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Understanding Hebrews 11:1

Dear Brethren,

What is the relationship between faith and evidence? Do you personally know? Are you sure?

Over the years, I have occasionally heard Hebrews 11:1 referred to incorrectly. Here is what this famous verse says: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Because the word “evidence” is found in this verse, some think it means we have evidence for our faith, but *this is not what it says*. On the contrary, it says that faith *is* our evidence—and that is a huge difference.

So that no one misunderstands, we should not have blind faith, as so many in the world have. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 admonishes us: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (*KJV*). Yes, we must prove all things, and that is why we routinely instruct individuals seeking baptism not to believe something because that is what they always believed (or assumed). They need to prove to themselves the existence of God, that the Bible is His instruction book to mankind, and that this is the true Church. These things are provable! It is not good enough to have “always believed in God” or that “I grew up in the Church and know it to be the true Church.” Many atheists sincerely believe there is no God, Muslims sincerely believe truth is found in the Koran, Protestants sincerely believe their form of Protestantism is the religion of the Bible, and Catholics sincerely believe they are the “true Church.” Believing something and proving something are two different concepts.

Many times over the years, when events became difficult or confusing, I personally went back to review these three pillars of faith. I proved to myself then—and still can today—that God exists. I proved to myself, and still can, that the Bible is His word. And when it comes to the true Church, I know what the

Bible says and cannot deny where God is working, based on what it says. It does not matter to me what others believe; I KNOW what I believe and why!

So I am not advocating blind faith, but Hebrews 11:1 *is not talking* about evidence-based faith. Notice again what it says: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Yes, faith *is* the evidence! It is not based on evidence, but *is* the evidence.

Is “Evidence” Enough?

Consider this: The children of Israel came out of Egypt following some of the most amazing signs ever seen by human eyes. They saw water turned to blood, frogs by the billions, biting insects and flies in swarms too great to number. They saw locusts, hail, and fire destroy the Egyptians’ livestock and land, while *their* livestock and land were protected. The death of the firstborn was a miracle of massive proportions, when thousands of people and animals died in one night based on nothing more than birth order. And imagine seeing the Red Sea open up, and walking through it on dry ground! What greater evidence could God afford a people to prove His existence? They had the evidence, but they did not have faith! What about us?

We may have seen God’s hand in our own unmistakably miraculous healing, or that of another. Such amazing healings certainly do occur, but one surprising thing I have noticed over the years is this: Many individuals who have personally witnessed and experienced miraculous healings eventually fall away! This does not mean everyone does, so if you were healed miraculously, take heart—but do not trust that such a miracle will “save” you.

Paul speaks about another kind of evidence in Hebrews 11. He does not speak of past evidence, which has been seen and

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experienced, but of future evidence: that which is *not* yet seen with the eyes. Faith IS that evidence! Human minds are fickle when it comes to past evidence, and that is why the evidence of faith is essential. In setting the stage to begin the so-called faith chapter, Paul wrote, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for...” Notice these other translations:

Now faith is **assurance** of things hoped for —ASV
 Now faith means that we are confident of what we hope for —Moffatt
 And what is Faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes —NEB

The object of our faith is what we hope for in the future. Is this not what Paul demonstrates in what follows? After giving several examples of faith, he concludes, “For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland [that for which they hope]. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Hebrews 11:14–16). Faith is *forward looking*.

Faith Precedes Possession

Mr. Herbert Armstrong wrote: “You do not *hope* for that which you already *have*. So faith comes *before* possession. Once you have *received* the *possession*, you no longer *hope* for it. But even before you receive it, you have it in SUBSTANCE, and that substance—that ASSURANCE that you *shall* possess it—is FAITH (Heb. 11:1)” (*What is Faith?*, p. 4, 1952).

This is confirmed by the second half of the verse: “faith is... the evidence of things not seen.” Mr. Armstrong went on to say, “Because what we SEE—what we FEEL—is not the true EVIDENCE. Having the thing—SEEING it— is not Faith. Faith *precedes* possession because FAITH is *confidence*—ASSURANCE—you *shall* possess it” (p. 5).

The faith chapter gives example after example of men and women who obeyed God, not based on past evidence, but based on faith that God will do what He said He would do. But some would say, “Didn’t they do this based on past evidence?” Consider again the children of Israel. They had plenty of

evidence that God existed. How could any people have *more* evidence? Yet, they lacked the evidence of faith and instead walked by sight. Why did ten spies who scouted out the Promised Land react one way while two acted differently? They all saw the same “giants.” And prior to scouting out the land, they all saw the same miracles along the way. They ate of the same manna day by day and saw that there was none on the seventh day. They had more evidence than you or I may ever see in our lifetimes, but they did not all react the same. Was it not that only two had the evidence that Paul calls faith?

Verse 6 of this faith chapter declares: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Abraham had that kind of faith. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8). He walked by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

When Abraham was told to sacrifice his son, he had never seen anyone resurrected from the dead. All of his emotions would scream at him not to obey God’s command. He had no evidence that God would stop him at the last minute, yet he did not waiver when told to do so. No wonder he is called the father of the faithful!

The three young Hebrew men who defied King Nebuchadnezzar’s command did not waiver when confronted by the king with the threat of being thrown into a fiery furnace. Notice their response to the king. “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king. ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up’” (Daniel 3:16–18). What an incredibly bold statement! What evidence did they have that assured them that God would deliver them? After all, unlike us, they never read the rest of the story! Their evidence was faith that what God said to do,

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What Drives Your Decisions?

What drives your decisions? Do you savor the things of God? Most professing Christians never even consider this question. What about you? Are you willing to bravely ask the question and look in the mirror of God's word for the answer? How easy it is for us to deceive ourselves into thinking we are acting according to God's will when we are doing the exact opposite. Have you ever thought you were totally right, when you were totally wrong? I have! And I doubt that I am alone among God's people.

Two immediate examples should come to mind. The first is when Jesus rebuked Peter for what most of us, if we had been there, would have considered a profession of loyalty and courage. Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was, and Peter answered correctly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus then went on to explain that Peter was a rock among them, but Jesus would build His Church upon a much larger rock—Himself! He then explained that He would first be put to death at the hands of carnal men. It was then that Peter boldly declared that it would figuratively be over his dead body before he would allow that to happen!

This appears to be a noble gesture on Peter's part, but Jesus' response was not what we would humanly expect. In fact, His strong rebuke must have shocked those who heard it! "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23)—or, as the *King James Version* states, "thou **savorest not** the things of God"!

Now consider this: Was it wrong for Peter to fight for his Messiah? On another occasion, Jesus told Pilate, "If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Many do not realize that there is a time coming when the resurrected sons of God WILL fight. "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment—this

honor have all His saints" (Psalm 149:5–9). This is also confirmed in Revelation 19:14.

So, where did Peter go wrong? Obviously, it was a matter of timing, and Peter did not take into account God's will and God's plan. He was "shooting from the hip," so to speak, and was out of sync with God's will. It is evident that Peter allowed Satan to influence his thinking. This example should sober us to consider carefully what we think on a multitude of subjects. How often do we think we are in line with God, when we are instead in tune with the Deceiver?

Calling Fire Down from Heaven

Another incident took place with two of Jesus' other disciples. James and John were nicknamed, "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). Why? You are no doubt familiar with this account as well. Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem and He sent messengers ahead to a village of the Samaritans to prepare a place to stay for the night, but the Samaritans rejected Him because He was on His way to Jerusalem. It was on this occasion that James and John asked, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54). Jesus' rebuke was swift and direct. "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (vv. 55–56). Here, again, we see that His disciples could not understand the difference in their situation with that of Elijah. They did not understand righteous judgment, nor did they *savor the things of God*.

In both these incidents, we could very well substitute our own names, since there was a certain human rationale behind each. Of course, it is our human nature to think we would not be so deceived, so let us look a little deeper.

Look around you. My wife and I like to watch people in airports. Are you as amazed as we are about how many people sport tattoos today? How far we have degenerated in twenty years! "Body art" or "ink" as they like to call it, was mostly the domain of sailors who had a bit too much to drink while in port, and you would almost never see a woman with a tattoo in our Western world. No longer! Why? Humans have a "sheep" instinct, and not everything about sheep is positive. If someone else does it, so must we. Even among

some of God's people, tattooing, unusual body piercing, and faddish clothing sometimes appears.

Getting a tattoo is not the worst sin one can commit, even though God clearly tells us in His word not to do it (Leviticus 19:28). Few people are aware of this verse. The question is whether those of us who know better will follow the world, or whether we will obey God. However, we see more and more disfigurement of the human body among those more recently called into the Church, and a deeply converted person will not judge or condemn someone for past mistakes for which an individual has repented. Frankly, there are far worse sins than this one that is often committed in ignorance, and some sins are easier to hide than others.

Clothing and Modesty

Dress styles are a perpetual challenge for the people of God. Scripture instructs women to dress modestly, but what is modesty? The Church of God has historically understood that there are cultural differences when it comes to dress, and that styles are in a state of constant change. Those of us who

Paul held that strong meat involves being “skillful in the word of righteousness” and having our “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” because of “reason of use.” Not everything is a clear “thus says the Lord.” **Some things call for us to make decisions based on biblical principles. This requires righteous judgment.**

are older remember bell-bottom slacks for men. Some in the Church of God viewed them negatively, while others could not wait to buy a pair. Sadly, there were much more serious stylistic issues at that time. Thankfully, most 1970's trends in dress were short-lived—for very good reasons.

But the real issue is not a change in style, but whether that change reflects modesty, and what is being promoted by the style. One might argue that the Bible doesn't explicitly condemn earrings on men in a direct command, but who was it in *modern times* that promoted this change in male behavior, and should a Christian want to take part in it? You may want to read David Kupelian's book on *The Marketing of Evil*, if you do not know.

The problem is that we all have different ideas about what is modest. Why? Why, if we all have the Spirit of God, are there so many differences? The Apostle Paul gives us a clue: “Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come

to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:11–14).

We often hear people talk about the “meat of the word” in terms of speculative prophecy, but this is not what Paul said. He held that strong meat involves being “skillful in the word of righteousness” and having our “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” because of “reason of use.” In other words, as we grow in understanding the mind of God, we should learn how to discern the difference between good and evil. Not everything is a clear “thus says the Lord.” Some things call for us to make decisions based on biblical principles. This requires righteous judgment.

Clothes considered stylish by this world are often lacking in modesty. They are often overly revealing of the female body: very short shorts, skirts that are overly tight and short, low-cut dresses that emphasize cleavage, and so on. Double entendre slogans on sweatshirts and T-shirts, also, are sug-

gestive and inappropriate. When a woman is constantly trying to stretch her skirt to cover more of her thighs when sitting down, maybe this should tell her something.

Part of the problem with dress is the ever-changing culture. Some things considered immodest in past generations are considered very old-fashioned today. There is also the issue of occasion. A tennis skirt may be modest on the court, but not

for an algebra class. Swimsuits would not be appropriate for Sabbath services.

Then there is the question that comes up from time to time regarding whether women can wear pants for Sabbath services. Dr. Roderick C. Meredith made it clear a number of years ago that a nice pantsuit may be appropriate. This may especially be true for individuals who have leg problems or who live in very cold climates. But, here is the problem: All that some heard when he explained this was that “pants are okay,” but that is not what he said. He spoke of nice pantsuits and gave the example of Condoleezza Rice (former Secretary of State under President George Bush) who often wore pantsuits in the conduct of government business. He was not talking about sweat pants, jeans, or casual pants.

Desiring the Approaches and Customs of the World

The “(fill in the blank) is okay” attitude is not an example of discerning between good and evil. This was the approach

of the religious elite of Christ's day. This is why they had a long list of do's and don'ts, and one will never come to an end of such a list. God expects us to learn to make righteous judgments based on the word of God and Christ dwelling in our minds by the Holy Spirit. We must come to the place where, instead of looking for permission to do what we always wanted to do, we learn to savor the things of God, not the approaches and customs of this world.

One subject that never seems to go away is that of birth-

We are confronted every day with an array of decisions. Whether to watch television and if so, *what* programs to allow into our minds (Psalm 101:3), and also, what is an appropriate amount of entertainment when balanced against Bible Study, prayer, physical exercise, genuine interaction with family, and more.

days. Some in the Church want nothing to do with them, while others engage in festive parties. It is evident from the scriptures that people knew how many years they lived. We know how long Methuselah lived, as well as Abraham, Jacob, and the kings of Israel and Judah. Obviously they were keeping track. However, not once do we read of a birthday party for any of God's servants. The only places where birthdays appear in the Bible are in relation to heathen rulers. Pharaoh's birthday celebration resulted in the death of his chief baker (Genesis 40:20–22). Herod's birthday celebration resulted in the death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:6–12; Mark 6:21–28). Although birthday parties today seldom end in death or dismemberment (we would hope!), these unflattering examples are the only indisputable birthday celebrations recorded in the Bible.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* records the following: "As late as 245 Origen ... repudiates as sinful the very idea of keeping the birthday of Christ 'as if he were a king Pharaoh'" (11th ed., article "Christmas"). While Origen was certainly not a true Christian, his comment reveals the attitude of the early Church toward celebrating Christ's birthday and gives us a clue as to how original Christianity felt about birthdays in general.

Yet, some members begin celebrating the birthdays of their children from their first year onward. No child at that age has any idea what is going on, but by the time she is 16 she understands that it is "her day" and she expects a party and presents. Is this a lesson we want to teach? Are we able to understand the difference between marking or recognizing the day of one's birth and celebrating it in a

party atmosphere? Are we able to make wise judgments, based on the word of God? Do we follow the customs of this world, as *sheep going to the slaughter*? Or can we savor the things of God?

Learning to Savor the Things of God

To savor the things of God requires studying God's word from a humble and deeply respectful heart (Isaiah 66:2). Our nature, even after baptism, must continue to convert to a new

way of thinking (1 Corinthians 2:9–11).

When the prophet Jeremiah tells us, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" he is speaking to all of us (Jeremiah 17:9). When God tells us, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death," we need to take notice (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). As we saw earlier, even though we were being directly taught by Jesus Christ for three-and-a-half years, the Apostles could still be

deceived. So where does that leave us? We must learn to savor the things of God, not the things of man.

We are confronted every day with an array of decisions. Whether to watch television and if so, *what* programs to allow into our minds (Psalm 101:3), and also, what is an appropriate amount of entertainment when balanced against Bible Study, prayer, physical exercise, genuine interaction with family, and more. How much time should we spend on social media, and what is appropriate communication and interaction with others? Frankly, some of the things that come to our attention do not reflect the mind of God.

There has always been a desire on the part of members and ministers alike to have every question spelled out as "right" or "wrong," "okay" or "not okay." Consider this however: God is not creating robots. He is creating children who think as He thinks. He gives us basic principles. Some are spelled out, as in the Ten Commandments. Statutes and judgments also help us to understand His mind on an array of issues, but He also wants us to learn to think as He thinks in an ever-changing array of circumstances. This requires not a never-ending list, but a mind that discerns—that *savors*—the way He would choose.

Laodiceans seem to have a problem with compromising. In other words, they are not very discerning when it comes to the nuances requiring righteous judgment. They do not savor the things of God. This is a challenge to all of us. Can we look past a list of do's and don'ts to discern the mind of God in matters that are not always clear and spelled out? Can we willingly apply His standards, without always having to be told what to do? Our lives may depend on it! (L)

Find Joy in the Morning this Feast!



By **Scott D. Winnail**

Each year, we are commanded to attend the Feast of Tabernacles in the location that God chooses to place His name (Deuteronomy 14:23). And each year, most of God’s people diligently and joyfully travel to these festival locations around the globe, excited about what He has planned for His Feast. We enjoy the spiritual food (the sermons, sermonettes and Bible studies), we enjoy the fellowship, we enjoy the physical food and we enjoy the beautiful surroundings. But what **spiritual habits** do we intend to employ while at the Feast this year? What actions can we take in order to maximize the spiritual benefits of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day? More specifically, what is one action we can all take to help make sure we are *spiritually* maximizing this very special opportunity, both as adults and as young people?

Did you know that there is a very important action that we can all take *every morning* during the Feast that will help ensure we are learning the spiritual lessons that God

intends us to learn from His Holy Days? Let me tell you about what, over the last 15 years or so, has become one of my favorite activities at the Feast of Tabernacles. I love to awake early at the Feast, make myself a really nice cup of hot tea or coffee, and find a cozy place to sit—preferably with an inspiring view. After praying for God to help me *see* things that I missed in the previous day’s messages, I open my Bible and church notebook, grab a highlighter or bright-colored pen, and begin reviewing the sermonette and sermon notes that I took the previous day. As I prayerfully review my notes, I highlight the really important points and key scriptures.

The late Mr. Bob League, a long-time minister in the faith, recommended this habit in a Feast sermon he gave in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in 2002. His recommendation then, and my recommendation now, was to get up early every morning during the Feast, review your notes from the previous day, and mark the very poignant or important points and scriptures with a colored pen or highlighter. And then every second or third day, review all the previous highlighted messages for the

Feast thus far, pray about it, and watch for themes to emerge—themes that God has inspired the speakers to address.

Seeing What God Has Inspired in the Messages

This is an action that adults and young people alike can take and learn to deeply enjoy. If we take the time to do this, we will learn far more from each message we hear, and we will also see more deeply and clearly the powerful spiritual lessons God has inspired to be woven throughout the messages. We can then begin to talk about these themes with our family members and other brethren, and we will grow in the fear and awe of the mighty God who has planned His Feasts for us!

Long ago king David prayed, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18). Many of the Feast of Tabernacles messages focus on the law and statutes, and prayerfully reviewing our notes and *meditating* on what we are highlighting can help us see more clearly the “wondrous” things from them. Later in Psalm 119, David also prayed, “And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts. I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love. My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes” (vv. 45–48). Why would king David have prayed this way? What is the “wonder” in the law of God? As we prayerfully meditate on our Feast notes and related scriptures, the wonder in the law of God will become that much more real to us, and we will learn to see what King David saw! We will develop far more excitement for God’s kingdom as we see more clearly the reality of that coming kingdom *based* on His law.

Jesus Christ commented during His earthly ministry, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it” (Luke 10:23–24). Brethren, at

The challenge to most of us is that rising early requires self-discipline, both in the morning and the previous evening. **Late nights result in sleepy mornings where morning study can quickly become a burden.**

the Feast of Tabernacles, God provides us with some of the most meaningful and exciting messages that we will hear all year long. God personally inspires the messages we hear, and we should be excited about each of them. As we take the time to focus on them and meditate further upon them, our understanding of the coming Kingdom will grow, as will our

personal desire to be a part of it! If we are unable to become excited about the messages we hear at the Feast, it may be because we are missing something that God intends for us to see and learn. If we miss it on the first hearing, daily review of notes and scriptures can help us hear what He intended the second time through.

In Psalm 30, king David observed, “For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but **joy comes in the morning**” (v. 5). Rising early to enjoy the quiet start of the day, and perhaps even God’s beautiful sunrise, while reviewing the powerful principles taught in the previous day’s messages is sure to bring deep joy! As we perceive the deeper meaning in the festival messages we hear, and as we learn to see more clearly the reality of the coming Millennium, we will look forward that much more to starting each day at the Feast with the joy and excitement that emanates from our Feast notes.

Building a Habit

The challenge to most of us is that rising early requires self-discipline, both in the morning and the previous evening. Not only must we set the habit of making ourselves rise early, we must also discipline ourselves to avoid staying up too late the night before. Late nights result in sleepy mornings where morning study can quickly become a burden.

Brethren, the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day last only eight days. The messages given are inspired by God and contain special information focused on the millennial rule of Christ and the saints on the earth and the incredible Great White Throne Judgment! Plan now to *review* and *mark* your notes each morning while at the Feast—and make this goal a reality. Of course, this will require taking notes each day so that you have something to review and mark! If you are not already in the habit, consider creating this new and special habit of rising early each morning, learning to enjoy the silence in the hotel room, condo, house, patio or balcony. Create an enjoyable

habit to go along with early rising—sip or nibble on something very pleasant, for example. Pray for God to help you “see wondrous things from His law” and from the messages that He inspires to be given. Review and mark your notes, and watch for God to show you things that you missed the first time through. As you review multiple days at one sitting, you

will start to see patterns and develop a depth of understanding about these Holy Days and their future fulfillment that you have *never* before experienced.

Enjoy the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day this year! And enjoy establishing the habit of *finding joy in the morning* during these amazing Feasts! (L^N)



Jonah the Reluctant Prophet

(Or, What it Means to Be “At One”)

By **Peter Nathan**

The Book of Jonah is a book of prophecy about which most everyone, from the smallest toddler to the eldest in the congregation, knows something. Did you realize that the book is read in synagogues on the afternoon of the *Day of Atonement*? The origins of this practice are lost in the shadows of antiquity. For the Jews, Nineveh’s fasting and repentance—elements that Judaism rightly associates with Atonement—are given as the reason. But even that limits the understanding of this short book. In this article, we are going to look at Jonah from a different perspective.

The Book of Jonah differs from the rest of the Prophets. It doesn’t follow the same style. The subject of the book is ultimately the prophet himself rather than his prophetic message. Yes, we know what his message was, but that is covered in just a few verses. The rest is about this man of God called Jonah—especially his response to the message the Eternal gave him to convey. As a prophet, a man of God, and a servant of the God of Israel, he can teach some powerful lessons to us—those who have been called to be servants of God today.

As a narrative, like Daniel in the lion’s den, the Book of Jonah is a great story to tell to even the smallest child. Yet because it is so familiar, yet different in style from other books featuring prophets, it is a book that contains lessons for us that can be easy to miss.

Israel is not a feature of the prophecy. Israel is really in the background of the prophecy. At the same time, however,

Nineveh’s sin and repentance only “appear” to be the focus. Because of these factors, it’s possible for us to miss out on what the real lesson is all about. The book is really about Jonah, the prophet, and his relationship with his God. It is about being *at one* with our Creator. That is the key to the book and its real association with the Day of Atonement. In examining the Eternal working with Jonah, we can appreciate lessons appropriate to this Holy Day.

Jonah’s Name, His Family, and His Problem

Let’s start with the very first detail provided in the book. We are introduced to this man Jonah, who we also find referenced in 2 Kings 14:25. What does the name Jonah mean? It means a *dove*. Jonah was sent to convey a message from the God of Israel to the Ninevites, who were Assyrians. The dove had a particular role in the Assyrian belief system. Ishtar as an Assyrian goddess used the form of the dove. The Eternal chose someone with a name that had a particular resonance with the people. Dagon, the fish god, was also part of the Assyrian pantheon. So, the Eternal speaks to people in ways they understand, and gets their attention so that He can reveal His truth to them.

But Jonah was an Israelite, not an Assyrian. How did his name connect with the God of Israel? We first find reference to a dove in the time of Noah, when the dove released from the Ark returned with an olive twig in its beak (Genesis 8:11–12). That was an indication of the fact that God had confirmed His promise to Noah and that life on earth was to continue. To this day, the dove with an olive branch remains a

symbol of peace. The olive twig was a sign of renewed life. The dove is then used in the New Testament as a symbol of God's Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16–17). So, we have in Jonah's name a symbol of life and, ultimately, of salvation.

Jonah is presented to us as the son of Amittai. The Hebrew simply means "My Truth." So here is this servant of God called *dove*, whose father was named *My Truth*. Now the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13). The source of truth is God (John 17:17). It's a quality or a facet of the character of both our Father and His Son. A quick reference to the book of Kings shows us that Jonah's family lived in a time of apostasy (2 Kings 14:24–25). Their connection to the God of Israel was established.

Jonah, despite the credentials of his name and calling, fell into a human problem. He failed to appreciate the God he served, and ended up being consumed by his feelings against the Ninevites, rather than seeing God's concern for them. He remains an object lesson for us to avoid falling into the same trap if we desire to be at one with our God.

In summarizing the four short chapters of this book, we are presented with a situation in which the sailors, the seas, the fish, the Ninevites, the plants, the worm—all of these things can do the Eternal's will, and respond to the Eternal, but *Jonah himself* finds it very difficult! He simply wants to do the exact opposite. When you read the book, notice how frequently, in the first two chapters, Jonah does the exact opposite of what the Eternal says. The Eternal tells him to get up and go to Nineveh. What does he do? He goes the other way. But what is the preposition that is used to show the other

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way? "He went down." He went down to Joppa, he went down into the ship, then where does he go in the ship? He goes down into the hull or the lowest point, and then where? Down to the bottom of the sea. So, here you read when the Eternal says something, Jonah does the polar opposite. And the Eternal rescued him from the depths, as we all are aware, and said again, "Arise, go to Nineveh" (Jonah 3:1–2).

Jonah's "Justice" Versus God's Mercy

That brings us to Jonah's attitude, played out in the last chapter of the book. Having finally preached to Nineveh, and seeing their repentance, Jonah went out and sat on the hill opposite the city to wait and see what would happen. Jonah, in a desperate state, prays to the Eternal, "... for I know

that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm [certain calamity]" (Jonah 4:2). That's drawn from one of my favorite scriptures, Exodus 34:6–7. Jonah is saying, "God, this is what You are like—forgiving, patient and kind." What's the problem with what he states? It's easy to read this as a case of Jonah quoting scripture to his God, but he gets something *very* wrong. The last part of his quotation is about the calamity. It's as though he was seeking to correct his Maker and accuse Him of being a "soft touch" when it came to those wicked people, the Ninevites. But Jonah left out a very important aspect. The last part of the self-description of the Eternal in Exodus 34:6 describes Him not in terms of calamity, but as "abounding in goodness and **truth**"!

Jonah appears to have lost sight of what the Eternal's character really is like, despite the fact that it was his own human father's name. So the son of "My Truth," doesn't understand God's Truth! Now there's a real problem for you. That's much bigger than what sort of fish could swallow a man, and keep him alive in its belly for three days and three nights, because now we're dealing with a spiritual issue rather than the power of the Eternal to intervene and prepare a fish to preserve Jonah for His mission. Remember, all other forms of life and action respond perfectly to the will of God. Jonah is the exception.

It's interesting when we look at the term for calamity that Jonah uses against the Eternal. Calamity is translated from the Hebrew word, *harah*, or evil. What would you say that Jonah is saying about the Eternal? Perhaps he's saying, "You

didn't do what You said You were going to do." Why? Because Nineveh repented. That's why I suggested the expression, "He's a soft touch." It suggests a cynical attitude on Jonah's part:

"People say they are 'sorry,'

and everything changes." The question comes back to, what is Jonah's view of the Eternal? What is he missing?

Now, of course, we find from the apostles that it's not God's will that "any should perish, but all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). What did Jonah want? Assyria was an enemy of Israel, and he wanted to see the Ninevites dead or destroyed. He didn't realize what the Eternal's plan was for any other people than his nation. He got carried away by his own nationalism. In other words, he saw God's plan in terms of his own people, rather than all humanity. There is a word that we can use for this; he was a particularist. So, in other words, he thought it was only the descendants of Israel that can have God's blessing, as opposed to the universalist, who sees all humanity having access ultimately to Him.

Jonah's attitude highlights another failure on his part to understand the reality of this world. How does the God family see evil? Sin and evil are to be placed on the head of the Azazel goat on the Day of Atonement and then taken away from all contact with humanity (Leviticus 16:20–22). The Eternal is *not* soft on sin. He understands the real source of sin better than any of us, and has a plan to remove the source from us (Revelation 20:1–2). He, as Jesus Christ our Passover lamb, has paid the penalty for our sins, but He is still going to place those sins on the head of the culprit who has led humanity astray. But real repentance is needed.

The Eternal gave Nineveh forty days to repent. Forty days is a period of judgment, and the number forty is used for judgment. Inherent to the message the Eternal gave to Jonah was a great statement about true repentance. It takes time for you to turn and change and head in the opposite direction. So, it's not just something that occurs in a moment. You have to follow through and show the fruit of repentance. In other words, this isn't a tent meeting where you give your heart to the Lord, where the preacher is gone the next day, and you just go back to being what you've been previously. Here was forty days of God's testing. Let's guess at how the people of Nineveh spent that time as they sought to repent (which they did: Jonah 3:6–10). I guarantee the Ninevites were marking those days off their calendars, one by one—perhaps asking themselves daily, “Have I done what is pleasing to God today?” What happens if you start doing things on a regular basis—over, say, forty days? It becomes habit. So, here is an opportunity where people are given the ability to create Godly habits. What does that say about the Eternal as well? He is full of lovingkindness, and He wants *everybody* to

Jonah was concerned with evil; the Eternal was concerned with Truth. He wants to see His character instilled in every human being so that **they can have eternal life and be part of the family of God**, which Jonah failed at that point to see.

be saved, not just Israelites. He knows what it takes for us to change. He knows that it requires time to create good habits or good character. It's not going to be something that happens overnight. Growth is necessary. There is a period of preparation, searching, and growth. That becomes very important.

You might say, Nineveh's sins or troubles became Jonah's. That's all he could see: “These people need destroying. Doesn't it say that God's going to destroy sin?” But He wants to save us by *separating us* from our sins. The last verse of

Micah, the next prophet, is probably one of the most incredible verses in the Bible because it talks about how our sins are going to be *separated* from us. They're going to be covered with waters, as the seas cover the deep, and totally removed from us (Micah 7:19). Jonah wasn't able to make that connection. He wasn't able to separate the evil and realize his God's desire to save these people from their evil and change them.

A Flaw in Perception: How Do You See God's Will?

Let's return to Jonah and his perception of the Eternal. The Eternal is characterized in Exodus 34:6 as being abundant in truth. Truth is an aspect of His character. An understanding of that truth and how it applies is what is going on throughout the Book of Jonah. When we look at some of the other events throughout this book, they are incidental to the very major point. How do you and I see God—both the Father and the Son? Do we see God and Jesus Christ correctly? Do we look from the divine perspective, or from that of our own locally conditioned outlook? That is a very, very powerful lesson. The Apostle Paul addressed this in 2 Corinthians 10:5, where he instructed Christians to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” In other words, any thought I might have about how I view society today is really very secondary. I have to be concerned about how the *Father and Jesus Christ* look on society today.

So, Jonah was concerned with evil; the Eternal was concerned with truth. He wants to see His character instilled in every human being, so all can have eternal life and be part of the family of God, which Jonah failed at that point to see. Hopefully, his view changed in the end.

Of course, truth is a means of combating evil. This was the other thing to which Jonah was blind. Jesus said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Free from bondage to whom or what? Satan and sin. But that freedom is conditional on atonement with Jesus Christ—and, hence, the Father—as the previous verse sets out the requirement for knowing truth. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed’” (John 8:31). And that freedom is played out in God's plan, when Satan is bound and put away.

Let Jonah be an example for each of us. Let's ask ourselves the questions that have to be asked regarding Jonah: “How well do I really understand the character and purposes of the Eternal? How would I have responded? What would I do? What would God really want me to do?” That becomes critical, doesn't it? Without that, there is no hope of being at One with our Creator. (LN)

The Sacrifices of the Day of Atonement and the Holy Days

Leviticus 16 is a remarkable chapter that sets out, in detail, the actions the High Priest was to undertake on the Day of Atonement (v. 29). The particulars of the chapter relate to the High Priest alone. The only other person in view is the “suitable man” who is to take one goat into the wilderness at the climax of the day (vv. 21–22). We know that in the time of Jesus and the early Church, this day was a day of great pageantry in the temple. Pilgrims to Jerusalem for the Fall Festivals gathered in great numbers to watch and observe the High Priest go through these actions. Yet, the chapter speaks to more than just the ritual of the Day of Atonement, as we find the events portray an overview of the steps in God’s Holy Day plan up to that point.

The Day of Atonement started for the High Priest with the bringing of sin offerings, the blood of which was taken into the Holy of Holies itself—the only day in the year when he could enter. One of the sin offerings was a bull, for the High Priest and his household. Another sin offering was the goat that was divinely chosen by the casting of lots to be for the Eternal (vv. 7–9). Notice that the original Passover sacrifice was to be a yearling male, taken from the sheep or the goats (Exodus 12:5). The blood of those sin offerings then had to be taken into the Holy of Holies by the High Priest and sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat that covered it (Leviticus 16:14–15).

We understand that the wave sheaf offering that took place during the Days of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:9–14) represented Jesus Christ’s brief appearance before His Father shortly after His resurrection (cf. John 20:17), having accomplished His sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. So, the initial instructions for the High Priest to take a goat as a sin offering and present its blood on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies harken back to what would happen to Jesus Christ as our Passover and the wave sheaf offering that occurred during the days of Unleavened Bread (Hebrews 9:11–12).

When he had finished sprinkling the blood from the sin offerings on the mercy seat, the High Priest was to go back into the Holy Place, the larger part of the Tabernacle of the Temple, where the golden altar of incense, the menorah, and the table of showbread were located. There, he was to purify those items of furniture through more sprinkling of blood (Leviticus 16:16–17). These items of furnishing are used in the New Testament to represent the work of those called into the Church, who have God’s Holy Spirit. The menorah was a light in a very dark place, just as we are to be a light in this world enveloped in darkness. It was fueled by olive oil, a representation of God’s Holy Spirit given to the Church on the day

of Pentecost. The incense from the golden altar is used as a description of our prayers ascending to our Father’s throne (Revelation 8:4). Although the showbread is not specifically used in the New Testament in relation to the Church, its unleavened form is a type of what we, as a result of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and with the aid of God’s Holy Spirit, are to become. In making atonement for this part of the Tabernacle, the High Priest is portraying the role of Christ in the Church today. He is cleansing us so that we can perform His work and be readied to be part of His family (1 Peter 4:17).

When he had finished his cleansing of the Holy Place, the High Priest was to come out of the tabernacle and into the courtyard, to the altar of burnt offering that he would cleanse with the blood from the sin offerings (Leviticus 16:18–19). Malachi speaks of the Messiah performing this function when He returns so that the offerings can be acceptable to our Father (Malachi 3:1–4). It is set in the context of events surrounding the coming of the Messiah, as we understand—His Second Coming, associated as those events are with the Feast of Trumpets. Isaiah also portrays the return of Jesus Christ similarly. Isaiah describes Jesus Christ coming with glorious robes splattered in blood, as though He had been treading a wine press (Isaiah 63:1–4). The High Priest had to wear special garments when he undertook these functions on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:4)—garments that may well have ended up stained with blood from his actions of sprinkling the blood as he went about the cleansing rituals. The High Priest was to bathe before attiring himself with these ceremonial linen garments.

Only when he had finished his work of cleansing, was the High Priest to return to the second goat, on which the “LORD’S lot” did *not* fall (vv. 9–10, 20). That goat was to have all the sins of the people confessed upon its head and was taken into the wilderness and removed from the people by the hand of a “suitable man” (vv. 21–22). John, in the Book of Revelation, shows Satan being taken away from contact with humanity upon the return of Jesus Christ as Lord of Lords and King of Kings (Revelation 20:1–3). The climax of the day of Atonement was that removal of sin from the people, the ultimate act of cleansing that the High Priest undertook on that day.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest, who at present is at His Father’s throne, pictured by the Holy of Holies. He is in the process of preparing us for roles in His Kingdom when He returns to banish Satan from his role as the god of this world and to usher in the glorious reign of the God family. The actions of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement help us appreciate how that transformation is going to occur. ^(LN)

He Will Return

By **Gary F. Ehman**

If you had all the physical wealth you needed, along with all the talent, political power, and resources available to you to accomplish it, what would you most desperately want to do in this, your physical life?

Some may want to cure cancer, stop wars or clean the environment; others may want to go on a prolonged vacation that would take them away from all of this.

I ask the question because deep within many of us, young and old alike, is a gnawing hunger to do something—anything! You know the feeling, a need to be in the middle of “where it’s at”—to be involved, to accomplish, to push back the feelings of frustration, futility, uselessness and inadequateness, which sometimes seem to govern our lives.

Some of us feel left out, passed by or unappreciated because all our life efforts either produce nothing or result in all the wrong things. Well, welcome to the human race: “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun... For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 2:11, 22–23).

This is the natural condition of man—even with a man such as Solomon. You and I, with our feelings and hunger, are not individually alone. We share such feelings with our fellow humans.

So where are we going with this article? Please, be patient with me.

God Won’t Abandon Us

Jesus Christ knew, while He was in the flesh—and knows now—His creation. He knows our feelings. He knows our needs. He has always known His creation and from the beginning wanted to be with us and serve us.

Establish this thought before we proceed: Israel left Egypt in excitement and joy, with a high hand. But God’s presence was always there, even when Pharaoh pursued them: “And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and

went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So, it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus, it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night” (Exodus 14:19–20). God separated between them, dark to one side, light to the other. It was God’s first act of protection for Israel since He delivered them out of direct bondage.

He was not about to abandon them. He, as Spirit, was with them—remarkably: “Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Exodus 40:36–38). All this despite their rebelliousness.

Solomon built the first temple for God. But notice what happened when it was completed, and after the priests placed the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies: “And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:10–11). Solomon asks an interesting question: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (v. 27). Many times, God has shown His presence on the earth, and for good reason. He has a desire to dwell with His chosen family. He yearns to do so. He seeks to be one with us individually (cf. John 17:20–23).

Scripture clearly shows that God loves His creation and wants to dwell with it. One of the most moving places in the Bible to demonstrate this is in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel, in the eighth and ninth chapters, records God’s displeasure in Israel’s idolatry, and what appears to be His proclamation of divorce from her.

A Reluctant Departure

In chapter 10, Ezekiel begins describing the astonishing withdrawal of God’s presence from the temple—that place where He dwelt with man since the time of Solomon (Ezekiel 10:1–5). God’s presence begins to leave—to leave the temple. “When the

cherubim stood still, the wheels stood still, and when one was lifted up, the other lifted itself up, for the spirit of the living creature was in them. Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them" (vv. 17–19).

Christ is still closely involved with His creation, remarkably, through His chosen ones—His Church. And He will continue that involvement, never abandoning that which He created. **Despite the faults of ancient Israel that caused Him to reluctantly remove His presence, He continued to develop His plan for them.**

The cloud hovers there for a moment. Ezekiel's vivid description continues: "So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city" (Ezekiel 11:22–23). God's presence moves from the temple to the Mount of Olives, stands there, *seemingly reluctant to leave*, as if contemplating on His time with them—considering His creation, the plans He had for them, His hopes for them.

Then it leaves earth.

But God did not abandon Israel or mankind. His plan for their salvation was still in place. One more point must be established. "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. ... But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: '*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah*'" (Hebrews 8:1–8).

Unveiling a Better Way

That point is simply this: Christ is still closely involved with His creation, remarkably, through His chosen ones—His Church. And He will continue that involvement, never abandoning that which He created. Please remember that despite the faults of ancient Israel that caused Him to reluctantly remove His presence, He continued to develop His plan for them. A new

and better way was unveiled: "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (vv. 9–10).

This required Jesus Christ to come in the flesh and become the blood sacrifice: "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11–12). That

is why we, earlier this spring, partook of the Passover.

This astounding sacrifice expresses the profound love God has for mankind, and opens the door to humanity's place in the universe: "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).

Jesus provided the key—the main ingredient to this final reconciliation: "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that [it] may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, [which] the world cannot receive, because it neither sees [it] nor knows [it]; but you know [it], for [it] dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:15–18). Please note that this is conditional, based on loving Christ and obeying Him. And brethren, this is not a new or a different concept; it is what was expected of Adam and Eve at the very beginning.

This "helper"—or "comforter" in the *KJV*—in the Greek is *parakletos*, one who pleads another's cause before a judge as an advocate or a counsel for defense. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, [which] the Father will send in My name, [it] will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (v. 26). God and Christ once more reached out to their creation with *help! They were going to repair the fault in the first covenant—man himself.*

What Christ's presence on Mount Sinai, giving the law—and in the temple through the sacrifices—could not produce would be accomplished by infusing into the mind of man the "earnest" of the mind of Christ. Paul describes this "guarantee" in the *New King James Version*, or "earnest" in the

King James Version, in his letters to those in Corinth and in Ephesus: “Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 5:5, *KJV*; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22).

The word “earnest” or “guarantee” here means money given as a pledge or down payment for a larger purchase, assuring that the full amount will subsequently be paid. Understanding this will help us to understand what Paul was saying about Christ: “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, [which] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13–14). We see here, too, that we are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit—marked with an emblem of God’s ownership, secured from destruction and set apart for reward.

Profoundly Involved with Their Creation

The Father and Christ know Their creation. They understand the needs, wants and hungers deeply embedded in us—the need to be fulfilled, and to be fulfilling. The “Comforter” is God’s answer. It will work if we allow it to work: “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31). Note the words: peace, edified, comfort. This is what the Feast depicts not only to us, but someday to all the world.

God’s Spirit—the Comforter—makes it possible to be fulfilled and fulfilling: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). This focuses on the reason behind the creation of man. We are not empty organisms, as in, “Here today, gone tomorrow.” We have meaning, value, importance to God—but only *if* we fulfill the plan of God in our limited physical ways, *now!*

There is no need to be doubtful about how the Father and the Son feel about us. Christ’s work while on earth set the standard for the relationship: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1–2). The Greek word “walk” is *peripateō*, meaning to walk purposefully, but the context means to conduct, regulate, or pass one’s life as Christ did in the flesh. They have given us the power to do this.

This was not a new concept to God. It has always been what God and the Word wanted from Their creation from the beginning. Notice Job’s understanding of this: “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). God “desires”? As the NASB translates it, “You will *long* for the work of Your hands”—in this case, the product of His hands, mankind. Our Father has shown, through the sacrifice of His own Son, that He is ready to go to exceptional lengths for those of us who are His people today and, eventually, the world.

God is involved with us and He is a lot more patient than you think when you obey Him: “For now You number my steps, but do not watch over my sin. My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and You cover my iniquity” (vv. 16–17). “To cover” means to “plaster over” our iniquities.

It’s All About the Plan

In all I have written here, you may not have realized that this article is about the meaning of the Feast of Trumpets. The Feast of Trumpets is all about God’s plan for mankind, and you, Christians, are that plan. Without you, there is no plan. We must come to an understanding that we who keep this Feast day are being prepared to rule and to someday *demonstrate* to mankind that we, when we are presented to them, are the result of keeping God’s plan while we were in the flesh. This article is about us—His Church—and our role in His plan, the meaning of that role, the establishment of His Church, as the core reason supporting His plan of salvation.

One final scenario is needed. “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9–11).

Why do you gaze and live in such pain, sorrow and anguish, brethren? This same Jesus who left the temple in Ezekiel’s vision, who came in the flesh, who died and was taken up into heaven, shall come in like manner, back to His temple: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19–22).

We must trust in these wonderful words of Jesus: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2–3). This is the hope of the Christian who observes this Feast of Trumpets. This is the promise God has given you.

He *will* return! (LW)



The Beautiful Truth of the Last Great Day

By **Wallace Smith**

What is the fate of those who die having never known Jesus Christ? Indeed, most who have lived and died have never even heard of Him! Will God only save a few in this life, allowing the many billions who've walked the earth without any real opportunity to be saved from their sins to simply be lost forever?

The truth we celebrate every year during the Last Great Day—the eighth day after the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles—is one of the most beautiful understandings we possess in God's Church. Following the pattern of God's Holy Days and their prophetic outline, we know that God has *not* abandoned those made in His image. Everyone who has *ever lived* will be given an opportunity to know Jesus Christ, and to know that the God of Creation is the God of the Last Great Day!

Yet the Church is often attacked for this belief. It has been called "Armstrong's Second Chance" doctrine and derided as unscriptural. Is it? Can you prove from your own Bible the truth this day represents? Why do we believe in the truth of the second resurrection to life and opportunity?

Let's review what God's word really does say on this subject.

Access for All Who Thirst

First, why do we associate the Last Great Day after the Feast of Tabernacles with the second resurrection? The Festival—

which goes unnamed in the Old Testament, beyond being called "the eighth day" (Leviticus 23:36, 39; 2 Chronicles 7:9)—takes its name in the Church from Jesus' own pronouncement, made on that day around 2,000 years ago. As the Apostle John reports, "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37–38). Lest there be any confusion, John explains that Jesus was speaking of the Holy Spirit (v. 39).

Jesus' words on that day seem to stand in contrast to His words recorded only one chapter earlier, in which He explains that only those actively drawn by the Father can come to Christ at this time (John 6:44, 65). The Apostle Paul, as well, explains to the Corinthians that God is not calling *everyone* today but is focusing on the "weak things of the world" as opposed to the mighty (1 Corinthians 1:26–29). Similarly, the Apostle Peter tells the crowd gathered for Pentecost in 31AD that forgiveness and access to God's Spirit is now available to "as many as the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). Many have made excuses for these passages and tried to deny them, but Jesus and His apostles are clear: God simply is not drawing or calling everyone in the entire world today.

Then what do we make of Jesus' words spoken on that eighth day—that last, great day of the Feast?

The meaning is revealed when we consider the prophetic sequence of the Holy Days, noting that the Last Great Day takes place immediately after the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Great White Throne Judgment

In Revelation 20:4-6, we learn that the saints, who will be resurrected and glorified at the return of Jesus Christ, will reign alongside Him for one thousand years—that time we refer to as the Millennium, pictured by the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. But we also learn so much more!

We learn in these passages that the resurrection of true Christians to eternal life is only the *first* resurrection and that a *second* resurrection of “the rest of the dead” is to follow *after* the thousand years are complete (v. 5)! And because they are contrasted with those in the first resurrection, over whom “the second death has no power” (v. 6), we know that those in the second resurrection are still subject to the possibility of death—are still physical and not yet eternal.

The details of this second resurrection are given later in the chapter, in which John describes the vision given to him of the Great White Throne Judgment. After describing God as seated on a great white throne, John reports:

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 Greek word here for the “books” that are opened is *biblia*—the Bible. God’s word is only truly understood *spiritually* (1 Corinthians 2:14), and we must have our understanding actively opened by God to the Scriptures in order to comprehend them (cf. Luke 24:45). For the vast collection of humanity in this second resurrection, the Great White Throne Judgment period represents the *first time* that the Bible will have been opened to them—*truly* opened—in a way that it can be fully understood and comprehended.

We must note that this description of the life of those resurrected at this time corresponds perfectly to the life of true Christians who are called *now*—who are now being judged as the household of God by their obedience to the gospel (1 Peter 4:17) and by the things written in the books of the Bible and the law of liberty it contains (James 2:12). The life we blessed few live now will *finally* become the life to which all, “small and great” are called! Everyone who has never had a real opportunity to do so will finally be able to fully understand the word of God and to be judged by it—that is, to be guided by it and to have their choices, day by day, examined in its light—just as those called in this day and age *now* are blessed to experience.

Why else would the Book of Life be opened also, as Revelation 20:12 declares? Scripture teaches us that the Book

of Life now contains the names of the saints—those who have overcome in *this* life (cf. Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5). Yet *they* were all resurrected at Christ’s return, so why reopen the book? *So that new names can be written on its pages.* Truly, Jesus’ words, proclaimed on that Last Great Day 2,000 years ago, will come to pass: All who thirst will freely drink!

And, in the end, those men and women who will not yield, having full understanding of what—and Whom—they are refusing, will be thrown into the Lake of Fire and utterly destroyed (Revelation 20:15). With the last death of a human being and with all others now possessing life eternal, death itself is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). John sees this in vision as death and the grave are thrown into the Lake of Fire, never to return to mankind (Revelation 20:14). The last human being thrown into the Lake of Fire will take death with him!

At that time, of all the human beings who have ever lived, *all who are willing* will possess immortality, and death will be no more. What a plan, and what a God!

But, there are many who question this understanding. In fact, few things we teach infuriate many “Christians” in the world *more* than the idea that those who are not “saved” in this life are *not* going to suffer in hell for eternity! It is worth taking the time to examine how this understanding of the second resurrection and the Great White Throne Judgment—that all who have lived and died will have an opportunity for salvation—is reflected in *many* other passages, as well as the vital role it plays in proving that God is true to His word.

“All Israel Shall Be Saved”

For instance, consider the words of Paul in his letter to the Romans. The Apostle clearly understood that there would be a *future* opportunity for the blinded of this age and found powerful, personal hope in that truth.

In Romans 9, we read of his passionate desire that his own people—the Jews and the people of Israel—would come to embrace their Savior, who, Himself, came *from* them in the flesh (v. 5). It broke his heart to see his people rejecting the very One sent to save them: “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh” (vv. 1–3).

He saw that the Jews were, for the most part, blinded at this time (Romans 11:7–8, 25), and that in Israel’s blindness God created an opportunity for the Gentiles (vv. 11–12).

Yet, even as he saw them dying around him in ignorance of their own Savior, he still held out hope for them! Immediately after speaking of their blindness, Paul declares, “And so all Israel will be saved” (v. 26)! “For God has committed them

all [Israel] to disobedience, that He might have *mercy on all*" (v. 32). How could this be true? How can "all Israel" be saved when the vast majority who have ever lived are *dead*, and most of those who were alive when he wrote were blinded? If God has "committed them all to disobedience" in this life, yet still plans to provide "mercy on all," that extension of mercy must come in a *future time*.

But how could Paul speak of such a time of opportunity, when "all Israel will be saved"? How could he be so supremely

How could Paul speak of such a time of opportunity, when "all Israel will be saved"? How could he be so supremely confident that the whole of Israel would one day have access to the Spirit of God and to salvation? **Because Paul knew the Scriptures!**

confident that the whole of Israel would one day have access to the Spirit of God and to the salvation that, in their blindness, they then denied in this life?

Because Paul knew the Scriptures!

He would have been intimately familiar with Ezekiel 37, which describes a very physical resurrection of, indeed, "the whole house of Israel" (v. 11)—or, in Paul's words, "all of Israel"! Read the passage for yourself in Ezekiel 37:1–14. God describes raising the bones of an exceedingly vast number of Israelites who have died without having His Spirit, giving them sinew and muscle, and restoring them to physical life! They rise believing that they are without hope and cut off from God (v. 11), but the Eternal says to them, "Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it" (vv. 13–14).

Truly as Paul said, "All Israel shall be saved"! God's word taught him that there is a physical resurrection to life ahead for those who died blinded by the devil so that they may receive the opportunity they never fully had in this life!

Only for Israel?

But Ezekiel only mentions Israel. Is the promise of a resurrection to physical life only for the nation of Israel? What about the billions upon billions of Gentile people who have lived and died in ignorance? Didn't Revelation 20 say that the dead "small and great" were brought to life?

Jesus Christ makes it plain in His own words that the dead of other nations will be brought up *with* Israel in the Great White Throne Judgment period. For example, consider His

comments in Matthew 12, in which He castigates the Jewish scribes and Pharisees for their faithlessness and lack of response to His ministry. He says, "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here" (vv. 41–42).

Notice that He clearly says that these Gentile peoples—the Assyrian people of Nineveh and the famous Queen of Sheba—would "rise up in the judgment *with this generation*." When these non-Israelites discover in the resurrection that these Jewish leaders had the very Son of God in their midst and did not repent, they will judge them as fools!

In fact, God says that the period of judgment to come for those in the second resurrection will be easier for the Gentile peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah than it will be for those Jewish cities who refused to welcome His disciples in this age (Matthew 10:15)—again, a clear indication that the entire world will come up in that resurrection, not just Israel.

So, yes, the non-Israelite dead will rise with Israel! When God says that He will raise "the dead, small and great," He means it.

Is God Truly Fair?

This brings up another piece of scriptural evidence that those who died without a real opportunity *will* have such an opportunity in the future. If they did not, could we consider God just and fair? If they are doomed to destruction, having been refused an opening to avoid it, couldn't we ask, like Abraham in Genesis 18:25, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Consider that God's word is absolutely clear about His commitment to equal treatment for all. Peter says that "God shows no partiality" in Acts 10:34—or, as the *King James Version* has it, "God is no respecter of persons." The exact same point is made in many passages, such as Deuteronomy 10:17, 2 Chronicles 19:7, Romans 2:11, and Galatians 2:6. The Almighty does not show favoritism or partiality. His law expresses this element of His character, commanding, "You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 24:22).

Yet, as we have already plainly seen, God is *not* actively working with everyone the same way at this time, and not actively calling everyone to Him in this life. For instance, Paul was specific: God is calling mainly the weak and lowly, not

the powerful (again, 1 Corinthians 1:26–29). If He does not give the rich and mighty an equal opportunity in the future, wouldn't that mean He is a respecter of persons?

Recognizing that, even today, many millions—even billions—all over the world never even hear the name of Jesus Christ spoken aloud, some theologians have tried to work around this conundrum. They propose that God is still not a respecter of persons and is still fair, because *in His perfect knowledge* He simply *knows* who will accept Him and who will not. That way, they can assume that those who have never heard of Christ throughout mankind's history are simply those whom God *foreknew* would deny Him.

Not only is this insulting to people of many cultures all over the world, it also disagrees with the words of Jesus Christ, Himself.

In Matthew 11:20–24, Jesus makes it plain that if the Gentile cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom would have seen the same mighty works that He performed in the Jewish cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, those Gentile peoples *would have repented!* In fact, He says of Tyre and Sidon, specifically, “they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (v. 21)! He says that even infamous Sodom would have responded to the sight of their Savior's miracles in its midst.

And He says they *will* respond, explaining to the Jews of His day that when the people of these Gentile cities are resurrected, it will be “more tolerable” for them than it will be for those Jewish cities (v. 22 and v. 24). Indeed, they will have an easier time responding, without the regrets of those cities of Judah, who will come to realize they had turned away their own Messiah.

Will He not give Tyre, Sidon and Sodom the same opportunity He gave Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum? Yes, He will! For, truly, God is fair, and He is no respecter of persons! Those who have died without their opportunity *will have that opportunity*. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God longs for all to come to repentance, and He *will* ensure all have their chance to do so.

There *is* a great day of judgment coming upon all mankind—a day when all who have ever lived will have their first real opportunity to know, understand, and embrace the truth, without the deceptive veil of the Devil covering their eyes (cf. Isaiah 25:7–8; Revelation 12:9).

Among the deceptions Satan has foisted on humanity is a twisted version of Christianity that denies the beautiful truth of the Last Great Day and the Great White Throne Judgment. The Adversary would have the world believe either that God is so *weak and helpless* that He is unable to save most of humankind from destruction (or, in the deceived eyes of many, eternal torment in agony), or that God is so *callous and uncaring* that He does not mind if most of humanity is destroyed in their ignorance.

But that is not the God of your Bible.

God's plan was *never* about a small group of people—the miniscule *fraction* of humanity privileged enough to hear the true name of Jesus Christ preached to them. He is *not* a God so capricious that He would allow the overwhelmingly vast majority of those He lovingly created in *His very own image* to be utterly destroyed forever without even an *opportunity* to escape such a fate and experience everlasting life!

The Bible describes, in detail, a God who is bigger than that! It describes a God who loves *every* human being He has *ever* made, and who has a plan in which *not a single one of them* simply falls through the cracks.

The God of the Last Great Day

If anyone could be considered someone who *did* fall through the cracks, my father might qualify. He died at age 73 and, for all I can tell, was clearly never called in this life to understand the truth and know his Savior. I knew him for almost 43 years, and I loved him. I long to see him again. I have many memories of him.

But when I reflect that God remembers even every sparrow that falls (Luke 12:6–7), then I have to recognize that my memories of him are *nothing* compared to God's memories.

God remembers the day my father began to be formed in the womb. God remembers the day he was born. God remembers every single joy my father ever experienced. God was present during every moment my father was in anguish, or in pain, or suffering. God knows the exact sound of every laugh that sounded from my father's throat. God knows the feel and taste of every tear my father ever cried and the exact path each one traced down his cheek.

Though my father did not know it in this life, God loved him far more than I ever did and desires to see him again and to embrace him—and to tell him that there is a better way and a new life ahead for him like nothing he had ever imagined before.

My father—and all of your lost loved ones, as well as the billions who died before them—will have that opportunity. Death and the Devil's deceptions have not locked them away from the love of God forever. Jesus Christ, the First and the Last, holds the keys of death and the grave (Revelation 1:18), and at His command they must open and yield all whom they possess. And in the Great White Throne Judgment that comes after the Millennium, they will do just that.

When we see the beauty and scope of God's amazing plan—a plan that reaches past the gates of the grave and includes every single human being who has ever walked this planet throughout all time, leaving no one behind—we can echo Paul's passionate words of praise: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

May we, too, give such praise to the God of the Last Great Day. (LH)

ONE MINISTER'S TRAVELOGUE

By Rees Ellis

The following is a synopsis of reports from Rees Ellis following his visit to the Francophone (French speaking) countries in Africa, as well as Ghana and Ethiopia. Between June 12 and July 7, Mr. Ellis visited brethren and prospective members in Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Burundi and Ethiopia. We thought our readers might enjoy this small glimpse into what it means to be a part of an international Work and a globe-spanning family! (Specific names have been removed from this report for privacy purposes.)

—Editorial Staff

Cameroon, Douala-Yaoundé

The first stop was Doula, the principal commercial city and point of entry for Cameroon, where several people had asked for a visit. After the disappointment of not being able to see those individuals, it was quite exciting in Yaoundé, the administrative capital. Three new people came for visits and counselling.

Two of them were young work colleagues, both pharmacists, who came with fundamental questions and finished up by asking, “What do we do next?” They seemed keen to keep the Sabbath and asked that we pray for them and help them to follow the Truth.

Another individual, an ex-preacher, had a strong feeling that the Holy Spirit was telling him to desire to preach again. He has a small following and is using our format, keeping Feast days, etc. His service is evangelical, incorporating his own ideas in what seems more like a simple prayer service with singing, praying and using our literature to teach from as it suits him. I explained that if he wants to work with us, he would have to follow our Church service format in a service that we organize. We’ll see if he will change his ways. I counselled him to channel his efforts in setting himself straight, submitting to God and finding stability in his family and professional life. If he does that, he’ll have focus and will be kept busy for quite some time.

I also had the honour to baptize a gentleman in Yaoundé. We had been counselling for quite some time and he had to wait a couple more years than originally planned, since we could not meet on my last visit. He has been an avid student of the truth since hearing Mr. Carion’s radio programme some years ago, and also reading Mr. Armstrong’s writings. He had conversed on a number of occasions with Mr. Apartian as well. It was a privilege to baptize him, and he hopes and plans to keep the Feast in Gabon.

Cameroon, Bafia

I travelled to Bafia—a two-hour bus ride on Friday—coming back Saturday afternoon to Yaoundé. It was quite an interesting visit.



A couple in Bafia is **most** enthusiastic about the Gospel being preached. The husband was a deacon in the Adventist Church. He is the head of a God-fearing family, with a collection of lovely and well-behaved children. They will be challenged by the need to unlearn their Adventist (evangelical) background. They had made many preparations for my visit to ensure a large turnout to witness a great prayer and miracle event. The arrangements included, amongst others, an interview on the local Bafia radio station and distribution of leaflets. In typical African manner, they had hired a large “public address” system for my messages to be spread as far as possible to those who didn’t attend. So, I gently gave them some practical lessons on how we conduct ourselves as a Church and our policy regarding the preaching of the Gospel, to which they responded positively. For my study with the group, we looked at answered prayer—starting out with Isaiah 59:1–2 and finishing up with James 5:13–16, since there were a few people who had asked for an anointing. Before I left, I anointed seven people, including a couple of elderly Catholic ladies who obviously need God’s healing.

I spent a good part of an hour answering questions, but it just wasn’t long enough, so I promised to return and give more time to answer their questions. I had to leave by bus to be in time for the announced Bible Study in Yaoundé.

I called a Bible Study for Sabbath afternoon at 16:00, at the YaahoT Hotel, Yaoundé, after I returned from Bafia. All three of the people I met the first day in Yaoundé came, and we were joined by one of the hotel staff, who was most interested and seemed to follow with some understanding. Unfortunately, he had to go back to his duties, so I didn’t get a chance to find out his background.

My conclusion and hope is that we set up a regular service, the sooner the better.

Gabon, Libreville

Early on Sunday morning, June 18, I travelled to the adjacent country, Gabon where we have a small group.

The Sunday evening Bible Study was about Colossians 2, the question of law and what was and was not nailed to the cross. It was quite late when we finished looking at photos of members from other countries and hearing how they live and cope with trials and joys.

Marriages for people in some of these countries can be a problem, because of the government requirements and costs involved. While there, I was able to conduct a wedding for a young couple! The members of the little Libreville congregation are thrilled!

We also talked about the possibilities for the future (TV or radio broadcasts, getting official recognition for the Church, visiting programme with Cameroon, youth activities, etc.).

Ghana, Accra

From Gabon, I had to fly across the Gulf of Guinea to the countries of Ghana, Togo and Benin. We have a small English-speaking group in Ghana. I was privileged to spend time with them, discussing plans for the Feast of Tabernacles and future opportunities in Ghana. We met with other people who had been part of Worldwide Church of God, and discussed news of others they had met over the years.

From Accra, a member drove me to the Togo border, giving us privileged time to fellowship, and I learned more of Ghana's recent Church history. He is a dynamic young fellow with clear ideas.

Togo, Lomé

I met with a Protestant pastor and director of "Promesses" magazine. He obviously hadn't seen our article with Luther in the spotlight. He was in agreement with our doctrines on full immersion baptism, laying on of hands, clean and unclean meats, salvation by grace and keeping the law, so I scratched a little deeper with the litmus test—the Sabbath and the Holy Days. That didn't ring a bell, so after a little study on the first and seventh days of the week and Jesus' three days and three nights in the tomb... in a nutshell, he was agreeing profusely. My counsel for him was to finish the Bible Study Course and give priority to reading the Holy Day booklet. He left without making indication of any forthcoming change, just happy to have spent time discussing the Bible and finding some common ground. It seems that the African Protestants/evangelicals accept or tolerate each other with various "higher levels of understanding," no matter what they do or do not believe in common.

Togo, Afagnan

Our Togolese member and leader met me in Lomé with our faithful taxi man, and off we went to Afagnan and the

Millennium "Chic" Hotel. I had a choice of rooms: with or without running water! I dropped my bags and spent the evening with the member and his family.

I counselled a woman for baptism and also had an opportunity to counsel with the wife of another member. She is following the example and instruction of her husband.

Sabbath was as exciting as ever, with 22 of us. Some people were missing: children grown up and now living in Lomé, the capital city, and others not able to attend because this is the rainy season and travelling in some areas becomes problematic.

The day began before 9:00 a.m. with fellowship and we started on time, despite some few straggling in later because of the rain. People walk to services, so they have to take detours to avoid the flooded routes. I gave a sermonette on Colossians 2:14, 20–23, followed by a sermon on answered prayer. We ate a simple rice meal that my host's wife had prepared for everyone. I did a study on tithing in the afternoon, followed by Q&A until after sunset.

Sunday was a work day with our trusted translator. We went over a programme on studying the Bible that we aired live at Mokpokpo, the local radio station, for exactly half an hour. It turns out the Ewe language is understood by Ghanaians in the south. It might be a way of preaching the Gospel to those people as well, so I've been exchanging emails with the Ghanaian brethren who have already gathered information on radio stations.

Benin, Cotonou

A member met me at the border of Togo and Benin and, after formalities and some negotiating, we headed out for Cotonou, two hours away.

Monday was a work day. We met with some mutual friends in Benin for early morning coffee. The rest of the morning I was busy with LYC preparation, including a four-hour conference call with my wife, Fanny, in Belgium, and John Meakin and Simon Roberts in the UK, as we refined our planning for this year's camp in Belgium.

I was then whisked away by the member on motor-bike to the home of another member for a Bible Study with our tiny Cotonou group. We were eight adults and four kids. I did the study on Colossians 2:14, 20–23, showed camp videos and answered questions till the rain stopped, then hopped through puddles to the main road to find a ride back to the hotel.

Before leaving Benin, I met with a representative of a radio station. As usual, they are most interested, so now I am waiting for an offer for Charlotte to evaluate.

Burundi, Bujumbura

From Benin, it was back into the air to fly to Central Africa and the nation of Burundi, arriving in the capital, Bujumbura.

We have a few members in this country who I was eager to see again. In addition, we had some interested people desiring a visit, individuals who were currently ministers in COG 7th Day–Jerusalem conference. We recommended that these men travel to Tanzania for the Feast of Tabernacles, so that they can have contact with the ministry and the church in order to chart a way forward. The other brethren in Burundi will be traveling across the border into neighbouring Tanzania for the Feast as well.

I'm rather concerned for our members in Uvira, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The DRC, as it is commonly known, lies to the south of Burundi. This has been a very troubled area of Africa. Travel there is not advised and communications are difficult at best. Despite many attempts to contact them, by both myself and the brethren in Burundi, we have no news of them. Your prayers on their behalf would be welcomed.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa

In Addis Ababa, I met with a member as I flew in from Burundi. He was prospecting for a new job in Addis. By the time I returned to Addis, he had secured a new job and was obviously happy to have done so.

Ethiopia, Hawassa

We have some prospectives in Hawassa, south of Addis. There I met with one individual, who is enjoying life as an engineer and was happy to link up with others in the Church. Two individuals invited me over for lunch. All should be baptised on my next visit to Ethiopia.

These people are eager to see the Gospel being preached in their own language. They have translated the booklet *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?* in Amharic, one of the local languages of Ethiopia. A member in Ethiopia will do the appropriate proofreading as he is an experienced proofreader from his university days.

Ethiopia, Addis Ababa

Later in the evening, before catching my plane home, I met with the youngest brother of one of our prospectives. He has good academic questions so we'll see how he deals with the truth as time goes on.

Belgium

I met Mario Hernandez at Brussels International Airport on Friday morning as I returned. We enjoyed having him at services, then had a *Tomorrow's World* Presentation on Sunday with four visitors and a picnic at our place afterwards with Church members.

I wish that many of you could have been there to share these awesome moments with our lovely, committed and faithful brethren, and with the excited people who have come in contact with us via the Internet. It is so obvious that God's Work isn't finished and the responses prove that we must continue, with all our means, to preach the Gospel! ^(LH)

UNDERSTANDING HEBREWS 11:1 continued from page 2

they would do. They would not compromise by bowing down to an idol! They would obey God, because they had faith that He existed and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him!

What Will Carry Us Through Trials?

Faith is the kind of evidence that gives courage to go through the most excruciating trials without giving up. "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..." (Hebrews 11:36–37). Only faith gives us such assurance that we, too, will obey God in the face of adversity.

No one knows what trials may come upon us in the future, but the ultimate test of our faith is evident from the faith chapter. It is whether or not we obey God. Living faith requires obedience. It is easy to talk a good fight, but to walk the walk is another matter. God gives us a clue as to what we will do when future trials come upon us. In the Parable of the Unjust Steward, Jesus explained: "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also

in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke 16:10–11).

Some envision themselves standing tall when the big trial comes. They imagine themselves standing firm, as did the three young men who stood before Nebuchadnezzar. But will they? God reminds us that what we do today indicates what we will do in the future. Little things matter. Notice the Parable of the Minas. "And he said to him [the one whose mina had earned ten minas] 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities'" (Luke 19:17). And we know what happened to the man who was fearful and failed to act on faith (Luke 19:20–26).

Evidence for what we believe is important, but without the evidence of faith, we will ultimately fail, just as the children of Israel failed. This is why Galatians 2:20 is so important. Human memory is fickle. What we saw yesterday may appear different today in the face of what is before us. Human faith is also fickle. What we ultimately need is the faith of Jesus Christ dwelling in us by the power of the Holy Spirit! Only then will we have faith as our evidence!

Geoff E. Weston



One-Year Anniversary: Congratulations, Springfield!

On the Sabbath of April 1, 2017, the **Springfield, Illinois**, congregation celebrated its very first anniversary. We prayed so long and hard about starting a congregation in the area that it's hard to believe it has already been an entire year! It was a special day of sermons, fellowship and food. God's Church is growing!

—Ally Maddox

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Aaron (Shelby) Vice, of the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation, are pleased to announce the birth of their second son, **Isaac Philip Vice**, on July 1. He weighed 7 lbs., 11 oz., and was 20 ¼ inches long. Mother and baby are doing well and big brother Asher loves his new baby brother. Grandparents are Donna Vice of the Lafayette congregation and Phil and Audrey Watkins of the Little Rock, Arkansas, congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Simon Jackson and Valerie Berkes, of the Joliet, Illinois, congregation, were united in marriage on July 30 as the highlight of an inspiring weekend retreat in picturesque Door County, Wisconsin, hosted by the Upper Midwest congregations of the Living Church of God. A reception followed the ceremony, which was conducted by Area Pastor Phil West.

The wedding of **Mr. and Mrs. Kasani (Acadia) Kotamo** took place on 2 April, with Mr. Adam West officiating. The couple were surrounded by family and friends for the beautiful occasion.

After meeting at LYP camp six years ago, **Jake Hunter** and **Cindy Rivet** were married in Mandeville, Louisiana, by Area Pastor Glen Harrison on Sunday, June 11. Cindy is the daughter of Mike and Belinda Rivet of Luling, Louisiana, and Jake is the son of Phil and Cindy Hunter of Carrollton, Georgia. Jake and Cindy reside in Georgia.

Alan Veronese and **Eva Mallaun** were united in marriage on Sunday, July 2, at the beautiful Magnolia Plantation in New Orleans, Louisiana. The evening ceremony, conducted by Area Pastor Glen Harrison, was followed by an elegant reception of food, dancing, and joyous celebration. The bride is the daughter of Robert and Stephanie Bradford of the New

Orleans congregation, and the groom is the son of Noemi Montoto of the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, congregation. The couple attends services in New Orleans.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred (Joyce) Mullett celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on July 8, enjoying cake and fellowship after Sabbath services with their Tampa, Florida, brethren. The previous weekend, their four daughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren, honored them with an anniversary party. Mr. and Mrs. Mullett have been faithful members of God's Church for more than 50 years.

On the Sabbath of July 1, **Mr. and Mrs. Johnny (Jewell) Kellum** were pleasantly surprised when the Springfield, Missouri, congregation presented them with a special cake, flowers, and a card signed by all the brethren, in celebration of their 60th anniversary.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill (Dorothy) Olsen, of the Springfield, Missouri, congregation, celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on June 28. They were baptized in 2004 and ordained deacon and deaconess in September of 2010.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Yancy Taber was ordained an Elder on the Sabbath of May 13 by Evangelist Gerald Weston, Evangelist Richard Ames, Pastor Rod McNair, and Elder Michael DeSimone. Mr. Taber is now serving as Associate Pastor to Mr. Lambert Greer in the Knox and Ft. Wayne, Indiana, congregations.

Mrs. Laura Denny, was ordained a deaconess on the Sabbath of May 13 by Evangelist Gerald Weston, Evangelist Richard Ames, Pastor Rod McNair, and Elder Michael DeSimone. Mrs. Denny serves in her home congregation in Charlotte, North Carolina.

We want to hear more about 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

Mr. Glen Duke, a longtime member of God's Church, died Sunday, October 2, 2016, in Monroe, Louisiana. He is survived by his wife, Kay, of 49 years, and three sons: Curtis, Paul, and Ronnie. Mr. Duke loved to discuss the Bible and longed for the Kingdom. Pastor Daniel Friz conducted his memorial service.

Mr. Roland D'Eon, of the Kingston, Ontario congregation, died peacefully in his sleep on January 15 at the age of 89. Hearing Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong on the radio eventually led to his family attending services in Toronto, Ontario in July 1967, and then to baptism for both him and his wife in January of 1968. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Lewela, and by four children: daughter Denise St Pierre, son Harold D'Eon (Deronda), daughter Barb Gibbs (John) and son Glen D'Eon (Patty). His mild manner, happy disposition and hospitable nature will be missed. The memorial service was conducted by Area Pastor Winston Gosse.

Mr. John Bennett Allen, a member of God's Church since 1968, died March 31 in Ruston, Louisiana. He was preceded in death by his wife of 57 years, Nelda. They served God many years as a couple, setting a wonderful example for the local congregation and all who knew them. Mr. Allen's kindness and sense of humor made a positive impression on all. He is survived by three sons: Dennis, Kelvin, and Benny. Elder Hermie Brown conducted his funeral service.

After 81 years of life, **Mr. Paul McPherson** finished his Christian race on July 1. He became a member of God's Church in the 1960s. For more than a year, Mr. McPherson was unable to attend services in Peoria, Illinois, because of failing health, but he kept up with sermons by CD. Mr. McPherson never tired of learning more and always enjoyed talking about God and the Truth.

Dr. Ben Benibo, 67, of the Chattanooga, Tennessee, congregation, died on July 6, at his residence. Baptized in 2012, Mr. Benibo was a faithful member who loved serving God's people and he will be greatly missed. His Ph.D. was in Poultry Science and he published several notable scientific studies. He is survived by his wife and two sons, as well as many extended family members.

Mrs. Wileen Franks, 89, of the Thomasville, Georgia congregation, died on Wednesday, July 12 at her residence. She was a retired schoolteacher. Mrs. Franks is survived by her husband of 67 years, Ronald. Mr. Joe Brown conducted her funeral service.

Ms. Sherrie Javine, 71, died on July 24. Just a few weeks before her death, she moved from Arizona to South Carolina to be

near family there. She loved her family, and also enjoyed crafts, cooking, gardening, and puzzles, and she had been a professional accordionist. Ms. Javine was baptized in 2014. She is survived by three sons, two daughters, ten grandchildren, thirteen great-grandchildren, two brothers, and three sisters. Mr. Mike DeSimone officiated at the memorial service.

Mrs. Jeannie Brazil, 71, of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, died early Friday morning, July 28. Mrs. Brazil had been a faithful member of the Church of God since her baptism in 1969. She worked in real estate, ran her own cleaning company and had worked tirelessly in a number of different facets of the Work at Headquarters in San Diego and then in Charlotte. She endured many trials moving through "the strait and narrow" pathway but remained strong in her beliefs. Even after her health caused her to "retire" from her daily duties, she continued to volunteer when there was a need. Mrs. Brazil is survived by her three daughters, Tracie Boleyn, Bonnie Bonjour and Laura Marino, along with twelve grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Her memorial was conducted by Messers. Rod McNair and Davy Crockett.

Mrs. Peggy Frances McNaughton, 79, a longtime, faithful member of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, died on Sunday, July 30. She was the last one remaining of a family of fourteen siblings. Mrs. McNaughton and her husband of 61 years, James, were fixtures at every activity, Bible Study and Sabbath service of the local congregation until health concerns made it difficult for them to attend on a regular basis. Her love for the membership, especially the little children, was always evident in her service to her brothers and sisters in the local area. Her delicious baked creations—which she described as "not looking too good but you can eat it"—were one of the main reasons that the local Silent Bake Auction fundraiser was a success year after year. Her husband survives Mrs. McNaughton along with one son and her daughter, Wanda, who also attends in Charlotte. Messers. Rod McNair and Michael DeSimone conducted the funeral.

Mr. Hennie Olwage, 77, died the morning of August 2. He was a longtime member, baptized in 1979, and faithful deacon, ordained in 1994. Mr. Olwage served faithfully in the Kimberley, South Africa, congregation and leaves behind his wife of 47 years, Magda, one daughter, three sons, and seven grandchildren. His daughter and one son are baptized members of the Living Church of God. Mr. Olwage will surely be missed and we are looking forward to meeting him again in the Kingdom of God. Area Pastor Christo Botha conducted the memorial service.

COMMENTARY

For Signs and Seasons

It's peculiar what can trigger our memories: sights, smells, a song, etc. In my particular case, trimming an overgrown inbox recently brought to mind fond memories, going back years ago.

We all reminisce on life's experiences at times: enjoyable occasions, exciting moments of success and achievements, friends whom we've loved. There were periods of life when the good times seem to fly by. There were times when we never thought we'd make it out of a trial. These are what some call the "seasons of life," famously written about in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. The nostalgia and occasional sadness from going down "memory lane" is exaggerated when we are removed from a "season of life" we can never relive, such as childhood. It can be painful when we are removed from friends and family by the sting of death. Being human is a contrasting ebb and flow of sorrow and joy, and everything in between.

In Ecclesiastes 3, the Preacher of Israel states that everything is "beautiful in its time" (v. 11). The fabric of time and experiences we call life can seem very beautiful when recalling the "good times." God—who inhabits eternity and is not bound by times and seasons—*gave* times and seasons for us to enjoy. With the physical creation comes the byproduct of times and the various seasons. In setting the earth and other astral bodies in their places, God said they were to be "for signs and seasons, and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14). Yet the Preacher also acknowledges that, while it is a gift to recall the past, God has put eternity in the hearts of human

beings (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Knowing where we come from and what we have experienced is not the answer to reconnecting with loved ones, nor is it the answer to where we are ultimately going.

True Meaning

The answer to the desire to reconnect with loved ones and find meaning in life's past "seasons" is part of what the Preacher alludes to as a mystery in the latter half of Ecclesiastes 3:11: "no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end." The mystery of making sense of past, present and future is summed up in what God calls His "feasts" (Leviticus 23:1-2).

God has outlined His great plan for mankind from beginning to end through these observances. They revolve around three agricultural "seasons" made possible by the physical creation referred to in Genesis 1:14. God's Holy Days are beautiful in their time, both in the annual festival celebrations God's people enjoy, and especially in what they represent. The "Spring" festival season focuses on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and redemption and deliverance. Pentecost focuses on the Church and holiness. The "Fall" festival season focuses on a time when the entire world will be reconciled to God and lost loved ones will even be reconnected with through resurrection. The Holy Days are a mystery to the world, yet paradoxically they offer the world hope in some of the most joyous occasions yet to come. Thank God He has given us both the "seasons of life" to enjoy, as well as His festival seasons, which point to our greatest hope.

—Jonathan Bueno

The above is adapted from one of the many commentaries discussing vital topics facing our world, available at the lcg.org and TomorrowsWorld.org Web sites.