

THE

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Grow in Faith Through Trials!

Dear Brethren and Friends,

Our predecessor in this Work, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, was often beset by trials as he began to build the Work and Ambassador College. Many times, his faith was severely tested and at times he almost gave up. He told me about this, personally, many times, and wrote about it in a number of places in his autobiography.

“On one occasion,” Mr. Armstrong wrote, “I almost snapped. I weakened to the extent that I actually prayed, one night, that God would let me die through the night, and relieve me from the almost unbearable agony. But next morning, I was deeply repentant for that, and prayed earnestly for God’s forgiveness. Twice I did give up, on going to bed at night. But next morning was another day, and I bounced back, repentant for having given up—if only momentarily” (*The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong, Volume 2, pp. 228–229*).

All this occurred because of the “\$30,000 headache” that had come down upon Mr. Armstrong when he was unable to come up with the payment for the Ambassador College property. (Remember, \$30,000 back then was almost like \$300,000 today!) He was faced with the possibility of actually having to close Ambassador College. At one point, Mr. Armstrong was so overcome with this constant harassment that, he wrote,

“I humbly asked God to consider that I was human, with human weaknesses, and PLEASE to give me six months’ rest from the terrible ordeal.

He did. And during the respite I finally learned how to **relax** in faith, and shift the weighty BURDEN of it over onto CHRIST! And, at least up to the time of this writing, God has enabled me not only to trust Him for the final outcome, but let faith remove the strain and anxiety.



When troubles or emergencies arise, we should be tremendously concerned! We should not take these things lightly or nonchalantly. We should be ‘on our toes’ to do whatever is our part, but trusting God in relaxed FAITH to guide us and to do His part which we cannot do for ourselves. We should be freed from destructive strain and

worry.

This lesson of faith does not come easily. Sometimes it is achieved only through punishing experience. We need to learn that God does not do all things for us. He does many things in, and through us. We have our part to do. But there are some things we cannot do, and which we must rely on Him to do, wholly, for us. It takes wisdom to know which is which” (*ibid.*).

Brethren, as we today enter into the very last of the “end-times,” many trials will no doubt come upon us. There will be “setbacks” in the Work, just as there were in the

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time of Mr. Armstrong. We will have to always keep our mind on the Big Picture and learn to look to God and to relax in **faith** and know that if we truly trust in Him, He will deliver us in His time and His way. The Apostle James was inspired to tell us: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2–3). So we must go through various trials in order to *build patience* and, over time, gradually increase our total **faith** in the living God.

We must be totally aware of what God tells us: “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6–8). Yet in the trials that we have today in the Work and in the Living Church of God and *all* branches of God’s Church—it may be easy to “give up” if things do not seem to be “going well” at any particular time. We may take it as some unusual “punishment” from God. Was God “punishing” Mr. Armstrong every time there was a financial downturn or some trial? I doubt it. And I am sure that those who knew Mr. Armstrong doubt this as well. There may have been times when God *was* trying to get his attention because of some problem. Other times, God let natural events take their course—as a general economic downturn of the entire economy sometimes affected God’s Work.

ALWAYS SEE THE BIG PICTURE

But in these “times of trial,” again, as I have said repeatedly, we must *always* keep our minds on the Big Picture. We must *know*, and **know** that we know, that God is real—that He is our Father, and that He will **never** leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5)! As the Apostle Paul went on to say in this passage, “So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (v. 6).

But in these “times of trial,” again, as I have said repeatedly, we must always keep our minds on the Big Picture. We must know, and know that we know, that God is real—that He is our Father, and that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5)!

Since I came to Ambassador College in the late summer of 1949, I can look back on almost 64 years of *deep experience* in the Church and Work of God. I say “deep experience” because—no credit to me—I was somehow thrown into close contact with Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong and the other leaders of the Work through my close friendship with Mr. Armstrong’s elder son, Richard David Armstrong, and my extremely close association with Herman L. Hoeh—who was my first roommate, for my entire first year, at Ambassador College. It gave me an unusual insight into the workings of the entire Work—since it was very small at that time, and since I was able to spend *thousands of hours* with Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong and Dick and Ted personally. I have seen how—despite our human weaknesses—God *delivered* Mr. Armstrong and the Work over and over, often *miraculously*. He was a man of **deep faith**. He would *trust God* in a way that very few human beings have done in modern times. Therefore, unusual supernatural *healings* and other blessings often occurred through his prayers.

Later, as the Work grew, Mr. Armstrong told several of us older evangelists a number of times, “Fellows, I know that we are not getting as many miracles and healings as we used to. Part of this is because the Work has grown so much that most of my time is taken up with *administrative things*—trips, meetings, etc. And I have not had or taken the time to devote to earnest prayer and study and fasting as I used to do.” This was a lesson I have never forgotten. For things have happened to me, personally, which I know that God has at least “allowed.” He may not have directly *caused* my stroke, my weak eyes or my lack of good hearing or any other ailments that come with older age. Yet, over the years, He has “allowed” sicknesses, trials, lack of income and many other sorts of trials to come on His Church, on His Work and upon **all** of us, individually. God tells us through His

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Visualize the Kingdom of God on the Earth!

How many times a day do you pray “Your Kingdom come?” Unless you are avoiding news reports entirely, you are constantly hearing of the evil, injustice and oppression that blanket most of the earth today. And, far from the utopian promises of technology bringing mankind an abundant new era, the reality of our 21st century is that billions now live in shocking poverty.

As *The Economist* magazine recently reported: “Of the 7 billion people alive on the planet, 1.1 billion subsist below the internationally accepted extreme-poverty line of \$1.25 a day” (June 1, 2013, p. 11). In other words, 15.7 percent



of all human beings in this “modern” 21st century are living in *extreme* poverty! More than one-third of the world’s population—more than 2 billion people—subsist on less than \$2 per day. The global median annual income—half earn more, and half earn less—is \$1,225. By the world’s

standards, the American middle-class and working poor are very blessed with wealth. Not only do half of the world’s richest 1 percent live in the United States; a single American earning \$34,000 per year is among the richest 1 percent of the world’s people. Of course, many who earn \$34,000 in the U.S. are struggling to make ends meet, with rising costs of health care, food, energy, education and other necessities. In the U.S. itself, to be in the top 1 percent of U.S. residents requires an annual income above \$500,000.

Did Christ envision a world with such inequity, where by some estimates the top 1 percent control about 39 percent of the world’s wealth, while the bottom 50 percent have less than 2 percent of the wealth? Our Savior is not a socialist nor a communist. Scripture teaches plainly that those who do not work should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Society is to provide for the weak, disabled and needy, but God values hard work and its rewards. Christ Himself said, “The laborer is worthy of his wages” (Luke 10:7). Whether one labors in the gospel, or in a factory, God’s way is not the way of exploitation of workers—as is so common in our world today.

Thankfully, there is a new world coming, a time when the world will be governed by the Prince of Peace and His servants the saints! Each year, anticipating that time, God’s people observe the Feast of Tabernacles that pictures this coming Kingdom of God on the earth. Those of you who have observed “the Feast” know the joy of God’s way of life. We visualize the promised future revealed in Bible prophecy. We see the contrast between God’s perfect way—which all the world will experience under Christ’s

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rule in the Millennium (Revelation 20:4)—and mankind’s 6,000 tragic years experimenting with humanly devised values and ways of life.

God’s plan has been in effect “since the world began.” In 31AD, the Apostle Peter spoke of the “times of refreshing” that will “come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Peter told his audience that God the Father will “send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (vv. 20–21).



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Yes, “times of refreshing” and “the times of restoration of all things” lie ahead of us in the not-too-distant future. What will God “restore?” He will restore His government to rule the world for everyone’s benefit. We know that God’s Kingdom on earth will bring equity and true justice. Christ will rid the world of injustice,

and the prediction of the prophet Amos will come to pass: “But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).

TOMORROW’S GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS

At the Feast of Tabernacles each year, God’s ministers remind us of our high calling. Our ultimate destiny is **not** to “roll around heaven all day” as the old song described. Rather,

we will be active as kings and priests on the earth (Revelation 1:6; 5:10). We will “judge the world” as God’s “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” (1 Corinthians 6:2; 1 Peter 2:9). As our Presiding Evangelist, Dr. Roderick C. Meredith, has reminded us numerous times, “We are now *training* to be kings and priests.”

Who else will serve in significant positions under Christ? We know that Jesus told His disciples, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:28–29). Obviously, at the time of the “regeneration,” when faithful Christians will be “born again” at the resurrection, the twelve tribes will exist and will be identifiable. We can only guess which apostles will be ruling over Ephraim (the British-descended peoples) and Manasseh (the American people) and the Northwestern European nations (mainly descended from other tribes of Jacob, who was renamed “Israel” as we find in Genesis 32:28).

And who will rule over the entire twelve tribes? Read Ezekiel 37:24–25, “David My servant shall be king over them [Israel and Judah, v. 16], and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.” Remember, God called ancient King David, “a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22). As kings, priests, and judges in training, we must strive to follow King David’s example through Christ living His life in us (Galatians 2:20). We also will teach the world God’s commandments, statutes and judgments.

Think of the many others identified in your Bible as proven faithful servants of God. The “faith chapter”—Hebrews 11—lists such saints as Abraham and Sarah, and even “the harlot Rahab” (v. 31). Who else will be near to God in authority? Jesus particularly honored the three great patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, when He stated, “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31–32). That powerful identification is repeated *five more times* in the New Testament.

Jesus also revealed two more top leaders in the coming Kingdom during the “transfiguration on the mount.” Christ told His disciples: “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matthew 16:28). Later, He took Peter, James and John to a high mountain, and “He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and

His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, *Moses and Elijah* appeared to them, talking with Him” (Matthew 17:2–3). Jesus gave these disciples a vision of the Kingdom including those two great servants of God. Both Moses and Elijah were prophets, although Moses also led the whole nation of Israel and exercised national government. Elijah not only urged Israel to seek the true God; he led schools for Israel’s prophets (2 Kings 2:1–5).

As we visualize the Kingdom, we look forward to these great leaders ruling, leading, governing and teaching major segments of the world. “Now as they came down from the

AS WE PICTURE THE KINGDOM, WE MUST READY OURSELVES TO RULE. LET US LOOK FORWARD WITH ALL OUR HEARTS TO THE TIME WHEN CHRIST WILL RETURN AND WE, THE FIRSTFRUITS, WILL ASSIST HIM IN HIS RULE.

mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell *the vision* to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead’” (Matthew 17:9).

God confirmed to Ezekiel three more servants who were faithful and righteous in His sight. Israel had hardened itself so severely that God said to Ezekiel, “‘Or if I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, even though *Noah, Daniel, and Job* were in it, as I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness’” (Ezekiel 14:19–20).

Can you begin to see the structure of God’s loving, divine government, consisting of faithful men and women who will rule in God’s coming Kingdom as glorified, immortalized children of God? In his inspiring booklet, *The World Ahead: What Will It Be Like?*, Dr. Meredith challenges us to visualize that time: “In that magnificent future, soon to be established at Christ’s coming, we will be able to fellowship and interact with the greatest leaders of the Bible and *many other* such faithful servants—the spirits of just men made perfect now and forever!” (p. 34).

We look forward to the first resurrection, when today’s saints will be reunited with the saints who “sleep in Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:14). We will rejoice in the wedding with our Savior (Revelation 19:7). Even now we have fellowship with God the Father and Christ (1 John 1:3). Soon, we will have an eternity to fellowship with our Father and Savior, with the faithful saints of our time, and with those the Bible lists as heroes and heroines.

OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE IN THE KINGDOM

God is reproducing Himself, preparing an eternal, royal family to serve all nations in the coming Kingdom. At the Feast of Tabernacles, we hear sermons helping us to see more clearly the glorious future God has planned for His

called-out ones, to serve Him in turning the whole world to righteousness. At the Feast, one way to picture this and to prepare is to look for ways to serve your brethren. Pray that God will show you ways you can serve others. Use your talents, and give of your time to encourage those around you. As Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).

God knows every hair on our head (Matthew 10:30). He knows the talents and gifts He has given us. We should use those gifts now as profitable servants, training for our future service in God’s Kingdom. We will all be kings, priests and judges, but God will also assign specific positions of service. Some will rule over five or ten cities (Luke 19:15–19); some will rule over nations (Revelation 2:26). Philadelphians will be at the Headquarters of God’s Kingdom, pillars in the very temple of God (Revelation 3:12). As priests of God, we will teach the way of love and truth. What will flesh-and-blood human beings experience in the Millennium and the White Throne Judgment, when today’s resurrected firstfruits will be the teachers? They will find that “your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:20–21).

We have great potential for service in the Kingdom to use those talents and gifts God has given us. So, we must *continue to grow* and multiply our spiritual gifts—as instructed in the parable of the minas (Luke 19:12–27) and the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). Christ warned, “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (vv. 29–30). We must strive to avoid being unprofitable servants!

A TRANSFORMED WORLD

Today, 1.1 billion people live in extreme poverty. In God’s coming Kingdom, the world will prosper as it applies God’s laws of tithing, observes the Sabbatical year when debts are forgiven, conducts business in a way that will encourage godly living—and experiences the blessings of rain in due season. “But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:4).

Our present world of war, conflict and oppression will be transformed. Christ will put all enemies under His feet.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:22–25). “Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Micah 4:2–3).



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Brethren, pray for God’s Kingdom to come. Work while it is day, for “the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). Let us rejoice in the Feast and exercise the vision God has given us. “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18). Thank God for His revelation of our glorious destiny. Let us go forward with faith, committing ourselves to the commandments and promises of God. Faithful saints have set the example for us: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, *embraced them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

As we picture the Kingdom, we must ready ourselves to rule. Let us look forward with all our hearts to the time when Christ will return and we, the firstfruits, will assist Him in His rule. As Dr. Meredith so movingly described in a powerful *Living Church News* article several years ago, “That is why we are called now. That is the magnificent future we can look forward to—the opportunity to assist Christ in ‘wiping away every tear,’ healing the sick, delivering the troubled, releasing captives from prison and bringing joy to the entire earth. Again, as we saw in Jeremiah’s inspired prophecy: ‘There is hope in your future, says the LORD’ (Jeremiah 31:17)! That hope—that magnificent opportunity to straighten out this earth and bring genuine peace and joy to millions—is what should motivate all of us to press toward the Kingdom of God with all of our hearts!” (“Are You Ready To Rule?,” September-October 2009, p. 4).

Brethren, let us rejoice in the Feast, embrace the promises God has given us, and visualize the coming Kingdom of God on earth! ■

Are You Ready for the Feast of Tabernacles?

Attending the Feast of Tabernacles is a highlight of the year for God's people. If we are growing in grace and knowledge, the reality of the Kingdom of God becomes ever clearer to us as we gather together each fall to celebrate our part in God's plan and to look forward to the establishment of God's government here on earth.

Many reading this article will be keeping the Feast within a few hours of their homes. Others may be traveling thousands of miles around the globe. Yet the Feast of Tabernacles is an observance that brings us all closer together as a Church.

What is God's instruction? We read: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it'" (Leviticus 23:34–35).

Notice that, although only the first and last days are "holy time," God says we must keep the Feast for *all eight* days: "For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it" (Leviticus 23:36).

For how long should we keep the Feast? "You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month" (Leviticus 23:41). Yes, God commands us to keep the Feast each year, year after year, generation after generation—forever!

"You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 23:42–43). Notice that we are to leave our homes and live in temporary accommodations for the entire Feast. This reminds us that we are merely sojourners here on Earth.

But why does God so emphasize the importance of our keeping the Feast of Tabernacles? What lessons are we to learn from it, and how should we prepare ourselves to celebrate it? "You shall truly tithe all the increase of

your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always" (Deuteronomy 14:22–23). Yes, God has commanded our attendance at the fall Feast so we may learn to fear the LORD our God always.

Elsewhere in this issue of the *Living Church News*, you have read exhortations to prepare spiritually for the coming Feast. Another aspect of our preparation is to prepare a tithe of our annual increase to pay our expenses traveling to and staying at the place where God places His Name: "But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD

your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household" (Deuteronomy 14:24–26).

God did not say that we can choose not to attend if the site is too far away. In the Millennium, people will come to Jerusalem for the Feast from every nation; they will not be able to complain that the site is too far distant. Except for severe health reasons, all God's people should attend, and He expects us to set aside a tithe for our expenses. In past years, some have excused themselves to return to work during the Feast, or have left early to get back to school. A few have attended only the morning service on the Last Great Day, so they could get an early start rushing back into the world. Yet the Last Great Day is holy to God and should be entirely and reverently observed until sunset.

Properly saving our second tithe is one of the ways we show our Father that we do fear to violate His statutes and that we desire to fully honor Him at His fall festivals. While financial planning may seem like a mundane topic to address, it is actually crucial for the success of



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the Feast! Without adequate preparation, including financial preparation, the Feast would be a chaotic, distressing, and discouraging time. Imagine, for a moment, if you put all your Feast expenses on a credit card, only to be paying them off for the rest of November, December and January! What a blessing that God gives us His gift of the Festival tithe—with no recurring headaches over how to pay it off after the Feast is over!

God's command to save a festival tithe is a vital link to ensure that the Feast of Tabernacles is observed each year. How many projects never happen because of "lack of funding?" Anyone associated with business or government knows that until a program is funded—it is not really committed to! The funding is where the commitment to the project is made. So, we can see why God saw an absolute need for a financial commitment by God's people all year long, to insure that they would always keep the Feast, year in and year out.

Many millennia ago, God laid out His system for funding the Feast, to ancient Israel. As the "Israel of God" today, we are to keep those same Holy Days. And therefore, the preparation for those Holy Days is the same, with some updates for a modern age. Deuteronomy 14:22 says, "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always."

This was a separate tithe than that given to the Levites (Numbers 18:21), because this was to be consumed by the giver of the tithe. Notice that God provided for this statute to be understood and followed even in the modern circumstances of our cash-driven society, by stipulating that our increase may be spent in the form of money (Deuteronomy 14:25).

Some few of our brethren around the world still do bring livestock to the Feast, to enjoy the fruit of their labors—their festival tithe—with their families and other brethren. However, for most of us in the modern economy, the only way we can save the festival tithe is through setting aside money. So, are we faithfully saving our festival ("second") tithe? If you were slack in saving that tithe for this year's Feast, resolve *now* to save it diligently for the Feast in 2014!

God is preparing a great future and a place for each of us in His family. He has called us to learn how to rule and teach this world the ways of peace and happiness. The Feast of Tabernacles is a unique opportunity for us to train for the awesome events to occur in the days and years just ahead. The Feast gives us a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

Even after the Kingdom is here, the Feast of Tabernacles will still be observed, and all nations will be required to attend. As we read in Zechariah: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is

left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16–19).

Once the nations learn what God will teach them at the Feast of Tabernacles, they will come to love and enjoy this holy time as much as His people do today. So, prepare diligently. See you at the Feast!

—By Rod McNair, with contributions by LCG Festival Staff



God's ETERNAL Promise

By Gerald Weston

W e do not like to think about it, but every one of us is going to die. Then what? What happens after death? Where, if anyplace, will you go? And what will you be? Answers vary depending on where you look and who you ask, but John 3:16 promises the potential of an unending life after death: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but **have everlasting life.**” We must note that the promise of everlasting life is conditional. Perishing is the natural outcome of a sinful life, but this verse gives us hope beyond the grave.

One common teaching in “mainstream Christianity” is that human beings each have an immortal soul and that at death the soul goes immediately to the paradise of heaven or to the torments of hell, depending on what kind of person you were. Others believe that death is likened to sleep, and that upon Christ's return, those who are His will awaken in a resurrection from death to live eternally. Some believe that eternal life is in a fleshly body on this earth and others believe in a new spirit body, either on the earth or up in heaven.

One popular idea is that you will be given wings and will float on clouds playing harp music in eternal retirement. Many people look forward to being reunited with their loved ones in some kind of unspecified heavenly paradise. Then there are those who speak more specifically about what to expect in heaven:

“*The greatest joy of heaven is the **Beatific Vision.***

This is *the sight of God face to face.* This vision is called beatific, because it completely fills with joy those who possess it. They know and love God to their utmost capacity, and are known and loved by God in return. *The Beatific Vision will satisfy completely and supremely all our desires.* Having God, we shall never wish for anything else” (*My Catholic Faith*, 1966, pp. 176–77).

With so many ideas about the afterlife, who can blame those who simply throw up their hands and give up trying to figure it all out? But when a loved one dies, we want to know. And, we often become seriously curious about the afterlife as we see the inevitable closing in on us.

On the *Tomorrow's World* telecast and in the Living Church of God, the sponsor of *Tomorrow's World*, we often say, “Don't believe us because we say it. Believe what your Bible tells you.” So, what—if anything—does the Bible teach regarding

an afterlife? What is the reward of the saved according to this remarkable and inspired book?

The man Job asked and answered an important question: “If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands” (Job 14:14–15). Job understood that God has a purpose, and a plan that He is working out in the lives of each human being He has created. He understood that this physical life is only a beginning, but to more fully understand what that purpose is we must look to the good news that Jesus brought.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

The term gospel simply means *good news* and the good news that Jesus brought to mankind was the Kingdom of God. The subject of the Kingdom of God is found throughout the New Testament, especially in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the book of Acts. It is remarkable that anyone could read these books yet misunderstand this important subject.

The book of Mark tells us about the beginning of Christ's ministry and His message: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.... Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:1, 14–15).

We see from these verses that the good news, the gospel, that Jesus preached is the Kingdom of God and it is this gospel that we are to believe. As we shall see, many details about this kingdom are revealed in the scriptures. How tragic it is that so few professing Christians have any understanding of this coming Kingdom when the New Testament is filled with the knowledge of it!

Luke tells us in the book of Acts that this was the same message Jesus taught after His resurrection some three-and-a-half years later: “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen... being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:1–3).

Between the time He began His ministry (Mark 1) and His last appearance to His apostles (Acts 1), He spoke constantly about the Kingdom of God. He went about all Galilee teaching and “preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23;



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9:35) and Jesus said, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Luke 4:43).

We see that the gospel of the Kingdom of God was at the heart and core of His famous sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:3, 10; 5:19–20; 6:10, 13; 7:21). In this same sermon He explains that seeking the Kingdom of God is to be the primary focus of our lives (6:33). This alone should tell us that the Kingdom of God is something exciting and something that we should greatly desire. Yet, how many are genuinely excited about going to an eternal retirement with nothing to do except look into the face of God in some sort of unproductive ecstatic trance? This is not at all what the Bible teaches!

JESUS TAUGHT THE PEOPLE ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND THE BIBLE IS CONSISTENT ABOUT WHERE HE AND HIS SERVANTS WILL RULE—NOT UP IN HEAVEN, BUT ON THIS EARTH!

Jesus’ parables often started with a question or a declaration about the Kingdom of God (see Luke 13:18, 20; Matthew 13:24, 44, 45). It is in these parables that we begin to see that God has called us to an active and productive eternal life. Jesus gave the parable of the minas, “because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (Luke 19:11). He described a certain nobleman who went away on a long journey to receive a kingdom. In the meantime he gave each of ten servants a mina (a unit of money) and instructed them to do business until he returned (vv. 12–13). Upon his return he gave out rewards based on what each servant had gained.

The symbolism is evident. Jesus is the Nobleman who went away to receive the Kingdom. A prophecy in Daniel 7:13–14 briefly describes His coronation ceremony. Later in this prophecy it tells us that the saints (the servants of Christ) will rule under Him (v. 27). Again, in the parable of the minas, Jesus explains that the man who multiplied his minas tenfold would be rewarded with rulership over ten cities in His Kingdom. The man who gained five minas would rule over five cities, but the man who did nothing with his mina would lose out on the kingdom altogether.

Other scriptures corroborate this pattern of rulership for Jesus’ servants in the Kingdom of God. When His disciples asked what was in it for them, He replied: “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28). And several scriptures inform us that King David will be resurrected and given rule over all twelve tribes of Israel. “But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them” (Jeremiah 30:9; See also Ezekiel 34:23–24 and 37:21–25).

But Christ will rule over the entire earth. “Then the seventh angel sounded: and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign

forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15). “And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (19:16).

A KINGDOM ON THE EARTH

Jesus taught the people about the Kingdom of God, and the Bible is consistent about where He and His servants will rule—not up in heaven, but on this earth! We find this remarkable prophecy toward the end of the Old Testament: “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives.... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:4, 9). In the song of the saints found in Revelation 5:10 we

read: “And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.” And in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

Some are confused by Jesus’ statement two verses earlier when He said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Are we to conclude from verses three and five that the poor in spirit go to heaven, but the meek stay on the earth? Absolutely not! Note that it says that the meek “shall inherit the earth,” but it is the “kingdom of heaven” that belongs to the poor in spirit. The other gospel writers always refer to the *kingdom of God*, but Matthew uses both terms interchangeably (Matthew 19:23–24).

Now we know that the Kingdom of God is not *in* God. This expression simply means that it is God’s kingdom. In the same way the Kingdom of heaven refers to ownership, not location. It is God who is at this time dwelling *in* heaven so it is properly referred to as the kingdom of heaven, meaning *heaven’s kingdom*.

Those that God is calling during this age will be resurrected at the return of Jesus Christ and given rewards to various levels of rulership (Revelation 11:15, 18). They are to be kings and priests when Christ returns to this earth (Revelation 5:10; 20:4), but they will not be composed of flesh and blood as we are today.

The Apostle Paul explains our future nature in 1 Corinthians chapter 15:

“The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.... Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:47–48, 50–53).

Satan has deceived us into thinking that flesh and blood is superior to being composed of spirit as God is, but a close examination of the scriptures gives us a different picture. We see that, after His resurrection, Jesus was able to walk through stone. When the stone was rolled back from His tomb, He was already gone. The stone being rolled back was for the benefit of others to see that He was gone (Matthew 28:1–6), and even with the doors locked and secure He was able to appear in the room with His disciples (John 20:19, 26). He was able to appear as a man and even eat a meal (Luke 24:41–43). He was able to go from earth to heaven and back at incredible speed

him” (v. 8). However, he shows that all things have not *yet* been put under mankind’s control. If it were, there truly would be “star wars”—given our current carnal state!

Paul is then very bold in describing mankind as “sons” of God (v. 10). This whole passage in Hebrews 2:5–18 is most instructive concerning this subject, and should be read carefully along with Romans 8:18–23 by anyone desiring to know God’s ultimate plan for mankind.

HOW LONG ETERNITY?

When we are young, we intellectually understand that we will grow old and die, but getting old and dying seems so far off in the future that this reality is usually of little consequence. As we grow older, however, we begin to recognize that life is not all that long after all. One year comes and another goes. Decades begin to accumulate. One day, we come to the stark realization that there

WHEN WE ARE YOUNG, WE INTELLECTUALLY UNDERSTAND THAT WE WILL GROW OLD AND DIE, BUT GETTING OLD AND DYING SEEM SO FAR OFF IN THE FUTURE THAT THIS REALITY IS USUALLY OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE. AS WE GROW OLDER, HOWEVER, WE BEGIN TO RECOGNIZE THAT LIFE IS NOT ALL THAT LONG AFTER ALL.

(compare John 20:17 and Matthew 28:9). Since we do not know the distance between God’s throne and the earth it is impossible for us to know *how* fast, but we can understand that anyone who is into speed travel will not be disappointed!

But, what about *wings*? Many people think Christians “get our wings” at the resurrection. Many non-biblical ideas have been recorded in writing and art, been preached, and spoken in jest by sincere people, but scripture must be our guide. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that we will have wings in the afterlife, but the Apostle John tells us this: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:1–2).

It should not surprise us that we are called children of God in this passage and that we are told that we will “be like Him.” Numerous other passages affirm our ultimate destiny in the Kingdom of God. How many people think that we will be some kind of angelic beings in the afterlife? Yet, we are told very directly that the “world to come” is not to be ruled by angels. “For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels” (Hebrews 2:5). As we have already seen, we are to rule the world to come with Christ upon His return. But if not angels, then what?

Paul quotes King David asking the question, “What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him?” (Hebrews 2:6). He goes on to say, prophetically, that God has put “all things in subjection” to mankind, and that there is “nothing that is not put under

are more years behind us than ahead of us, and the train of life we are on is picking up speed. Sixty does not seem as old as it once was. After all, we tell ourselves, we are “young at heart.” But 70, 80 or even 100 years no longer seems long enough. “Where did all the years go?” we find ourselves asking, just as our parents and elders did. This life is nothing against the backdrop of eternity.

With all this on our minds, it is natural to wonder: Is there life after death? If so, we may wonder what form that life will take, and what we will be doing? Will that life be eternal? Of and by ourselves, we have to admit that we do not know much about our future.

So, we can be grateful for the information God gives us in John 3:16. No, this one verse does not give us all the answers. However, it assures us that the One who created time itself is deeply and personally concerned about every moment of our life. It reveals that there is a future for those who are willing to act on God’s word—to do what it says, in obedience to the Savior, Jesus Christ. It gives us the comfort of knowing that, although this present life is temporary and fleeting, our hope of eternal life is real—and is attainable through Jesus Christ.

Life after death is not some kind of unproductive “retirement” from the activity of our present life. It is not a passive ecstatic trance, or a release into a formless “nirvana.” Rather, as we learn in God’s word, eternal life will be an opportunity for great accomplishment—and it will be exciting to a degree that we in our present human lives can scarcely imagine. Paul understood this hope when he wrote: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). That glory awaits every faithful Christian who accepts—and acts on—the promise God makes in John 3:16. ■

LESSONS FROM THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

By John H. Ogwyn (1949–2005)

Shortly after King Herod put John the Baptist into prison, Jesus Christ came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. For most of the next three years, He and His disciples trudged up and down the dusty roads of Galilee, Samaria and Judea as He preached this message to multitudes that assembled to hear Him. Much of Jesus' preaching, remarkably, was in the form of parables.

Why did Jesus preach this way? What are parables, and why did Jesus use so many? During the fall festival season, we focus much of our attention on the Kingdom of God. What lessons can we learn from Jesus' parables about God's soon-coming Kingdom?

Did you know that the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke mention parables approximately 50 times, while John's gospel contains none at all? Matthew, Mark and Luke record more than 30 different parables—three that occur in all three gospels, several that occur in two, and many that occur in just one. Luke records the most parables. Matthew joins seven parables of the Kingdom together and lists them one after the other in Matthew 13.

What exactly is a parable? The Hebrew word that is translated as "parable" in Ezekiel 17:2 is translated as "proverb" in the book of Proverbs. It refers to a comparison used to teach a lesson. In the New Testament, the Greek word *parabole* refers to a symbolism, or a comparison, and is the origin of our English word "parable." In Hebrews 9:9, Paul uses the word *parabole*—translated as "symbolic"—after earlier in the chapter describing the layout and furnishings of the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) which symbolized God's plan of salvation.

When teaching the multitudes about God's Kingdom, Jesus used such parables—symbolism or comparisons—almost exclusively. Most people believe that Jesus used parables to make His teachings understandable to the masses, but Scripture says the very opposite (Matthew 13:13). Only for Jesus' disciples, to whom He gave clear explanations, did the parables make plain His various lessons about the Kingdom (vv. 10–11).

Each of Jesus' parables stands on its own, using an illustration to teach a specific lesson. The Kingdom of God is such a vast subject that no one comparison can do it justice. The examples that Jesus used help us to understand different aspects of the Kingdom.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SEED

Matthew's gospel often links together, because of common subject matter, teachings that Jesus gave at different times. Such is the case in Matthew 13, which records seven

parables of the Kingdom. Mark includes three of these seven parables, while Luke repeats just one.

The parable of the sower and the seed is the first of these seven in Matthew. When we compare it to the parallel accounts in Mark 4 and Luke 8, we can recognize this as one of Jesus' early parables, given before He first sent the disciples out to proclaim the gospel. Luke 8 describes Jesus personally preaching the gospel message, healing the sick and casting out demons, while He taught and trained the Apostles who accompanied Him. In Luke 9, we read of Jesus sending the

Apostles out to do what He had been doing—preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. In effect, they were "planting" the gospel message, "sowing the seeds" of the Kingdom.

This is why the disciples first needed to understand the parable of the sower and the seed, which explained the results they would experience from sowing the seed of the Kingdom. We in God's Work today must also understand this parable, since we have the same commission and should expect the same result.

The parable describes four types of soil on which seed fell, each producing a very different result. Each type of soil represents a different response to the gospel message. Some seeds fell by the wayside, where the birds ate them. In other words, these seeds never even germinated. Many who heard the gospel message directly from Jesus failed to respond at all, and His disciples should expect the same. Other seeds fell on stony ground with a thin layer of topsoil. Though these seeds germinated and came up quickly, they had shallow roots; they soon withered when the weather became hot and dry. Jesus compared this to people who responded quickly and emotionally to the gospel, but did not prove things deeply, and who would soon wither under trials and difficulties. Still other seeds fell among thorns; they germinated and came up, but weeds and thorns eventually choked them out. Christ compared them to people who responded to the gospel and began progressing toward the Kingdom, but whose spiritual growth was eventually choked by the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches. Only the final group of seeds, which fell on good ground, yielded a crop. Some produced more fruit and some a little less, but all grew, matured and were harvested.

Christ wanted His disciples to understand that, as they went out to proclaim His message, many who heard it would not respond at all—and of those who did respond, most would not come to harvest. Some would offer a quick response, but it would prove shallow and they would soon wither. Others would last a little longer, but their spiritual growth would be



choked by the pulls of the world around them. Only a little of the seed sown would produce mature, fruit-bearing plants.

SIX MORE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

The second of Matthew 13's seven parables—the parable of the tares—further developed a similar theme. In this parable, the master sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat while the master slept. When the seed had sprouted and produced a crop, both wheat and tares were growing together in the same field. Tares are weeds that look very much like wheat in the early stage of development, but that never produce grain for the harvest. In this parable, the master told his servants not to try to uproot the tares during the growing season, lest they also uproot some of the wheat. Rather, he told them to let it all grow together until harvest time, when the tares would be gathered, bundled and burned. The wheat would then be harvested and gathered into the master's barn.

Christ used this parable of the tares, as He used the parable of the sower and the seed, to teach His disciples how people would react when they heard the gospel of the Kingdom preached. Much of the “seed” they sowed would either fail to germinate, wither under persecution or be choked by the cares of this world. Only a little would come to harvest, and some of what grew to harvest would not be seed that they had planted. Some would be “tares” sown by the wicked one.

As the first century AD progressed, it became obvious that not everyone “in the Church” was the result of godly seed; many were carnal people who were never spiritually a part of the Church. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand, as Church history unfolded, that He had foreseen all along what would happen!

The next two parables in Matthew 13 make a different point, offering needed encouragement. The mustard seed is the tiniest garden seed, yet eventually produces a large bush where birds can perch. The parable of the mustard seed taught the disciples that the Kingdom of God, though appearing small at its beginning, would grow great (vv. 31–32). With the parable of the leaven, Jesus compared the Kingdom to the leaven that a woman worked into her bread dough. As she worked, leaven permeated the dough and the entire lump became leavened (v. 33). These two parables reveal that the Kingdom would not only start small and grow large; it would eventually spread everywhere and permeate everything.

Just as Christ had foreseen the disciples' disappointments in spreading seed, He foresaw that what He was preaching among a handful of people in a remote and obscure part of the Roman Empire would grow, encompassing the earth and beyond.

Two of the Matthew 13 parables stress the priceless value of the Kingdom that Jesus came offering. Christ compared the Kingdom to a treasure hidden in a field, so valuable that, when

a man found it, he sold all he had and bought that field (v. 44). Anyone who finds such a treasure, and recognizes its true worth, will make every sacrifice to obtain it. The Kingdom, of course, is a treasure of greater value than anything else we might possess. Jesus made a similar point, from a slightly different perspective, with the parable of the pearl of great price (vv. 45–46). Here, He compared the Kingdom to a merchant who recognized a pearl's great value, and sacrificed all he had to obtain it. The Kingdom is of indescribable value. Those who will eventually possess the Kingdom are those who recognize true value when they see it—and are prepared to sacrifice all for it.

The seventh Kingdom parable in Matthew 13 is the parable of the fisherman's net (vv. 47–50). Several of Jesus' original disciples were commercial fishermen, very familiar with casting a net and drawing in their catch. They knew that when the full net was finally drawn to shore, the sorting process began. Unclean fish, and those that were otherwise unsuitable to be sold in the market, were thrown back, and the others were made ready for use. So also it will be at the end of the age. Christ was explaining that God will sort through the “catch” of these fishers of men. The disciples would not need to worry about the final sorting out of those who responded to the gospel message. God will know who is who.



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PARABLES OF JUDGMENT AND JOY

Aside from these seven in Matthew 13, other parables also illustrate important lessons regarding the Kingdom of God. Some parables emphasize God's coming judgment, and the accountability required of all who are invited to share in the Kingdom. Along with judgment, however, we also need to understand a vital lesson about God's joy at repentance. God is not only a God of judgment; He is also a God of great mercy.

The parable of the wicked vine-dressers is one of the judgment parables. Jesus spoke it shortly before His final Passover, and it is recorded in Matthew 21, Mark 12 and Luke 20—one of just three parables recounted in all three of these gospels. Christ directed this parable at the Jewish religious leaders, whom He knew were already plotting His death.

These leaders had heard Jesus' message for three years, and had direct knowledge of many of His miracles, including His raising Lazarus from the dead after he had been dead and buried for four days. Several weeks before the Passover, when the priests and Pharisees received word of Lazarus' resurrection, they made the decision to kill Jesus (John 11:47–48, 53). Jesus, knowing what they were plotting, brought it into the open and made plain the consequences to them. He told a story about a landowner who planted a vineyard, let it out to keepers and traveled to a far country. Later, he sent servants to collect his portion of the harvest. Over several years, the keepers abused the servants whenever they were sent, beating some and killing

others. Finally, the householder sent his son and heir, whom the keepers murdered so they could seize the property for themselves. “When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” Jesus asked in Matthew 21:40. The chief priests and Pharisees had to respond that the owner would undoubtedly take the vineyard from them, and give it to others who would properly render their dues. Jesus told them that their answer was correct, and that the Kingdom would be taken away from them and given to a nation bringing forth fruits. These religious leaders understood that the parable was directed at them, and became more determined than ever to eliminate Jesus (Matthew 21:45–46). Christ made plain that possession of God’s heritage involves accountability and judgment.

In Luke 14, Jesus Christ recounted the parable of a man who invited many people to a great supper. When the time came for the banquet, and the servants invited the guests to come, those who were invited began to offer excuses as to why they could not come. They clearly did not attach much value to the invitation that they had received. The host then declared that none who had previously been invited would taste his supper; he told the servants to go out to the highways and bring to the supper the poor and maimed and blind. Christ’s point was that if those who first received God’s invitation to His Kingdom did not appreciate and value that invitation, others would be called to take their places. Again, with opportunity comes accountability and judgment.

Luke 15 records three parables that describe God’s joy over repentance. The first two are short illustrations. One involves a man who had 100 sheep and lost one; the next describes a woman who had ten pieces of silver and lost one. The point of each illustration is that a diligent search was made for the lost item, and great joy was experienced when it was found. Christ then illustrated the same point with a longer story, the well-known parable of the prodigal son. This, too, is a story that illustrates God’s great joy when a sinner comes to repentance. Remember that the story of the prodigal son is not only about the son who went astray, finally hit bottom and came to himself. It is also about the love of the father who saw him coming home, and went to embrace him and receive him joyfully. The Kingdom of God is not only a message about accountability and judgment; it is also about the Father’s great joy at receiving back those who were once lost.

THE KINGDOM IS COMING

As Jesus left Jericho, heading for Jerusalem with His disciples shortly before the Passover season of 31AD, there was excitement among those who were following Him. They just “knew” that the Kingdom of God was going to be established right away. Knowing what was on their minds, Jesus told the story of the young nobleman who went away into a far country

to receive a kingdom and then return (Luke 19:11–27). Before the nobleman left, he gave ten minas to ten of his servants, with instructions to make wise use of it on his behalf. When he returned, having received kingly authority, he called his servants and demanded an accounting. Each servant was rewarded with a position of rulership in the newly established kingdom based on what he had done while his master was absent. One was given rule over ten cities; another was given rule over five. One servant who had not been productive at all had his mina taken away from him. The point of the parable was that the Kingdom of God would not be set up immediately; rather, Christ would go away to the Father—but would eventually return, and *then* would reward His disciples based upon their faithfulness and diligence in His absence.

One parable in Luke 14 concerns the common human trait of ambition, and the desire to advance by political maneuvering. While attending a large Sabbath dinner hosted by a leading Pharisee, Jesus noticed how the guests sought to achieve status and recognition by obtaining the most prestigious seats, to make themselves seem important. In response, He told His fellow guests a parable about a wedding banquet. Some guests at the banquet sought a prestigious seat, and were embarrassed when asked to move to a lesser place. Others willingly

took lower seats, and were pleasantly surprised when asked to move to a more prominent place. Christ’s point was that those who seek to exalt themselves will be humbled, while those who humble themselves will be advanced. In worldly governments, the people who seem to advance are those adept at using political means to pursue ambition. In God’s government, that is not the case: the way to advance is not by seeking high office, but rather by humbly pursuing service.

The last of the three parables recounted in all three synoptic gospels is one that Jesus spoke in the context of His Olivet prophecy. He had made plain that there were definite signs of the coming Kingdom, but that no one—not even the angels—knew exactly when it would be established. Jesus told His disciples: “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near” (Matthew 24:32). In the same way, when the various signs that Jesus had earlier described (recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) begin to take place, His true followers will know that the Kingdom is drawing near. Just as summer shortly follows the budding of the trees, so the Kingdom will follow these signs within a single generation. While heaven and earth might pass away, Jesus declared, His words would not.

Jesus taught many lessons in parables, often about different aspects of the Kingdom of God. As we turn our minds to the good news of God’s coming Kingdom, we should realize the importance of Christ’s parables in understanding that Kingdom more deeply. While their real meaning is usually obscure to the world around us, Christ’s parables reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of God to those whom God is calling! ■



Fight the Good Fight!

Each year, as we look forward to the final four Holy Days in God's annual cycle, it is natural to take stock of where we are, where we have been, and where we are going.

"Where we are going," in the most superficial and physical sense, will be a Feast of Tabernacles site where God has placed His name, where we will rejoice and spend the tithe we have saved for that purpose (Deuteronomy 14:23–26). But we also know that the Feast pictures our promised destination in the Kingdom of God, when we will be resurrected and changed (1 Corinthians 15:51–52) and will perform our Millennial service as kings and priests under Jesus Christ, bringing peace and prosperity to a world that has gone far astray from God's way.

Most of us can think of times when we have gone astray from our God. But if we are not actively "practicing" the way of sin—if we repent of our sins, and we change when we become aware of what we have done wrong—we know that, like the Apostle Paul, we have "fought the good fight" and that if we endure "to the end" we will receive our reward (2 Timothy 4:7; Matthew 24:13).

FIGHT AGAINST GOD?

Scripture gives us a sobering example of a being who fought against God, and who has received a grave punishment as a result. Of the three archangels we find mentioned in Scripture—Michael, Gabriel and Lucifer—one became jealous of God and plotted to overthrow his Creator and take over His government.

Lucifer's plotting, however, failed. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars [angels] of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12–14).

This vain being wanted to be "Number One" in the universe! He wanted this so badly that he was willing to rebel against the all-powerful Creator God. Through his deceptions he was able to draw a third of the angels with him to join in his rebellion. We read: "His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (Revelation 12:4). Because of his rebellion, Lucifer's name was changed to "Satan"—which means *adversary*.

By contrast, Michael, Gabriel and two-thirds of the angelic host were not seduced by Lucifer's attempt to displace God and wrest away the throne of heaven for himself. They have served loyally before the Father and the Word, and will

be with Christ at His second coming. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matthew 25:31).

AT ONE WITH GOD

On the Day of Atonement, the Israelites offered one goat as a sacrifice to God. They banished another goat into the wilderness, representing the "putting away" of the sins of the people. The slain goat was a "type" of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice redeems mankind from its sins. The other goat, called the Azazel, pictures the banishment of Satan, who—after Christ returns—will be "put away" until the very end of the Millennium.

Satan has already lost his fight. As for us, beings of flesh rather than spirit, we know we will not suffer Satan's fate, no matter how much the devil wants to convince us that a vengeful God would want us to suffer for eternity. That is Satan's destiny, not ours. As fleshly beings, if we reject God, we will simply be burned up—become ashes—devoured, not eternally tormented, by the lake of fire. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26–27).

After we have lived and died, we will receive our reward—eternal life or eternal death. "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:2–3).

If God has opened your mind to His truth, and you have obeyed Him by repenting, being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit, you are being evaluated right now. "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?'" (1 Peter 4:17–18).

However, for the vast majority of human beings, their time of judgment will come in the future, at the White Throne Judgment, pictured by the annual Holy Day known as the Last Great Day, which we keep on the day immediately after the Feast of Tabernacles. Immediately after the thousand-year Millennium, billions of human beings will be resurrected as flesh, to have their first and only opportunity to accept Jesus Christ's sacrifice and practice His way of life. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of



Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades [the grave] delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Revelation 20:12–13).

The Church has generally understood from Scripture that the White Throne Judgment period will last for about a hundred years (Isaiah 65:20). Those in the White Throne Judgment who repent and accept Jesus Christ’s sacrifice can become members of God’s Family. Those who refuse will be burned up, never again to be resurrected. “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14–15).

All human beings have an incredible potential ahead of them. We who are called in this age—the “firstfruits”—have an especially wonderful opportunity ahead of us, to obtain a

righteous character, and not to use those abilities for sin and destruction.

One-third of the angels used their abilities for sin and destruction, and became demons through Satan’s rebellion. They will forever suffer Satan’s fate. We, however, will face utter extinction if we rebel against our Creator, since God in His mercy has made us to live as flesh for only a short span of time. “All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:6–8). That is our fate, if we fail.

Thankfully, God has given us, His called and chosen firstfruits, the ability to succeed. We are meant to be the greatest of God’s creations. “What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him

THANKFULLY, GOD HAS GIVEN US, HIS CALLED AND CHOSEN FIRSTFRUITS, THE ABILITY TO SUCCEED. WE ARE MEANT TO BE THE GREATEST OF GOD’S CREATIONS. “WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM, OR THE SON OF MAN THAT YOU TAKE CARE OF HIM?”

“better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35). Why is our resurrection called “better”? In the Millennium and White Throne Judgment, human beings will have to overcome their carnal human nature, just as Christians do today, with the help of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Those called in this present age, however, must *also* fight against Satan and society. In the Millennium, Satan will be bound, unable to influence human beings. Society will be led directly by Jesus Christ. Those who overcome today are fighting a much more difficult fight than will be fought in the Millennium. In return, God promises a greater reward—that of becoming firstfruits and even of being Christ’s bride. God would not have called us now if He did not know that we could “make it”—so we should never become discouraged when we face a trial or temptation. We must know that—with God’s help—we can overcome the world, the devil and the flesh.

FIGHTING WRONG IMPULSES

Human beings have physical needs and desires. To survive, we must eat the food that comes from the same dirt of which our forefather Adam was made. Yet we must guard against gluttony in our eating. To propagate the human race—to “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28)—God has given us a sexual drive and the ability to enjoy pleasurable intimacy in a God-ordained marital union. Yet we must not misuse that drive by engaging in any sexual activity outside of marriage.

God created human beings in His image (Genesis 1:26). So, although we are flesh just like any animal, we also have something that sets us apart from the other animals—the “spirit in man” (Job 32:8). Through this spirit, we have emotional, intellectual and creative impulses similar to those of God Himself. Our challenge as human beings is to use those impulses to build in ourselves God’s own holy and

a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet” (Hebrews 2:6–8).

SUBJUGATING THE FLESH

When we are faced with temptation, we may recognize that all things are not yet in subjection under our feet. Yet even with nothing more than human will, many unconverted people are largely able to subdue and control the appetites and pulls of the human flesh. As Christians, with the added benefit of God’s own Holy Spirit, we have an even greater power to help us overcome.

We also have the example of holy men and women of God who have gone before us, who have overcome not only their carnal human nature, but also the opposition of Satan and society. Scripture reminds us: “And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good

testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Hebrews 11:32–40).

Scripture also tells us that, at the end of this age, when the Beast and the False Prophet appear on the world scene, true Christians will have to endure terrible persecutions. Many of those not protected in the Place of Safety will be martyred for their faith. Considering what is coming, and what many of God’s people have endured in the past, our sufferings and persecutions should generally seem mild by comparison. Remembering those heroes of the faith, and mindful of the reward ahead of us, we can have the confidence to fight the good fight—to run our race with endurance!

GOD KNOWS OUR SUFFERING

The Logos—the Word or the Spokesman—came to earth in the flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, to save mankind from its sins. In doing so, He personally experienced the pains and temptations human beings endure under Satan’s evil rule. To become our High Priest, representing us before the throne of God, Jesus had to experience our sufferings and overcome the temptations put before Him.

Throughout Christ’s whole life on the earth, He rejected sin and lived God’s way. For 33½ years, He demonstrated by His example as a flesh-and-blood human being that it is possible for us to live a perfect life, with the perfect help of God, who makes available to us the gift of His Holy Spirit. By successfully overcoming, Jesus Christ became the captain of our salvation and the firstborn of many brethren: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:14–18).

How did Jesus come to understand what we are going through in the flesh? Because “in the days of His flesh, when

He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest ‘according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Hebrews 5:7–9). We, too, must learn obedience and be brought to perfection through suffering in the flesh, just as Jesus did (Galatians 2:20). He set the example and has shown us the way to salvation.

Jesus Christ will soon return to this earth, as the Prince of Peace and King of kings. He will bring God’s way to the entire world. Satan will be bound, and society will be governed by God, not the devil. This is the time pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles. We who are called in this age are preparing for our role in that soon-coming time.

We prepare for that time by fighting the good fight today. We are not fighting alone; we have the help of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit within us—and God the Father is cheering us on to finish the race! We can succeed if we love God with all our heart, mind and soul. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:31–37).

As we prepare to observe the final four Holy Days in God’s cycle of annual Sabbaths, let us be vigilant not to let down. We must continue to fight the good fight—to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). If we do, we will receive a reward so wonderful that it is beyond our present ability even to imagine it (1 Corinthians 2:9; 13:12).

—LCG Editorial Staff



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Woman to Woman

By Faye League

Widows Still Grow and Bear Fruit

TO BECOME A WIDOW CAN BE A VERY TRAUMATIC AND SORROWFUL TIME IN A WOMAN'S LIFE. SOME ARE WIDOWED AT A YOUNG AGE, AND OTHERS AFTER MANY YEARS OF MARRIAGE. EITHER WAY, IT CAN BE VERY



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DIFFICULT. IT TAKES TIME TO RECOVER AND MOVE ON—SOME LONGER THAN OTHERS. THIS PROCESS, I HAVE OBSERVED, CAN BE VERY DAUNTING AND CHALLENGING—ALMOST OVERWHELMING AT TIMES. WHEN A WIDOW FINALLY COMES TO GRIPS WITH THE SITUATION AND TAKES HER TIME IN MAKING DECISIONS CONCERNING HER FUTURE, THEN SHE CAN MORE CLEARLY UNDERSTAND IN WHICH DIRECTION HER LIFE SHOULD GO AND HOW BEST TO COPE.

As Christian women, knowing the truth concerning the resurrection is priceless—and is a great source of comfort and hope for widows. “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

Again and again, I have seen personally how God loves the widows and is very concerned for their welfare. This is no surprise, as in Scripture God instructed the nation of Israel through Moses concerning the widows and their offspring. “You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child” (Exodus 22:22). Also in Deuteronomy 10:17-18 we read, “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.”

In the New Testament, these same judgments and principles were also applied, as we see in Acts 6:1-6 and also in James 1:27.

A widow's prayers are very important and special to God. We read of the prophetess Anna, who served God in the temple day and night with prayer and fasting (Luke 2:36-37). Over the years, I have often seen that God seems to “lean in just a little bit closer” to listen to a sincere, heartfelt prayer of a widow whose life is dedicated to Him. A widow's prayer is a vital tool that can pack a powerful punch!

In the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation, where my husband serves as an Associate Pastor, we have many widows—very fine, loyal and dedicated women. In talking to some of them, I have heard moving stories of how they have managed, coped and moved forward through the years since becoming a widow. Their responses had a number of points basically in common:

- God is their mainstay—their greatest source of comfort, courage and strength.
- The continued support from family, friends and Church brethren is a constant source of both help and encouragement.
- Knowing the truth, and keeping their hearts in God's Work, helps them stay on their toes and have focus and purpose.
- Giving of themselves in service to others helps to alleviate the loneliness, and brings as much or more pleasure to them as to the recipients.

These widows, like many others, have chosen to move forward and bear fruit. This is as it should be—and is what their husbands would want them to do.

Over the years, I have been blessed by the wisdom of many widows I have come to know due to my husband's various transfers to pastor different congregations. Three incidents in particular, which I will share here, stand out in my memory.

THE WIDOW'S WISE ADVICE

I was especially moved when, at a gathering for dinner in a widow's home, this wise lady said to all of us, “Women who still have husbands need to appreciate them, because I truly miss mine.” These are wise words, indeed, because it is so easy to fall into the habit of taking our loved ones for granted and to lose the appreciation that we should have for

them. We need to appreciate our husbands while we have the opportunity.

THE WIDOW'S KEY

In another Church area, my husband and I would visit a widow who had checked herself into a nursing home because of frail health. She has been an exceptional example there. We would ask her how she was doing. She would not complain, but she would fill us in on any health issues or contrary changes and conditions at the nursing home. And then, she would always say, “But things could be worse.” In my mind, I can still hear her saying that. Being close to God, she has tapped into a key that helps her to cope. Thinking of all of the things that could be worse by comparison lends perspective to the current state of affairs, and helps one to be more tolerant and therefore better able to cope.

THE WIDOW'S PILLOW

In another Church area, on our last Sabbath there before relocating to another area, a petite elderly widow approached me after services with a gift that she had made herself. It was a beige towel that she had made into a pillow. It was filled with soft filling and trimmed with brown and beige fringe. I thanked her warmly for it, and we chatted for a while, and then I took it home with me. Even though I could find no decorative or necessary use for the pillow, I was determined to keep it because this kind, gentle widow had given it to me.

Later, after about a year in our new location, I had settled into an early morning routine that I had established for quite some time. Being an early riser, I would go into the kitchen, and for a little sustenance eat a ripe banana and have a cup of hot coffee—so as to not be groggy. Then I would take care of my morning prayer and study. By daybreak, I was out the door for my five-mile morning jog.

On one particular morning, as I was nearing the end of my jog, I tripped on a rough place in the pavement and fell and broke my left wrist. The situation was very serious, and my husband took me to the hospital emergency room.

When we arrived at the E.R., the staff was undergoing a shift change, and there was no doctor there yet. The hospital staff put me in a room where I had to wait for an hour. In the meantime, my wrist was settling into a very unnatural position. Finally, a doctor and his male assistant came in. They asked me to sit on a table facing them. The assistant said to me, “We could put you to sleep, but that would take too long”—they must have been behind schedule!

I had no idea what to expect. The assistant gripped my right hand in his, and held my forearm firmly, then said, “Brace

yourself, this will be painful.” So, I gripped his hand and braced myself. Then the doctor took my limp left hand, held my forearm firmly and pulled the hand and wrist forward—jerking, twisting and pushing my wrist back into place. My husband could hear my cry of agony from the hallway. They then bandaged the wrist and sent me home.

Shortly after arriving home, I realized to my dismay that my wrist was so deeply bruised, sore and sensitive that I could not lay it on anything to rest it, because the pressure brought severe pain and suffering. I could not even lay it on my lap, and a sling was out of the question. As the day wore on—with hour after stressful hour of not being able to rest my wrist—the situation was becoming unbearable, to the point of making me physically ill and desperate. All we could do was pray to God for mercy and help.

Then I thought of the widow's pillow. I remembered that it was very soft. I thought to myself, “Maybe, just maybe.” I took the pillow out of the closet, sat down in a comfortable chair and put the pillow in my lap. Then I gingerly laid my wrist on the pillow. I experienced such welcoming softness—no pressure, no pain, just instant relief—answered prayer! I was so thankful for the widow's pillow and so very appreciative of it.

Needless to say, as my wrist healed, I took the pillow everywhere with me, even to Church services. Never mind that it was not decorative. Never mind that it was not

fancy. It was just what I needed.

I still have the widow's pillow, and I will always keep it because of the blessing it brought to me in my time of need.

One never knows how far-reaching a widow's act of kindness, her gift, or her good example may be, such as the widow's pillow. In Luke 21:1–4, Christ pointed out the example of the widow's two mites. “And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So, He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’” This widow's example is still reaching down through the centuries teaching lessons.

It takes courage and fortitude for widows to move forward, bearing fruit. But blessings abound for those who do. In Ecclesiastes 11:1 we read these encouraging words, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.” If you are a widow, take comfort in God's word, and rejoice in His plan for you. If you are not a widow, be grateful for the wisdom and experience the widows may offer, and be sure to give them the honor God wants them to have. ■



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Grow in Faith Through Trials

Continued from page 2

Son Jesus Christ directly: “the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:30–31).

So God knows the details of all the hairs of our heads! That is hard to understand sometimes, unless you realize that even puny men—who have invented computers—are able to keep track of **billions** of pieces of information! If our puny minds are able to do this, then what can the **great God** do? It should become obvious. He is able to keep track of all these things and watch over every facet of our lives, every facet of His Church and Work and “monitor” even our “attitudes” as He wishes! For He is working *directly* with those of us He has called, and is fashioning and molding us to become like He is.

LEARN TO GENUINELY TRUST GOD

The word of God tells us, “The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works” (Psalm 33:13–15). A little later in this wonderful Psalm, David tells us, “Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in Him, *because we have trusted in His holy name*” (vv. 20–21). Dear brethren, most of us in the Church “believe” in God. But have we really “trusted” in His holy name? I hope each of you will ask yourselves that question. I ask myself that question with increasing frequency as I get older and as I come to a more thorough realization of how much I need to **totally trust** in the God who gives me life and breath. For, as I have indicated, we are entering the very last days when *unusual trials* and tests are predicted to come upon us. As the Apostle Peter explained, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12–13).

We should grow in faith enough to be able to “rejoice” in these trials, once we learn to **totally trust** in God as our direct Father and the “Rock” of our salvation! God must become totally “real” to each one of us. We must learn to “walk with God” by being in a spirit of prayer *all day long*. We must be regularly *studying, meditating* on and *drinking in* of the word of God so that the reality of His approach,

His mind and His person becomes deeply implanted in all our thoughts and actions. Jesus said, “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, *so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me*” (John 6:57). If you and I truly “feed” on Christ—if we constantly *drink in* and *meditate on*

the word of God so that God our Father and Jesus our High Priest become closer to us and more real to us, then we will learn to *abound in faith*! More **healings** will occur in the Church of God. More **miracles** will occur, and more *blessings* and *power* will become evident in the Work we are doing to prepare for the end of this age and prepare God’s people for the coming Kingdom of God.

Yet, even this does not mean that all these trials will cease. They did not cease for Jesus Himself when He was *crucified* at the end of His perfect life. They did not cease for the Church of God in the early apostolic days. Remember, Herod had James—brother of John—**beheaded** during that time, and Peter suffered also under Herod’s persecution. “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then

he **killed** James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover” (Acts 12:1–4).

All this happened *in spite* of the fact that the Church was growing and that the brethren, overall, had great faith and increasing power in doing the Work of that age. Peter must have been especially aware of that since, as we just read, *he was to be the next victim* of Herod’s persecution, yet God delivered him! We read: “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Arise quickly!’ And his chains fell off his hands. Then the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself and tie on your sandals;’ and so he did. And he said to him, ‘Put on your garment and follow me.’ So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which

DEAR BRETHREN, MOST OF US IN THE CHURCH “BELIEVE” IN GOD. BUT HAVE WE REALLY “TRUSTED” IN HIS HOLY NAME? I HOPE EACH OF YOU WILL ASK YOURSELVES THAT QUESTION. I ASK MYSELF THAT QUESTION WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY AS I GET OLDER AND AS I COME TO A MORE THOROUGH REALIZATION OF HOW MUCH I NEED TO TOTALLY TRUST IN THE GOD WHO GIVES ME LIFE AND BREATH. FOR, AS I HAVE INDICATED, WE ARE ENTERING THE VERY LAST DAYS WHEN UNUSUAL TRIALS AND TESTS ARE PREDICTED TO COME UPON US.

opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people” (vv. 5–11).

Do we have the faith that God can deliver us from our most terrible trials? Looking back, Peter could write with great feeling from his own experience how we Christians “are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:5–7).

Indeed, God wants to know how “genuine” our faith really is. So He will allow many trials and tests to come upon us *for our own good*. He will occasionally, no doubt, *bring* these trials upon us directly, as King David often acknowledged. Other times He will simply “allow” the vicissitudes of our lives and of the world around us to affect us in a way to “shake” us and make us realize, more deeply than ever, **how much** we need God and the help of our Father in heaven. So, even if we catch ourselves “slacking off,” we know that if we repent, and then deeply meditate and **cry out** to God for understanding and help, we **will** gain the understanding we need and we **will** receive God’s answer to the degree we **trust** in Him and *walk with Him*.

BE HUMBLE AND OBEDIENT TO GOD

Obviously, regarding this latter point, we **must** do our part by surrendering to let Christ live in us. Certainly, we will **never** do this perfectly. But we **must** do this as an overall way of life. As God inspired the beloved Apostle John to tell us, “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, **because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight**” (1 John 3:20–22).

As we “walk with God”—daily and hourly meditating, praying and sincerely *seeking* for Christ to live within us through His Holy Spirit—we will gain “confidence,” as John’s writing indicates. Then, more and more, He will hear our

prayers and we will receive His answer “because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

Dear brethren, a number of times many brethren felt that Mr. Armstrong was **not** doing “those things that are pleasing in His sight” and began to withhold their tithes or even leave the Church. One of those times was when Mr. Armstrong **changed** how we *counted* Pentecost and how we handled the situations of divorce and remarriage. Many of you older brethren may remember this. So these things certainly did bring a “trial” on the Church—mainly because at least a few dozen or a few score brethren were not able to see the “Big Picture” regarding the fact that Mr. Armstrong *was still* preaching the Truth of God and doing the Work of God. These changes were **not** changing the basic approach to keeping the Ten Commandments or the law of God, but were simply “growing in grace and in knowledge” in how to handle Pentecost and divorce and remarriage.

Nevertheless, many ministers at that time, including Raymond C. Cole and others, left the Church because of some of the changes Mr. Armstrong had made. The income would go down temporarily in some cases. But God *always saw* us through. This was not because we were “perfect,” but because we definitely *did* hang on to the Truth—even **growing** in understanding of *how to apply* certain principles and **how** to do the Work with genuine **faith**.

Those brethren who fell away because of these changes were **not** blessed. Those ministers who followed Raymond Cole, and later those who followed Ken Westby and the great “rebellion” on the East Coast and other defections, mostly split up among themselves and virtually “disappeared” as far as having any impact on the world as a whole or doing the real Work of God.

We who remained did not always fully understand these changes at first. Yet the *faithful* brethren had to be willing to *think through* where the Work was still being done and where *faithful men* were still teaching the basic way of God and being *used by God* to preach “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” around the world (Acts 8:12). Therefore, brethren, your “faith” does **not** rest upon your *immediately* agreeing with every scintilla of each little new nuance God may show us in some aspect of our understanding the overall basic flow of prophecy. Certainly, if we in this Work *turn away* from the **basic** things such as the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, the

AGAIN, BRETHREN, WE NEED TO TRULY SEEK GOD AND CRY OUT TO GOD WITH OUR WHOLE BEING WHEN SEVERE TRIALS LIKE THIS OCCUR, WHEN DEMON ATTACKS BECOME SEVERE, WHEN SERIOUS ILLNESS IS ABOUT TO TAKE SOMEONE’S LIFE OR WHEN UNUSUAL TRIALS COME ALONG IN THE WORK OF GOD—WHICH THEY HAVE AND WHICH THEY WILL FROM TIME TO TIME. WE MUST NOT GIVE UP FAITH! WE MUST KNOW THAT AS WE WALK WITH GOD, HOWEVER IMPERFECTLY, HE WILL INTERVENE IF WE LEARN TO PUT OUR TRUST IN HIM.

Holy Days, etc. then you should be able to see through that and **leave**—as I had to do when Joseph Tkach completely abandoned the *basic foundations* of the Truth we had come to understand. That is different.

But your **faith** rests on God’s word, and on His **promises** to those who—in spite of human weaknesses—**“keep His commandments** and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” Again, dear brethren, try to see the “Big Picture” in all of this and not be “picky” and always looking for the “loose brick” or some excuse to fall away or to do your own thing. Those occasional men—especially men—who are always anxious to “be important” and “start their own church” will *always* be out there looking for an excuse to find some followers and make themselves feel important. God will **judge them** for dividing and confusing His Church and *weakening* the effect of the Work, and for putting “stumbling blocks” before the brethren whom they confuse or take away from the Church that *is really doing His Work!*

Moreover, for those of us who are sincerely trying to “walk with God” and let Christ truly live in us—humbly and submissively—we can truly **grow** in both faith and in understanding. We **must** grow. For even Jesus’ own disciples—when He was *right there among them*—lacked the living **faith** they should have had to trust God for healing, for the expulsion of demons, etc. When a young man’s father was literally *crying out* for the disciples to rebuke an unclean spirit that was attacking his son, Jesus’ disciples were *unable to do so!* Jesus said, “O **faithless** generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to me” (Mark 9:19). Immediately, Jesus confronted the situation. He talked earnestly to the father who *wanted* to have faith but admitted, “Lord, I believe; *help my unbelief!*” (v. 24).

Truly, God does have **mercy** on all of us in these cases. And we need to **believe** that, brethren. So Jesus, seeing the “hurt” of these people and the seriousness of the situation **commanded** the evil spirit to come out. And: “Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him” (v. 26). When the disciples—no doubt very humbled by this—asked, “Why could we not cast it out?” Jesus said, “This kind can come out by nothing but **prayer and fasting**” (vv. 28–29).

Again, brethren, we need to truly **seek God** and **cry out** to God with our whole being when severe trials like this occur, when demon attacks become severe, when serious illness is about to take someone’s life or when unusual trials come along in the Work of God—which they *have* and which they **will** from time to time. We must **not** give up faith! We must know that as we walk with God, however imperfectly, He will intervene if we learn to put our **trust** in Him. For God looks down with great favor on those who do not just “believe” in Him, but who **trust** in Him. For God’s word absolutely promises that, in times of trial, “the **LORD shall**

help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, *because they trust in Him*” (Psalm 37:40). This type of expression occurs again and again all through the Psalms—as many of you know. Please learn to *study the Psalms*, regularly. *Drink in* of the “mind of God” in this way so that you will learn to think like Christ, feel like Christ and have absolute **trust** in God as Jesus Christ and the faithful disciples did.

Then, with increasing frequency, God **will** hear our prayers. He **will** heal our brethren more often and more powerfully. He will bless and empower the Work more effectively as we near the end and as we **must** have a greater impact on this world before it is too late. We are still in the process, right now, of being “tried and tested.” Mr. Armstrong went through the same type of trials and tests *for decades*. He knew that this was part of God’s Plan to *teach us* lessons of *humility*, of *patience* and of *genuine faith* as part of the very character of God, which He wants to develop in every one of us as His future born-again sons. A little after writing some of the earlier paragraphs which I quoted, Mr. Herbert Armstrong talked about the period of 1950 when God had taken away most of the terrible trials and things began to go a little easier for a little while:

“Although we had gotten over what I called ‘the first hump’ by January, 1949, the upward climb of this work of God was still ‘TOUGH GOING.’ It was not easy. Jesus Christ never promised ‘easy going.’

Through 1950 I do not remember any crises so severe that the very existence of the work hung in the balance. I had, at last, learned the lesson of **RELAXED FAITH**. I no longer let the problems we met put me under such an ordeal as I had gone through previously.

Now I was able to cast the burdens on the living **CHRIST**, meanwhile leaping to action to pray intensively for guidance, and to energetically **DO** whatever was in my own power to do—but in a **FAITH** that was relaxed and confident, trusting God with the results” (*The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, Volume 2, pp. 256–257).

Brethren I hope *all of us*—as a Church—can learn these lessons of **faith**. I pray that each one of us will learn to **cry out** to God so that we can have genuine faith in God and truly **trust** in God’s promises in a way most of us have not yet learned to do. Then, we can *know* and **know** that we know that God will hear our prayers and empower us as never before in His service near the end of this age. May God speed that day!

In Christian love,



LOCAL

CHURCH NEWS

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Kevin Johnson was ordained an elder on May 18 by Area Pastor Martin Fannin. Mr. Johnson serves in the Blairsville, Georgia, congregation.

Mr. Dale Bailey, Mr. Marshall Moluf and Mr. Steven Sharver were ordained deacons on Pentecost by Area Pastor Dan Hall and elders Gary Stein and Dwayne Crisman. Mr. Bailey serves in the Hawkins, Texas, congregation and Mr. Moluf and Mr. Sharver in Dallas, Texas.

Mrs. Dianne Blackwood was ordained a deaconess on Pentecost by Area Pastor Gary Ehman and elders George Webb and Charles Ogwyn. Mrs. Blackwood serves in the Asheboro, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. Dean Manning was ordained a deacon and *Mrs. Donna Tripp* was ordained a deaconess on Pentecost by Area Pastor Karl Beyersdorfer and elder Shannon Christal. Mr. Manning serves in the Joplin, Missouri, congregation and Mrs. Tripp serves in the Chanute, Kansas, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Mickey (Clara) Mayeaux and Mr. and Mrs. Michael (Belinda) Rivet were ordained deacons and deaconesses on Pentecost by the Director of Church Administration Douglas Winnail and Area Pastors Glen Harrison and Daniel Friz. Mr. and Mrs. Mayeaux serve in the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation and Mr. and Mrs. Rivet in the New Orleans congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Peter (Carol) Wiebe were ordained deacon and deaconess on June 8 by Area Pastor Michael Elertson. Mr. and Mrs. Wiebe serve in the Winnipeg, Manitoba, congregation.

Anniversary

Mr. and Mrs. Gary (Karen) Davis of Rolla, Missouri, observed their 50th wedding anniversary on May 26. The Rolla congregation, where Mr. Davis serves as a deacon, held a reception in their honor on June 1.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. JD and Thea Jackson of the Cincinnati, Ohio congregation welcomed their first child, *Savannah Rose Jackson*, into their family on March 9. Savannah weighed 7 pounds 7 ounces and was 21½ inches long.

Mr. and Mrs. Anton (Veronica) van der Byl from Port Elizabeth, South Africa, are happy to announce the birth of their firstborn son, *Miqueas Pieter van der Byl*, born May 8. Miqueas weighed 4.1 kg and was 53 cm long. The grandparents, including Mrs. Soria de Medrano of the Cochabamba, Bolivia congregation, are all overjoyed to welcome Miqueas into the family.

Mr. and Mrs. Kevin (Beth) Costello of the Washington, D.C. congregation are thrilled to announce the birth of their first child, *Benjamin Ryan Costello*, born May 8. Benjamin weighed 8 pounds 15 ounces and was 22 inches long.

Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan (Victoria) Riley, members of the Mississauga, Canada congregation, are pleased to announce the birth of their second child, *Hugh Atwood Micah Riley*, born on June 7. Weighing in at 8 pounds 5 ounces and 21½ inches long, he joins big brother Elijah and is already showing signs of enjoying family story-time before bed!

We want to hear more about the happy milestones in the lives of our brethren. If your family has had a birth, marriage or major anniversary, please ask your local pastor to send word to the *Living Church News*, PO Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010 (or to send e-mail to lcn@lcn.org).

In Loving Memory

Travis Patrick Goddard, 23, died in a motorcycle accident on March 17. Travis was a third generation member of God's Church, baptized in 2009. His grandparents heard Mr. Armstrong on the radio in the 1950s and were baptized in the early 1960s, and most of Travis' family are members of the Living Church of God. Travis will be remembered for his kindness, concern for others and his great love for God and His truth. He was greatly loved and will be missed terribly by his family and friends. Mr. Sheldon Monson conducted the funeral.

Jack Routledge of the Calgary, Alberta, congregation died on April 19 at the age of 90. Mr. Routledge was born June 12, 1922 and baptized on March 9, 2002. He is survived by his wife Yvonne, a daughter and son-in-law, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. His faithfulness and positive attitude will be greatly missed.

Vivian Hedrick, of Mountain View, Missouri, died June 1 at the age of 80 years. She was baptized into God's Church in 1990 and attended the Rolla, Missouri, congregation for many years until declining health precluded it. Mrs. Hedrick was a very quiet meek lady and she always had a smile. She will be very much missed by her family and friends. Mr. William Oswald conducted her funeral service.

June Olsen, age 88, of the Charlotte, North Carolina congregation, died peacefully in her sleep on June 17. Her husband Thomas, a deacon in God's Church, predeceased her in 1979. Baptized in 1959, Mrs. Olsen was one of the first five members of the Global Church of God. She had for many years faithfully graded *Tomorrow's*

World Bible Study Course test cards by hand, before infirmity caused her to retire at age 84. She is survived by her daughter Sandra Davis, son-in-law Donald Davis and granddaughter Lisa Davis. Grandson Mark predeceased her in 1992.

Nancy Jo Hall, 61, of Lindale, Texas, died on June 19. A retired Registered Nurse, she served God's people alongside her husband, Area Pastor Dan Hall, for nearly 38 years. A 1974 graduate of Ambassador College, Pasadena, she earned an Associate's Degree in Nursing in 1995 from Louisiana State University. In addition to her husband, she is survived by daughter and son-in-law, Jennifer (Reynaldo) Colon of Charlotte, North Carolina; son and daughter-in-law, Stephen (Elizabeth) Hall of Alabaster, Alabama; mother Genevieve Embury and brother Stephen Embury of Waycross, Georgia; granddaughters Emma Jolye Hall and Julia Elizabeth Hall of Alabaster, Alabama, and Genevieve Isabella Colon and Vivian Elise Colon of Charlotte, North Carolina. Mr. Bob League officiated at her memorial service on June 23.

Leona May Bonjour, 66, died on June 26. She and her husband Gaylyn, an elder serving at LCG Headquarters in Charlotte, had celebrated their 48th wedding anniversary on June 19. She was baptized in 1982, along with her husband whom she married at age 18; they were ordained as deacon and deaconess in 1990. A dedicated Living Church of God employee working in the Mail Processing Department, she served God and His people faithfully until the end, tirelessly trying to set the best example she could to please her Creator. Her gentle loving kindness will be missed by all who knew and loved her.

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COMMENTARY

THE BLESSINGS OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

Around the world, faithful Christians are preparing to celebrate the Feast that Jesus Christ and the apostles observed 2,000 years ago. This is the same Feast that *the whole world* will learn to celebrate in the coming Kingdom of God. The Feast of Tabernacles is a *joyous* celebration, and a commanded assembly that true Christians continue to observe. What is this Feast, *why* is observing it a blessing, and *what* does this Holy Day point to?

God provided ancient Israel with instructions about how to observe the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23:33–43. This holy, seven-day festival begins on the “fifteenth day of the seventh month” of the Hebrew calendar. It is immediately followed by “the eighth day” (v. 36), also called “the last day, that great day of the Feast” or simply the Last Great Day (John 7:37). John chapter 7 shows Jesus Christ teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles, and Zechariah 14:16–19 reveals that during the future millennial reign of Christ, *all nations* will celebrate it. Today, faithful Christians are called “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16), and continue to observe this special Holy Day as they emulate Jesus Christ, striving to abide “in Him” and to “walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

Why else do Christians continue to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles? In addition to the fact God established the biblical Holy Days to be observed *forever* (Leviticus 23:41)—and in addition to the fact that Jesus observed the

Feast and that Christians are admonished to *imitate* Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1)—the Feast of Tabernacles is also a joy to observe because it points to the wonderful reign of Jesus Christ, which will be a time of *great blessings*.

The knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth “as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). Perfect government will be established, and Christ will rule as King of kings, with His righteous saints, for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4–6)—and then forever (22:5)! God will restore Israel and bless all nations that learn to worship Him. There will be peace and prosperity (Amos 9:11–15, Isaiah 19:24–25) and abundant food for all people and nations (Micah 4:3–4, Ezekiel 36:33–37). Sickness and disease will be cured (Jeremiah 30:17; Malachi 4:2). Fear and anxiety will be removed from the earth (Isaiah 51:11–13; 35:4). Right worship of God will be taught throughout the world (Isaiah 30:21; Ezekiel 11:19–20, Hebrews 8:11–12; Revelation 20:1–6).

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures God’s kingdom on Earth, and faithful Christians emulate their Lord when they pray, “Your Kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). This will usher in the time when the promise described in Revelation 20:6 will be fulfilled: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be the priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” God speed that day!

—Wyatt Ciesielka