (3:9). A few verses later, we read that “all have sinned” (3:23). So, Paul is highlighting the fact that all are sinners. What does that imply? If all have sinned, then all stand in need of God’s redemption. By His kindness, He supplies it through Jesus: “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:24). Let us not miss this fact: there is no person who, because of his/her moral goodness and strength of character, can be righteous without God. Not one human being can say to the Lord, “I do not need You in order to be righteous, because I am righteous on my own accord, all by myself.” Such senseless arrogance will cause a person to remain lost before his Maker.

Here is a second thought from Romans 3. After Paul declares, “There is none righteous, no, not one,” he goes on to say that “There is none who does good, no, not one” (3:12). Should we conclude that there is not one person anywhere who has ever had a heart that causes him to do some good things? Surely not. In the same breath, so to speak, Paul also said, “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (3:18). Does that mean that there was not a single Jew or Gentile who did not have a healthy reverence for God? No. Paul is emphasizing that, in general, humanity rejects God and lives wickedly. And, because of our sinful ways, we stand in need of God’s righteousness, that is, His way of making sinners righteous.

Back to the question that stands as the title of this article: Is it possible to be a righteous person? The Bible gives an affirmative answer. In many cases, when we read the word “just” in the New Testament, it is from the same Greek word (“δίκαιος/dikaios”) which is translated as “righteous” in multiple cases. It means “in a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God” [Thayer via e-Sword, word no. 1342]. So, when we read that “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17), that is the same as saying the righteous shall live by faith. Is it possible to live by faith? Yes. Who does that? Answer: the righteous/the just. Thus, it is possible to be a righteous person. The Bible confirms that Noah was such a man (Genesis 7:1). So was Abel (Hebrews 11:4).

What about this? Jesus said, “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). Who will enter into life eternal? Jesus said it will be the righteous. If no one can ever be a righteous person in God’s eyes, then no one will be able to go to heaven. Again, the Bible teaches that God hears the prayers of certain people. Which ones? Answer: the righteous (1 Peter 3:12). So, if there are no righteous people, then there is not one person who has his/her prayers heard by God!

What does a righteous person do? “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7). One is righteous who does righteousness. Since all of God’s commands are righteousness (Psalms 119:172), then one is righteous before God when he practices what God instructs him to do. His life is a pattern of ongoing righteous living. It is not easy to be such a person, but it certainly is possible. As Christians, when we continue to walk in the light, then we continually are cleansed by the blood of Jesus and stand righteous before the Godhead (1 John 1:7).

Not one person is perfect. Each of us has flaws, which means we need to humble ourselves before God, turn from our sins, and submit to His will. It is God alone Who is the Justifier/Righteousifier of those who believe in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Those who believe in God’s Son are those who live by faith, practicing His instructions.

While no one stands righteous before God by his own inherent goodness or earthly accomplishments, by God’s grace and saving gospel, it is possible to be a righteous person. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6).

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF JOEL: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The book written by Joel comes right after the book of Hosea. This book has a uniqueness about it, and it certainly has connections to the message of the new covenant. As you study it, consider this thought: from Joel 1:1 to Joel 2:17, it appears that the prophet is speaking, while from Joel 2:18 to the end of the book it seems that the speaker is the Lord Himself.

**Historical setting:** Joel’s prophecy was written after a locust plague had brought horrible destruction on Judah (1:4). The devastation caused by this plague was unparalleled (1:2,3), relentless, and complete (1:4,7,10,11,18,19), halted the offerings at the Lord’s house (1:9,12), took away the people’s joy (1:12,16), and had a profound effect on nature (1:18-20).

Unlike many of the prophets, Joel does not specify which kings were in power at the time of his writing. From the contents of the book, it seems obvious that its message was addressed to the inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom (Judah). We say this because Joel speaks of the activities of “the house of the LORD” (1:9,13,16), which was the temple that was located in Jerusalem. He also refers to priests being the Lord’s ministers/servants (1:9,13; 2:17). Joel mentions neither the destruction nor destroyers of either the Northern Kingdom or Southern Kingdom. Many conservative-minded Bible students suggest that Joel did his prophesying around B.C. 830.

**Some key thoughts:** When you study the book of Joel, there are three matters that really catch your attention. Those would be an unprecedented locust plague, “the day of the LORD,” and a prediction of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Let us look a bit deeper.

(1) The book’s overall message is connected to the term “the day of the LORD,” which is found in each chapter of the book (1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14). Joel describes “the day of the LORD” as being “destruction from the Almighty” (1:15), as well as “great and very terrible” (2:11) and “awesome” (2:31). In the Old Testament, the words “the day of the LORD” refer to a judgment from God, a visitation in which He would punish the wicked and bless the righteous. Each biblical reference to “the day of the LORD” must be understood in view of the context in which it is used.

In connection with the day of the Lord, Joel speaks of the sun being “turned into darkness and the moon into blood” (2:31; 3:14,15). This is highly figurative language which the prophets often employed as an attention-getter to show the amazing and devastating nature of the day of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 13:9,10).

(2) The destructive plague of locusts that Joel describes was not what is commonly called a natural disaster. Rather, Jehovah sent the plague as a punishment for Judah’s sin. God said that He sent the locusts as His great army against Judah (2:25). Unlike many of the writing prophets, Joel does not mention any specific sins committed by Judah, yet he does record God’s call for His people to repent: “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God . . .” (2:12,13).

(3) The outpouring of God’s Spirit – “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh” (2:28). When would that be? “Afterward.” After what? At some point after Judah returned to God with all her heart and He bestowed on her the promised blessings about which we read in 2:18-27. Guided by the Spirit, Peter declared that the Spirit of the Lord was to be outpoured “in the last days” (Acts 2:17). Joel’s prophecy clearly pointed to the outpouring of the Spirit on that Day of Pentecost on which the church began in Jerusalem, as Peter said to the Jews who assembled on that occasion, “But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16).

The outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28) would be for “all flesh” – no racial barriers; for “sons and daughters” – no gender barriers; for “young” and “old” – no age barriers; it would result in prophecies, dreams, and visions. All of those phenomena took place in the first century A.D.

**Additional principles to ponder from Joel:**

God’s nature and attributes – He is Almighty (1:15), He speaks (2:11,12), He is gracious and merciful (2:13), He is slow to anger and of great kindness (2:13), He gives blessings (2:14,19,23), He is zealous/jealous (2:18), He shows pity (2:18), He does marvelous things (2:21), He judges and carries out justice (3:4,7,12), and He is the shelter/hope and strength of His people (3:16).

“Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (2:32). There definitely was physical deliverance for the Jewish disciples of Jesus who escaped Jerusalem during its destruction in A.D. 70. But, the New Testament quotations and application of deliverance for those who call on the Lord’s name points to spiritual salvation through the Christ when one obeys the gospel (Romans 10:13-16; Acts 22:16).

Accountability before God – All people of all nations must give account of themselves to the Lord. There is no way to escape His arm of judgment; it is for all (3:1,2,9,12-14). Joel plainly shows that those who stick with God will be blessed, but those who turn away from Him will face unpleasant consequences.

-- Roger D. Campbell
Being “lost” before God is not an imaginary idea. The apostle Paul reminded the saints in Corinth: “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 4:3). He further said that such people had their minds blinded and did not believe the gospel (4:4). What was their spiritual condition? They were perishing.

We also recall that Jesus said, “For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). What was His purpose in coming to the planet earth? To save those who were lost. Again, it is undeniable: some people are lost. In fact, we would observe with a tremendous sense of sadness and horror that the great majority of humans are lost.

Who are these lost people? In short, lost people are those who are not saved. What can cause a person to be separated from the God of heaven? Only one thing: his/her own personal sin. Sin separates the sinner from Jehovah (Isaiah 59:1,2). People who have committed at least one sin and have not had their sin(s) cleansed by the blood of the Lamb are lost people. The unsaved are lost, and the lost are unsaved.

Who are the lost? Those who are living in sin outside of the Christ are lost. By God’s wisdom, redemption/forgiveness of sins is available in one place and one place only. Where would that be? In the Christ (Colossians 1:13,14). Put another way, salvation is in Jesus (2 Timothy 2:10). People become lost by the sin which they commit. They remain lost outside of Jesus if they do not obey the gospel by being baptized into the Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Romans 6:3,4). So, one group of lost people would be those who are unsaved outside of Jesus. Put another way, they are not Christians, having never been added to God’s family, the church, wherein is salvation (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23).

Who else is lost? Those who at one time had their past sins washed away and became Jesus’ disciples, but later fell away. It is okay to say “fall away.” Jesus used that terminology (Luke 8:13). The Bible further says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19,20). “The sinner” is the soul who needs to be saved from death – it is a brother or sister who has wandered from the truth, regardless of the reason(s), and now stands in a need-to-be-rescued state. No emotional appeal or messed-up, man-made dogma can overturn this fact: disciples of Jesus who turn away from Him are lost.

It is a great tragedy when a child of God falls away and becomes lost again. It is equally tragic when fellow Christians observe such and make no serious effort to try and win them back.

Every spiritual saint ought to be in the business of reaching out to the lost, making a diligent effort to help them get out of sin and comply with God’s teaching so their sins can be washed away and remembered no more. The communities in which you and I live are filled with those who are lost outside of Jesus. Some of them are lost in blatant immorality. Others are decent folks from a moral standpoint, but proudly and fervently deny that they need the Lord and the salvation which He offers. Still others are lost because they have bought into and propagate the falsehoods of man-made religions. Here is the question that is staring you and me right in the eyeballs: What are we doing to bring the gospel to the lost people around us?

In our acquaintances, most likely you and I also personally know members of the church who have left their first love. They are scattered throughout our communities. To such folks, Jesus’ message is that they need to remember from where they have fallen, repent of their sin, and return to Him and their first love/works (Revelation 2:4,5). Those precious people are lost! What are we doing individually and collectively to bring them back to the Lord’s refuge? If our answer to that question is, “Nothing, we are not raising a finger to help lost sheep come to the Shepherd,” then I would suggest to you that our souls are in jeopardy, too. If I continue to assemble regularly with the saints and live a life that is unstained by immorality, yet I fail to have a heart that cares enough about the lost state of others to try and help them come to or come back to Jesus for the salvation of their soul, then I need to have a revival in my spirit and repent!

There is not a word in the English language that is sadder than the word “lost.” We have identified the lost. Now we need to go reach out to them with our Lord’s powerful, soul-saving gospel. The Master did not say, “Sit and wait on them to come to you.” He said, “Go . . . and preach.” Let us do it!

-- Roger D. Campbell
Matthew 18:23-35 – The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

Do you recall the background to this story that Jesus told to His apostles? After He instructed them about what one should do if his brother sins against him, Peter asked, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). Jesus’ response to Peter’s question was two-fold. He first said, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (18:22). To drive home His point, He then told a story, one we call “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.”

The story focuses our attention on three people: a king and two of his servants. When the king started to settle accounts with his servants, one of them was brought who owed the king ten thousand talents (18:24). That was such an enormous debt that the servant would not have been able to pay it off in a whole lifetime. Yet, when he begged his master to have patience with him and give him a chance to pay it off, the master was moved with compassion and forgave him the debt (18:26,27).

At that point, another servant enters the picture. The first servant (the one whose huge debt was forgiven by the king) went and found a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller debt. Though the second servant made the exact request that the original one had made of their master (“Have patience with me, and I will pay you all” (18:29,26)], rather than show his fellow servant mercy like the king had done with him, he had the poor fellow cast into prison until he could pay off the debt. Wow. That is why we label that guy as “the Unmerciful Servant.”

Do not miss the king’s response to the unmerciful servant’s attitude and conduct. He told him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him” (18:32-34).

So, what does it all mean? Whom do the people and actions represent? The king/master symbolizes God. The two servants represent children of God who are spiritual brothers one to another (18:35).

The parable is a message about debt and forgiveness of it. The servant’s debt to his master points to our debt to the God of heaven. Each of us has a great debt to God because of our sin against Him. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We come to Him with nothing to offer as a payment for our debt/sin. We are blessed, though, that God has pity on us like the master did on his servant. Thank God that He is “rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4).

The parable is a message about showing mercy and forgiveness when others have a debt to us. That is the whole point of the story, is it not, that the Lord wants us to learn how to have a forgiving spirit? Look again at the language used to describe the king in his dealings with the servant who had a huge debt. The master “was moved with compassion” (18:27) and “had pity on” him (18:33). God wants me to learn from Him and imitate Him. If I do not show mercy and extend forgiveness to those who sin against me, then I am not being like my heavenly Father.

It hurts us, sometimes with deep cuts, when others sin against us. We must learn to develop a forgiving heart. Our willingness to forgive others, or a lack of it, shows to what extent we are grateful for the forgiveness we have received from the Lord. A key thought in the parable is to understand why the master called his servant “wicked” (18:32). The reason is not difficult to recognize, is it? He called him a “wicked servant” because he failed to emulate the king’s pity and forgive one who had a debt against him. A disciple of Jesus might love his family deeply, attend every service of the church, and live a life that is free from immorality’s stain. But, if amidst it all he has a heart that is unwilling to forgive those who sin against him, in God’s sight he is “wicked.”

The parable is a message about a servant’s relationship with his king being dependent, in part, on his willingness to forgive his fellow servant. The king was not happy with and even punished the servant who refused to show mercy on his fellow servant. Are you ready for the punch line? “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (18:35). Those words were Jesus’ “add-on” statement to the parable to make it clear just how serious it is when I am not willing to forgive others. If I will not from the heart forgive those who sin against me, then my Father in heaven will not forgive me.

“But what if a stubborn, heartless brother will not forgive me when I seek his forgiveness?” That is his issue to handle; regardless, I still must be forgiving.

“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy” (James 2:13). Again, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

-- Roger D. Campbell

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THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION

In some fashion, either directly or indirectly, every single word of every single Bible statement is connected with the salvation of God, that is, the salvation which the God of heaven offers to mankind. If there were no God of salvation, there could be no salvation of God! The Psalmists declared, “Blessed be the LORD . . . The God of our salvation! Selah. Our God is the God of salvation . . .” (Psalm 68:19,20).

“Salvation” refers to deliverance or rescue from danger. In the Bible, “salvation/to save” can have more than one meaning. There is salvation in a physical sense, such as when the Lord delivered the Israelites out of the land of Egypt (Jude 5). The most common concept of “salvation” is to be saved from past sins, that is, to have sins forgiven (Matthew 1:21). A third meaning of being saved is to receive eternal life/unending salvation in heaven. When Paul wrote to Christians, whose sins already had been forgiven by the blood of Jesus, he exhorted them to put on “as a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Because this salvation was something for which they hoped, they had not yet received it. Since we have only one hope, which is life eternal (Titus 1:2), that would be the salvation to which we look forward.

It is no secret why humans need God’s salvation. Sin is a killer (“For the wages of sin is death,” Romans 6:23) that separates its practitioners from the God of heaven (Isaiah 59:2). Human beings could never come up with a plan or do something impressive by which they can save themselves. Thus, all who have ever sinned stand in need of the Lord’s salvation. If you and I are going to be saved, we will be saved God’s way, or else we will not be saved at all.

The God of heaven certainly has the power to save us. He is the Creator, the One Who made the material universe out of nothing. He is, after all, the Lord Almighty (2 Corinthians 6:18). He rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt (Jude 5), saved Daniel from a lions’ den (Dan. 6), and delivered Paul from the mouth of a lion (2 Timothy 4:17). Such a great Being has the power to save our souls from the clutches of sin, too!

The God of heaven has the desire to save us. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). In some instances in life, a person may have the capacity to do something, yet he lacks the desire to carry it out. That is not the way the God of heaven is: He has both the power and desire to save lost people.

Being rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4), the God of heaven has the compassion to save us. “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). The Almighty Creator cares about His creation. Thank God, He cares!

The Lord further has the plan to save us. That scheme was “in place” in God’s mind before creation (1 Peter 1:18-20; Ephesians 3:9-11). To fulfill that plan, by His amazing love the Father “sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). On His part, Jesus laid down His life (John 10:17,18). What about the Holy Spirit’s role? He revealed the truth of God through inspired messengers (John 16:13,14), making known to mankind the good news about the hope of salvation. We should be grateful that the God of hope has given us a message of hope about “the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1).

That salvation which is granted by the God of our salvation is available to all people. It is available in potential – Jesus came to be “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42) in the sense that all sinners have the possibility to be saved through His death (Hebrews 2:9). In reality, not every person will be saved eternally (Matthew 25:46). The salvation-giving God justifies/saves those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). What kind of believers would that be? Those who are in the Christ, which is the only place where salvation from sin is attainable (Ephesians 1:7).

God makes the most incredible offer to humanity. What is that? To come live with Him forever! God Himself is an everlasting Being (Psalm 90:1,2), and He has prepared a marvelous, never-ending place for His faithful servants: “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). Because the God of all grace and hope is the God of our salvation, He deserves our ongoing, lifelong reverence, gratitude, praise, and faithful service.

-- Roger D. Campbell
The BOOK OF AMOS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The prophet Amos, a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit, was from the Southern Kingdom, but Jehovah sent him to prophesy to the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Amos 1:1; 7:14,15). His powerful message was just what God’s people needed to hear. Their spiritual and national well-being depended on accepting it and applying God’s word in their lives.

Historical setting: The word of the Lord came to Amos in the days of two kings: King Uzziah was on the throne in Judah while Jeroboam II (the son of Joash) ruled in Israel (Amos 1:1). That would make the historical date to be about B.C. 760. Amos was a contemporary with Hosea and perhaps overlapped with the time of the work of Jonah, Isaiah, and Micah.

During the reign of King Jeroboam II, Israel was prosperous, strong militarily, and at peace. On the spiritual side of matters, however, with their material prosperity many developed pride and a false sense of security. It was a time when the people seemed to have little desire to turn to the Lord and serve Him.

Some key thoughts: It is not difficult to grasp a number of the forceful thoughts set forth by Amos.

1) What was it that the Lord wanted to see in His people? Through Amos, the God of righteousness called on His people to return to Him (4:6-10), seek Him and live (5:4,6), seek good and live (5:14), hate evil and love good (5:15), as well as carry out justice and righteousness (5:7,24).

2) Sin ran rampant in Israel (also identified as “Samaria” by Amos and other prophets – 3:12; 4:1; 6:1). Instead of being the holy nation that God wanted Israel to be (Exodus 19:5,6), He described Israel as “the sinful kingdom” (9:8) and spoke of the people’s “manifold transgressions” and “mighty sins” (5:12). How sad! So despicable were Israel’s conduct and stubborn refusal to acknowledge their mistakes and return to God that He rejected their worship, including their offerings, saying, “I hate, I despise your feast days . . . I will not accept them” (5:22).

3) What had the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom done that was so horrible? It was an accumulation of widespread, ongoing rebellion and corruption. Among other things, they mistreated the poor of the land (2:6; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4,6), perverted the way of the humble (2:7), charged the prophets not to prophesy (2:12), worshiped idols (3:14; 8:14), took bribes (5:12), and dealt deceitfully with others (8:5). In addition, some were eaten up with materialism and reveled in their luxurious living (3:15; 4:1; 6:1,4-6). If we did not know better, we would think that Amos was preaching directly to modern-day societies!

4) Captivity was on the way. Amos began by calling for judgment on the Gentile nations round about Israel (1:3-2:3), he next called for judgment on Judah (2:4,5), then finally he called for the punishment of Israel (2:6,14-16). Israel’s punishment would be her due “fruit” for rejecting the Lord’s plea to repent and return to Him. Amos’ message to Israel was, “He will take you away” (4:2), or as God Himself warned, “Therefore I will send you into captivity” (5:27). Again, the country prophet from Tekoa declared this about Israel and its king: “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive from their own land” (7:11). That captivity came about in B.C. 722/721 when the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom and deported many Israelites. It was all so avoidable! That is correct: Israel could have avoided destruction and captivity if the people had humbled themselves and submitted to the great I AM. The choice was theirs.

A Pointer to the Messianic/new covenant era: In Amos 9:11,12 it is written: “On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old. That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does this thing.” To whom or what do these words apply? Thankfully, we do not have to guess.

In about A.D. 49/50, the apostles and elders came together in Jerusalem to discuss matters pertaining to keeping the law of Moses and fleshly circumcision (Acts 15:1-6). After Peter, Barnabas, and Paul addressed the assembled saints, James (not the brother of John, but most likely the younger brother of Jesus) spoke. He referred to what Peter had said that day about the conversion of Gentiles (15:7-11,13,14). James then stated, “And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written” (15:15). He then quoted Amos’ prophecy (Amos 9:11,12), applying it to the conversion of the Gentiles. To whom were the Gentiles being converted in the first century? To the Christ. By what means were the Gentiles being converted to Jesus? God’s grace and gospel. To what were the converted/saved Gentiles added? To the church (Acts 2:47). Thus, Amos’ reference to “the tabernacle of David” had nothing to do with the rebuilding of a physical structure; rather, those words pointed to the days when Gentiles would be saved via Jesus and the gospel and be brought into the church, where they would be one in the Lord with the Jews.

As we study Amos, we marvel at his courageous proclamation of truth and God’s awesome character.

-- Roger D. Campbell
I WANT TO BE RICH!

I am not the only one who wants to see me obtain riches. The God of heaven also wants me to be rich. He wants the same for you, too. Do you believe that?

Before I proceed, let me assure you that I am not in any sense advocating a “Prosperity Gospel” or some type of “Health and Wealth Gospel.” Some religious charlatans claim that if we serve the Lord faithfully, then He will bestow upon us good physical health and financial prosperity. That message may sound appealing, and it may attract some unsuspecting people, but the reality is, the Bible does not teach it. The truth is, in the New Testament we read that some first-century saints were faithful in God’s service, yet they were poor from a financial standpoint (2 Corinthians 8:1-3). Other committed servants of the Lord faced health challenges (2 Timothy 4:20).

Still, I stand by what I said: I want to be rich. If we are not suggesting that God promises to pour out great heaps of material riches on His servants, to what do we refer when we openly admit that we have a desire to be rich? We speak of being rich in a spiritual sense. Jesus came into this world in order to make you and me rich. Why would we claim such a thing? Read this: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our Lord humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant (Philippians 2:6,7). Through His lowliness and humiliating death, we can be rich in Him. Paul used those facts to motivate the Christians in Corinth to give sacrificially to the Lord’s Cause.

Jesus invites every person to come to Him to find rest for their souls (Matthew 11:28). His Father has prepared all spiritual blessings for mankind. And where are those spiritual blessings available? In the Christ (Ephesians 1:3). If I am in the Lord, I am rich — I have all spiritual blessings as I live the abundant life that He provides (John 10:10). Jesus told His suffering disciples in Smyrna, “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich . . .)” (Revelation 2:9). They were poor in a financial sense, but abundantly rich through Jesus on the spiritual side.

Right-thinking people, if they had to choose, would choose spiritual riches over material riches any day of the week. Jesus told a parable about a certain rich man who seemed to trust in himself and material possessions. His crops were bountiful, but God called him a fool and said his soul would be taken while His material things would be left behind. Jesus concluding remarks about that man’s scenario were: “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Unwise people are stuff-oriented; wise folks are “rich toward God,” making their relationship with Him the top priority of their life. When God is in first place in our thinking and plans and we walk with Him, we are immeasurably rich!

The Lord wants us to be rich in faith. If that is what He wants, then that is what we should desire, too! As James wrote about the need to avoid partiality in our dealings with others, he asked, “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5). Notice the connection of these three items: rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom, and love God. More than once, the Master spoke about His disciples being people “of little faith” (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31). Let us strive to be rich in faith, trusting in God with all our heart (Proverbs 3:5).

Another area of richness to which Christians are called is to be rich in good works. Timothy was instructed to charge those who are counted as rich in worldly goods, “Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:18). Because all children of God “are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Ephesians 2:10), the idea of being rich in good works certainly is not limited to those with great material possessions. Doing good for others is not so much about the size of our money pile as it is about the size of our heart. Carrying out some good works might involve substantial financial costs, but other good works may simply require the investment of time, a serving heart, a listening ear, or using a hand to write or type a message.

There is another beautiful aspect of richness which we ought to consider. Paul described himself and other disciples in this manner: “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:10). Paul counted himself as a rich person (“possessing all things”). And what else? His heart rejoiced because he had a part in “making many rich.” Does he mean that he was giving advice about stock investment or conducting weekend “How to Make a Bunch of Money and Retire Early” seminars? No. Well, how was he making other folks rich? By teaching them the gospel and helping them get into the Christ, where they would become new creatures and enjoy all spiritual blessings, including eternal life!

Thank God that we can enjoy and proclaim “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).

-- Roger D. Campbell
In the opening portion of his second-recorded epistle to the saints in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul had words of commendation and appreciation for the young congregation. Hear the words which we identify as 2 Thessalonians 1:3,4:

(3) We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. (4) so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.

The Thessalonian Christians were real people, folks who, like you and me, had to live in an imperfect world and deal with various matters in life which were not ideal. Here are some things we can “take away” from Paul’s moving message to them.

Thank God for faithful brethren! What did Paul tell them? “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren . . .” (1:3). Surely you and I would echo those sentiments today: thank God for faithful brothers and sisters in the Lord who do so much!

Are we not blessed when brethren humbly serve us? (Galatians 5:13).

Are we not blessed when brethren treat us like family? (Mark 10:29,30).

Are we not blessed when brethren show hospitality to us? (1 Peter 4:9).

Are we not blessed when brethren reach out to comfort and edify us? (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Are we not blessed when brethren exhort us? (Hebrews 3:13).

Are we not blessed when brethren pray for us? (James 5:16).

Are we not blessed when brethren stand with us in fighting the good fight of faith? (2 Timothy 4:7).

Are we not blessed when brethren put our best interests above their own? (Philippians 2:3,4).

Are we not blessed when brethren love us, doing and saying that which benefits us? (1 John 3:16-18).

Yes, it is wonderful to be a part of God’s family, which is, hands down, the greatest family on the planet! Thank God for His faithful children, who are such a blessing to His Cause.

Thank God for brethren whose faith is growing! Paul’s description of the Thessalonians’ faith: “your faith grows exceedingly” (1:3). Did the members of the church there have faith? They sure did. But, more than possessing faith, their faith was growing. And, not only was their faith growing, it was growing exceedingly. How encouraging to witness such faith!

Is it possible for you and me to imitate their faith, a faith that was growing exceedingly? Of course! Remember, it is great to grow in knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), but growing in knowledge of God’s word does not always translate into growing faith. Some people have acquired and continue to acquire great amounts of knowledge, but currently they do not live by faith.

On the other hand, our hearts rejoice to see sisters and brothers, both elderly and youthful alike, growing immensely in their personal faith. Because they have learned to trust in the Lord at all times (Psalm 62:8) with all of their heart (Proverbs 3:5), they now have the courage to do what the Lord instructs them to do: things like resist the devil (1 Peter 5:8,9), put God’s Cause first (Matthew 6:33), and reach out to those whose souls are in danger (Galatians 6:1).

Thank God for brethren whose love is abounding! Paul told them: “the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other” (1:3). Did you notice? It was not just a small percentage of them who demonstrated love. No, it was “every one” of them abounding in love. How encouraging to see brethren today who genuinely care about the physical, material, and spiritual needs of others. Love provides meals for the hungry or grieving. Love brings the gospel to close neighbors and people living in faraway lands. Love takes care of orphans and widows (James 1:27). Love kindly communicates to settle disputes that inevitably arise in a local church. Love rebukes the rebellious, and love forgives those who repent. Let us all be diligent to grow and abound in love (2 Peter 1:5,7).

Thank God for brethren who maintain faith and patience in the midst of tough times, even persecutions and tribulations! The disciples in Thessalonica faced great challenges, some of which could not have been pleasant to face in their day-to-day lives. Yet, through it all they continued to manifest patience and faith (1:4). “Patience” is from a Greek word (“ὑπομονή/ hupomonē”) which means “steadfastness, constancy, endurance; in the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and suffering” [Thayer, no. 5281]. The church still is blessed today to have brothers and sisters who by faith and love persevere despite health challenges, financial concerns, family issues, and many other potential hindrances. We say it again: thank God for brethren!

--- Roger D. Campbell
THE CALL OF GOD

Have you ever had anyone tell you that they feel like the Lord has called them to do something? The truth about God calling humans cannot be determined by emotions, feelings, or man-made traditions. The Bible, and the Bible alone, provides us with accurate information about the call of God.

Bible-believers accept the fact that God calls humans. “. . . walk worthy of God who calls you . . .” (1 Thessalonians 2:12). Again, it is written, “. . . proclaim the praises of Him who called you . . .” (1 Peter 2:9). The Bible describes God’s calling as “a holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9).

From what and to/into what does the God of heaven call us? The Bible affirms that He calls us:

- Out of darkness and into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)
- Into the fellowship of His Son (1 Corinthians 1:9)
- To peace (1 Corinthians 7:15)
- To liberty (Galatians 5:13)
- Into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12)
- To holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7)

A person who disregards the call of God misses out on the opportunity to have such blessings in his life.

How does God call people living today? We read in the Bible that in ancient times Jehovah directly called/communicated with humans. He called Noah to build an ark (Genesis 6:14), then called him to come into the ark, and later called him out of the ark. Abraham was called by God to leave his home and go to an unidentified place (Hebrews 11:8). While Barnabas and Saul were laboring with the church in Antioch, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). That was a direct communication and calling from the Godhead.

The Bible also informs us that God speaks to us through Jesus. “God . . . has in these last days spoken to us by His Son . . .” (Hebrews 1:1,2). Now that Jesus no longer lives in the flesh on the earth, how does God call people?

“Well, I believe the good Lord has the power to call folks in any way that He chooses.” We must not confuse two matters: (1) God’s power and (2) the plan/method which He uses. What does the Bible teach about how God calls humans living today? Whatever the correct answer is, it does not bypass or take away man’s freedom of choice. That is, God’s call is not irresistible. Someone may suggest that the call of God is mysterious and inexplicable. Another person may add that God calls a person by sending the Holy Spirit to open a person’s heart in a miraculous fashion. The problem with such sentiments is that they have no foundation in the Scriptures.

When we pull out our Bible and look at the message of 2 Thessalonians 2:14, what do we see? “To which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” How did Paul say that God had called them? By the gospel which Paul preached. That would be an indirect calling rather than a direct one. Jesus once said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (John 6:44,45).

What did Jesus say about one who comes to Him? First of all, only those whom the Father draws can come to Jesus. Second, the one who comes to the Christ is one who has heard and learned from the Father. Thus, the way that God the Father draws/calls/pulls a person to Jesus is via the word of God. The call of God is an appeal to a person’s mind.

How should you and I respond to God’s calling? In other words, how should we respond to the gospel? Jesus has all authority (Matthew 28:18), and in order to please God we must hear His Son (Matthew 17:5). When Moses gave instructions to the Israelites, He charged them to obey the voice of the Lord. How would they obey God’s voice? By observing/keeping His commandments (Deuteronomy 28:1,15). Thus, when one submits to the Lord’s instructions, He is submitting to His voice and submitting to Him. Have you accepted the call of the gospel to believe on Jesus as Lord and the Christ, then repent and be baptized for the remission of sins? (Acts 2:36-38).

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF OBADIAH: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

It is unfortunate that the only thing which some people know about this book is that it contains only one chapter, making it the shortest book in the Old Testament. Like other prophets, Obadiah’s message was based on, “Thus says the Lord” (1:1,4,8,18). When God says something, it is important, regardless of how many times He says it or how many words He speaks to get His message across!

**Historical setting:** Obadiah, whose name means “servant of Jehovah,” does not spell out for us when he did his prophetic work. Because he does not mention any specific kings, we are unable to date his writing by appealing to the reign of any monarch.

The book looks back at a time of destruction for the children of Judah (1:12). Some Bible students suggest that this has reference to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians in B.C. 586. Others think Obadiah points to an attack on Judah at a much earlier time during the reign of King Jehoram (848-844 B.C.; 2 Chronicles 21:8-10,16,17). In any case, Obadiah does not mention the destruction of the temple, does not note who the attackers of Judah were, and does not refer to any deportation of God’s people.

**A brief overview:** (1) Obadiah’s vision of Edom’s coming doom (1:1-9), (2) Edom’s sins – the reasons she deserved to be punished (1:10-16), and (3) deliverance in Mount Zion (1:17-21).

**Some key thoughts:**

(1) The coming doom of Edom – In the very first verse of the book we learn that this is going to be a message about Edom: “Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom . . . ” (1:1). “Edom” was another name for Esau, Jacob’s brother (Genesis 36:1,8,9). Just as there had been problems between Esau and Jacob, so there often were feelings of hostility and conflict between Israel (Jacob’s offspring) and Edom (Esau’s offspring).

Obadiah portrays the Edomites as not being innocent before the Lord, and He would punish them for the evil which they had done. Edom learned the hard way that sin is a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14:34). Edom was a nation of pride and self-trust, boastfully asking, “Who will bring me down to the ground?” (1:3). In the next verse, we hear God’s thundering response: “I will.” Yes, Jehovah told the proud folks of Edom, “I will bring you down” (1:4). God told them, “The pride of your heart has deceived you” (1:3). Edom trusted in her geographic location, (1:3,4) and her human alliances (1:7), but neither of those could provide security for her against God’s mighty hand, in which she should have trusted.

A second fault of the Edomites was their mistreatment of God’s people (1:10-14). They did violence against their brother, Jacob (1:10). They rejoiced at the destruction of Judah (1:12), and acted without human decency toward the Israelites in the day of their affliction (1:13,14).

(2) Standing “on the other side,” as the Edomites did (1:11), is the same as standing with the enemy. It is not that the Edomites raised a hand to harm the descendants of Jacob when Jerusalem was captured and plundered. No, their fault lie in that they did not raise a hand to aid them. Edom did not instigate the crimes against God’s people, but she was guilty all the same. Obadiah’s charge against the Edomites was, “Even you were as on one of them” (1:11). What did our Master say? “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matthew 12:30). There is no middle ground: we either stand with the Lord, or else we stand against Him. Some may not think of themselves as open opposers of the Lord and His Cause, but, in fact, if they are not on the His side, they are opposing Him.

(3) Nations reap as they sow – Obadiah declared, “For the day of the LORD upon all the nations is near” (1:15). In the Old Testament, the phrase “the day of the LORD” was a day of doom/destruction for the enemies of God, but a day of deliverance for His righteous servants. Someone said, “There is nothing so costly to governments as sin and unrighteousness.” The destiny of each nation lies in the hands of the Almighty! As individuals, families, congregations, and nations, we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

Many nations today are sowing humanism, evolution, sexual immorality, and the constant pursuit of material riches. When they do so, what harvest can they expect other than corruption and destruction?!

(4) The availability of God’s deliverance – “But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance” (1:17). Through Obadiah, the Lord foretold a time that His people would be blessed by deliverance (1:17), holiness (1:17), and saviors (1:21). According to God, each of these would be available in Mount Zion. “Zion” points to a stronghold and protected place of the Lord God. As a whole, the Bible points to spiritual safety with God, that is, spiritual deliverance by Him in spiritual Zion. We now enjoy spiritual security in the Christ (Romans 3:23-25), and the church is the spiritual house/kingdom/Zion over which Jesus reigns through His word (Luke 1:31-33; Ephesians 5:23,24).

Obadiah’s pointed message reminds all who read it that God holds each of us accountable for our actions.

-- Roger D. Campbell
TO WHICH GOD ARE WE SACRIFICING OUR KIDS?

The Bible tells us that King Ahaz of Judah “burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel” (2 Chronicles 28:3). Later, Ahaz’s grandson, Manasseh, “caused his sons to pass through the fire” as well (2 Chronicles 33:6). Those apostate leaders of God’s people offered their children as human sacrifices to pagan deities. How sick! How sad for the innocent children, and how sad for the moral environment of the nation.

Surely all Christians look at the literal offering of literal kids in a literal fire as being repulsive. It is simply unthinkable that parents would do that with their kids, thinking that somehow such action would be helpful to someone. Yet, in modern times, in what some might deem to be more sophisticated manners, there are Christian parents who sacrifice their kids. They may not toss their kids into a literal fire or into the crocodile-infested waters of a river, yet, in a sense, they are turning their kids over to some type of “god.” This point is not hard to prove.

Some Christian parents offer their children to the “god” of secular education. We would never deny that receiving a solid secular education has the potential to be a great blessing for both males and females. But, that is a far cry from saying that secular education for their kids ought to be the number one desire for parents. It is a sad sight to observe that some Christian parents put so much emphasis on secular studies, paying large sums of money for their kids to receive special tutorial lessons and investing huge amounts of time to provide special learning opportunities for their kids so they can be “the best,” but at the same time they give little, if any, emphasis to those same kids learning God’s word, being at every Bible class of the local church, or joining in activities with other young folks from the congregation. Parents, the Lord expects us to seek first His Cause (Matthew 6:33), and our kids need to hear and see that in our decisions, including how we emphasize their secular education in comparison with how we value spiritual matters.

Other members of the church sacrifice their kids on the altar of enjoyment, including everything from participation in music and theatrical performances to sports and other recreational activities. If you suggest that kids participating in music, theatre, or sports has the potential to help them in life, you will not get any argument from me. What we do not want to develop, though, are scenarios in which we promote, either directly or indirectly, the mindset of being “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). When we allow or arrange for our kids to miss the services of the church in order to participate in fun stuff, then we are sending a message – a message that will stick with our kids and others for a long time.

We think of other parents who offer their kids to the “god” of money. In this case, it is the parents who are chasing after material riches and neglecting their kids in the process. Parents, make arrangements to spend time with your kids. Communicate with them. Invest time in them. Attend their special activities. Yes, they need you to provide the necessities of life for them, but they also need you in their lives. “The love of money” has caused many to be ensnared and drown in spiritual destruction (1 Timothy 6:9,10).

A number of years ago, I had a discussion with a police officer who was a brother to a friend of mine. I listened in horror and disgust as he told me about how common it was in that area for parents to sell their young daughters into prostitution. The parents would receive what they considered to be a large amount of money for this “sale.” That parents could be so unloving and so self-centered is unfathomable. Yet, some Christian parents who would consider such a choice to be wicked, basically cast aside their kids as they put their all into acquiring financial prowess.

Would it be unreasonable to propose that some parents sacrifice their kids to the “god” of worldly success? What I mean is, some parents make it a point to pound into the thinking of their children that “success” for them (the kids) is defined by accumulating material riches. Thus, per such parents’ mindset, what the kids need to do is put their greatest efforts into “getting ahead” in financial matters. What about their spiritual development? What about them coming to Jesus for rest? (Matthew 11:28). What about them setting their minds on things above (Colossians 3:1,2) as they strive to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus? (2 Peter 3:18). Well, maybe later. Those things are secondary. At least they are in the mind of too many parents, and as a result their kids never become committed followers of the Christ. It is not difficult to understand why.

We agree that parents need to urge their kids to pursue success, but the success which we have in mind goes along with what Jehovah told His servant Joshua. God told him to meditate in and observe His law. With what promised result? “For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8). Successful people are those who will hear the Master say on His day of judgment, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). Think on these things.

-- Roger D. Campbell
Acts 9:31 – THE CHURCHES OF GALILEE

When it comes to the contents of the ninth chapter of the book of Acts, my guess is that most Bible students associate two events with this section of Scripture: the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and the fact that Peter raised Tabitha from the dead. Those were monumental occasions, indeed.

We want to consider Acts 9:31, a verse which may get “lost in the shuffle” at times. There we read about what was going on among the congregations in three geographic regions:

Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

If we date the conversion of Saul/Paul as about A.D. 35, then what is stated about the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria transpired sometime in the mid-30’s of the first century. That was a few years after the beginning of the church in Jerusalem.

Let us focus specifically on the churches that were in Galilee at that time. In the first century, the land between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River was divided into three areas: Judea (south), Samaria (central), and Galilee (north). In the last twenty-three books of the New Testament, which would be from Acts to Revelation, how many times do we read about the churches/Christians in the territory of Galilee?

Only once – in Acts 9:31. I find that fascinating! Jesus grew up in Nazareth of Galilee, performed His first earthly miracle in Cana of Galilee, did many things during His public ministry in Capernaum of Galilee, and preached extensively in the villages throughout Galilee. Yet, in the Holy Spirit’s record of the activities of the church in the first century, there are a total of two sentences about the churches of Galilee.

That, of course, leaves us with several unknowns. How many local churches were there in Galilee, and where were they? Josephus, a Jewish historian in the first century, noted that there were over two hundred villages in Galilee in Jesus’ day, yet we have no biblical record of where the churches assembled in Galilee. How interesting that we can identify several of “the churches of Asia” in the first century, but cannot do the same with the churches of Galilee.

And what about the number of members in those local churches in Galilee? The Bible is silent on that topic. What were the names of the members in Galilee? We know some of the names of saints in Corinth, Rome, Thessalonica, Philippi, and Rome, but can only speculate about who were the members in Galilee. At what point did they appoint elders in those Galilean congregations? Again, we just do not know.

As we consider all of those unknown elements of those early congregations in Galilee, let us remember these two truths. First, the Lord knows His own and He has their name in His book of life (Philippians 4:3). Second, while we do read a couple of times about the number of members in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41; 4:4), faithful service to the Master is a whole lot more important than counting how many folks are present in an assembly or have their names on a local church’s membership list.

We are grateful for the five “knowns” about the churches of Galilee which we can observe in Acts 9:31. First, they had peace/rest. A congregation is truly blessed when it is at peace with the Lord, the civil authorities provide an environment in which members are able to “lead a quiet and peaceable life” (1 Timothy 2:2), and the members are at peace among themselves (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Second, the congregations in Galilee were edified. That simply means that they were strengthened/built up spiritually. Christians are told to edify one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and we are built up by the word of the living God (Acts 20:32). When a church is not being edified, it is not growing and not reaching its potential in serving and glorifying the Lord God.

We also are informed that churches in Galilee walked “in the fear of the Lord.” That is a healthy thing to do, as it is written, “. . . let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

Fourth, the churches of Galilee walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The God of comfort wants His faithful servants to be comforted. The Holy Spirit comforted saints by the truth which He revealed (1 Thessalonians 4:18), and it would have been comforting to the first-century disciples to see the gifts that the Holy Spirit provided for the confirmation of the gospel (Hebrews 2:3,4) and for the church’s edification (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

Finally, the Galilean congregations “were multiplied.” How exciting! It is a thrill to observe when Christians sow the seed and the Lord gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6), and it is uplifting to see brethren establish new congregations in areas where none existed previously. May we have a heart that wants to learn from our brethren who lived in Galilee.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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THE BETTER NEW COVENANT

Somewhere in the neighborhood of six hundred years before Jesus was born, the Lord God declared through the prophet Jeremiah that He would “make a new covenant,” a covenant that would be different from the one which He made with His people at Sinai after He brought them out of Egypt (Jeremiah 31:31,32). So, if the Israelites were paying attention to what Jeremiah communicated to them from God, then they understood that at some point there would be a new covenant.

When the Christ established the communion on the night before He went to the cross, He said this to His apostles about the cup they were to drink: “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The “new covenant” is Jesus’ covenant.

In the book of Hebrews, we read that Jesus is “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 9:15). It is called “the second” covenant in contrast to the one that Jehovah made with Israel at Horeb. The Christ took away the first covenant/law in order to establish the second one (Hebrews 10:9).

It is a fact that the new covenant is better than the old one. That is not hearsay, nor is it speculation – it is a fact, a fact that is recorded in the Bible. In Hebrews 8:6, it is written that Jesus is the Mediator “of a better covenant.” Again, we read, “By so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22). When the Lord tells us that something is better, then we need to accept His word about it since His appraisals always are accurate.

To declare that Jesus’ covenant is better does not imply that the old covenant/law was bad. In fact, the old law was the opposite of bad – it was good. God was its Source, and all that comes from Him is very good (Genesis 1:31). When speaking about the law of Moses, Paul wrote, “Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). The old covenant that the Lord made with Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1-3) served to give the Israelites knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20), showed them how to do what was right and good in His sight (Deuteronomy 6:18), and when properly understood and applied, was a tutor to bring them to the Christ (Galatians 3:24).

That does not mean, though, that the old covenant was not without limitations. Consider these facts about the old law/covenant. It had “weakness and unprofitableness” (Hebrews 7:18), “the law made nothing perfect” (Hebrews 7:19), it was not faultless (Hebrews 8:7), and one could not be justified by it (Acts 13:38,39). Furthermore, the old covenant is described as “the ministry of death” (2 Corinthians 3:7). It pointed out sin and its penalty, but the annual Day of Atonement was a reminder that under the first covenant, without the blood of the Lamb of God the Israelites did not have a sense of complete removal of their sins (Hebrews 10:1-4).

In what ways is the new covenant better?

• It has better promises (Hebrews 8:6).
• It has a better mediator (Hebrews 8:6).
• Under it, we have a superior high priest (Hebrews 4:14,15; 7:26-28).
• It has “a better hope, through which we draw near to God” (Hebrews 7:19).
• Its permanency – it will be in effect until the end of the world/age (Matthew 28:18-20).
• Under it, God does not remember our sins and lawless deeds (Hebrews 8:12).
• Under it, we have eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9).
• Unlike the ministry of death (the old covenant), it is the ministry of the Spirit/righteousness/life/more glory (2 Corinthians 3:6-11).

Since the new covenant is better, then why would anyone think it would be a good thing to go back and attempt to live under the old covenant?! That would not make any sense. Why turn from the superior to the inferior, or why try to weaken the better one by mixing it with the old, abolished one? Again, that would be a non-sensical approach.

Jesus has all authority in spiritual matters (Matthew 28:18). It is God’s will that all men everywhere submit to the authority of Jesus, confess Him as Lord, and serve Him faithfully. May we put forth our most diligent effort to teach others about Jesus’ new covenant and His eternal salvation.

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF JONAH: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

What a fascinating book this is! In it we see only one small segment of Jonah’s life and prophetic work. Yet, due to the nature of the message, we know more about the personal life of Jonah than we do about the life of any of the other “Minor Prophets.” Only one statement in the entire book of Jonah records words which Jonah preached or predicted to other humans: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4).

Historical setting: Jonah, the son of Amittai, prophesied during the days of King Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kings 14:25), somewhere around B.C. 780. At that time, the Assyrian Empire was the dominant power in the Middle East, and Nineveh was its capital city. Nineveh is mentioned a number of times by Jonah (Jonah 1:2; 3:2-7; 4:11), and it is the place to which God sent His prophet to preach. The Assyrians were notorious for their cruelty and would have been one of Israel’s adversaries. That may help explain why Jonah was reluctant to go preach there when Jehovah first charged him to do so.

A chapter-by-chapter breakdown: Where is Jonah? Chapter 1 – Jonah is in a boat and cast into the sea; Chapter 2 – Jonah is inside a huge fish; Chapter 3 – Jonah is preaching in Nineveh; Chapter 4 – Jonah is sitting outside of Nineveh, waiting to see what will become of the city.

Some key thoughts:

(1) One – The book contains a powerful message about one prophet (Jonah), the inhabitants of one city (Nineveh), and the one true God.

(2) The actions of the Lord God dominate the book. He is referred to as “Lord” or “God” about forty times (in forty-eight verses). So, if you take God out of the narrative, there would not be a whole lot left! What actions of Jehovah do we see in this book?

- He sent out a great wind into the sea (1:4).
- He prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah (1:17).
- He spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out on dry land (2:10).
- He prepared a plant/gourd, a worm, and a vehement east wind (4:6-8).
- He spoke to Jonah (1:1,2), delivered the prophet out of the fish’s belly (ch. 2), spared the Ninevites (ch. 3), and in the end rebuked Jonah (ch. 4).

(3) This book reminds us that the God of heaven is a universal God Who sees all, knows all, and cares about all people in all places, including the Ninevites.

Other memorable lessons: Though the people of Nineveh were not Israelites and thus were neither part of God’s chosen nation nor under the law of Moses, they were accountable to the Lord God. The Bible speaks of their “wickedness” (1:2) and “evil way” (3:10), meaning that they were transgressors of God’s law. So, yes, during the Old Testament era the Gentiles were obligated to serve Jehovah. Jesus said the people of Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them (Luke 11:32), which again implies that they had sinned by violating God’s law.

It is impossible to run away from God! Jonah foolishly tried to escape “from the presence of the LORD” (1:3,1), but he failed miserably. One might ignore or forget about the Lord, but that does not mean that the Lord forgets about him!

Jehovah has the whole world in His hands. Yes, the earth is His and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1). In the book of Jonah, we see the Lord using a storm, the sea, a fish, a plant, a worm, a strong wind, and even a reluctant servant – all for His purposes. I may not understand completely all of God’s actions, but I must recognize His sovereign right to act as He desires.

By his experience inside the fish, Jonah was reminded that the Lord God was His only source of hope. The worst thing in the world is to be separated from the Lord, and Jonah came to realize this, turning to God out of his affliction (2:1,2,6,7) and proclaiming, “Salvation is of the LORD” (2:9).

We must be prepared to preach what God says and do it where God wants it done. God’s charge to Jonah was, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you” (3:2). When God names the place(s) that He wants His servants to carry His message, they need to comply. Jonah refused to do so the first time around, but later did. And the message? We must preach a “thus says the Lord” because that is what God wants people to hear!

Jonah, a spokesman of the Lord, struggled with his attitude. He knew that God is gracious, merciful, and abundant in lovingkindness (4:2). He knew that if he proclaimed God’s word to the Ninevites and they chose to repent, then God would spare them. That is exactly what happened, and tragically, Jonah was not happy about it (4:1-11). How sad.

A pointer to the Christ: Jesus said it this way: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40). That was a prediction of our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, and He spoke of it as “the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matthew 16:4). Yes, Jonah was a real person, and yes, “the fish story” really happened. So did the Christ’s resurrection!

-- Roger D. Campbell
Throughout the Bible, there are a number of instructions from the Lord concerning matters that He wants people to remember. Of course, anytime there is a directive from God that applies to us, we need to take it to heart. The word “remember,” though, should cause us to elevate our awareness and attention. Let us consider a few biblical matters in which God has given the charge to remember something or someone.

1 Remember your Creator – “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

2 Remember the Lord’s redemption – As Moses told Israel about how to deal with a Hebrew servant, the exhortation was, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you . . . ” (Deuteronomy 15:15). Christians, too, were slaves in the past. We were the slaves of sin, but now seek to be the slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:16-22). Let us never forget that we were cleansed from our sins (2 Peter 1:9), and let us be grateful for our free redemption.

3 Remember God’s commands – In a context in which God through Moses instructed the Israelites to put tassels on their garments as a reminder, here was the whole point of emphasis: “and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God” (Numbers 15:40). What a marvelous message for God’s people of every era: remember what God says, do what He says, and be holy.

4 “Remember Lot’s wife” – That is exactly what Jesus said as He spoke about the Son of man’s revelation/coming (Luke 17:32). As we read these words of the Master, our thoughts immediately go to the tragic mistake that Lot’s wife made. After escaping the city of Sodom just before it was wiped out, in an act that was in total defiance of what God commanded, she turned around to look back at the degenerate city and turned into a pillar of salt. It seems that disregarding what God says is not a small matter after all!

5 Remember that a servant is not above his master – To help prepare His apostles for the persecution which they would face if they remained loyal to Him, Jesus told them, “Remember the word that I said to you. ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20).

6 Remember what Jesus said about giving and receiving – “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). In principle, we always ought to strive to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus.” In particular, we should learn to develop a spirit of generosity and desire to be a blessing to others.

7 Remember Jesus (and what He has done for us) – As Paul wrote to the disciples in Corinth about the instructions which he previously delivered to them concerning the Lord’s Supper, he reminded them of this: “and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of Me . . . ’ He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’” (1 Corinthians 11:24,25).

8 Remember the poor – Actually, this was an idea that John, James, and Cephas expressed to Barnabas and Paul. Here is what Paul wrote about it: “They desired only that we should remember the poor; the very thing which I also was eager to do” (Galatians 2:10). When we “remember” the poor, we do more than recall that there are such people, and we do more than recognize that they have needs. The call to “remember” them is a call to “do them good,” as Jesus said (Mark 14:7).

9 Remember the resurrection of Jesus – “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Timothy 2:8). His resurrection showed Him to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4), and it is via his resurrection that God causes us to have a living hope (1 Peter 1:3).

10 Remember prisoners and mistreated people – The instruction for first-century Christians was to continue in brotherly love and to entertain strangers (Hebrews 13:1,2). The very next sentence was, “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the body also” (Hebrews 13:3). We must not forget the children of God who suffer innocently, even to the point of going to prison for His sake. Let us remember them in prayer and give them moral support, just as we would appreciate them doing such for us.

When God designed the human brain, He made it with a great capacity to recall things. When the Lord calls on us to “remember” something or someone, let us give heed to His admonition.

-- Roger D. Campbell
Those five, non-complicated words comprise the entire message of 1 Timothy 4:11 in the English Bible. Paul gave that charge with the authority he possessed as an apostle of the Christ (1 Timothy 1:1). It originally was spoken directly to Timothy, to whom this epistle was penned (1:2).

It is obvious that the contents of this letter were intended to reach a much wider reading/listening audience than just Timothy. We say this because Paul’s tells Timothy to “instruct the brethren in these things,” and by so doing he would show himself to be a good servant (4:6). Again, we read that Timothy was charged, “Teach and exhort these things” (6:2). The Lord wanted other saints to hear and heed the message in Paul’s letter to Timothy. It was not a secret message which had meaning only in Timothy’s life.

Back to 1 Timothy 4:11 — “These things command and teach.” “These things” points to the matters about which Paul was writing. Timothy, an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:2,5), needed to be committed to sticking with “the Book.” God’s preachers are those whose message constantly is founded in a “thus says the Lord.” Lost people and the faithful of God need to hear what the mighty God says in His mighty word. Please! We have heard enough opinions, quotes from your former instructors, and citations from the internet. Sir, what we need is the Bible. Give it to us!

There is a maddening scenario that is becoming “the norm” in some local churches. The saints are starving for book, chapter, and verse lessons. The lessons preached and taught contain little meat, and the membership is growing weaker and less knowledgeable. In response to the church’s inability to handle strong, Bible-filled lessons, the teacher/preacher lowers his expectations and feels compelled to present his lessons on a lower level, challenging no one, including himself, to grow. This truth cannot be denied: the membership of the church stays weaker as the sermons and classes remain weak.

“These things command and teach” — “Command” has a strong sound to it, does it not? A gospel preacher is neither the Savior nor Final Judge, but God wants him to teach His word with authority. “Command” is from the Greek word “παραγγέλλω/paraggellō,” meaning “to transmit a message along from one to another, to declare, announce; to command, order, charge” [Thayer, word no. 3853 via e-Sword]. It is the same Greek word that is used in Acts 17:30 — God “commands” all men to repent; it also is used in 1 Timothy 6:17 — there it is “charge” those who are rich in this world’s goods. Brother preacher, you need to speak with authority. Do not be timid. Do not apologize for declaring God’s whole counsel. Tell us what God’s word says, and if we manifest a rebellious spirit, then rebuke us with all authority (Titus 1:13; 2:15). God will hold you accountable if you fail to do so!

“These things command and teach” — “Teach” is from the Greek word “διδάσκω/didasko,” which means “to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses; to be a teacher; to discharge the office of a teacher, conduct one’s self as a teacher” [Thayer, word no. 1321 via e-Sword]. Teacher, take your task seriously.

In order for a teacher to be most effective, what are some things that he will need? Obviously, he has to acquire knowledge of God’s word. In any realm of life, we are unable to teach to others that which we personally do not know. A teacher can acquire knowledge by his own independent study, or he can get it by learning from others in an organized manner, but he must put a premium on knowledge.

A teacher needs to hone his communication skills in order to be the most effective tool in God’s hand as possible. Teaching is not about what some call “the gift of gab.” It is about being able to speak with clarity and accuracy, doing so in such a way that people can understand what is said and see the need to implement the Lord’s instructions in their lives.

A teacher’s personal conduct is another important factor. Look at what we see in 1 Timothy 4 — the instruction is to “command and teach” (4:8), then the instruction is to “be an example” (4:12), and finally the teacher is charged to “take heed to yourself and to the doctrine” (4:16). People do not want to listen to one whom they know fails to show a pattern of good works in his own life (Titus 2:7).

Another big item for any teacher is his attitude. Does he come across as one who genuinely cares about the souls of those who sit at his feet? Does he show kindness in dealing with others, even those who may not like him? Does he manifest humility in his daily life and when he is presenting his lessons?

We thank God for the faithful declarers of God’s word among us. Let every teacher do his teaching “heartily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Colossians 3:23). Teachers and preachers, prepare well, pray about it, and present your lessons with fervor!

-- Roger D. Campbell

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THE INSCRIPTION WRITTEN ON THE CROSS OF JESUS

Someone wrote something and put it on the cross on which God’s Son bled and died. The words were written in three different languages: Greek, Latin, and Hebrew (Luke 23:38). That which was written and placed on His cross is called “a title” (John 19:19), “an inscription” (Luke 23:38), and “the inscription of His accusation” (Mark 15:26).

The Bible records matter-of-factly that “they put up over His head the accusation written against Him” (Matthew 27:37). That statement identifies the location of the inscription: it was over/above the Christ’s head. But who wrote it? The answer to that question is found in only one Bible verse: “Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross . . .” (John 19:19).

Pilate wrote it, that is, “Pontius Pilate the governor” (Matthew 27:2), who tried Jesus, sentenced Him to death, and oversaw the whole shameful, unjust affair.

What did the inscription/title written by Pilate say? Here is the Bible’s record:
- “THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Mark 15:26)
- “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Luke 23:38)
- “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Matthew 27:37)

Other than recognizing the facts of what was written, who wrote it, and where it was placed, what other observations and spiritual lessons can we glean from the inscription placed over Jesus’ head?

First, read “the whole story.” Regardless of the Bible topic, in order to get the complete picture, we must read and consider all that God has spoken on any given subject. When we do that with the words comprising the inscription on Jesus’ cross, we see that the totality of that title would be this message: “THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” The temptation is to read a single Bible verse/statement and jump to the conclusion that no other information is available or needed. Some do that with John 3:16, concluding from the wonderful words of that text that in order to be saved from sin, there is no need for a lost sinner to repent and obey any instructions from the Lord. That supposition easily is shown to be false simply by reading other Bible verses which touch on the matter of forgiveness, including the “repent and be baptized” message of Acts 2:38. Read it all, friend.

Second, different is not necessarily contradictory. What the four individual writers (John, Luke, Mark, and Matthew) tell us about the inscription on Jesus’ cross is not the same. Mark’s version is the shortest, and what he records is found verbatim in the other three books as well: “THE KING OF THE JEWS.” What Matthew, Luke, and John record simply supplements what is found in Mark’s account. There is no contradiction between any two of those writers’ messages. Something is a contradiction only when there is no logical, rational way of explaining the differences. Different is not wrong: different is just that — different.

Notice the response of the chief priests to the inscription that Pilate wrote. They told Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The king of the Jews,’ but, ‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’” (John 19:21). The Jewish leaders had a serious issue: Jesus’ miracles and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies proved He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Contrary to their claim, He did not “make” Himself God’s Son (John 19:7): He was God’s Son! In the same way, in God’s plan He was to be king. It was not some sort of self-exaltation.

A fourth lesson: sometimes unbelievers say things that are accurate. Pilate, an unbeliever, described Jesus as “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus confessed that He was Jesus of Nazareth (John 18:7,8). Even if Pilate in mockery wrote that Jesus was the king of the Jews, this fact remains: earlier that day when Pilate asked, “Are You the King of the Jews,” Jesus responded, “It is as you say” (Luke 23:3). Even the mockery of an unbeliever (Pilate) did not change the truth which he wrote, a truth that the whole world needs to hear.

What response will you and I have to Pilate’s inscription? Will we serve Jesus as our King? Now, look below the inscription and see the love of the sinless, tortured Savior, “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter. 2:24).

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF MICAH: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The prophet Micah, whose name means “Who is like Jehovah,” was a contemporary with the prophets Hosea and Isaiah. While Isaiah is counted as the court/palace prophet of the day in Judah, Micah is more widely seen as “the country preacher.”

**Historical setting:** Micah prophesied during the time of the Divided Kingdom. Specifically, he proclaimed God’s message in the Southern Kingdom during the days of three of Judah’s kings: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The general date assigned to Micah’s prophetic work is B.C. 735 to 700.

Micah was blessed to serve the Lord during the reign of King Hezekiah, who was one of the most conscientious reformers in Judah’s history. Yet, when we read Micah’s message to God’s people, he portrays them as sin-ridden and heading toward destruction. In fact, though the main thrust of what Micah spoke was directed to the Southern Kingdom, including a prediction of Jerusalem’s fall (3:12), he also prophesied about the destruction of Samaria, which stood as a symbol of the Northern Kingdom (1:5,6).

**Some key thoughts:**

1. Spiritual corruption in Judah was widespread. Empowered by the Spirit of Jehovah, Micah’s task was to declare to Jacob his transgressions and to Israel his sin” (3:8). Doing so was not the most pleasant task in the world, but one which God wanted His servant to carry out. How Judah needed to face the reality of her sins and repent! Micah’s message was an outcry against the lack of respect for authority in the land. At the same time, though, his words held out hope and peace for those who would submit to the ultimate Authority – God.

What forms of evil were prevalent among God’s people in Micah’s day? Idolatry was widespread (1:7; 6:16), the people lie awake at night scheming about how to work iniquity after daybreak (2:1), and covetous men violently took other’s property (2:2). Some were guilty of mistreating the poor and those who were unable to defend themselves (2:8,9; 3:3).

People of the land told the true prophets not to prophesy (2:6). At the same time, the priests and pseudo prophets were instruments of wickedness. They lied and caused God’s people to go astray (2:11; 3:5). They also were hirelings who warred against those who would not pay them: “Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, ‘Is not he LORD among us?’” (3:11).

National leaders were corrupt, being guilty of hating good and loving evil (3:1,2). They mistreated and took advantage of the people (3:2). They took bribes and schemed together to carry out immorality (7:3). Does that not sound like many modern-day civil leaders?! Human nature does not change, does it?

It was no secret that Judah would reap the fruit of her spiritual pollution. God’s blunt message through Micah was, “And to Babylon you shall go” (4:10). Micah made that prediction about one hundred years before Judah was carried away to Babylon.

2. In contrast to the evil that was so prolific in Judah, what did God want to see in the lives of His children? First, He wanted them to know the righteousness of the LORD (6:5). In that same context, we read one of the most well-known statements from Micah’s pen: “And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8). God wanted His people to see that worship to Him was of no value unless they lived righteously in their daily lives. He also wanted them to understand that it is not a matter of choosing between (1) serving Him and (2) treating other people properly. He wanted them (and wants us) to do both: love God and our neighbors.

3. Micah says much about a “remnant,” which was a reference to the faithful minority among God’s people. Micah’s remnant message offered comfort and hope to the faithful servants of Jehovah who endured and stayed loyal to Him (2:12; 4:7; 5:3,7,8; 7:18).

**Pointers to the Christ and His reign:** There are a number of statements in Micah’s message which point to the Messiah and His covenant. Perhaps the first one which comes to mind is this: “The One to be Ruler in Israel” was to come forth out of Bethlehem (5:2). This was a clear reference to a historical event which occurred about seven hundred years later: “Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea” (Matthew 2:1).

Another powerful prediction is recorded in Micah 4:1,2. There, in language that closely resembles the wording of Isaiah 2, it is written that “. . . in the latter days . . . the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains . . . For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” Micah was foretelling the establishment of the church, which is God’s house (1 Timothy 3:15). The prophet went on to describe the peaceful reign of the Messiah (4:3-7).

See if this sounds familiar: “A man’s enemies are the men of his own household” (7:6). Jesus used that language when He spoke about the need for His disciples to love Him more than they love their own family members (Matthew 10:35-37). There is much for us to learn and appreciate in the book of Micah.

-- Roger D. Campbell
WHY SHOULD PROPER CONDUCT FEEL SO SPECIAL OR IMPRESSIVE?

There is a time to give recognition for a job well done, including words of encouragement to those involved as well as others. Paul commended Philemon for his love and faith (Philemon 5). The same apostle praised the Macedonian saints because of their selfless giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Jesus pointed out the uncommon faith of a centurion, saying that He had not found such great faith in Israel (Matthew 8:10). Yes, there is a time to give honor to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7). A literal or verbal pat on the back can go a long way in encouraging folks to “keep up the good work.”

On the other hand, I recently found myself wondering why appropriate action by dedicated disciples of Jesus should “stand out” to us and seem so impressive (maybe with a “Wow” response from us). Over and over I have been blessed to witness members of the church acting in the humble, holy manner which God expects from all of us. Why does that sometimes grab our attention as if it is so out of the ordinary? Probably because too often what we observe saddens our hearts since it involves people failing to carry out God’s will in their lives. Let me share some encouraging examples.

I see Christian parents telling their children to do something (or not do something), and the children do not sass their dad or mom. They simply do what they are told with no facial or verbal response which would indicate that they despise doing what their parents are “forcing” them to do. Because we frequently see young people and small children disrespecting and rebelling against their parents, it seems impressive that two people’s offspring actually submit to them. I find it terribly tragic that proper honor and obedience (Ephesians 6:1-3) should seem so extraordinary.

Nearly thirty years ago I preached at a congregation which I had never visited before. Prior to that day, I knew none of the members there and none of them knew me. I can tell you this, though, I left there shaking my head in amazement. I was impressed. I was encouraged. Why? Because their attendance at Sunday Bible classes, Sunday morning worship, Sunday evening worship, and mid-week Bible study was almost identical. The week I was there, for the four gatherings which I just mentioned, their highest attendance was 155 and lowest was 150. I know there are circumstances which can prevent saints of God from attending a particular assembling of His people, but brethren, our goal ought to be 100% attendance by 100% of our members at 100% of our services! It saddens me to think that followers of Jesus putting the Lord’s affairs first in their lives should come across as being so impressive (Matthew 6:33). Why should not the attendance pattern which I have just described be the norm and not the exception?!

How refreshing it is to see a married couple speaking to one another with kindness. When they are not together, they always speak in a positive way about their spouse, too. How encouraging! But, wait a minute: should that not be “normal” behavior? Should not every couple treat each other with courtesy? (1 Peter 3:8). Should not every wife and husband love each other unconditionally (Ephesians 5:25) and speak to edify one another? (Ephesians 4:29). It is sad when we are so accustomed to seeing couples being hateful to each other that we are impressed by a husband and wife treating each other in a Christ-like way.

Not long ago I was a guest speaker at a congregation. I was encouraged by the kindness and friendliness shown to me by the membership in general, but I especially noted the action of two young people when I was there. I had never met either of those young ladies previously, but they made a special effort to search me out (one before services and the other afterwards) to introduce themselves, welcome me, and express appreciation for my coming. Here is my question: Should not all members show a spirit of hospitality and a pleasant, welcoming spirit to our guests? (Hebrews 13:2; Romans 16:16). It is sad that I honestly considered those two young folks’ approach to be impressive because it is so different from what many saints of God do when visitors come their way.

A Christian family goes to the beach and later posts photos on social media. Their photos show everyone dressed in a non-flesh-flashing, non-provocative manner. They make a special effort to dress modestly, being thoughtful of others who will see them (1 Timothy 2:9,10). Good for them! Again, it saddens me that their choice to dress in such a fashion stands out as noteworthy. Why is that? Because a number of those who call Jesus “Lord” have no sense of shame (Jeremiah 6:15) when they publicly reveal their thighs, bellies, and chest.

I have had my spirits lifted in recent times to see brethren working diligently to reach out to lost people with the gospel. They take “the Great Commission” (Mark 16:15) and “Macedonian Call” (Acts 16:9,10) to heart. Common members of the church were into “evangelism” in the first century (Acts 8:4). Why does it seem so special when we see that today?

May God help us to give Him what He deserves: our very best. “And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation . . .” (Hebrews 13:22).

-- Roger D. Campbell
When Jude wrote a letter to first-century Christians, his intention was clear. He wrote in order to exhort them “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Jude warned the saints about ungodly, fleshly men who were corrupting the church. He wanted Jesus’ followers to be forearmed against their devious devices and dangerous doctrines.

In a just fashion, using His own approaches, and on His own time schedule, God will deal with those who corrupt the truth or live corruptly themselves. In connection with the overall thrust of the book of Jude, as a means of getting the attention of the brothers and sisters to whom he wrote, Jude appealed to God’s past dealings with certain people. Hear the message of Jude 5: “But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.” There are some great lessons for Christians of every generation to observe from those words in Jude 5.

The great value of reminding/repetition – “But I want to remind you . . .” Jude acknowledged that the saints to whom he was writing were familiar with God’s dealings with Israel. Still, he wanted to remind them about it. Jesus was a master at using repetition and referring to Old Testament incidents and teachings as reminders. Peter basically told the members of the church to whom he wrote an epistle that as long as he still was alive, they should count on him to remind them of God’s truth and their responsibilities (2 Peter 1:12-15). Yes, we need to hear the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), but there is a place, an extremely important place, for reminding folks about the basics. Humans are prone to forget or get distracted and fail to see the significance of certain matters. Bible class teachers and gospel preachers, do not be hesitant and negligent to remind. Believe me, people need reminders.

The knowledge of the brethren to whom Jude penned this letter – “. . . you once knew this . . .” In a nutshell: I know that you know this, but I am telling you anyway. Did you notice that Jude referred to Old Testament matters without giving any type of explanation? What does that show us? First of all, God expected those Christians (and us) to be familiar with the history of the Old Testament. Jude’s message about “the people” being delivered out of Egypt should have been one which they knew well from their studies of the book of Exodus. Second, the Lord expected these Christians not only to know the facts, but to learn from those matters. Third, God expected them to make the proper application of what they knew/learned.

The Lord is at the center of the content of Jude 5. Jude’s message about the Lord serves as a strong reminder, a reminder that causes His right-thinking children to stand in awe of Him. In that verse we see Jehovah portrayed as:

- The great Demonstrator of power – Our God engaged in a “head-to-head” battle with Pharaoh, and God’s power reigned supreme. The monarch of ancient Egypt, who caused mere mortals to tremble before him and his iron fist, wanted Israel to stay put in Egypt. In contrast, God’s view was, “They are coming out.” We know whose will prevailed!
- The great Deliverer – God saved the people. His people, “out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 4:20). And how did He accomplish such? He did so “by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15).
- The great Destroyer – Please do not ignore this aspect of the Lord’s character. Jude says that He destroyed those who did not believe. Our God is gracious and kind, yet those attributes neither negate nor minimize His wrath. God calls on us to recognize both His goodness and His severity (Romans 11:22).

It is possible for God’s people, that is, those whom He has delivered, to become unbelievers. Think again about the wording of Jude 5: first the Lord saved His people out of Egypt, then afterward destroyed the unbelievers among them. That gets my attention! Yes, it is possible for God’s people to depart from Him through unbelief (Hebrews 3:12). Yes, it is possible for believers to become unbelievers.

Focus on a few contrasting statements from Psalm 106. When God carried Israel out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, “Then they believed His words” (106:12). They went from believers to forgetters: “They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt” (106:21). Then they went from being forgetters to being unbelievers: “. . . They did not believe His word” (106:24). No sophistry or tampering with the text of the Bible can remove this reality: those children of God who choose not to trust in Him and His salvation will face the music!

The message of Jude 5 is rich. Let us learn to appreciate it and apply it properly.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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HOW WERE SOME SAVED BY FAITH, APPARENTLY WITHOUT BAPTISM?

A conscientious person recently asked about this topic. In particular, he wondered: If the Bible says that a person’s faith saved him, should we conclude that he was baptized at some point? How would that apply to people living on the earth today?

In every era of human history, those people who have pleased God have been those who lived by faith. We often recall the faith of Abraham, who clearly was justified by faith (Romans 4:1-12). A number of other men and women from the Old Testament era who pleased the Lord “by faith” are noted in Hebrews 11.

Habakkuk, a prophet of Jehovah, received this message from Him: “But the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). That thought is repeated three times in the message of the new covenant (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). It is undeniable that, per the Lord’s arrangement, the just/righteous live by faith.

There were instances in the life of Jesus when He proclaimed that a person was saved or blessed because of his/her faith. Here are three specific cases:

Luke 7:48 – He told a woman who had anointed Him, “Your faith has saved you.”

Luke 8:48 – He told a woman who had suffered with a flow of blood, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well.”

Luke 17:19 – He told a leper (the only one out of ten who returned to express thanks and give glory to God), “Your faith has made you well.”

Concerning this last gentleman’s situation, some have asked: If all ten lepers were healed, how is it that this one man’s faith made him whole/well? There is a difference in (1) a person receiving God’s blessings and (2) a person being saved. God bestows sunshine and rain on both the righteous and unrighteous (Matthew 5:45). While the Lord blesses the ungodly, that certainly does not mean that they are saved in a state of unbelief.

As for Abraham and others who lived by faith before the coming of the Christ, they were not baptized in water. Thus, they were justified before God without being baptized. That was the case because water baptism was not required of those who lived before the law of Moses was given, nor was it a part of the instruction of that law for the Israelites (just as offering animal sacrifices and males going to Jerusalem three times annually to observe feasts are actions which are not required for those living under the new covenant of Jesus). Different covenants, different demands.

How did baptism get into the picture? Well, God put it there! He did so in the days of John the Baptizer. John came “preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3). His baptism was called “the baptism of John” (Luke 7:29). The Jews from “Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan” went to be baptized by John, confessing their sins (Matthew 3:5).

What about those Jews who had access to John’s teaching but failed to receive his baptism for the remission of sins? The Bible says, “And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him” (Luke 7:29,30). Those who rejected John’s baptism rejected God’s will, and no one who rejects His will can please Him.

“Well, what about those people to whom Jesus said that their faith saved them?” Do not forget this truth that Jesus proclaimed about Himself: “. . . the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” (Luke 5:24). He said that after He had pronounced a man forgiven of his sins (5:20). While living on the earth, the Master had the authority to forgive sins according to His desire. You see, His covenant, the covenant of which He is the mediator, did not go into effect until after He died (Hebrews 9:15-17).

That brings us to these giant questions: What about people living today? Can they be justified by faith? In fact, if anyone under the new covenant is going to be justified/saved, it will be by faith (Romans 5:1). Does that eliminate water baptism as a condition of salvation? No, it does not. Under Jesus’ covenant, salvation is for those who believe and are baptized (Mark 16:16). Baptism’s purpose is to wash away sins (Acts 22:16), and that truth will never change.

-- Roger D. Campbell
The very first verse of this book informs us that the message will be “The burden against Nineveh” (Nahum 1:1). The major thrust of the book, from beginning to end, is the fall of Nineveh, described as “the bloody city” (3:1). When its destruction arrived, people would exclaim, “Nineveh is laid waste” (3:7).

**Historical setting:** When Nahum prophesied, the Assyrian Empire was the dominant power in the Middle East. Assyria had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel in B.C. 722/721 and also had attacked Judah on more than one occasion. The people of God counted Assyria as a ruthless enemy.

Nineveh, located on the Tigris River, was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire. The inhabitants of Nineveh repented when another prophet of Jehovah, Jonah, went there to preach (Jonah 3:1-10; Matthew 12:41). That happened well over one hundred years before Nahum’s writing. By the time the Spirit of God guided Nahum to speak of Nineveh’s future, the city’s cup of sin was running over and her destruction was on the horizon.

When exactly did Nahum present his message about Nineveh? Nahum mentions the past overthrow of the Egyptian city of No Amon, which occurred in B.C. 663 (3:8; called “No” in the KJV and known in history as “Thebes”). Thus, Nahum wrote after that event. As we noted, Nahum foretold the destruction of Nineveh, which took place in B.C. 612. So, Nahum’s message came between the two events and dates reference above: he prophesied after the fall of No in B.C. 663 and before the fall of Nineveh in B.C. 612.

Unlike other prophets who declared God’s word in that same general time period, Nahum writes nothing about the internal affairs and corruption of Judah and Jerusalem. Instead, like Jonah before him, he speaks a message that exclusively was against Nineveh.

Nahum was not the only prophet of the Lord who spoke about Nineveh’ coming desolation. Isaiah foretold that devastating event (Isaiah 10:24-27), as did Zephaniah (Zephaniah 2:13-15).

**Some key thoughts:**

- The destruction of Nineveh, “the bloody city” (3:1), is the dominant theme. The name “Nineveh” is found three times in Nahum’s message (1:1; 2:8; 3:7). The unmissable message for Nineveh was, “Behold, I am against you, says the LORD of hosts” (3:5). What was going on in Nineveh that would cause the Creator of the universe to be against it?

- Nineveh’s wickedness was continual (3:19). It conspired against the Lord (1:9). It was given over to idolatry (1:14). It was full of lies and robbery (3:1). It was guilty of harlotry and sorcery (3:4).

- In view of the above observations, we are reminded by the book of Nahum that no person or nation can stand against Jehovah and win. On the surface, at times it may appear that a person or country is successful in its rebellion against the Lord. Yet, in the end, God will have the final say! Nineveh plotted against the Lord and failed! (1:9,11). When God is against an individual or a collection of people due to their evil, none can stand before Him. It is true: “sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

  The Bible’s message about the wickedness of Nineveh makes it plain that, though the Ninevites were Gentiles, they were accountable to God for their actions. They did not live under the law of Moses, but they were guilty of sin, meaning that they transgressed God’s will (1 John 3:4; Romans 4:15). God’s destruction of Nineveh was not simply a matter of Him “getting even.” Rather, it was a matter of Him carrying out His justice against those who deserved to be punished for their ungodliness.

  • Nahum shows us several aspects of God’s nature.
  
  - He shows us God’s goodness, saying, “The LORD is good” (1:7). Amen! All that God ever has done has been done with mankind’s best interest in mind. He is slow to anger (1:3) and has no delight in sin or the punishment of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). We recall that at an earlier time God had shown His goodness by sparing the city of Nineveh after the people repented when Jonah preached to them (Jonah 3,4).
  
  - Nahum shows us God’s severity, too. “God is jealous” (1:2), meaning that He will not share with anyone the devotion which should be granted to Him alone. He takes vengeance on His enemies and pours out His indignation, anger, and fury (1:2,6). God Himself will “lead the charge” against Nineveh. Read how God said “I will” do it to the city (2:13: 3:5,6).

  The prophet further shows us God’s power. Indeed, He is “great in power” (1:3). In part, He demonstrates His power via nature (1:3-5). His power comforts, too, as He is a stronghold in the day of trouble (1:7).

  **Two other important lessons for us to learn:**

  Through Nahum, God foretold what would happen to Nineveh, why it would happen, and how such would come about. What amazing knowledge! Truly, “His understanding is infinite” (Psalm 147:5).

  Here is a sad reminder from Nineveh’s history: the repentance of one person, one family, or one group of people cannot guarantee future faithfulness. Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them over 100 years before Nahum’s day. In Nahum’s time, Nineveh once again was a spiritual disaster. Think about that.

-- Roger D. Campbell
THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAVENLY MATTERS

Christians who set their minds on things above often think about heaven itself. That sounds like a natural thing to do for folks who understand that (1) they are merely sojourners and pilgrims on earth and (2) they will have a wonderful inheritance in heaven (1 Peter 2:11; 1:3,4). I recently have been asked by sincere saints about a few heaven-related matters. Let us take a brief look at them one at a time.

1. Are those who have left this world “looking down on us,” aware of what is transpiring on earth, and do earth’s activities influence the deceased people’s emotions?

It is not uncommon to hear people remark that as they were facing a particular trial in life, they could feel the presence of a deceased loved one with them. Or, one might attribute his/her success to a loved one looking down on them from heaven and helping them through their endeavor. Maybe someone wants to encourage and comfort a friend who has lost a loved one, so they say, “I am sure that ________ is looking down from heaven right now and smiling when he sees how strong you are.”

In reality, there is nothing in the Bible which would indicate that what you and I do on earth influences the emotions of a person who has left this world. There is nothing in the Scriptures which shows that the dead are aware of what is going on among the living this very day.

When Jesus died, He went to Hades, not directly to heaven (Acts 2:27-31). In Jesus’ story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, those men went to Hades after they left this world, not directly to hell and heaven (Luke 16:19-31). “Yes, but did not the rich man know that he had five brothers on earth who needed to hear a warning about the torment that the unrighteous receive already in Hades?” He was aware that he had five brothers still on earth when he himself died (Luke 16:27,28), but there is no indication that he was aware of their daily routines and doings after he passed away. Lazarus and the rich fellow were conscience after death and could remember their earthly experiences (Luke 16:22-25), but there is no hint in the Bible that they have knowledge of what is going on “down here” in their absence or that they in any way can influence what takes place on earth.

Consider these thoughts: “For the living know that they will die. But the dead know nothing. And they have no more reward. For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6). While the dead are remembered for a time, and while they can have some influence on earthly affairs via what they did when they were still living on the earth, it is clear that they know nothing about present-day activities on earth and do not have a direct share in what is going on in the world after they leave it.

2. Why kind of body will we have in heaven? We simply could say that we will have the type of body that the Lord wants us to have, do you not agree?

The Bible says, “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption . . . It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42,44). So, the resurrected child of God will have a body, and the Scriptures say it will be a “spiritual” one.

Our resurrected, heaven-bound body will be a changed one – it will be different from our current, bones-and-blood body. As Paul said in the same letter which we just quoted, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed . . . and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51,52). Furthermore, our resurrected, heavenly body will be incorruptible and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:53,54). Heaven is an environment that is both eternal and free from corruption, so our God will give us a suitable body for such a place.

Whatever kind of body Jesus now has in heaven, that is the same kind which we will have there. Read these powerful words of encouragement: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body . . . ” (Philippians 3:20,21). We will have a glorious body that will be like our Lord’s. Yes, “. . . when He is revealed, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). I cannot wait! How about you?!

3. Will we recognize one another in heaven? They were not in heaven, but on the Mount of Transfiguration Peter could identity whom Moses and Elijah were, even though those latter two came back from the realm of the departed (Mark 9:5). Again, though it was in Hades and not in heaven, the rich man could recognize Abraham after both of them had left this world (Luke 16:23,24). Jesus said that many will sit down in the kingdom of heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 8:10). Would that not indicate being able to recognize those three?

After David’s baby boy died, the king stated, “Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Samuel 12:23). That sure sounds like David would know his son when he saw him.

-- Roger D. Campbell
The third division of the book of Philippians begins with Paul’s appeal for the saints in Philippi to “rejoice in the Lord” (Philippians 3:1). He next called on them to beware of dogs, evil workers, and the mutilation (3:2) – a clear warning about people who were dangers to the church’s spiritual well-being. The language Paul used most likely pointed to individuals who still were trying to bind the law of Moses and put emphasis on physical circumcision and one’s biological background.

In contrast to those who put stock in matters of the flesh, Paul said, “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (3:3). In this case, the word “we” refers to Christians, regardless of whether they are Gentiles or Jews after the flesh.

In the Bible, the expression “the Circumcision” generally is used to refer to the Jews, contrasting them with the Gentiles, who are identified as “the Uncircumcision” (Ephesians 2:11). Circumcision of the male flesh is mentioned first in the Bible in Genesis 17. There we read that God instructed Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised as “a sign of the covenant” that Jehovah made with the father of those who believe (Genesis 17:11). Physical circumcision on the eighth day also was commanded under the law of Moses (Leviticus 12:2,3).

It is worthy of noting that under the old covenant, there was another type of circumcision in addition to the cutting off of the male flesh. Through Moses, the Lord charged the Israelite nation, “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deuteronomy 10:16). One who had a circumcised spiritual heart was devoted to the Lord and ready to lay aside anything that stood between him and his God.

Under the new covenant, Jesus’ followers comprise “the circumcision.” How interesting. As Paul wrote elsewhere, in the Christ we were “circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Colossians 2:11). Again, it is clear that this is all about a person’s heart and has nothing to do with the flesh.

Do you recall what Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians about the true circumcision? He made these three observations (Philippians 3:3):

- We worship God in the Spirit.
- We rejoice in Christ Jesus.
- We have no confidence in the flesh.

Let us expand our thoughts. Again, most often when we hear or read in the Bible about “the circumcision,” we think of the Jews. In fact, there are three ideas which went hand-in-hand during the Old Testament era: (1) circumcision, (2) the people of God and (3) Israel. The circumcised were the people of God, and the people of God were the Israelites.

Bring those thoughts forward to the new covenant. We already have seen that under Jesus’ reign, “the circumcision” refers to His disciples. What about “the people of God” and “Israel”? It is undeniable that under the old covenant, the Israelites were the chosen people of God (Deuteronomy 7:6). In the big picture of things, that simply meant that they would be the ones through whom the Messiah/Savior of the world would come (Romans 9:4,5). Things are different under Jesus’ law. The plain message of Jesus’ doctrine is that today Christians are identified as “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9,10). But what about the Jews? An individual Jew can become a part of God’s family/chosen people by obeying the gospel and being baptized into the Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). Under the new covenant, being part of God’s chosen people is all about being born again, that is, via a spiritual birth, and has nothing to do with one’s DNA or fleshly background.

In Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia, he mentioned “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). The context of that statement shows us to whom he referred. He was not talking about Israel according to the flesh. Rather, he was talking about those whom he had just described as being “in Christ Jesus . . . a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). Whether or not a person is in the right relationship with the Lord has no connection with physical circumcision. Rather, it is all about being new creations in the Christ and possessing a “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6; 6:15).

In our service to the Lord, there is no room for boasting about our physical or cultural heritage. It is, however, appropriate for us to have a sense of satisfaction in knowing that in Jesus we are the circumcision of God, the people of God, and the Israel of God. That is the Lord’s arrangement and His terminology. Let us embrace it. Let us be humbled by God’s mercy, grateful for His abundant blessings, and excited about telling others the good news of His gift of eternal life through Jesus.

-- Roger D. Campbell

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IF SOMETHING IS LEGAL, DOES THAT MEAN IT IS RIGHT IN GOD’S SIGHT?

God’s wisdom is far above man’s (Isaiah 55:8,9). Human reasoning, including the policies of civil governments, often is different from God’s. Regardless of how one expresses the sentiment, this truth shines bright: God’s decrees are above the decrees of human governments. God’s law is higher.

Many people, including some Christians, are of the persuasion that if something is legal, then it is acceptable in God’s sight. The Bible does not support such a conclusion. I know that a subject such as this can stir up strong emotions, but the correct answer to our question about legality and rightness cannot be determined by emotional appeals.

Civil government has a role to play in society. The Bible says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities . . . and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Romans 13:1). Furthermore, a government ruler is described as “God’s minister” (Romans 13:4). Though the Lord does not approve of every decision and policy of each government, civil governments exist by the authority of God.

What is the function of a civil government? Civil governments provide and enforce law (Acts 25:10,11). Second, civil government punishes evildoers (1 Peter 2:14). A civil government also is to provide peace and stability in society (1 Timothy 2:1,2). It is true that not all governments carry out these tasks properly, but that is what they are supposed to provide for their citizens.

Paul the apostle was a citizen of two kingdoms. He was a Christian, and thus a citizen in the Lord’s kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:12-14). He also was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37). As a Christian and Roman citizen, at times Paul appealed to civil law and the privileges which it granted to him. For instance, when he was being interrogated by lower-level civil officials, he appealed to his right to be tried by the emperor of Rome, Caesar himself (Acts 25:10-12). Thus, in principle, it is not wrong for a child of God to use civil laws to his/her personal benefit or to the benefit of the Lord’s Cause. Let us look further.

If a civil law forbids a particular activity, that does not prove that such an activity is wrong in God’s sight. We think of an instance recorded in the book of Daniel. The king of the Medo-Persian Empire forbid anyone under his rule to make a petition to any “god” or man during a thirty-day period. Daniel knew of that decree, yet he continued to pray daily to the Lord (Daniel 6:7-10). Daniel, though he was a lawbreaker when he continued to pray to God, made the right decision. No human or group of humans have the right to forbid action which the Lord requires.

If a civil law requires a particular action, that does not prove that such action is pleasing to the Lord. We return to the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, commanded all people under his rule to bow down and worship an idol. At least three of God’s faithful servants, Azariah, Hananiah, and Mishael, refused to do so (Daniel 3). By failing to obey the king, they broke the law, yet their action was the correct action to take. No civil authorities have the right to force humans to commit sin.

If a civil law allows a particular action (a government neither forbids nor demands it), that does not prove that such action is pleasing to the Lord. Prostitution is legal in some locations, but it is a violation of God’s will that bed relations are only for those who are married to one another (Hebrews 13:4). Worshipping idols is allowed by human governments, but that does not make this transgression of God’s will acceptable to Him. The Bible says to flee idolatry, so idolatry is unacceptable, period (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Same-gender marriages and adultery are legal under some civil laws, but they are a violation of God’s teaching. Marriage is for a husband and wife, which means a male and female (Matthew 19:4-6). When one divorces his wife, not due to her cheating on him (that is, committing fornication), if he marries another woman, then the relationship he has with that second female is adultery (Matthew 19:9), and no civil laws can make that relationship pleasing to the Lord.

The Lord God is the One who determines what is right and wrong. If the decree of a human government contradicts God’s standard of truth (John 17:17), then what humans say, whether it is a king, queen, sultan, prime minister, president, governor, mayor, or military council, is wrong and needs to be changed.

-- Roger D. Campbell
The name “Habakkuk” means “embrace” or “embracer.” The Bible records nothing of this man’s personal life other than the fact that he was a prophet (1:1), meaning He was Jehovah’s spokesman.

**Historical setting:** Habakkuk identifies the Chaldeans, meaning the Babylonians, as the ones whom God would raise up against Judah/the Southern Kingdom (1:6). The message of this book was written sometime before the Babylonians’ first attack on Judah, which took place in B.C. 606/605.

**Some key thoughts:**
- Habakkuk is perplexed. How can God see all the evil that is going on in Judah and not do something about it? How long will it be before God does something? (1:2-4). Why do the wicked prosper? God’s response was that He was going to do something about Judah’s evil: He was going to punish them through the Chaldeans (1:5,6).
- That brought on another perplexing matter for Habakkuk: how in the world could God use the Chaldeans to punish Judah, when it was obvious that the Chaldeans were more wicked than the Lord’s people? (1:12-17). God then basically told Habakkuk, “Do not worry. After I use Babylon as My instrument to punish Judah, Babylon will get what she deserves because of her sins” (2:6-20; cf. Jeremiah 25:9-12).

In the end, Habakkuk is satisfied with God’s explanations and personally responds with this sentiment: “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will joy in the God of my salvation” (3:2,18).

- “The Book of Habakkuk differs from other books of prophecy in one special aspect. Instead of taking Jehovah’s message directly to the people, he takes the complaint of the people to Jehovah, representing them in the complaint” [Homer Hailey, A Commentary on the Minor Prophets (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI), 1972, p. 272].

**Other notable lessons and reminders:**
(1) God’s children sometimes have questions about God and His activities which they do not understand completely. Habakkuk was human. Being human, he had some matters that he did not totally comprehend. As a lover of his country, Habakkuk was concerned that maybe his country was not getting “a fair deal.” It may be that Habakkuk really is speaking to God on behalf of the entire nation of Judah, expressing confusion over why things happen as they do.

Habakkuk’s first question is, “How long...? (1:2). It appears that for some time, Habakkuk has been appealing to God with an ongoing request. To this point, God had not yet “heard” Habakkuk; that is, He had not yet responded like Habakkuk wanted Him to since He had not yet “saved” Judah (1:2). The prophet next wants to know, “Why?” (1:3). Why does he have to see all this evil in Judah’s society that seemingly goes unchecked and unpunished?

As we contemplate questions about God and His actions (or what we may perceive to be a lack of action on His part), let us be careful in our attitude and speech, always remembering that there is no wrongdoing in God (Psalm 92:15). Since God’s wisdom is unlimited, He does not need our advice or approval (Romans 11:33,34).

(2) As God rules in the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:17), sometimes He uses wicked people to carry out His will. The ones whom God chose to punish His children, the nation of Judah, were the wicked Chaldeans (1:6,13,14). God referred to King Nebuchadnezzar, whom He used to conquer Judah, as “My servant” (Jeremiah 25:9). The Babylonians were responsible for their own character. Though God used them for His purpose, He could not be blamed for their wrongdoing (1:7). Yes, God saw the wickedness of the Babylonians, pronouncing five “woes” against them (2:6,9,12,15,19), and He would, according to His own time frame, punish them for such.

(3) In every age, those who please God are those who live by faith. It is written, “But the just shall live by his faith” (2:4). Despite the unrighteousness of Judah and Babylon which brought about their downfall, a “remnant” could be saved by living by faith. Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the New Testament: in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. What kind of faith is it that pleases the Lord and causes a soul to be saved? A: Faith that acts/obeys out of a heart of love (Galatians 5:6; Hebrews 5:9; 10:38-11:40).

(4) There is an unmistakable contrast between the Lord God and the idols which men serve. It was no secret that Babylon served idols (1:11,15,16; 2:18,19). Habakkuk points out some major differences between idols and the real God of heaven (2:18-20): idols do not profit (2:18), but the Lord is of profit – He saves (3:13,18); idols are made by men’s hands (2:18), but God is the Creator of the universe (Exodus 20:11); an idol is a teacher of lies (2:18), but the Lord cannot lie (Titus 1:2); idols cannot speak or hear (2:18,19), but the Lord does both (2:2; 3:2); idols are dead – there is no breath in them (2:19), but God is alive – He speaks (2:2); idols are located wherever their human-makers place them, but God is in His holy temple (2:20).

Most likely, the book of Habakkuk is one of the least read books in the Bible. Yet, it contains a number of great principles to learn and apply.

-- Roger D. Campbell
ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE “RED” CLUB?

The term “RED” which we are using is purely fictional; I made it up. But, believe me, the club/group/team which it represents is real, composed of people who are very much alive and active.

“RED” is the short form of “Run Everybody Down.” Are you a member of that club? Do you make it your ambition in life to find fault with every fellow Christian and every activity of the local church?

Most congregations have such people. Some of these RED Club members are quite elderly, while others are middle-aged and some are still in their youth. Some are males; some are females. Some are extroverts, while others are introverts. Some hop from one congregation to another; others stay at the same local church. This club’s membership is open to all! That is the way Satan wants it. When it comes to the number of people in the RED Club, as the devil sees it, the more the merrier. The apostle Paul wrote that we are not ignorant of Satan’s devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). It seems clear that “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4) is the CEO of the RED Club, which has to be one of his more successful devices. Why would he disband the RED Club when it is causing such havoc and heartache?!

Whom do the RED Club members badmouth? The list would be much shorter if we would try to identify those about whom they do not “go off!” You name the person or group of people, and they can find a way to be critical of them. And, they rarely are bashful about sharing their strongly-held opinions. They can be unmerciful with the song leader(s). Ditto with those brothers who lead prayers. What about those who teach a class or preach a sermon? They run those brothers down, too. Do they find a way to run down the elders and deacons? Those are some of their favorite targets for criticism. What about evangelists, do they go off about them as well? Of course. Who else is on the receiving end of their tirades and disdain? Small children, the parents of those children, teenagers, VBS-planners, bulletin-board decorators, announcement-makers, those who clean the church building, and, well, just about every other person or group of people whom you and I might name.

Some members of the Lord’s body are so skilled in criticizing that they surely must have earned a degree in Criticism from some educational institute. They are “pros” at running others down.

It pains me to acknowledge it, but it feels like some of God’s children never have anything good to say about anyone in the church . . . ever. I take that back: some of them might have a good word or two to say about those who are in their little clique.

Bible students are familiar with the fact that Paul rebuked Peter to his face (Galatians 2:11-14), Jesus publicly labeled scribes and Pharisees as being hypocrites (Matthew 23), Peter warned of false teachers and their cunning approach (2 Peter 2:1-17), and those who preach God’s word are charged to convince, rebuke, and exhort (2 Timothy 4:2,5). Sin is serious stuff, causing separation from the God of heaven (Isaiah 59:1,2). It is horrible to think of people being separated from the Lord in this life. It is even more awful to think of their eternal separation from Him (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Unchecked immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-7) and lukewarmness (Revelation 3:15-17) can corrupt an entire congregation. It is the plain duty of God’s saints to expose the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11).

There always is a need for God’s people to take a look inwardly to see how they are measuring up to His will (2 Corinthians 13:5). Are we failing to do something that the Lord instructs us to do? Are there areas in which we need to put forth a greater effort? Do we need to consider changing our method of carrying out a particular activity in order to be more effective? Should we put more focus on training workers in certain areas? Self-evaluation has the potential to be a healthy thing. However, constant bashing, badmouthing, and running down everything and everyone are neither healthy nor fruitful.

If you are a RED Club member, please give this a try. Look around. Look around at the good being done in your congregation. You might be surprised how much good stuff there is for which you could thank the God of heaven. Where I am a member, despite our flaws, we have a great work being done with Bible correspondence courses. We have men of blameless character shepherding the flock. We have edifying training classes each week. We have compassionate saints helping the lost, helping one another, and helping the needy. We have dedicated Bible class teachers. We have deacons who are ready to serve on demand. If you are trying to sell the idea that “Nobody is doing anything, everyone is dead, and except for me and my tight, little clique, the church is pretty much made up of uncommitted, untalented dead weights,” then you need to peddle your propaganda elsewhere because we are not buying or tolerating it here.

To the dedicated members of the Run Everybody Down Club, we ask, “Where is the mercy?” Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy” (James 2:13).

-- Roger D. Campbell
For many Christians, the fifth chapter of 2 Corinthians has a familiar ring to it. For sure, it is a most encouraging message! In it we learn to look beyond this life to what the Lord has prepared for us “over there” (5:1-9), and we also are reminded of our reconciliation to God (5:17-21).

In between those two topics is a section on judgment matters (5:10-15). Let us take a closer look at this middle passage of the chapter, especially at verse ten, where it is written, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” When it comes to judgment matters, what can we learn from this verse and some of the statements which follow?

• **The Judge – the Christ** – “before the judgment seat of Christ” (5:10). Jesus said, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). The Father created all things via the Son (Hebrews 1:1-2), saves the world through Jesus (1 John 4:14), and one day will judge the world through that One whom He raised from the dead (Acts 17:31).

• **The judged – all people** – “we must all” stand before the King of kings (5:10). While the context of 2 Corinthians 5 speaks specifically about the affairs of Christians, other Bible passages make it plain that all people of all nations, regardless of their spiritual status, will be judged by the Christ. All nations will be gathered before Him to be separated, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (Matthew 5:31,32). The Bible says that through the risen Son, God will judge “the world” (Acts 17:31). No one will be exempt from such.

• **Type of judgment – individual, personal** – “each one” is to be judged (5:10). Such judgment for each person will be according to “what he has done.” There will be no one standing in as a substitute and no one will be able to be judged on behalf of another. The judgment of the Christ will be given to each person as an individual. That truth cries out for each one of us to be ready for that great occasion!

• **Judgment based on our conduct in this life** – “the things done in the body” (5:10). In the writings of the apostle Paul, at times the word “body” refers to the church, but in the context of 2 Corinthians 5, Paul has been writing about our “earthly house”/physical body (5:1), being at home in our earthly body (5:6), and being absent from our physical body (5:8). When Paul writes about judgment being carried out in such a way that “each one may receive the things done in the body” (5:10), the reference is to our conduct while living on earth in our physical body. The implication is that our judgment will not be based on anything which might transpire after we leave this world. Again, we are reminded to live our lives in such a way that we will be ready for the coming judgment.

• **Judgment according to a standard** – “whether good or bad” (5:10). It is not a question of whether the standard of judgment itself is good or bad – it is God’s standard, so, of course, it is good. The “good or bad” refers to one’s conduct in this life. God’s word is the standard of truth by which each person will be judged. The word of the Christ will judge both those who reject Him and those who follow Him (John 12:48). Those who “do good” will be raised and judged to life eternal, while those who do evil be raised and judged to eternal condemnation (John 5:28,29). God’s Son will pronounce the final judgment for each individual, but each person’s own choices in life will determine his/her eternal destiny. In this life, men may ignore, mock, or despise God’s standard for right living, but when they stand before the Savior in judgment, their life will be measured by that standard and nothing else.

• **The Lord’s terror and judgment** – “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men . . .” (5:11). This thought comes immediately after Paul’s declaration about each person appearing before the Christ’s judgment seat (5:10). Thus, the Lord’s terror should motivate us to have proper thinking about the judgment and have proper conduct in order to be prepared for that judgment.

What motivates us to teach others and tell them about the Lord’s judgment? Here are some answers from the context of 2 Corinthians 5: (1) The terror of the Lord moves us to tell them of His judgment (5:11); (2) The love of the Christ compels us tell others of His judgment (5:14); (3) What Jesus did for us (“One died for all”) motivates us to declare the judgment (5:14,15); (4) We want people to know God’s will and rather than live for self, learn to live for Jesus and be ready to face His judgment (5:15).

Every person needs to know what the Bible says about judgment matters. For those who are unprepared for that occasion, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). On the other hand, those who walk with the Lord in love “have boldness in the day of judgment” (1 John 4:17).

-- Roger D. Campbell

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WHO CARES FOR MY SOUL?

In Psalm 142, we see the Psalmist pouring out his emotions before the God of heaven. David, the likely writer of this Psalm, was a hero in Israel after he killed the giant, Goliath. King Saul soon became envious of David due to the latter’s popularity among men and blessings from the Lord. As Saul pursued David and sought to take his life, David had times when he was disheartened. It sounds like this Psalm describes such a period of time in David’s life.

In Psalm 142:3-5, we read that the Psalmist declared to the Lord, 

When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path. In the way which I walk they have secretly set a snare for me. Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul. I cried out to You, O LORD; I said, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.’

Did you notice that one unique statement? “No one cares for my soul” (142:4). How horrible! Sometimes young people who have made some serious mistakes may feel that no one cares for them. Some elderly people who rarely have visitors may be convinced that no one cares for them. When parents divorce, their children may feel like no one cares about them and their feelings.

In low moments, in times of disappointment and discouragement, many of us may have shared the same sentiment: “I am not sure if anyone really cares about me.” Let us take that statement from the book of Psalms which we noted above and modify it to make it read as a question: “Who cares for my soul?”

In truth, there are some people who do not really care for my soul. Atheists, denying that God exists and is the Giver of spirits (Hebrews 12:9), certainly do not have my eternal well-being in mind. Materialists, who deny that man has an eternal spirit, do not care for my soul. Self-centered people – those folks who are preoccupied with their own little world, have no concern for my soul. Hateful, cold-hearted, mean people do not care for my soul. Those whose only interest is in obtaining money, prominence, and power have no genuine concern for my soul. And, those who do not care about their own souls, as they are bent on fulfilling their own desires, they care not for my soul.

There are, however, those who do care for my soul. Satan cares for my soul in the sense that he knows exactly where he wants my soul to be in eternity – stuck with him in eternal torment (Matthew 25:41). On the positive side, the Godhead surely cares for my soul like no human can! The Father gave up His Son (John 3:16), Jesus willingly laid down His life as a ransom (John 10:17, 18), and the Spirit of grace revealed God’s message of salvation by grace (Hebrews 10:29). Yes, God cares for my soul!

Christians recognize that among the human ranks, there are many who care for our souls. Elders watch for our souls (Hebrews 13:17) as they take care of God’s house (1 Timothy 3:4, 5). Gospel preachers love our souls (2 Corinthians 12:15). Bible class teachers care about our souls: they pray for us by name, they prepare diligently for each lesson, and they work patiently with us. In the one spiritual body, the members all care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25, 26). Most of us also have family members – parents, spouse, and kids, who love us dearly. It is great to be loved in such a way that people really do care about our everlasting welfare.

It is no secret that some people care about my soul while others do not. But what about me? Do I really care for my soul? If I have been refusing to live in harmony with the instructions of the Bible, do I care enough about my soul to repent of my sins and change my life? (Acts 3:19). Do I care enough about my soul to humble myself before God so He will lift me up? (James 4:10). Do I care enough about my soul to forsake everything for Jesus’ sake? (Luke 14:33). Do I care enough about my soul to cut off the evil associations which threaten to corrupt my thinking and conduct? (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Do I care enough about my soul to put God and His Cause first in my life? (Matthew 6:33). How important is it to me to make it to heaven? If I say I really care about my soul, then I need to be ready to bow before and submit to King Jesus in all things.

No, not everyone cares for my soul. Yes, some do. What about me? How much do I care about my soul?

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The thirty-sixth book of the Old Testament was written by the prophet Zephaniah (not to be confused with Zechariah). Because of his message about the outpouring of Jehovah’s wrath, some have dubbed Zephaniah as “the prophet of God’s wrath.”

**Historical setting:** Zephaniah prophesied during the days of King Josiah of Judah (1:1), whose reign was B.C. 640-609. That means Zephaniah would have been a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah.

The main thrust of Zephaniah’s message was to the nation of Judah, as he records these words of the Lord: “I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . .” (1:4). Per the message of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, King Josiah carried out a number of reforms in Judah, trying to rid the nation of wickedness and bring the people back to the Lord. Zephaniah refers to some of Judah’s evil activities, but he never mentions any great reforms being carried out by Josiah. What does that indicate? Either Zephaniah prophesied before Josiah’s reforms took place or else the king’s reforms were not really accepted in the hearts and lives of the people.

Judah foretold the fall of Judah and Jerusalem, a fall that came in B.C. 587/586 at the hands of the Babylonians. Here are some key thoughts to consider:

- Zephaniah predicted “the day of the LORD” for God’s people (1:7,14,18; 2:2,3). Again, that day was “at hand/near” when Zephaniah wrote his message (1:7,14). It will be a day of terror and doom, a day of punishment for the unrighteous (1:7,8,9,12). Note that the Lord says He will be the one to bring this day on Judah (1:2-4,8,12,17).

This day of the Lord is called “a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation” (1:15). Some foolishly thought this day would not come because, in their mind, God does neither good nor evil (1:12). There was only one way to escape the punishment/wrath of that day: seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and seek humility, that is, do the Lord’s will (2:3).

- That which brought on the day of the Lord for Judah was her sins. God’s clear message was, “I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD” (1:17). The Jews of Zephaniah’s day worshipped Baal, the hosts of heaven, and Malcham, also known as Milcom and Molech (1:4,5). Some of them bowed before both the Lord and idols (1:5). One wonders, had the Israelites not read the first two of the Ten Commandments?!

In addition to idolatry, violence and deceit were widespread in Judah (1:9). God’s own description of Jerusalem shows the level of its spiritual depravity. He called it rebellious and polluted (3:1). The people of the city did not obey God’s voice and would not receive correction (3:2). Indications are that, instead of putting her trust in the Lord, the nation put her trust in idols and alliances with foreign nations (3:2). Many among Judah’s leaders were rotten with corruption, including the princes, judges, prophets, and priests (3:3,4). When you have such leadership, the followers are greatly hindered from serving God faithfully.

- Material blessings cannot deliver people from the judgment of God. “But, hey, we have a lot of money and material resources.” That proves nothing about a person or nation’s spiritual standing before the God of heaven. God’s powerful proclamation through Zephaniah was, “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath” (1:18). Possession of material substances cannot eliminate all problems in life, and they certainly cannot remove the judgment of the Lord!

- Zephaniah predicted a time of restoration, which supplied a message of hope to God’s faithful servants. The Lord spoke of the remnant of the house of Judah (2:7), the remnant of His people (2:9), and the remnant of Israel (3:13). In the Old Testament, the term “remnant” was used to refer to a small group of people who remained loyal to the Lord. God’s promise was to visit His people and take away their captivity (2:7; 3:20). There would be the physical return of the Jews to Judah after their seventy years of captivity in Babylon, and there also would be joy and salvation in the days of the Messiah and His kingdom. While the book of Zephaniah clearly shows God’s disgust with the conduct of His people, it closes with a message of hope (3:14-20). Here is the reminder for us: if we will stick close to “the God of hope” (Romans 15:13), there always will be hope for us, despite how bleak things might look on the surface.

- Zephaniah’s message also points out a number of things about God’s traits/nature. He is a jealous God of wrath (1:18). The prophet also says, “THE LORD is righteous” (3:5). You can count on it: the Righteous One will do what is right . . . always! In fact, the very next statement in the Bible, in that very same verse, reads, “He will do no unrighteousness” (3:5). He never has and He never will.

The God of heaven is “the Mighty One” Who saves (3:17). May we learn this from Zephaniah: let us serve the Lord with all of our heart and soul so that when we face “the day of the Lord,” it will be for us a day of deliverance and not a day of doom.

-- Roger D. Campbell
WHEN WE ARE FEELING “DOWN” OR DESPONDENT

In the course of life, we all have our “ups and downs.” Those “ups and downs” may involve financial matters, our relationships with other people, our health status, or our performance in our job or other tasks. We also go through mental “ups and downs,” do we not?

Sometimes we just feel like we have “the blues.” We may or may not be able to put our finger on exactly what is causing us to feel “down.” The truth is, dealing with the feeling of being “down” or despondent is a real part of life. “Despondency” is defined as “depression of spirits from loss of hope, confidence, or courage; dejection” [www.yourdictionary.com]. Does that sound familiar?

Even faithful servants of the Lord have to deal with bouts of depression or despondency. The prophet Elijah did. In two consecutive chapters in the book of 1 Kings, we see Elijah go from being “sky high” to hitting “rock bottom” mentally. God’s prophet enjoyed the high of his victory (actually, it was God’s victory) at Mount Carmel over hundreds of false prophets (1 Kings 18). Then, things took a turn for the worse. What happened? Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, sent a messenger to tell Elijah that she planned to have him killed (1 Kings 19:1,2).

How did Elijah respond to that news? “And he prayed that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’” (1 Kings 19:4). This was no joking matter. This was not a movie. It was not a novel. It was the prophet’s real life. When it becomes real in our lives or comes into our minds, it gets personal.

Thankfully, in Elijah’s case, after the Lord communicated to him, he was able to get out of the doldrums (defined as “low spirits; dull, gloomy, listless feeling”; www.yourdictionary.com). Based on this incident in Elijah’s life, please consider some suggestions/observations.

(1) Analyze the situation. Why am I down, and is it (whatever “it” might be) as bad as it first seems? For Elijah, it was not. The Lord’s question to His servant was, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (19:9). Elijah cried, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts . . . I alone am left, and they seek to take my life” (1 Kings 19:10). Elijah was not seeing things clearly. In reality, as God told him, there still were seven thousand in Israel who had not yet bowed the knee to Baal (19:18). A challenge for us when we are feeling down: keep things in proper perspective.

(2) Take care of your physical health. One’s mental health and outlook can be affected by the status of his bodily health. Due to his depressed state, Elijah was convinced it would be better for him just to die. God’s angel told him to eat and drink, which he did. The same scenario was repeated. In the end, Elijah “went in the strength of that food” on his journey (19:5-8). Consuming food does not cure all that ills us, but taking care of our physical health is important when we are facing mental challenges.

(3) Listen to what God has to say. Elijah did, and he was blessed for it. “The word of the LORD came to him” (19:9) and the prophet paid attention. “Then the LORD said to him . . .” (19:15), and the prophet took His message to heart. Turn to God’s word to receive insight, reminders, and comfort. It really helps!

(4) Get busy in the Lord’s work. At that point in his life when Elijah was way down, the Lord’s instruction to him was to get up and get active in His work. He told him to go and anoint a new king of Syria, anoint a new king over Israel, and anoint Elisha as a prophet (19:15-17). Being busy in God’s work: for some of us, that may mean to stay busy in what we have started doing, or for others it may mean that we need to step up our efforts or get back to being about our Father’s business. Elijah did, and it helped.

(5) Make a special effort to be encouraged by good things that are going on. As we noted, Jehovah told Elijah, “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (19:18). Rather than emphasize what is weak, lacking, or wrong, try to find something positive and focus on it. It helps.

(6) Make an effort to seek out other faithful servants of God and spend time with them. After Elijah received his “get-up-and-get-with-it” charge from the Lord, “he departed from there, and found Elisha . . . Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant” (19:19,21). Having association and camaraderie with Elisha had the potential to be a great blessing to Elijah. Spending time with faithful followers of the Lord can boost our spirits, open our eyes to the reality that others also face challenges like we do, and help us to see how blessed we are.

For further study, consider an occasion when David was disheartened after his own people turned against him. David’s response was to strengthen himself in the Lord (1 Samuel 30:3-6). Think about it.

-- Roger D. Campbell

[I have been carrying around handwritten notes on this topic for a couple of years. I think I wrote them while flying to or from Southeast Asia, but I am not 100% sure. If any of the ideas were borrowed from others, I do not recall doing such, and any failure to give proper credit to someone else is unintentional.]
1 John 3:16-18 – LOVING IN DEED AND IN TRUTH

In the letter which we know as the book of 1 John, there are an abundance of topics which are addressed. Some relate to fundamental doctrines, some relate to troublesome false messengers, and others pertain to the everyday lives and choices of Christians.

One passage which grabs our attention is the message of 1 John 3:16-18, where it is written:

(16) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (17) But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

What a marvelous, memorable message that is! Let us look at those words and the surrounding context to learn about God’s will for love in our lives.

Love – a recurring theme in this letter. Love for our fellow Christians is one of the dominant themes of this epistle, especially in chapters three and four. From a number of angles, the Spirit through John appealed to the first-century disciples to love one another. That is just a part of whom God’s children are, recognizing this truth: “... we should love one another” (3:11). Would it be correct to say that God commands members of His church to love each other? Read for yourself: “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment” (3:23).

Love in word – When we read, “... let us not love in word or in tongue” (3:18), that is not a divine decree forbidding children of God from verbalizing their love for one another. The point being made is that we ought to do more than talk about love – we need to show it in our action. Jesus told His apostles, “... I have loved you” (John 15:12). Paul wrote the same thing to the saints in Corinth, saying, “... though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved” (2 Corinthians 12:15). When it comes from a sincere heart, saying or writing “I love you” does not violate Jesus’ teachings.

Love “in deed and in truth” – Again, that is the plain point of 1 John 3:18. Genuine love for other humans is something that we put into practice.

In this context, we see that such love was exemplified. It was shown by none other than the Lord Himself. What was His greatest manifestation of love for humanity? “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us” (3:16). What kind of love was that? It was love in action, love sacrificing, love doing what was in the best interest of others.

In this context, we also see that such love is expected of every single follower of the Christ. He exemplified it and He expects it from us, too. In view of what He did for us, we know, “And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (3:16). In this matter, Cain seriously failed his brother (3:12). We must not do the same. When we see our brother in need of material goods, we need to have compassion, open our hearts and our stockpile of blessings, and help! (3:17). Until we grow to the point of putting love into helpful action, we are just talking and tinkering, and perhaps, deceiving ourselves.

Love in deed and in truth – love from the heart. Immediately following the charge for you and me to love in deed and in truth (3:18), in each of the next three statements/sentences there is reference made to a Christian’s heart. Look at them: “our hearts before Him” (3:19), “our heart” (3:20), and “our heart” (3:21). Our heart may or may not condemn us (3:20,21). God sees and God knows.

Words are words. Action is action. But do the words and/or action come from the heart? Are they sincere before God and man, or are we like the hypocrites of Jesus’ day who looked great on the outside but were a mess within? (Matthew 23:27,28). Yes, God calls us to put love into action, but none of us should believe the faulty notion that all action shows true love. Such is not the case. Action without proper motivation (love!) is empty and fruitless.

Lack of love – This is not a pretty picture, but it is one that John sets forth. If I fail to love my brother in the Lord, which is the same as hating him, that makes me a murderer (1 John 3:15). That is what the Bible says, and such language gets my attention. What else?

If a child of God does not love his brother, he is “not of God” (3:10). Such a disciple of Jesus is acting like Cain (3:12). Raise your hand if you want that label (“Acts Just Like Cain”) for your conduct. The world hates, and we expect that (3:13), but we do not expect to see such among God’s family. What else?

One who does not love his brother abides in death, which is separation from God (3:14). The saint who hates his brother is a murderer, and the consequence of being a murderer is that one does not possess eternal life (3:15). You see, my relationship with God, in part, depends on how I treat other people. Think about it.

-- Roger D. Campbell
WHY IS THE WORLD IN SUCH A MESS?

The ruler of one nation slaughters any fellow-countrymen who oppose him. In another country, a woman, in the name of religion, plants a bomb on a subway and murders scores of innocent people. Tech-savvy criminals steal money from bank accounts online and hijack e-mail accounts. From national leaders to common workers, folks speak profanity as casually as you and I take a drink of water, and they do not care who hears their disgusting slime.

With modern technology and convenient communication (including news agencies and social media), news travels quickly and photos instantly reveal gory details. Such is the world in which we live. Which do people find more interesting and newsworthy: to report that thousands of flights arrived safely, or that one plane carrying ten passengers crashed? Which catches people’s attention more: a report that one thousand law enforcement workers did their job lawfully and with respect for those whom they serve, or to tell of one lawbreaking, abusive officer who “crossed the line?” A great deal of what is communicated on the news and via social media is alarming, even downright depressing.

In view of all the mean-spirited activity and immorality which abounds in our society and around the world, we are made to wonder: “Why is the world in such a mess?” The Lord has infinite understanding of all matters (Psalm 147:5), so He understands completely what the major factors are in mankind being in such a mess. While we lack His comprehension, some things are obvious.

For perspective, consider two conversations which could have taken place. First, we go back a few thousand years before the birth of Jesus: “We have a question for you, Noah. Sir, why was the pre-flood world in such a mess?” His answer: “. . . the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . . every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). In Noah’s day, human conduct was a disaster. Why? It was a heart problem.

Now, we go to the first century. “We have a question for you, John. Why is the world in such a mess?” His answer: “. . . the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). Earlier in that same century, we turn to another apostle. “We have a question for you, Paul. Why is the world in such a mess?” His answer: People are “dead in trespasses and sins . . . fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind . . .” (Ephesians 2:1,3).

Those facts noted above remind us of this reality: what currently is going on in our lifetime is not the first period in history when humanity has made a mess of things on a wide scale. Yet, we admit that in any generation it is possible for people and their evil deeds to “grow worse and worse” (2 Timothy 3:13). As scary as it sounds, things could get worse than they are now . . . much worse. Man’s number one problem is sin — when people have evil thoughts and have their mind set on fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, man’s corruption will be continuous and progressive.

We often observe a lack of common decency and respect for human life. Man was made in the image of the Creator (Genesis 1:26,27), but when people constantly are fed the message of atheism and organic evolution, do not be surprised if the indoctrinated ones act like animals in their dealings one with another.

When you throw in humanism, which places prime importance on human intellect, human power, and humans deciding for themselves what is right and wrong, then there is no room for the Lord in that picture. This truth cannot be denied: when you cast aside the Lord and His truth, there is no end to the debauchery which mankind will embrace — recall the behavior and doom of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7).

We say it again: man’s most serious issue is sin, and sin is a problem which comes from the heart (Mark 7:19-23). That is fixable on an individual basis if a person is willing to humble himself before God, repent of his sins, and turn to Him for forgiveness.

God is working right now to rid the world of darkness. In order to do that, He inserts light into the world. How does He do that? Through His Son – the light of the world (John 8:12), through His word – the light for man’s path (Psalm 119:105), and via His children – the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). The world is changed for the better one heart at a time. Thank God for His light and the hope it brings.

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF HAGGAI: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Though Haggai’s message comprises only two chapters out of the Old Testament’s nine hundred and twenty-nine total chapters, it contains a number of great lessons – lessons for God’s children in any era of time. Haggai’s writing has a powerful punch!

**Historical setting:** After the Israelites of the Southern Kingdom were exiles under the dominion of the Babylonians for seventy years, the Lord God, in fulfillment of His promise, visited them and brought them back to their homeland. Actually, it was by His providence that Cyrus, king of the Medo-Persians, allowed the Jews to return home (Ezra 1:1-4).

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua, a number of Jews, with the blessing of King Cyrus’ decree, traveled from Babylon to Judah in about B.C. 536 (recorded in Ezra 2). One of their main objectives was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, as it had been destroyed when the Babylonians conquered Judah.

The Jews were able to lay the foundation of the temple in a timely fashion (Ezra 3:8-11). Not long afterwards, the Jews were forced to stop their rebuilding project (Ezra 4). About fifteen years passed. The temple remained unconstructed. It was at that time that Jehovah sent two messengers to exhort the Jews to get back to work and finish the temple task. Those two men were the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1,2).

When we read in Haggai 1:1 that the word of the LORD came to Haggai in the second year of King Darius, that gentleman was the ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire, and the date was around B.C. 521. Haggai would be on the scene in Jerusalem until at least the time the temple was rebuilt in its entirety (Ezra 6:14,15). When you think about the book of Haggai, think about it being connected with the history recorded in the book of Ezra, chapters one through six. It was an exciting, but challenging period of time. Now, we are ready to look at Haggai’s words.

**Some key thoughts:**

(1) Three English words form the major thrust of Haggai’s message: “build the temple” (1:8). The prophet’s appeal is for the Jews to get up, get back to work, and get the temple project completed. The Jews who returned to Judah had constructed nice, paneled houses for themselves. What about God’s house? It still was lying in ruins (1:4). Then came the call from the Lord: “Go . . . and build the temple” (1:8).

(2) The Jews needed to do some self-inventory. Seeing the lives of the Jews, combined with their lack of effort in finishing His house, God told His people, “Consider your ways!” (1:5,7). It always is a healthy thing for the children of God to examine themselves and see if they are living in harmony with the will of their heavenly Father (2 Corinthians 13:5).

(3) If the temple was going to be finished, a lot of work would be required. The temple certainly would not build itself! “So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God” (1:14). Beautiful! Keep it going! God’s word came again to the people via Haggai, and the clear appeal was, “. . . be strong, Zerubbabel, says the LORD; and be strong, Joshua . . . and be strong, all you people . . . says the LORD, and work; for I am with you says the LORD of hosts” (2:4).

**Other memorable lessons:**

The role of a prophet was to speak God’s word, making no additions or subtractions to what He said. Read the book of Haggai and be thrilled by the seer’s commitment to declaring, “Thus says the LORD.” For instance, in Haggai 1:13 we read, “Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, spoke the LORD’s message . . . says the LORD.” One of the things that sets God’s people apart from the religious world is their devotion to a “Thus says the Lord.”

Haggai has a connection to the new covenant. The message of Haggai 2:6 (“. . . Once more, it is a little while, I will shake heaven and earth . . .”) is quoted in Hebrews 12:26. In the context of Hebrews 12:26, we read about (1) “Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (12:24), (2) our need to hear the One Who speaks from heaven (12:25), and (3) the kingdom which the first-century saints received and comprised (12:28). Thus, Haggai was foretelling the coming kingdom of the Messiah, that is, His church.

The words of Haggai 2:20-23 also point, at least in a symbolic way, to the new covenant. In those verses, we read about Zerubbabel being told that God would shake heaven and earth, overthrow kingdoms, and in that day make Zerubbabel a signet ring. Did you know that this Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David and an ancestor of Jesus? He was (Matthew 1:12; Luke 3:27). We might think of Zerubbabel as a type of the Christ: both Zerubbabel and Jesus led people out of bondage, both built temples, both were of the lineage of David, and both were given great authority.

The Bible says that Haggai helped the Jews during the process of rebuilding the temple. As God’s spokesman, he exhorted, rebuked, and called the people to action. Let us learn these valuable lessons.

-- Roger D. Campbell
“I AM A CHRISTIAN, BUT I NEVER TALK TO PEOPLE ABOUT THE CHRIST”

Sometimes when a person who makes no claim to follow Jesus is around a Christian, he may feel uncomfortable, thinking that the Christian will talk non-stop to him about the Lord. My brother in the flesh once made this observation about a Bible-believing friend who made him feel uneasy: “He is always trying to cram his religion down other people’s throat.”

I am not certain how valid my brother’s appraisal was. Sometimes how we respond to someone else approaching us about a particular matter depends on our perspective. If we are in agreement with or sympathetic to his cause/plea, we may not feel intimidated at all. On the other hand, if we have no interest in what a person is trying to share with us, we might conclude that he/she is being “pushy,” when, in fact, they are just bubbling over with enthusiasm about some matter.

Here is what I think. One of the reasons that some CHRISTians today are reluctant to talk to others about the Christ, the gospel, and the church is this: they do not want to be perceived as being too pushy, too fanatic, or, as my brother said about his friend, we do not want others to think that we are trying to cram our religion down their throat. If that be the case, then it sounds like we feel uncomfortable talking to people about spiritual matters because we are afraid that such topics will cause them to be uncomfortable. It is as if we decided that someone else’s comfort level is our top priority. It should not be so, my brethren!

Our main desire and concern for a lost person ought to be his eternal salvation through Jesus (Hebrews 5:9). True, we must try to “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16), and we certainly have to “pick our spots” when it comes to when, how, and how frequently we will approach a lost person with the gospel, but let us not forget the bottom line: as long as a sinner does not know about Jesus, or as long as a lost person knows the truth but is unwilling to submit to it to purify his soul (1 Peter 1:22,23), he remains lost — 100% lost.

It horrifies me to think that in order to put a friend, family member, colleague, or classmate at ease, in order to make them feel less apprehensive when I am around them, it horrifies me to think that I would even consider saying to them, “Relax. Yes, I am a CHRISTian, but you do not have to worry about me bringing up the topic of religion, because I never talk to people about the Christ.”

Please consider three different scenarios. In one case, a man is on the board of directors of an automobile manufacturer, but in his private life he never talks to people about the vehicles his company sells (oh, he has mentioned the company name a time or two, but never in a way that he was trying to “talk up” the value of the vehicles his company sells). In a second situation, a woman is a member of a “Fan Club” of either a musical group or a sports team. She pays her annual fees to maintain her membership in the club, yet she never, ever talks to others about her club and how wonderful it is. The third scenario involves a member of Jesus’ blood-bought church. This person puts a check in the box “CHRISTian” when he fills out a written survey about his religious preference, but he would never think about talking to anyone about Jesus. “I am a follower of Jesus, and that is good enough for me. Why would I want to talk to others about Him? I do not want to bother them, and they probably would not be interested, anyway.”

What is amiss in the three pictures that we just described? Can you imagine a man who is in a high position in a company never mentioning that company’s products to prospective buyers?! Can you imagine a devoted member of a sports team’s fan club not sharing her enthusiasm with others when her team wins the championship?! And, finally, can you imagine a self-proclaimed CHRISTian never opening his mouth or never writing a message to tell others the fantastic news of Calvary, the church, and eternal life in heaven?!


In speaking about Jesus, one of Paul’s clearly-stated goals was this: “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28). In order to reach such a goal, that is, “every man” being complete in the Christ, we will need to talk to people about the Lord Jesus!

If someone has told you that talking to others about the Christ is all that a CHRISTian ever does, you were misinformed. At the same time, if you have been told that being a follower of the Christ does not include talking to others about Him, you were misinformed about that, too. Please think seriously about this matter. Pray earnestly about it. Then, get ready to talk to others about Him and His gospel!

-- Roger D. Campbell
3 John 1:9,10 – DIOTREPHES, THE PREEMINENCE-LOVER

There are three saints who were a big part of the message of John’s third epistle – Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius. While commendable things are said about “the beloved Gaius” (1:1) and Demetrius had “a good testimony” (1:12) among the brethren, Diotrephes was a different story. That guy was trouble.

Sadly, we remember Diotrephes for the wrong reasons. Read for yourself everything that is recorded about him in the Bible. Here is the text:

(9) I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. (10) Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

It is obvious that Diotrephes was bad news for the church. When we break down what John wrote about this strong-willed brother, what do we see?

• He loved to have the preeminence (1:9). The expression “loves to have the preeminence” is from one Greek word, “φιλοπρωτεύω/philoprö-teuō,” which means “to aspire to pre-eminence, to desire to be first” [Thayer, word no. 5383 via e-Sword]. Brother Diotrephes wanted to be counted as “the top man.” The truth is, the Bible teaches that Jesus, as the sole Head of the body, is to have the preeminence “in all things” (Colossians 1:18). No Christian, regardless of his/her clout among men, has the right to compete with Jesus. Diotrephes overstepped his authority.

• He loved to have the preeminence “among them” (1:9). This specifies the realm in which Diotrephes wanted to be first. John says Diotrephes did his haughty works with “the church” and “the brethren” who composed it (1:9,10). It is not pleasant to deal with someone in society who arrogantly wants to “run the show.” When we encounter such an individual in God’s church, it is especially distasteful.

• He did not receive John and others (1:9). The indication is that the others were faithful saints. We understand that we are not supposed to welcome with open arms those who do not teach the pure doctrine of the Christ (2 John 1:9-11). However, when God’s children are walking in the light with Him, we need to receive them (1 John 1:7).

• He prated against John and others with malicious words (1:10). To “prate against” is a translation of the Greek word “φλυαρέω/phluareō,” which is defined as “to utter nonsense, talk idly, prate; to bring forward idle accusations, make empty charges; to accuse one falsely with malicious words” [Thayer, word no. 5396 via e-Sword]. Such language comes from a wicked heart (Luke 6:45).

• He not only did not receive the brethren himself; he also forbid others to receive those brethren (1:10). His bullying tactics influenced others not to do the right thing. It is an abomination to put a stumblingblock before others (Luke 17:1,2).

• He put out of the church anyone who desired to receive the brethren (1:10). Diotrephes was a one-man destruction crew to the church’s work and harmony. It is proper for a congregation to take disciplinary action against a rebellious member (1 Corinthians 5:1-3), but it is not God’s will for one person to “take over” and try to kick people out of God’s family. Who appointed Diotrephes as the dictator? It sounds like he appointed himself!

• He was the epitome of evil. In the context of this epistle, the words “do not imitate what is evil” (1:11) apply first to Diotrephes, who was evil to his core. This brother had spiritual issues which were at least three-fold: attitude, words, and action. His attitude was evil: he wanted to have the preeminence. His speech was evil: he spoke malicious words. His action was evil: John spoke of his improper deeds (1:10).

• He was a leader of men. No, he was not a godly leader, but since he was able to get others to follow his lead and act like he desired for them to act (being unreceptive of John and other brethren), his influence definitely made him a leader. Does this example not remind us that it is extremely unwise to follow blindly after other humans in the spiritual realm? Many do that, to their own destruction. When the blind lead the blind, the results are disastrous (Matthew 15:14).

The spirit of Diotrephes lives on today in the hearts and lives of some cantankerous, overbearing brethren who are bullies. Some of them are gospel preachers, others are brothers who try to elevate themselves to be the chief elder, and yet others are those who try to dominate the decisions and activities in a local church which has no eldership to lead it.

When a Diotrephes arises among us, we ought to treat him with courtesy, but he needs to be resisted, rebuked, and disciplined. In the church of the living God, we do not need folks who aspire to be bosses over other members. What we need are people who want to be servants of all (Mark 9:35).

-- Roger D. Campbell

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TAMPERING WITH GOD’S ARRANGEMENT FOR THE HOME

The Lord God is all-wise, so He knows what is best for humanity. Because God loves us, He wants what is best for us. God communicates with us via His word, and in that word He has revealed what is best for our lives, including matters pertaining to the home.

God brought down His hammer of judgment on the ancient Assyrian Empire. One of the reasons was the haughtiness of its king, who boasted, “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent...” (Isaiah 10:12,13). The ancient king’s attitude is seen in many scenarios today, including how some people approach God’s arrangement for marriage and the family. Like Assyria’s king, such folks think they are mighty and wise and prudent, so they choose to do things their own way and disregard what God has to say.

When people tamper with and cast aside what God says He desires for the home, disaster follows. Nations suffer when God’s plan for the home is disregarded. Families suffer when God’s will for the family is ignored. God’s church suffers when His children choose to fulfill their own fleshly desires rather than submit to His instructions. And, yes, the world, the nation, the home, and the church all suffer when teachers and preachers spread messages about the home which contradict what God has to say.

God is the one who instituted the home. He created Adam and Eve and brought them together as husband and wife (Genesis 2). As the Creator of the universe, it is His right to speak to humanity in language that commands us how to act. Yes, He has every right to expect each one of us to comply with His will, including what He says about the home.

Bed relations outside of marriage violate God’s will for the family. It is God’s will that only two people who are married lawfully before Him have the right to sleep with one another. For a husband and his wife, their bed is undefiled (Hebrews 13:4). When people practice or endorse bed relations outside of a genuine marriage, they are disregarding God’s arrangement for the home.

When people divorce for any flimsy reason, or when others encourage such action, they are tampering with God’s arrangement for the home. The Spirit’s instruction to married saints is, “... A wife is not to depart from her husband... And a husband is not to divorce his wife...” (1 Corinthians 7:10,11). If a man divorces his wife, unless he does so because she has committed fornication, if he then marries a second woman, the relationship between him and that second female is adultery. Jesus said so (Matthew 19:9). The Lord of lords also said this about the marriage bond: “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6).

Same-gender relationships — homosexuality, lesbianism, and two people of the same gender “married” to one another, all of these are a violation of God’s plan for the home. The message of Matthew 19 is crystal clear: per God’s plan, marriage is for “male and female” (19:4), for those who leave “father and mother” (who are male and female, 19:5), and for a “man... joined to his wife” (a male and a female, 19:6). Marriage and bed privileges are for husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-25), not man with man or woman with woman. Those who engage in same-gender relations are counted as “unrighteous” by the Lord and cannot inherit His kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). God does not hate such people, nor do we. God being our Helper, though, we will not give our voice to support same-gender relations, nor will we sit by with a tolerant heart and locked lips.

Women giving birth to a child, having conceived with the aid of an implanted “donation” from a male who is not her husband, is tampering with the Lord’s plan for the home. God’s plan is for a wife to conceive from her relations with her husband and no other way. God’s arrangement for human procreation is through the activity of a husband and his own wife, period.

When a husband and his wife agree to be co-heads of the family, they are tampering with God’s plan for the home. By God’s decree, the husband is head of the wife (Ephesians 5:23). He is not allowed to share that headship, and she is not allowed to snatch it from him or jointly possess it.

Regardless of what topic is under consideration, God’s arrangement is always best. May we have a heart that wants to learn, live, and teach His will.

-- Roger D. Campbell
THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Among the last twelve books of the Old Testament, this book contains the most chapters. There are a slew of men in the Bible with the name “Zechariah.” The writer of this book was the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo” (Zechariah 1:1,7) – not the same person as an earlier prophet Zechariah (2 Chronicles 24:20).

Historical setting: Zechariah, a contemporary of and co-worker with the prophet Haggai, played a key role in encouraging the Jews who had returned to their homeland to finish the reconstruction of the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:1; 6:14, 15). He began prophesying in about B.C. 521/520, in the second year of Darius (Zechariah 1:1). Under Zerubbabel and Joshua’s leadership, coupled with the prophetic work of Zechariah and Haggai, the temple was completed in B.C. 516/515, which was twenty years after the first group of Jews returned to Judah (Ezra 6:14, 15).

Some key thoughts:

(1) God’s passionate appeal to the Jews in the days of Zechariah was, “Return to Me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you” (1:3).

(2) Like the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation, in many aspects the book of Zechariah involves apocalyptic literature. “Apocalyptic” literally means that which unveils or uncovers. This type of literature uses a series of visions and signs/symbols that unveil/uncover God’s message. In the first half of Zechariah’s message, there are at least eight visions (1:8-17; 1:18-21; 2:1-5; 3:1-10; 4:1-14; 5:1-4; 5:5-11; 6:1-8). “The visions of Zechariah focus one’s thoughts on the omnipresence of Jehovah, the reality of sin and suffering, and the dire need of divine pardon. Zechariah’s visions foretell the overthrow of Zion’s enemies, the heathen nations who would thwart the purposes of God. And his visions thrill the heart with promises of Jerusalem becoming the City of Peace” [V.E. Howard, The Living Messages of the Books of the Old Testament, “The Living Message of Zechariah, p. 400].

(3) Zechariah’s message was one of encouragement and hope for the Jews who faced difficulties. The first eight chapters of this book offer words of encouragement connected with the task of completing the rebuilding of the temple. God told His people that He was jealous for Jerusalem (1:14), which is called “the apple of His eye” (2:8). He said, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it” (4:9). It was not a one-person job, as Zechariah exhorted all the Jews, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Let your hands be strong . . . that the temple might be built” (8:9). God wanted the Jews to know that He would be with and bless their building project as they served Him.

Chapters 9-14 provide encouragement in matters related to the future coming of the Messiah. This latter section of the book shows God’s people as victorious under His mighty care for them. They were to rejoice greatly in the Messiah’s coming (9:9). God would strengthen and save His people (10:6,8,12). Remember: the blessings to be obtained during the reign of the Christ (blessings connected with God’s temple, Jerusalem, and His people) are spiritual blessings that we have in Jesus through His spiritual reign. The thought that everything would work out for the ultimate good of the Lord’s people should have been a comforting message to the Jews.

(4) References to the coming Christ abound in Zechariah’s writing. If we miss these, we have missed a major thrust of this book. Consider these prophecies:

3:8 – The Lord would raise up His servant, the BRANCH (Romans 15:12).

6:12,13 – The BRANCH shall build the Lord’s temple, shall sit and rule on His throne, and shall be priest on His throne (Hebrews 8:1,4).

9:9,10 – Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-5)

11:12,13 – Betrayal for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15)

12:10 – They shall look on Him whom they have pierced (at the crucifixion, John 19:34-37)

13:1 – A fountain opened for sin and uncleanness (Jesus’ blood, Colossians 1:14)

13:7 – Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered (the apostles fled, Mark 14:27,50).

Other memorable lessons and reminders:

God refers to the prophets as “My servants” (1:6). An intriguing question: “For who has despised the day of small things?” (4:10).

God sees all: “. . . the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth” (4:10).

God always has expected His people to be honest: “Speak each man the truth to his neighbor” (8:16; referenced in Ephesians 4:25).

The Lord is portrayed as the Good Shepherd who saves and protects His flock (9:16). Does that not remind us of the Lord Jesus? (John 10:11).

Jehovah is the One who “forms the spirit of man within him” (12:1).

The book of Zechariah is challenging. Within its message, though, are mighty messages of great encouragement for the Jews of the prophet’s day. And for us, the multiple references to the coming Messiah and those fulfilled prophecies reconfirm His deity.

-- Roger D. Campbell
SOME MISUSES OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Master’s magnificent message which we read in Matthew chapters five through seven has been dubbed “The Sermon on the Mount.” We are blessed immeasurably to have these words of Jesus recorded for us. Those who drink deeply from this section of the Bible can receive great guidance and assistance.

A recent, brief conversation with one gentleman reminded me that, as is the case with other passages of Scripture, some people use faulty reasoning when applying certain portions of the Sermon on the Mount. For our purposes, let me mention one example of such from each of the three chapters.

• Matthew 5:20 – the message: “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:20 – the misapplication: “If the Jews were commanded to tithe, and our righteousness has to exceed theirs, then we are required to give more than ten per cent of our income.” A bit later in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did mention giving alms (6:1-4), but what we read in Matthew 5:20 is not about our contribution of material things.

Matthew 5:20 – the meaning: Many of the Jews considered the scribes and Pharisees to be the most spiritual among them. Thus, for Jesus to say that His followers must have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, surely sounded like a very high demand to His listeners.

From other Bible passages connected with the life and teaching of the Christ, we learn that the way of the scribes and Pharisees was one of self-righteousness (Luke 18:9), hypocrisy (Matthew 23:2,3), pretension/outward appearance only – to be seen of men (Matthew 23:5,14,27,28), and omitting the weightier matters of the law (Matthew 23:23). Such attitudes must be absent in the heart of anyone who wants to enter the kingdom/church. One who longs to please the Lord must have a noble and good heart (Luke 8:15). In addition, God’s way of making man righteous is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16,17). One who wants to be a citizen in the kingdom must be willing to accept His gospel plan for our righteousness, not the ways of the old covenant.

• Matthew 6:5 – the message: “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”

Matthew 6:5 – the misapplication: Not long ago a man got quite huffy when I knocked on his door and tried to share with him a tract about Jesus. He told me, “Religion is a personal thing, and I don’t think we ought to be spreading it. Jesus said to go into your room and pray by yourself, so we need to keep our religion to ourselves and leave other people alone.”

Matthew 6:5 – the meaning: Jesus was warning His disciples not to imitate the practice of some Jews whose prayers in public settings were “long and loud” in order to draw attention to themselves and cause others to admire them. By praying with no one else around, when it just a disciple and his heavenly Father, there is no temptation to pray with the intention of trying to impress anyone.

Jesus, however, was not forbidding praying in front of others in each possible scenario. He Himself offered a prayer in the presence of a multitude of people before feeding them (John 6:10,11). Paul gave thanks in the presence of many on board a ship (Acts 27:35). Jesus’ message was about the proper attitude in prayer, not the location of the one who is praying.

As far as spreading the word about Jesus goes, our Lord wants His followers to declare the gospel of salvation to every person (Mark 16:15,16). Not everyone whom we approach with the good news will be thankful and receptive, but we must keep sowing!

• Matthew 7:1 – the message: “Judge not, that you be not judged.”

Matthew 7:1 – the misapplication: “Judging other people is wrong. We do not have the right to condemn anyone for anything that he does. We need to leave other people alone and just mind our own business.”

Matthew 7:1 – the meaning: Jesus explained that in whatever manner disciples judge others, they can expect to receive similar judgment/treatment from them (7:2). The judgment that Jesus is condemning is inconsistent/unfair judging (7:3,4). It is not wrong to recognize and acknowledge that a brother has a speck in his eye (7:3). It would be wrong, though, to see and speak about his speck, but at the same time refuse to deal with the beam/plank that we have in our own eye.

The judgment that Jesus condemns is harsh and hypocritical judging (7:3,4). In principle, His teaching also would condemn hasty and uncharitable judging, prejudicial judging (“prejudging”), and judging a person’s motive without proof that his intent is wrong. When you keep reading in Matthew 7, though, you plainly see that our Lord expects us to understand what is holy, identify dogs and hogs, and recognize false prophets (7:6,15). He wants us to practice “fang and fruit inspection” (7:15-20).

Let us maintain our love for Jesus’ teaching, keep studying diligently, and rightly divide His truth.

-- Roger D. Campbell
For many years, the apostle Paul had longed to go to the city of Rome to do the Lord’s work there (Romans 1:9-12). By God’s providence, Paul’s desire to make it to Rome was fulfilled (Acts 28:16). After being imprisoned in Caesarea (on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea) for at least two years, from there, still a prisoner of the Roman Empire, he was transported by ship to Rome.

Acts 27 gives a record of some of the events connected with the major portion of that sea journey toward Rome. This is a historical section of the Scriptures, yet there are numerous lessons which we can observe in the text. Let us take a look.

Passengers – There were a total of two hundred and seventy-six people on the ship (27:37). That number included those who were operating the ship, prisoners, and a centurion with his soldiers. Specific mention is made of three Christians: Aristarchus (27:2), the writer of the book of Acts (he talks about “us,” 27:2), and Paul (27:1,3). Paul counted himself as “the prisoner of the Lord” (Ephesians 4:1) because it was for his commitment to Jesus and the preaching of His gospel that he originally was imprisoned.

Purpose – In the big scheme of things, this voyage was for the purpose of getting Paul to Rome. On the human side, he was being ushered there by Roman authorities. Why? Because he had appealed to the emperor of Rome to hear his legal case (25:10-12), a right which was Paul’s as a citizen of the Roman Empire. On the divine side, God wanted to get Paul to Rome so he could preach and encourage the saints there (Romans 1:15-17). In fact, when Paul had been taken into custody a couple of years before this ship trip to Rome, the Lord promised His apostle, “Be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome” (23:11). In view of all of this, to Rome Paul must go.

Perils – Paul and all others on board the ship faced some difficulties. Contrary winds (27:7,14), depressing weather conditions (27:20), and the ship running aground and breaking up (27:41) were some of the unpleasant situations that all those traveling on the ship faced. Let us be reminded: God never promised us that in our earthly lives, everything will be “smooth sailing, both literally and figuratively. There were children of God on board that vessel, but that did not exempt them from having to deal with trials and unpleasanties just like all other folks did.

Prediction – During the midst of some dangerous weather circumstances, an angel of God appeared to Paul and told him that the ship would run aground on a certain island, but there would be no loss of life (27:24,26). Do you recall how that all played out? Exactly as God said it would. Are you surprised?! The ship did run aground. It did run aground on an island (Malta, 28:1). And, all those on the ship did escape safely to land (27:44). Know this: the God of heaven sees the future, with all of its details, just as clearly as you and I see the present. Yes, our God’s infinite understanding is amazing (Psalm 147:5).

Paul’s personal dedication – When Paul shared with them God’s message about the safety of the passengers and destruction of the ship itself, he unashamedly, but not boastfully, expressed his devotion to God and whatever He says. Paul declared that (1) he belonged to God (27:23), (2) he served God (27:23), and (3) he believed God (27:25). In reference to believing God, Paul’s own words were, “I believe God that it will be just as it was told me” (27:25). That is the kind of faith that you and I need to have: if God says it, then that settles it! When the devil and his deluded disciples speak blasphemous words about the Creator and His communication to mankind, we must not blink, blush, or abandon ship. We must stick with God’s unchanging truth. Why? Only it can make us free and keep us free (John 8:32).

Prayer – After Paul relayed the message about the upcoming peril of the ship, but without loss of human life, “he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all” (27:35). It always is right to be thankful for our blessings. It always is proper to express our gratitude to God in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18). It is even appropriate to pray in the presence of others, like Paul did, as long as we are not doing it to draw attention to ourselves and receive the praises of men (Matthew 6:5). Giving thanks for the food which we consume may sound like an irrelevant, trifling matter to some, but, in God’s sight, thanking Him, even for “the little stuff,” is a big deal.

Plea – When some on the ship wanted to escape on a small boat, Paul’s plea was, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved” (27:31). When the Lord designates a place of safety, then that is the refuge spot into which we need to get and remain! Redemption is in God’s Son (Colossians 1:12-14), so that is where every person needs to be. If you are not yet in Jesus – God’s place of safety, why not submit to Him today by obeying the gospel (Romans 6:3-5)?

-- Roger D. Campbell