

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Anxiety over a Future Threat

Dear Brethren,

My Editorial in this edition of the *Living Church News* is titled, “It Is Your Patriotic Duty to Vote.” I can hear it now from the critics—*Weston is leading the Church into politics!* I find that thought quite amusing, because the article says something very different from what they will accuse me of. So, why give them ammunition?

A bit more than a decade ago, there was a young man running around proclaiming, “Mark my words, there will be no Living Church of God in six months.” But rather than admit that his prediction was grossly in error and dare to question his decision to leave our fellowship, he chose to continue following a man who led him away from doing the Work and into an unproductive end. Sadly, that leader died, and with him the organization he started.

Then there was the strongly proclaimed idea that Living University would be ordaining women as ministers. There was no question about it! It was going to happen! Yet L.U. was replaced by Living Education, and we have yet to ordain even one woman as a minister anywhere in the Living Church of God—nor will we ever do so. Where was the evidence for believing such nonsense? And where are those accusers now? Have they reassessed their decision to leave us as a result of something that was patently incorrect from the beginning? I think you know the answer.

Another young man, who was too young to understand what happened in the Worldwide Church of God, went about proclaiming, *Weston is taking the Church the same direction as Tkach.* That was at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Church was dealing with something we had never faced before—having to deal with government- and venue-imposed mandates regulating our meeting for services and Holy Days. We had to function as one cohesive Church with congregations all over the world, though regulations varied widely from place to place.

Sadly, there were some who were willing to divide God’s people over masks and a temporary cessation of in-person singing. Neither restriction lasted long in most jurisdictions. Today, it is the rare individual who chooses, of his or her own volition, to wear a mask at our services, and most of us have been singing hymns collectively for more than three years. Some who criticized us for temporarily holding services online are now so scattered that they only have online services available to them!

Anxiety and Fear

In Jonathan Haidt’s new book *The Anxious Generation*, he writes, “Anxiety is related to fear, but is not the same thing. The diagnostic manual of psychiatry (DSM-5-TR) defines fear as ‘the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas anxiety is anticipation of future threat’” (pp. 26–27). Anxiety—the “anticipation of future threat”—is what we see in the examples I’ve noted. Haidt’s thesis explains how electronic media has damaged many adolescents, and it is interesting to see that an irrational fear of an anticipated future threat is the common thread linking the three very different examples above.

More recently, I have heard from more than one source that the Living Church of God is becoming exclusive, moving in an isolationist direction. The specific accusation varies—some say we are self-righteous and think we are better than others, while others make the absurd claim that we are, or soon will be, cutting brethren off from their family members. That is pure nonsense!

Yes, it is true that some members in our fellowship are self-righteous, and some may believe we are the only people of God. But that was *never* Dr. Meredith’s thinking, nor is it mine or that of the overwhelming majority of our ministry. At the same time, we recognize that there *are* differences—that the

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statement “we are all the same” is not accurate. If we were all the same, why did some choose to start their own organizations when they recognized that Dr. Meredith was already preaching the true Gospel, giving a warning to the world, and feeding the flock? And what about those who have broken off from us? No, dear brethren, it is delusional to think that we are all the same. We have great similarities, but we have different beliefs about what the Bible says about Church government and different ideas about the identity of nations, just to name a couple.

There are those who do not believe in the seven successive Church eras described in Revelation, even though this was longstanding doctrine in the Church prior to the breakup of WCG. We continue to recognize Church eras for many biblical reasons. The last two eras of the Church are very different, as one can see from reading Revelation 3—and their outcomes are different. Christ Jesus says to Philadelphia, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (v. 10). To Laodicea, He says, “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (v. 16).

Both Philadelphia and Laodicea were Church congregations in the first century AD, and they are eras with two different attitudes at the time of the end. As we know, the predominant attitudes of all seven churches could be found among people in each of the seven original congregations, and the same applies in each of the succeeding eras. However, specific attitudes dominate the different congregations and eras.

Why does this truth make some people uncomfortable? One prominent leader said that believing in eras promotes competition and judgmental attitudes between God’s people. Fair enough—some individuals will put down others as being Laodicean rather than Philadelphian. But if this is true about eras, is it not also true regarding the original congregations in Asia Minor? Yet no one denies that there were seven literal congregations to which the letters were sent. So, that argument is a red herring; it diverts attention from the truth that God inspired letters to seven congregations with seven different sets of strengths and weaknesses—congregations in Asia Minor that represent seven eras, or stages, through which the

Church of God would pass from the first century to the time of Christ’s return.

Are Jesus Christ’s own inspired warnings through the Apostle John invalidated just because some self-righteous individuals, lacking wisdom and contrary to scriptural admonition, compare themselves among themselves (2 Corinthians 10:12)? There have always been people among the brethren who are self-righteous and even unconverted. Indeed, just as there were seven different attitudes in the seven congregations recorded in Revelation, so are there seven different attitudes that have dominated the Body of Christ over the last two millennia. (Please review our booklet *God’s Church Through the Ages* for further information on this subject.)

The Age of Misinformation

A popular quip tells us that the difference between a conspiracy theory and a “fact” in today’s world is about six months. In our deceit-filled world, this is too often the case. Yet it ignores the sobering truth that there are also many patently false conspiracy theories. As we saw in the examples I cited at the start of this article, even members of God’s Church are sometimes susceptible to conspiracy theories—and, if there is anything we have learned, someone once bitten by a conspiracy theory is almost never again persuaded by the truth of the matter. We live in what is often called the “Information Age”—but, more accurately, we might call it the Age of Misinformation. The Internet, though helpful in so many ways, is dangerously rife with deliberate fabrications. No truer words can be found than those found in Isaiah: “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter” (59:14).

Our world is in deep trouble and is looking for a savior in all the wrong places. Friends, family members, and fellow workers often tell us that it is our patriotic duty to vote. Strong opinions prevail among those who came out of the Worldwide Church of God. To learn the biblical truth on the subject—the truth God’s Church has consistently taught—be sure to read my article on the next page.



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“It Is Your Patriotic Duty to Vote.”

United States President Abraham Lincoln stated that “government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.” Although other nations may not use the same words, the idea of government by *the people* resonates in the hearts of many—even in the Church of God. But is this God’s way?

How well is government by *the people* working? Regarding its efficacy, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill spoke cynically before the House of Commons in 1947: “Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (*Churchill by Himself*, p. 574).

The idea that democracy, while not perfect, is still the best of all possible governments has formed the thinking of many in Western-style democracies and republics. This thinking is often true of many members of the Church of God. Some leaders are clearly better than others, which is even seen in how the Bible describes the kings of Israel and Judah, and this can make some members of the Body of Christ desire to make their voices heard to ensure the best leader is elected to office. But, again, is this how God thinks on the subject?

Furthermore, we find that one side of the political spectrum is often on the wrong side of almost every biblically defined moral issue. Should we not then vote against candidates who promote abortion, same-sex marriage, transgenderism, legalization of recreational drugs, euthanasia, and a host of other morally defective stances? Should we not want to see in office the person who professes to be on the biblical side?

There are scriptures supporting human government. The Apostle Paul suffered under the hands of Roman governors, yet he wrote, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13:1–2).

Does this therefore indicate that we ought to vote into office those who share some, or even many, biblical values? Christian nationalists think so, as explained by

Christianity Today: “Christian nationalism is the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way... that America is defined by its ‘Anglo-Protestant’ past and that we will lose our identity and our freedom if we do not preserve our cultural inheritance” (“What Is Christian Nationalism?,” February 3, 2021).

What about those of us in the Church of God? Should we support the Christian nationalist movement? If not, should we vote for other reasons?

In American politics, it is well known that a politician must satisfy his base of supporters to gain his party’s nomination. This usually means pandering to the extreme of either side of the equation. But once he is the party’s nominee, he must move to the center to capture the votes of the undecided in the middle of the spectrum—in other words, tell the people what they want to hear, whether it is the truth or not. Perhaps this explains in part why politicians are famous for making promises but not for following through on them, though some leaders do better than others at fulfilling their promises.

So, what should you do as a true servant of God? Is it your patriotic duty to vote for the lesser of two evils? Are we to use human reason, or should we look to God for the answer?

Adam and the Two Trees

Mr. Herbert Armstrong often referred to the two trees in the Garden of Eden. What do those trees have to do with this subject? Everything! The 1969 *Ambassador College Envoy* addressed man’s attempts to build a world on his own. The yearbook addressed the notion that “experience is the best teacher.” It went on to show how worldly education—“the Mother which spawned the Scientists, Captains of Industry and Business, Politicians and Rulers, Leaders in Modern Society, and the Theologians”—has created a “sick, chaotic world of violence.” Addressing the subject of government, the *Envoy* explains:

The modern world has produced three more or less new forms of government. Each promises peace, happiness, and prosperity for its people.... United States and British-type “Democracy”; Swedish and French-type Modern “Socialism”; and atheistic Communism.

All three are predicated on the theory that every individual has the right to share in the results of Science, Industry, and the modern life. All three are based on a system of Industry, and diffusion of Education. But what do we actually find? We find some heads of state sincerely seeking peace, and the betterment of their peoples. But none is bringing peace because none knows the WAY to peace. But all too often we find also the opposite. We find selfish, greedy men of excessive vanity, ambitious in their lust for RULE, scheming to get their hands on the throttle of POWER for personal aggrandizement and monetary gain. We find graft, immorality, deception, dishonesty, running rampant in high places.

Governments promise PEACE—but bring WARS!

Brethren, do we really think there will be a “knight in shining armor” who can solve our problems, other than the Prince of Peace? Surely not, but some may look for more modest benefits from a candidate they believe will bring solutions to *some* of those problems. However, the real solution can never be found in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It must be found in the word of God.

Adam chose the wrong tree, and mankind has been following his example ever since. Mr. Armstrong recognized the tendency, even among those who seem to be members of the Body of Christ, to get caught up in this world’s entertainment, education, cultural norms, or systems of governing. Yet the Church of God has traditionally refrained from involvement in voting, jury duty, and the military. Why? Because we are called to a *higher* mission.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus three times referred to Satan as the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and Paul explained that the god of this age blinds the minds of men from understanding the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3–4). And we must never forget Paul’s words: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1–2).

Why Are We Called Now?

Scripture is clear that God is not calling the whole world at this time. So, if He is not calling everyone, why is He calling anyone? Two reasons: The first is to do His will by proclaiming the good news of His coming kingdom and warning the world of where it is heading. The second is to prepare a few during this age to share in that ruling government. These few are those who learn the way of peace during this life. They will then teach the way to peace, prosperity, and happiness to all during the soon-coming millennial reign of Christ.

Paul explains that we are citizens of a different country. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20–21). This does not say we will go to Heaven when we die. Notice that he refers to “heaven, *from which we also eagerly wait* for the Savior.” When Christ returns, His reward will be with Him (Isaiah 40:10; 62:11). Notice also that we are “registered in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23).

Paul tells us that we as Christians represent that kingdom. “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). While the context of this passage directly refers to Paul and his fellow ministers, the principle of ambassadorship applies to all of us. As he wrote a few verses earlier, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (v. 17). When we were baptized, we pictured the death of the old man and came up to a new way of life. We became a new creation with an eternal citizenship, to become ambassadors of that new country.

Even human ambassadors do not take part in the politics of a foreign government; they live in a foreign land and represent their country in it. This does not mean that they do not have strong opinions about the country to which they are sent, but they do not vote or lobby for a party or candidate—they are expected to put on a neutral face. They obey the laws of that country and show respect for its citizens.

Nebuchadnezzar’s Lesson

The Bible is not ambiguous as to who has the final say in choosing national leaders. It is not you and it is not me. To put it bluntly, we cannot outvote God. He has power over every circumstance that can turn an election “on a dime.” Individuals who looked to be a “shoo-in” leading up to an election have suddenly fallen for more than one reason. The Bible is clear: It is God who determines elections and leaders.

This lesson was brought home to a great king 2,600 years ago. God gave King Nebuchadnezzar a dream, and Daniel was given supernatural understanding to explain the meaning of that dream—that it is God who “removes kings and raises up kings.... For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory... and has made you ruler” (Daniel 2:21, 37–38). Yes, it was God who chose this carnal king for His purpose.

In a later dream, Nebuchadnezzar was told that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men” (Daniel 4:17). If God sets up even the lowest of men, who are we, with our limited minds, to

vote against God? He puts rulers in place who are the best to suit His purposes, often speeding up or slowing down the fulfillment of prophecy. Under inspiration from God, Daniel further explained to Nebuchadnezzar, “They shall drive you from men... *till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses*” (v. 25).

Is it not obvious that God is in charge overall, while it is Satan, the devil, who promotes *government by the people*? Government from the bottom up has *never* been God’s way. When Moses could not handle the number of cases coming to him from the children of Israel, his father-in-law told him to teach the people God’s laws and statutes, so that they might settle their own disputes according to God’s principles. He then went on to instruct Moses, “Moreover you shall *select* from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens” (Exodus 18:21). These men, who feared God and were to use God’s laws in making judgments, were *selected* as secular judges.

Balloting

The principle of selection, or appointment, is what we also find in the New Testament for ordinations and offices in the ministry. “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5). Notice carefully that Church leaders were *appointed*, not voted in.

Some have tried to use a few verses in Acts to claim that the people democratically chose their leaders, but this is not being honest with the Scriptures. One example is found in Acts 1, when the Apostles needed a replacement for Judas. Peter clearly took the lead (v. 15). He set the parameters or qualifications: “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (vv. 21–22). From the small group of 120—of which probably half were women, and most others would not fit the qualifications as spelled out by Peter—only two were set forth. After praying about it, “they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles” (v. 26).

Some have equated casting of lots with *bal-lot-ing*. This is why some avoid the word *vote* and substitute *ballot*, but this is a deceptive and unscriptural word game. Any study of the biblical practice of casting lots recognizes it as a special appeal to Almighty God for a decision “secure from all influence of passion or bias” (“Lot,” *The People’s Bible Encyclopedia*); it has nothing to do with voting. Pieces of wood, stone, or clay, with names written on them, were cast into a container, and these lots were drawn out to determine a decision. The promised

land was divided by lots (Joshua 18:6–10). Specific duties for priests serving in their designated courses were determined by lot (Luke 1:9). And lots were used by the high priest to determine which goat was for the Eternal and which one was for Azazel (Leviticus 16:7–10).

In the case of Acts 1, neither the people nor the Apostles cast ballots. Instead, in accordance with every other such biblical reference, there would be one lot for Matthias and one for Joseph called Barsabas (v. 23). Their names were placed in a jar, bag, or basket, and one was drawn out. This is similar to the modern practice of “drawing straws.” In the case of replacing Judas, this was a special appeal to God, accompanied by heartfelt prayer, to guide the lot that would be chosen. This is also the last mention of the use of lots in Scripture—from that time on, leaders in the Church were always appointed.


“Your Kingdom Come”

Many are familiar with the four beasts that are described in Daniel 7, but Daniel’s vision does not stop with the destruction of these beasts and the little horn that comes up on the head of the last beast. It also gives us insight into a coronation ceremony in Heaven that will take place prior to Christ’s return: “One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven... came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13–14).

A subsequent verse has great relevance for the subject of this article: “Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (v. 27).

Notice the similarity to Jesus’ parable of the nobleman going into a far country (Luke 19:12–27). It is evident that the nobleman is Jesus Christ; He goes into a far country—Heaven—and receives a kingdom over which He is coronated and given authority. The saints, servants of God, will be appointed by Christ to reign over cities on this earth to bring about the peace and prosperity so elusive to human rule.

Dear friends, we must leave *no* part of the old man out of the water of our baptism. Will we still hang on to our carnal past, eating from the wrong tree, thinking that *government by the people* is God’s way? Do we understand what Mr. Armstrong taught regarding the two trees? The only candidate who truly matters does not need your vote; He has already been selected by His Father, who will also determine who sits on the right hand and left hand of our Savior (Matthew 20:23). ^(LN)



The Joy of Your Salvation

By **Richard F. Ames**

Calling out to his God, King David of Israel movingly pleaded, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit” (Psalm 51:12). But what exactly *is* salvation? What did David mean when he wrote those words, and what do those words mean to each of us?

We know that so many professing Christians are confused and deceived, believing that they have been saved for eternity simply by saying one prayer. They don’t understand that the result of genuine prayer is the growth of godly character. They don’t understand that salvation is not just a gift but also a process—not that we as converted Christians ever need to doubt our salvation, but rather that we learn to yield to our Savior to do His perfect work in us, making us complete (James 1:4).

The professing Christian world is confused and deceived—with many thinking that Christ’s work with them began and ended when they first accepted Him according to their limited understanding. They think that all a person has to do is say the name of Jesus and they’re “once saved, always saved.” They don’t know the truth about godly character. They don’t know the truth about God’s master plan of salvation. They don’t know *how* they are to be saved.

The Tenses of Salvation

Salvation is not just a one-time event, as most Protestants erroneously believe it to be. Rather, true salvation is past, present, and future. These are the three tenses to our salvation. First, let’s consider Paul’s inspiring and encouraging words about our *future* salvation: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:8–10). That’s the future—that’s how we *shall* be saved. And we all know the famous verse, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). That’s the future tense again.

Yes, Christ is alive, and He’s here in Spirit today. He’s at the throne of God, acting as our High Priest, ever making intercession for us. Indeed, there is a *present* tense of salvation. We read that “we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 2:15). That’s present progressive tense; it’s not that our salvation is already complete. We are all works in progress; God is still working with us. I know I personally have a long way to go—I pray to have some more years for overcoming. And I hope each of us are not in the process of perishing but are instead growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18). If we were *already* saved, there would be no need to grow spiritually, but we are *now being saved*.

Finally, there’s the *past* tense of salvation. We *have been* saved from our past sins. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). We have been saved from the death penalty. Consider that “when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:4–5).

What’s the washing of regeneration? It’s our baptism. When we are baptized, we come up out of the water and we have been forgiven of our past sins. We were saved from the death penalty, which means we were saved from our past sins. We are thankful for our God-given understanding of the past, present, and future aspects of salvation.

Physical Salvation

Many of you experienced the joy of salvation at your baptism, right after you came up out of the water and realized, *All my sins have been forgiven! I’ve been saved from the penalty of death and from all my past sins!* What great joy we all feel on that day!

But there is also a physical type of salvation. Most of us, at some time or another, have experienced a life-threatening situation. Yet we can look back and see that God intervened and saved us from death, or from something very close to that. As many of the brethren know, I have had some serious health

challenges recently. Earlier this year, for a while, when I was in the hospital's Intensive Care Unit, I wasn't at all sure that I would even live much longer. But God can rescue us from our trials. He can work miracles.

We all know the account in Scripture of the Apostle Peter walking on the water. Peter boldly said, "Lord, if it is You, command me come to You on the water" (Matthew 14:28). Jesus then commanded Peter to do so; He said "Come" (v. 29). At first, Peter did indeed walk on the water. But then he became fearful; "when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!'" (v. 30). And what happened? "And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased" (vv. 31-32).

Do you have genuine faith that Christ will save you even in your most difficult trials? When you doubt, will you let Him restore your faith? How many times have you prayed, *Lord, save me, or Father in Heaven, please save me?* Well, Peter prayed like that, and God saved him immediately.

Moses and Israel's Salvation

The history of the ancient Israelites is a history of God offering physical salvation from terrible trials. Like Peter who feared on the roiling waters, the Israelites feared when Pharaoh's chariots pursued them toward the Red Sea. But consider what Moses said to his newly free people: "And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace'" (Exodus 14:13-14).

There are times when we, like those Israelites, need to stay still, holding onto the faith and the hope that God will intervene—when we must "stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD." In such time, we must stay silent and wait for God to intervene on our behalf.

Yet there are also times when we must act: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward'" (Exodus 14:15). So, there are times when we stand still, and there are other times when we need to go forward. Continuing, we read that "the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore" (v. 30).

Let's consider another historical example of physical salvation, when Judah was invaded by Assyria. What did God do? People were basically starving: "And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria

departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh" (2 Kings 19:35-36). God can vanquish our enemies far beyond what we could ever do or imagine ourselves. He can save us from the greatest obstacles.

Deliverance, Preservation, and God's Grace

We know that the true Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. But that kingdom is an active kingdom, and its ruler is Jesus Christ. How does Paul describe the Gospel? He wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17). The good news of the Kingdom—remember, the Greek word *gospel* means "good news"—is that it will bring salvation to its subjects.

Under the entry "Salvation," the *NKJV Study Bible* reminds us, "The Greek word for *salvation* used by Paul literally means 'deliverance' or 'preservation.' In a spiritual context, the idea is rescue from the power and dominion of sin." Yes, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ's good news for us, is that He has the power to bring salvation!

As a mental exercise or a meditation, you can put in "good news" every time you see the word *gospel* used in your Bible. You can see that the different revelations of "good news" in your Bible all support and uphold the coming of the Kingdom of God, through which all who have ever lived will have the opportunity to be saved!

Taking Action

We all know Peter's inspiring and convicting message to the Jews who had only days before called for the execution of Jesus Christ. He called them to repentance, not just of that sin but of all their sins—all of their carnal human nature (Acts 2:38). He told them that they needed salvation. "And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.' Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:40-41).

Peter told the throng that they needed to take action to be saved. In response, around 3,000 of them accepted baptism. And what about our day, today? We certainly live in a "perverse" generation. The Living Church of God is proclaiming that same message—that everyone whom God calls should take action, repent, and receive salvation.

Many of you reading this article have yourselves "taken action." You were saved from the death penalty for sin, and this was made possible for you because you took action in the past, knowing from Paul that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as

a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Romans 3:23–25).

Notice that God did not, at baptism, save you from future sins you had not yet committed. Rather, He gave you the Holy Spirit to give you access to the power to overcome

We know that so many professing Christians are confused and deceived, believing that they have been saved for eternity simply by saying one prayer. They don’t understand that the result of genuine prayer is the growth of godly character. They don’t understand that salvation is not just a gift but also a process—not that we as converted Christians ever need to doubt our salvation, **but rather that we learn to yield to our Savior to do His perfect work in us, making us complete.**

your sinful nature and to learn to practice righteousness instead of sin. So, when someone asks you the question, *Are you saved?* you can answer, with confidence, *I was saved from my past sins by the shed blood of Christ. I am being saved, growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, so that I can become more like Him. And, in the end, I will be saved by Christ’s life* (Romans 5:10).

Saved by the Savior

We often call Jesus Christ our Savior, but how often do we really think deeply about what that title means? Consider the angel’s announcement to Joseph about Mary being pregnant with Jesus.

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20–21).

Notice that He would save people *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. To do this, He suffered, bled, and died. It’s not that we had to become worthy of salvation before Christ died for us. Rather, we read that “God demonstrates His own love to-

ward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Christ has that deep love for every potential member of His family, even those who have not yet accepted His offer of salvation.

And for those of us who have accepted His offer, He is our High Priest: “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). When we sin—not that we practice sin, but we all have human frailties we must repent of—we have a way of escape. “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

It’s not that we sin again and again, and that Jesus Christ will become the King of a sin-filled world. No—remember that John the Baptist said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Christ takes away your sins and mine, and the time will soon come when He will take away the sin of the whole world in His kingdom.

The Savior’s Mercy

We know that Christ sent us the Holy Spirit so we would be able to practice righteousness, not sin. But we also know that we continue to sin, having not yet been made perfect. But we should not live in worry about our salvation. We should remember what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:3–6).

No, God’s work in each of us is not yet complete—but we can still have joy and confidence in our salvation. We can call on God to save us from our weaknesses and our trials. Think of these words of King David:

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled; but You, O LORD—how long? Return, O LORD, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies’ sake! For in death

there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:1-5)

Yes, David told God why he should be delivered, as a dead David could not thank Him!

Asking God to plead his case, David said, “Also draw out the spear, and stop those who pursue me. Say to my soul, ‘I am your salvation’” (Psalm 35:3). David knew that God was his salvation. We should know that for ourselves as well.

Saved for a Purpose

As Christians, we are heirs of the Kingdom of God. We are heirs of eternal life. You’re heirs of the earth. The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall also inherit salvation. “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...?” (Hebrews 2:1-3).

The Laodiceans tend to neglect such a great salvation. Having been given such an awesome gift, we must not be like that—we must not grow complacent and think, *I don’t need to strive to be close to my Savior; He’ll do it all for me.* While He will do far more than we ask (Ephesians 3:20), He still wants us to have an attitude like David’s: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1).

We need not be afraid. Though Scripture tells us to work out our own salvation with “fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), it is not that we distrust our Savior or doubt His ability to save us. Rather, we look with awe and reverence at what God is doing in our lives. It is no small thing. It is not something we should neglect. He is mighty enough to save us to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25).

And He saves us for a purpose. We who are called in this present perverse age have been called to do the Work of preaching the Gospel to all nations. That Gospel of the Kingdom of God is also the gospel of salvation—not just yours and mine, but salvation of all who accept God’s call. And there is a reward that comes with our doing the Work: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

Yes, there is a process of salvation, of ourselves individually and of the whole world. Unlike those who believe that their salvation was a “one and done” event, we understand that our salvation will reach its completion at a wonderful time in the not-too-distant future, when we will inherit immortality:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption in-

herit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).

The World Needs Salvation

Most professing Christians have the false idea that salvation is only a past event, that you accept Christ and that’s it—“once saved, always saved.” But, as we have seen, salvation is a past, present, and future process. Again—if someone asks you the common question *Are you saved?* or *Have you been saved?*, you can give them the full answer: *I’ve been justified, redeemed, and saved from my past sins; I am now being saved as I grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ; and I shall be ultimately saved by Christ’s life.*

This world desperately needs salvation. Some of you older readers may remember the powerful address given to the United Nations General Assembly by United States President John F. Kennedy, who said, “Mankind must put an end to war—or war will put an end to mankind.... Today, every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable.... Together we shall save our planet, or together we shall perish in its flames” (September 25, 1961).

More than 60 years after President Kennedy’s warning, that threat has only grown worse. And when we think about the extinction of all mankind, we think about a deeper meaning and a more personal connection to the word *salvation*. When we pray, *Your Kingdom come*, we’re praying not only for ourselves; we’re praying for all humanity, that God will save the human race from total extinction. We pray that others will be saved, not just ourselves.

God has saved us from slavery to sin. He has given us the promise of eternal life. We read, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

We are strangers and pilgrims here on planet Earth, but we rejoice in the knowledge of what God is doing in our lives. So, let us thank God for the gift of salvation, as well as for His awesome plan that results in that salvation. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). Let’s remember to pray, as King David prayed, *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.* (L)



Overview of the Prophets

By **Josh Lyons**

When was the last time you cracked open the Old Testament book of Nahum? (Maybe newer Bible students are thinking “Nay-whom?”) What about Jeremiah or Ezekiel, or good ol’ Obadiah? If you’ve used the same Bible for a while, do some sections show more wear from extra use? In the Bible I’ve used for a number of years, the New Testament shows more wear than the Old. This is normal because there are parts of the Bible that we frequent more than others. Even Jesus and the Apostles quoted from some Old Testament books more than others, as recorded in the New Testament.

For many of us, some of the prophetic books might be ones we don’t read so often. This might not be true for everyone, but for many, books like Proverbs, the gospels, and many of the New Testament epistles are naturally easier to read, understand, and take personal lessons from. This is especially true in comparison to writings by some of the prophets, such as Nahum, Obadiah, and Habakkuk.

But, of course, Jesus said we should live by every word of God. So, this article will give a basic overview of the Prophets, specifically what are called the Major and Minor Prophets. It will give some basic background information and context, and then explain four major themes found in these books.

The Major Prophets consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets, or “The Twelve,” are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. God inspired men to write these 15 hard-hitting and inspiring books that have been read by generations for more than 2,500 years.

Why Are the Prophets Important?

These books make up a large portion of the Bible, with the Major Prophets comprising about 15 percent of the Bible. The individual books in the Major Prophets include what are typically the second-, third-, and fourth-longest books in our Bibles, after the Psalms. If we add the Minor Prophets to the Major, we have almost 20 percent, or a fifth of the Bible. That’s quite a chunk!

Another reason the Prophets are important is that many of God’s servants in the Old Testament were prophets, such as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and the men who wrote the books we’re discussing in this article. God used these men not only to write some of the Holy Scriptures, but also as part of the foundation of His plan: “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” (Ephesians 2:19–20).

The prophets’ writings also contain many lessons, prophecies, and parallels relevant for individuals and nations today, especially the Israelite nations.

Where Are the Prophets in History?

A prophet is a person called by God in a special way and given a mission to a specific person, group of people, or nation. God often gave prophets visions and other revelations, and the ability to perform miracles and dramatic signs. They had a very close relationship with God and spoke directly on God’s behalf, as Jeremiah 1:9 says: “Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.’”

As with much of the Bible, the context of history is very important to fully understand the prophets’ messages, so the following paragraphs will briefly give some historical context. Other context is also important, such as to whom the prophets were writing.

After leaving Egypt and wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Israel entered the Promised Land around 1400 BC. After that, the period of the judges lasted for a few centuries, followed by the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, who reigned from approximately 1050 to 930 BC. Israel largely reached its peak during Solomon’s reign, and then began declining due to increasing sins. The nation of Israel then split in about 930 BC into the Northern Kingdom (called Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (called Judah).

The Major and Minor Prophets began coming on the scene during Israel’s and Judah’s spiritual decline, about 100 to 200 years after the kingdom split. Broadly speaking, they wrote their books over a period of about four centuries: 800 to 400

BC. This relatively short period of time saw many prophets preach, warn, and write powerfully. The people in Israel and Judah were growing more and more sinful, so God was sending them many warnings to turn from their sinful ways.

The following lists the approximate centuries in which each of these prophets lived:

- 850–750 BC: Joel
- 800–700 BC: Hosea, Jonah, Micah, Amos
- 750–650 BC: Isaiah
- 700–600 BC: Nahum
- 650–550 BC: Jeremiah, Obadiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah
- 625–525 BC: Ezekiel
- 575–475 BC: Haggai, Zechariah
- 500–400 BC: Malachi

The dates for Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk are less certain than the others because their writings don't contain clear internal dating markers.

Along with knowing the general time frame, keeping some of the major contemporary events in mind is also helpful. For instance, to understand the twentieth century, it is vital to know about events such as World Wars I (1914–1918) and II (1939–1945), the formation of the state of Israel in 1948, the reunification of Germany in 1990, and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Many world-changing events occurred during the prophets' lives. In 721 BC, the Assyrian Empire conquered Israel's capital, Samaria, and began deporting the Israelites northward. This was the end of the ancient nation of Israel biblically and historically, with the ten northern tribes "lost" until the "last days." In 612 BC, the Assyrian Empire fell when its capital, Nineveh, was conquered by a group of peoples that included Babylonians, Persians, Medes, and Scythians.

Then came the time known as the "Babylonian Exile," largely between 604 and 539 BC, a period when many Jews were exiled to Babylon in stages. One of the major events of this period occurred in 586 BC, when Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire conquered Judah, destroying Jerusalem. Solomon's magnificent temple (the "First Temple"), built around 950 BC, was burned at this time. In 539 BC, the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persian Empire led by Cyrus the Great. This begins the period called "post-exilic," the time after the Jews' exile in Babylon. In 516 BC, the Second Temple was completed by the Jews after they returned from exile in Babylon.

Several major empires played a prominent role during these times. The Assyrian Empire dominated from 912 to 612 BC. The Babylonian Empire (the head of gold in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of Daniel 2) reigned from 625 to 539 BC, and then the Medo-Persian Empire took center stage from 558 to

330 BC. To ponder the magnitude of these historical events during the lives of the prophets, consider how utterly monumental the fall of Berlin, Beijing, Moscow, or Washington D.C. would be today. Please see our booklets *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy* and *The Middle East in Prophecy*, which cover these dates and events in detail.

Often, God inspired the prophets to issue warnings and predictions leading up to the fall of the prominent cities and nations of their day. These dates, events, and overall historical background are helpful when reading the Prophets because the messages of the prophets are communicated in the context of real people, events, cities, dates, and empires.

Now that we have in mind some basic information and historical context, let's examine four major themes in the Prophets. These aren't the only themes, but they are some of the most prominent.

First Theme: God Is in Charge

Mr. Richard Ames often reminds us that one of life's most fundamental truths can be simply stated as "God reigns supreme." This means that God is in total control of everything from electrons to galaxies—including nations and their leaders, weather, and individual lives—and from the newest newborn to the most powerful leader on earth.

Many examples throughout the Prophets make this point strongly. Sometimes, God states it directly, as when we read, "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:9–10).

Elsewhere, God shows how He has used nations and their leaders: "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation.... Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!" (Isaiah 10:5, 15). God used Assyria as a tool, just as a craftsman would use an axe or a saw. Similarly, God uses nations today, even the most powerful ones, as He sculpts the masterpiece that is His ultimate plan for every human being.

And God hasn't just used nations and empires to guide history; He often leads individuals very closely, as with kings Cyrus of Persia (Isaiah 45:1) and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Jeremiah 25:9), as well as the prophets Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5), Hosea (Hosea 1:1–9), and Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2).

Second Theme: God Abhors Sin

God abhors sin—which, if it is not repented of, brings His wrath and judgment. This is a theme throughout the Bible, and one that the prophets communicated forcefully and fre-

quently. Page after page of the prophets' writings explains God's great displeasure at sin—often by His people in Israel and Judah, but sometimes by nations like Assyria (in Nahum and Jonah) and Edom (in Obadiah)—and explains the punishment that would come if the people didn't repent.

Notice these references to *iniquity*, *wickedness*, *evil*, *abominations*, and *sin*: “Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed, who establishes a city by *iniquity*” (Habakkuk 2:12). “You have plowed *wickedness*; you have reaped *iniquity*. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own way, in the multitude of your mighty men” (Hosea 10:13). “O Jerusalem, wash your heart from *wickedness*, that you may be saved. How long shall your *evil* thoughts lodge within you?” (Jeremiah 4:14). “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits *iniquity*, and does according to all the *abominations* that the *wicked* man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the *unfaithfulness* of which he is guilty and the *sin* which he has committed, because of them he shall die” (Ezekiel 18:24).

As the prophets warn against sin, they also describe the repercussions of failing to repent. Amos 3:13–15 is one example of the prophets' descriptions of God's coming punishment for sins: “‘Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,’ says the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, ‘That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions... I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end,’ says the LORD.”

Nahum 3:3–7 is part of God's message to the capital of Assyria, Nineveh, explaining that one of the dominant empires at that time would soon be utterly destroyed because of the people's sins:

There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses—they stumble over the corpses—because of the multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlot, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries, and families through her sorceries. “Behold, I am against you,” says the LORD of hosts; “I will lift your skirts over your face, I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame. I will cast abominable filth upon you, make you vile, and make you a spectacle. It shall come to pass that all who look upon you will flee from you, and say, ‘Nineveh is laid waste!’”

As these examples show, the prophets cried out to many peoples of their day to repent of their wickedness, lest the consequences of their sins be severe. This is one of the loudest and most vital messages in the Prophets that nations today, especially modern Israelite nations, should pore over and learn from—because they are following the same path.

Third Theme: God Desires Obedience

The prophets described the main *problem* as sin, and then gave the main *solution*: repentance and ongoing obedience to God.

Notice one of God's messages through the prophet Ezekiel: “I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways.... Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin.... I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 18:30; 33:11).

Another example was given by the prophet Jonah, called by God to preach a powerful message of repentance to Nineveh—which, as previously mentioned, was the capital city of perhaps the most powerful empire on earth at the time. It would have been like asking someone to go preach repentance to Berlin in 1940!

God said to Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jonah 1:2). Amazingly, this is one of the few examples of an entire city responding to a prophet's warning with sincere repentance, thereby avoiding God's wrath. “So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.... Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it” (Jonah 3:5, 10).

The story doesn't remain so positive for Nineveh and Assyria, though; the repentance didn't last, and several decades later, Nahum predicted Nineveh's destruction and Assyria's fall. Assyria fell in 612 BC.

Israel and Judah failed to respond to repeated messages of warning and repentance that God sent through His prophets. “Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and note it on a scroll... that this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the LORD; who say to the seers, ‘Do not see,’ and to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits’” (Isaiah 30:8–10). Because Israel and Judah didn't heed the prophets' messages, they endured God's punishment and were conquered by their enemies, never fully reaching the potential and outpouring of blessings that He would have granted if they had sincerely obeyed Him (Deuteronomy 28:1–14).

Modern Israelite nations are sadly making the same sinful mistakes, and the results will be even worse than what befell ancient Israel (Jeremiah 30:7).

Fourth Theme: There is Magnificent Hope

The Prophets contain a lot of “bad news.” Much of their messages warned people—especially Israel and Judah—of very

real and severe consequences if they continued down a sinful path. But, within the prophets' many dire warnings, they also vividly prophesied about a magnificent and glorious hope that would come at various steps in God's plan, especially at the end. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible* says that a key element of the prophets' messages was a "blend of judgement and hope" (p. 373). Multiple articles could cover the various aspects of hope the Prophets described, but here are a few.

The prophets prophesied about the magnificent hope of the coming of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. The Old Testament contains more than 300 prophecies about His coming, and many of those prophecies are found in the Prophets. At the time when the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth wouldn't be born for several hundred years; however, that Being was *alive* at the time of the prophets and was the One who inspired them to write about His future as a human being (cf. Luke 24:27; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:46; 8:58).

Isaiah prophesied about 700 years before Jesus' birth that He would be born of a virgin, called Immanuel ("God with us"), live in Galilee, bring light to the world, suffer greatly, take on sicknesses to allow for our healing, and die for the sins of many (Isaiah 7:14; 9:1-2; 53:1-12). About 200 years after Isaiah, the Logos inspired the prophet Zechariah to predict that He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, enter Jerusalem on a donkey, and have His side pierced (Zechariah 11:12-13; 9:9; 12:10). Scores of other examples could be mentioned, such as prophecies about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, by Micah (Micah 5:2); His sojourn in Egypt, by Hosea (Hosea 11:1); and Jonah's foreshadowing of His three days and three nights in the tomb (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:39-40).

A second aspect of hope the prophets foresaw was the glorious restoration that will take place when Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God to reign on earth during what we refer to as "the Millennium." As you may have noticed, we often read many passages from the Prophets during the Feast of Tabernacles, such as Micah's description of all nations going up to be taught by God, turning their weapons into useful tools, and sitting under their own fig tree (Micah 4:1-4). Other prominent prophecies about the Millennium are in Zechariah 14:16-19 and Isaiah 2:2-4; 35:1-10.

Isaiah was inspired to record beautiful and vivid descriptions of the great restoration that will occur on earth when Christ establishes the Kingdom of God, with Isaiah 9:6-7 being one of the most inspiring:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;
and the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of
the increase of His government and peace there will
be no end, upon the throne of David and over His

kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment
and justice from that time forward, even forever. The
zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Several centuries later, Jesus Christ would continue the marvelous message of hope, which He preached in city after city, declaring passionately the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43). Interestingly, Isaiah, Malachi, and others also prophesied that Christ would come as a Messenger of good news (Isaiah 61:1; Malachi 3:1).

Though there are others, we'll focus on just one more aspect of hope the prophets "saw" far in advance as God inspired them—the resurrection from the dead and eternal life. In the July–August 2021 *Living Church News* article "Life After Death: What Does the Old Testament Teach?," Mr. Gerald Weston wrote, "And there are more direct proofs that the Old Testament scriptures offer hope of eternal life. All three major prophets [referring to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel] attest to this fact."

Isaiah prophesied that God would one day "swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8). Jeremiah described that King David will be resurrected (Jeremiah 30:9). Ezekiel was inspired to record his breathtaking glimpse of the second resurrection, watching as dry bones in a large valley joined back together and were given flesh, their physical lungs taking in breath for the first time in centuries or even millennia. This pictured the time after the Millennium when most of mankind will be raised to physical life and given the opportunity to obtain eternal life (Ezekiel 37:1-14). Mr. Weston's article also explains the prophet Malachi describing the Book of Life, calling it a "book of remembrance" containing the names of those who obtain the gift and blessing of living forever in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 20:12, 15; 21:27). Again, these are just a few examples from the prophets' God-inspired writings that paint a splendid illustration of the hope that God allowed the prophets to glimpse far in advance, and which they wrote down more than two millennia ago.

In the period of approximately 800 to 400 BC, God inspired 15 men to preach, prophesy, and write vital messages not just for those living at those times, but also for many others who would come and go over the following millennia. In our current sliver of history, you and I can be inspired by, learn from, and nourish a soul-anchoring hope from the prophets' messages. These ancient writings form about a fifth of the Bible, containing vital warnings, prophecies, lessons, and hope—more relevant than ever for individuals and nations as time advances further toward the end of the age.

So, as a friendly reminder, don't forget to occasionally dust off Isaiah, Haggai, Micah, Hosea, and the rest of the Major and Minor Prophets to read and learn from the inspired words recorded by God's chosen messengers. (LN)

A Potentially Prophetic Commencement Speech

By **Wallace G. Smith**

When Mr. Harrison Butker, the 28-year-old kicker for the Kansas City Chiefs football team, spoke at a commencement address this past May, he kicked up quite a controversy.

Some saw it as simply another example of the culture war going on in Western civilization: traditional family structure and traditional values versus modern, progressive ideology. And, frankly, it was refreshing to see someone famous and under the age of 30 taking a public stand against the moral rot of our times.

Yet his speech was more than that. There was—believe it or not—a prophetic edge to it. Most commentators would miss that edge, but the members of God’s Church must not. If we take a little time to reflect, Mr. Butker’s speech may remind us of long-understood prophetic truths that can slip through our fingers in the ideological noise and confusion that surrounds us.

We published a shorter take on his commencement address in a commentary on the *Tomorrow’ World* website, titled “Harrison Butker’s Speech: Right, Wrong, and Possibly Prophetic.” But here in the *Living Church News*, let’s spend a little more time with it—and, in doing so, remind ourselves of truths we cannot afford to forget as Jesus Christ’s return draws nearer than it has ever been.

If you have not seen or heard Mr. Butker’s commencement address, you can find it in its entirety on YouTube or read its transcript on the website of the *National Catholic Register*. He gave his address on May 11, 2024, at the graduation ceremony for Benedictine College, a private Catholic liberal arts school in Atchison, Kansas. Mr. Butker had already made some waves with his views, so Benedictine College leaders surely understood what they were getting when they invited him to be their keynote speaker. And, if they did, he did not disappoint.

Let’s examine Mr. Butker’s speech from three perspectives: What it got right, what it got wrong, and what elements of it might touch on prophetic developments just ahead of us.

What He Got Right

Mr. Butker is to be commended for how boldly he called out many evils of today’s world and defended many biblical values

that the morally deteriorating Western culture has increasingly rejected as backward and passé, and even as vile.

He called out society’s fascination with many facets of the culture of death, such as euthanasia, as well as abortion—which he rightly called “the murder of innocent babies.” He noted how these sins, “as well as a growing support for degenerate cultural values in media, all stem from the pervasiveness of disorder.” Lest he be misunderstood, Mr. Butker described the “pride” so celebrated by the homosexual community as “the deadly sin sort of pride that has an entire month dedicated to it.” He pushed back against the notion that ideas and religious beliefs must be hidden away and kept private “whenever they go against the tyranny of diversity, equity, and inclusion,” noting that many “fear speaking the truth, because now, truth is in the minority.”

And the Chiefs kicker went further, advocating traditional concepts of gender roles, rooted in the biblical design of the family. He charged men to be “unapologetic in your masculinity, fighting against the cultural emasculation of men.” As for women, Mr. Butker expressed special concern: “I think it is you, the women, who have had the most diabolical lies told to you.”

He noted that many female graduates in the crowd were surely looking forward to successful careers in the business world, but also conjectured that most of the young women listening “are most excited about your marriage and the children you will bring into this world.” Choked with emotion while explaining how his wife’s support has been a necessity in his and his family’s success, he praised her choice to “embrace one of the most important titles of all: homemaker.” The comment brought a prolonged burst of applause from the audience.

Unsurprising Reactions

The reaction across the political spectrum was unsurprising. Social progressives, LGBTQ+ advocates, and others took Mr. Butker to task for his “hateful” and “bigoted” views. A *Guardian* piece by columnist Arwa Mahdawi—which would surprise no one familiar with her articles—was titled “Harrison Butker’s Misogynistic Graduation Speech Shows the Bigots Are Winning.”

As for the National Football League’s official statement that Mr. Butker’s views “are not those of the NFL organiza-

tion,” the satirical website *The Babylon Bee* was on target with its tongue-in-cheek headline: “‘Harrison Butker Does Not Reflect Our Values,’ Says League of Woman Beaters.”

To be sure, it is encouraging to hear a 28-year-old man use his platform to push back against the wickedness of our age, and we should not think he is alone in his generation. Many are waking up to the fact that the world is not what it should be, and a hunger for older ways—too hastily cast aside by past generations—seems to be growing among young adults. As Mahdawi laments in her article, sales of the kicker’s Kansas City Chiefs jersey have soared since his address. In fact, sales of the jersey in *women’s* sizes quickly sold out within days of the speech.

What He Got Wrong

But we cannot listen to the speech without noting that it was far more than a call to embrace traditional values, conservative values, or even biblical values. It was a call to embrace *Roman Catholic* values—actually, to embrace traditional Roman Catholicism itself.

On one hand, this should not be a surprise; Mr. Butker is a passionately traditional Catholic, and he was speaking at a Roman Catholic university. But for all the good in his address, it is in its Roman Catholic center that the speech loses its footing.

Mr. Butker said in his speech that the “Catholic faith has always been countercultural.” But it hasn’t been. In fact, much of what we see in Roman Catholic traditions are purposeful, intentional adoptions of pagan culture, adulterating Christ’s original teachings. Mr. Butker declared the Roman Catholic Church to be “the Church founded by Jesus Christ,” when, plainly, it is not. Its teachings, in ways large and small, stand in stark contrast to the teachings of the Church that Jesus Christ established and the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Mr. Butker pointed to “the holy sacrifice of the Mass” as “more important than anything else,” though Christ’s original followers would consider the ritual foreign and unlawful—a perversion and corruption of the biblical Passover.

Much more could be said, but in his well-delivered and stirring speech, Mr. Butker illustrated that it isn’t enough just to recognizing the maelstrom of evil into which society is being drawn. In fact, his solution—embracing an apostate counterfeit of the true faith of Jesus Christ—is a big part of how our present world got to where it is.

Put bluntly, the Roman Catholic Church and its Protestant offspring are the Harlot of Revelation and her Harlot Daughters, described in Revelation 17. They are founded on the rejection of God’s divine law and its replacement with the ideas of men—the attitude that since Adam and Eve has served as the broken foundation of our world. Turning from the satanic hedonism we see around us to Satan’s counterfeit

Christianity as a “solution” would be as unwise as leaping from frying pan to fire.

Prophetic Possibilities

Yet it is in this aspect of Mr. Butker’s speech—its passionate devotion to traditional, conservative Roman Catholicism—that we can see potentially prophetic significance in what one young football player has to say.

The counterfeit Christianity to which Mr. Butker would point young college graduates *will* one day wield massive authority in the world as no other religion ever has. That religion and the False Prophet who will lead it are represented by the First Horseman of Revelation, who goes out “conquering and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2). That apostate church will create an unholy union with a European beast power and will leverage the political, economic, and military might of that union to “make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Revelation 13:7) and to force the world to bend the knee to its twisted false version of Christianity (vv. 11–18).

It is easy in the secular West for Christians to get caught up in the illusion that end-time persecution will come at the hands of atheists, communists, or whatever bogeymen our over-politicized culture suggests. And, of course, there is a very real culture war between the secular and the religious. But Bible prophecy does not detail a future in which secular atheists run the world. Rather, it pictures persecution coming upon the saints of God through a triumphant, world-conquering, *counterfeit Christianity*—a religion that, in multiple ways, *appears* to be headed by Jesus Christ, but teaches the subtle twists of the devil (Revelation 13:11).

The persecution prophesied to come upon true Christians will *not* be in the name of Marx, Lenin, or Mao. It will be *in the name of Christ* (Matthew 24:4–5). Jesus Himself says that “the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2).

And with this in mind, we can see how a speech by a 28-year-old sports star, exhorting young Roman Catholics to embrace a more traditional version of their faith, is *very* significant. In an age when many Roman Catholics are frustrated by their church—headed by a largely progressive pope—appearing to compromise with worldly values, the robust and unapologetic devotion to “old school” Roman Catholicism that Harrison Butker represents could catch on among a new generation rejecting modern mores.

Mr. Butker encouraged the young men and women in his audience to embrace “our duty and ultimately privilege to be authentically and unapologetically Catholic.” We need to remember that Bible prophecy reveals that a time is coming when *billions* of deceived people around the world will heed such a call—and we need to remember what such a time will mean for Christ’s true followers. (LN)

Young Women and Modesty

By **Jeanine Smith**

Editor's Note: *The following two articles have been adapted from material found at LivingYouth.org, where you can find many other items of interest to Church youth and their families.*

We can tell from the Bible that women should not be ashamed of their bodies. When God created Eve, He made her beautiful, and women are designed to *want* to be that way. The Apostle Peter acknowledges that women indeed want to be beautiful, and he reminds them that the truest beauty is far more than skin deep (1 Peter 3:3). A Christian woman's character needs to be beautiful, and every godly woman wants to be beautiful on both the inside and the outside.

It is appropriate for women to desire to be beautiful in public, as well as in private. But that is not the same as being what the world calls “sexy”—by definition, sexually suggestive or stimulating. We should be mindful of our goal when we choose how to dress. Certainly we do not want to tempt others to view us as objects of lust, so we should think about something Jesus taught while He was expanding God's law: “I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28).

Consider this in light of the example of Job, a man about whom God said, “there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8). We note Job's words, “I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?” (Job 31:1). But this doesn't mean Job had taken an oath of celibacy—we read about a Mrs. Job, and while God replaced their children, Scripture does not indicate that she was ever replaced. Their three daughters were even called the most beautiful women in the land (Job 42:15).

So, we can assume that Job was attracted to his wife—that, after the most difficult trial in his life, he went to her for love and comfort after he felt accepted again by his Creator. It's safe to assume that Job loved Mrs. Job with all his heart and gave her lots of physical affection. If he was going to “look upon a woman,” it was going to be *his* woman.

Now imagine that we live down the street from Job. When we walk our dog in our short-shorts and crop-top, Job has to look away. When he goes to the Church picnic and plays softball, he has a hard time looking in our direction, because our sleek-fitting yoga pants show our muscles flexing and un-flexing with every step. When he gives a sermon, he must refrain from looking at us as he addresses the audience, because our keyhole blouse and pencil-skirt view is distracting.

Job is righteous, and he seeks to avoid lust. This doesn't make him a eunuch—he is a fully functioning adult male with a wife and many children. But as a man of God, walking in the same godly standards as our modern-day brothers in Christ, Job is practicing the very point Jesus taught thousands of years later, and he is not interested in gawking at any woman who is not his wife.

But does that mean that Job's neighbors should feel comfortable wearing the kinds of tight and revealing outfits that force him to look away? No, this doesn't seem fair—and it eventually causes Job to ignore his female neighbors who dress in that way, no doubt greatly reducing his interest in knowing those neighbors as friends.

Sisters in Christ

With this in mind when we consider clothing options, we should be aware of our modern sexualized society and recognize that, even inside the Church, not all men are up to Job's level of righteousness yet. A man may not *plan* to look, but the shock of seeing certain outfits within the congregation may leave him gawking until he comes to his senses and repents. Why make your brother stumble?

Satan wants to destroy the family, and part of his plan involves reducing women to objects for sexual gratification—and reducing men to puppets of their sexual lusts. Men and boys are not inherently disgusting, sex-crazed beings—but they *are* designed to notice women. God designed “the way of a man with a virgin” (Proverbs 30:18–19), and godly men want to have that “way” only with their wives. Our culture of multiple sexual partners has removed that loyalty. As a result, men in general are often accused of thinking only about sex, which is unfair; since women are not objects to be gawked at, we shouldn't dress as though we are.

The devil has confused women with arguments that we have the right to dress however we want, and that it's up to our brothers not to ogle. It's true that, if our brothers are like Job and have made a covenant with their eyes, they won't ogle. But why should we make their God-given task harder? If we do, we're only training our brothers to avoid looking at us as they strive to obey God. As daughters of God, we, too, are responsible for how we represent our Father, the Head of our Household.

So, when we go out in public, let's look in the mirror and be objective: *Am I wearing this because it makes me look appropriate for the situation I'll be in, or because it makes me look sexy?* If it's the latter, let's choose not to wear it, embracing our roles as sisters in Christ. (L)

Young Men and Modesty

By Mark Sandor

As a history teacher, one of the biggest complaints I ever heard from my students was about the school's dress code, and these complaints sometimes caused me to think about the relationship between female modesty and male thoughts. Students had been told that boys are easily distracted by female dress—hence, at least one of the reasons to have a dress code. While the students did not like to acknowledge that connection, the Bible also points out in 1 Timothy 2:9 that women should “adorn themselves in modest apparel” and focus more on “the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:1–6).

But this article is for young men: When you think of modesty, do you think it only applies to the ladies? That can be a dangerous trap, for two reasons.

First, it is also very possible for men to be immodest. Some men can focus so much on working out that it seems they idolize their bodies. While exercise and activity have great benefits for our physical and mental health, some men clearly work out primarily to look good.

This is usually revealed in how they act outside the gym. Have you ever known a guy who seems to be looking for every opportunity to take his shirt off, as if he's Chris Hemsworth? That guy is clearly not just after health benefits. He wants to display his body—a blatantly immodest act. Working out can certainly help men look better, but that does not give us an excuse to be immodest about it.

The second lesson about modesty, though, has to do with the connection I mentioned at the beginning of this short article: Do you let a woman's dress determine your thoughts? Yes, young ladies have specific verses in the Bible to follow, and it goes without saying that women who take the Bible seriously will take those verses seriously. But what about those women who do not? What is the likelihood that you will come across women dressed immodestly at the beach, the gym, or even Walmart? Pretty high. And if they are dressed immodestly, does that excuse your thoughts?

I hope the answer to that question is obvious to you. We men are without excuse.

Galatians 5:22–23 lists “self-control” as one of the fruits of God's Spirit. Men must learn to control their thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5) regardless of their circumstances—and we should not think we can hide our own sins behind someone else's. When Jesus told His followers to not even look at a woman to lust over her (Matthew 5:28), He did not give any kind of loophole based on how she was dressed. If you lust

after a woman, you are committing adultery. Whatever she is wearing does not excuse you.

Numbers 25 gives us a strong warning, telling of how the women of Moab seduced Israelite men. *Both* the worldly women and the Israelite men sinned by committing sexual immorality and idolatry—so, *both* groups were punished. The Israelite men suffered a devastating plague, while Israel later wiped out their seducers (Numbers 31).

The Israelite men were not spared because the Moabite women were immodest—they were expected to know better and avoid sin, regardless of how the world around them acted.

Brothers in Christ

For young men in God's Church today, there are “Moabite women” aplenty. And pornography is a horrendous sin that can easily become addictive for those who choose to go after these modern “Moabite women.” Our society encourages young women to sexualize themselves and dress immodestly. Even in God's Church, we must often revisit the concept of modesty, as society puts so many pressures on young women. But you, young men, are under just as many sinful pressures to think of young women as sexual objects rather than as sisters in Christ. From these pressures, the Bible exhorts you to flee (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Your sisters in Christ can serve you, young men, by dressing modestly—but you can serve them by controlling your thoughts, words, and actions toward them. Do you treat them like sisters in Christ or like Moabite women? Do you dare sin by asking them for sexual pictures? Who would ask their sisters for such things? If you have committed this sin, you need to seek forgiveness from God and from the women you have wronged.

Instead, men in God's Church should respect our sisters in Christ by being a brother to them. In fact, strive for that relationship with *every* woman you meet. We hope that most of you will have one wife, but aside from her, you must treat “older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity” (1 Timothy 5:2).

So, young men, do not think that modesty is only for the ladies to worry about. You, too, must avoid becoming vain about your appearance. And you must not shrug off your need to grow in self-control by blaming women for your lack of character. Even when a man meets an immodest woman, he has no excuse for developing a debased mindset. Let us look instead to the instructions and examples within Scripture, which allow us to have fulfilling relationships with *all* women as their brothers in Christ. (LW)



TITUS 2:3-5

Woman to Woman

A Heart of Stone

By **Amber Leonard**

There are many different personality types among ladies in the world and in God’s Church, as we can even see from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. God created such variety among His daughters for a reason: to help us grow into more humble, compassionate, and loving Christian ladies together. Many personalities work well side by side to accomplish goals, while other personalities may conflict with each other.

In any setting where there are many personalities, there is bound to be upset eventually. This is where it can become dangerous to our spiritual health if we let an offense, perceived or otherwise, progress in our minds. An offense can cause us to hold on to grudges and be bitter toward that lady for years. It may even create in us a heart of stone. What does our Father in Heaven say that we must do when facing a conflict or problem with another of His daughters?

A Perceived Offense

If you are like me, you have at one point or another in your life been offended or come into conflict with another lady. Years ago, I allowed a small perceived offense to grow and fester, leading to a terrible outcome. All I could think about was that I needed to say something to that lady friend about it so that it could be fixed. Truly, the problem only existed in my mind and not in reality, but I was compelled to say something to that lady about it and eventually did.

The moment I wrote out a message and sent it, I regretted it. Sometimes, when you go back and read your own words, you see how insignificant your perceived issue is and how prideful you are in taking matters into your own hands. Yes, it felt right in the moment to say something, but what good did it do in the long run? Did it fix the situation? After sending my point of view that had been blown way out of proportion, I realized how hurtful it was and I apologized. I received a reply that it was indeed hurtful to her, and from that point on our relationship was irrevocably damaged.

What started out as a perceived offense turned into losing a good friend whose company I enjoyed very much. It reminded me: “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his

soul from troubles” (Proverbs 21:23). Of course, though the verse uses “his,” this applies equally to women as to men.

Between You and Her Alone

However, there are times when we should go to our sisters with an offense. We are told, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother” (Matthew 18:15)—and our sister as well. We are also admonished, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:17–18).

It is tempting, when our feelings are hurt, to search out a listening ear from our friends and family who we know will see things from our point of view and vindicate our actions. However, in doing so, we are spreading the matter further and damaging another lady’s reputation as well as our own. “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends” (Proverbs 17:9).

Go to Your Sister in Loving Humility

We are told to, when necessary, go to our sister and explain the fault to her—not in a bitter, vengeful attitude, but with love and humility. Going to our sister in true humility is extremely important, because we may have been stewing over an issue for weeks or months and mentally blown it out of proportion. Perhaps the slight from a lady, whether intended or not, has become a huge insult in our hearts and we feel like we will burst if we do not say something to her. This is a perfect time to reflect on how we should “avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Timothy 2:23–25).

Of course, we should pray before we go to our sister and risk driving her away with our feelings of hurt and anger. If we come to our Father in prayer with an attitude of vengeance against that person, will He only see things our way and choose our side over theirs? Unlike us, our Eternal Father will

take into consideration both ladies' individual personalities and problems when we come to Him with our issue.

We read, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2). He can see both sides of the argument better than we ever could. If we let Him, He can lead us through prayer and Bible study to the right attitude and words to use when going to our sister. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.... Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:29–32).

We must pray for humility in *what to say* and *how to say it* so that we are not returning insult for offense. In other words, our going to our sister in a wrong attitude could cause a worse offense on *our* part. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3–4).

It's usually helpful to take time to calm down and consider all aspects of the situation. Writing thoughts down on paper and tearing it up afterward can help clear the jumbled emotions and purge them of the perceived hurt. Often, when we write our ideas down and reread them the next day, we



may begin to see that what we have to say may not be as big of a deal as we believed, or we may have been harsh in what we wanted to say. Then we will be able to weigh whether going to our sister would be beneficial or hurtful to our relationship. It is easier to avoid damaging a relationship with your sister than to repair it later (Proverbs 18:19).

Be Ready to Forgive

If, after much prayer and consideration, the issue still must be addressed with our sister and we feel we cannot forgive and forget on our part without an audience with her, we must be careful not to go to her under the guise of false humility, but in love and with a truly forgiving heart, go to speak with her *in person*. We often feel like we should write messages, but they do not always convey the true attitude we intend and sometimes give offense instead. They may also give us a false sense of security and boldness to say things that we should not.

Our ultimate goal in going to our Christian sister with a problem is not to make ourselves feel better. Scripture reminds us, "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back" (Proverbs 29:11). And we read, "A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart" (Proverbs 18:2). These verses apply to women just as to men. Our desire in going to our sister should be to forgive and forget her offenses just as God does for us, so that we may also be forgiven of our faults. *No one* likes for their mistakes to be held over their heads or to feel like they are not forgiven. None of us are perfect and we have all more than likely offended someone in the past. Are we really able to throw the first stone?

Our Father does not hold our transgressions over us, and we must not do so to one another. Christ proclaimed that "if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15). "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12–14).

Remember the Bigger Picture

When we look at the big picture, with the Kingdom of God as the vision of our future and not this life's struggles only, our perceived offenses and problems pale in comparison. We read that "the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Peter 4:7–8). (LN)

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Dveal Allen are happy to share the joy of their growing family by announcing their fourth beautiful child. **Samuel Allen** was born on April 1, weighing in at 8.1 pounds and measuring 20 inches long. The other three children are getting used to their new brother, and all are doing well! The Allen family attends the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Chad (Sarah) Brinkman are excited to announce the birth of their fifth child, **Edith Katherine Brinkman**. Edith was born on March

28, weighing six pounds and 15 ounces. Her siblings Ella, Arlee, Elias, and Avery are overjoyed at her arrival. The Brinkman family attends the Winchester, Virginia, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Iain (Michelle) Hazen are happy to announce the birth of their daughter **Aurora Delilah Anne Hazen**, born on May 11, weighing five pounds, ten ounces, and measuring 18 inches long. The family of Mr. Iain Hazen attends the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Urbain (Line) Hazoumé, of the Libreville congregation in Gabon, are delighted to introduce their second child, daughter **Loma Déjolie**, born on March 26.

Mr. and Mrs. Kevin (Tatiana) Moluf are pleased, happy, and excited to announce the birth of their daughter **Andromeda Louise** on March 19. She weighed four pounds, three ounces, and was 17.25 inches long. Although she arrived a little early, Andromeda is doing very well, and her mom and dad have both settled into parenthood.

Ordinations

Mr. Firman Bramantyo was ordained an elder on March 25, during the Ministerial Conference in the Philippines, by Regional Director Robert Tyler and pastors Rajan Moses and Joseph Gonzales. Mr. Bramantyo serves in the Malang congregation in Indonesia.

Mr. Joshua Crockett was ordained a deacon on April 29 by pastor Gary Stein and elders David Crockett and Dale Bailey. Mr. Crockett serves in the Big Sandy, Texas, congregation.

Mr. Hernal Fuller was ordained an elder on April 29 by pastor James Sweat and elders Richard Thomas and Robert Stephens. Mr. Fuller serves in the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, congregation.

Mr. Franklin Joseph Gonzales was ordained a pastor during the Philippines Ministerial Conference in March by Regional Director Robert Tyler and pastors Rajan Moses, Felipe Casing, and Martin Montgomery. Mr. Gonzales serves congregations in the Philippines.

Mrs. Veronica Green, Ms. Simone Moore, and Mrs. Carolyn Rand were ordained deaconesses on April 29 by pastor Gary Stein and elders Marshall Moluf and Felipe Torres. Mrs. Green, Ms. Moore, and Mrs. Rand serve in the Dallas, Texas, congregation.

Messrs. Samwel Ongow and George Onunga were ordained pastors and **Messrs. Godphrey Omolo, Elly Osumba, and Agik Otieno** were ordained elders on April 25 by Regional Director Peter Nathan and elder Elizaphan Mijondo. These gentlemen all serve in congregations in Kenya: Mr. Ongow in Luanda Dudi, Mr. Onunga in Kokuro, Mr. Omolo in Migori Sagero, Mr. Osumba in Kendu Bay, and Mr. Otieno in Rusinga.

Mr. Eric Sater was ordained a deacon on April 23 by pastor James Sweat and elder Julian Braddock. Mr. Sater serves in the St. Petersburg, Florida, congregation.

Mr. Chris Sookdeo was ordained a deacon on June 3 by pastor Paul Shumway and elders Damian Weekes and David Grant. Mr. Sookdeo serves in the San Fernando congregation in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Juan Torres was ordained a deacon on April 23 by pastor James Sweat and elder Julian Braddock. Mr. Torres serves in the Lakeland, Florida, congregation.

Mr. Rony Venus was ordained a deacon on April 24 by pastor Wilner Pierre and elder Etienne Duval. Mr. Venus serves in the Fort-de-France congregation in Martinique.

In Loving Memory

Mrs. June Barrett, 90, died peacefully in her sleep on February 5. Baptized in 1984, Mrs. Barrett was a faithful longtime member, known for her kindness. She is survived by her two children. Mrs. Barrett was a member of the Taunton congregation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lave Baz, 76, died peacefully at his home on May 10. He was baptized in 2008 and served as a deacon in the Lakeland, Florida, congregation. He had a deep love for the brethren and for God's way of life. Mr. Baz loved people, especially children, and he never met a stranger. He served in the U.S. Army from 1966–1969 and later worked as a photographer. He loved taking photos of God's creation and enjoyed growing a countless variety of plants. Besides his wife, Connie, he is survived by two sons, three grandchildren, two brothers, and two sisters. Mr. Baz will be sorely missed by many.

Mr. Siegfredo Borromeo, 88, of Palawan, Philippines, died on April 14. An engineer and teacher, Mr. Borromeo read widely and loved reading the Bible. He was baptized in 2016. He loved the truth and remained in it.

Mr. Eddie Breaux, 65, died on May 13 at his home, surrounded by his family. In earlier years, Mr. Breaux worked for utilities companies and Gannett Publishing, but he counted it an honor to spend the last 15 years of his life serving as a minister in God's Church. He put his heart into serving God and His people. At his death, Mr. Breaux was pastoring congregations along the Gulf coast of Mississippi and Florida. He is survived by his wife, Connie, as well as their daughter and other relatives.

Mr. Rodney Edgar, 83, died peacefully in his sleep on May 2, and his memorial service was held on May 12. Two weeks later, his wife, **Mrs. Lyn Edgar, 81**, died, too. Her memorial service was held on May 29. Mr. and Mrs. Edgar met on the dance floor in Ayr, Queensland, in 1963 and shared 57 years of marriage. They were baptized in 1971. Mr. Edgar was a very energetic man until health problems in his last years. Mrs. Edgar was a very positive person, despite her health difficulties. The Townsville congregation in Queensland, Australia, misses them.

Mrs. Nora Fike, 83, died on May 6. She had suffered a series of strokes over the last several years. Mrs. Fike was a longtime member of God's Church, baptized in 1975. She was a mild-spoken, sweet, and gentle lady with a beautiful smile. Mrs. Fike is survived by her loving husband, Ronald Fike, and also missed by the Fresno, California, congregation.

Mrs. Lilla Hill, 69, died on April 28. Mrs. Hill was an active member of the local congregation until a severe infection in her foot started a cascade of events that led to her death. She made flower arrangements for Sabbath services and sent cards to others who were going through trials of their own. She will be greatly missed, including by the Fresno congregation in California.

Mrs. Herminia Laconsay, 92, died peacefully in her sleep on March 8. She was baptized into God's Church in 1968 and attended the Baguio congregation in the Philippines. She served as a deaconess for many years. Mrs. Laconsay was greatly respected and loved.

Mr. Mark Mba, 83, died in May. He and his wife Joan were the only members in southeastern Nigeria. Mr. Mba was baptized during the Feast of Tabernacles in 1977 and is survived by his wife.

Mrs. Marieanna Oakley, 88, finished her race when she died on January 7. Mrs. Oakley was baptized 49 years ago. She lived a very full life in many ways. Prior to coming into God's Church, she attended the University of Washington and studied underwater volcanoes in Alaska. She loved God's creation and had a curiosity about the amazing world around her. Even though she was a shut-in during the last few years of her life, she always had a big smile, was energetic, and enjoyed talking about the truth of God.

Mr. Clyde Terryll Ogden, 83, died on March 26 in Arlington, Texas. He was born on April 10, 1940, in Chicago, Illinois, to Delois and Martha (Miller) Ogden. Baptized in 1970, Mr. Ogden will be greatly missed, certainly by his Dallas church family, which loved him very much. He was definitely "one of a kind." Mr. Ogden is survived by Sue, his wife of 59 years, as well as two sons, three grandchildren, one great-grandchild, and nieces and nephews.

Mr. Paul Corwen "Corky" Parker, 61, died on March 26. After his baptism in August of 2012, he became a fixture in the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, serving as an usher until he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at the age of 55. Mr. Parker was very much a family man and dearly loved his two daughters. He was well-loved in the community and highly regarded by the veterans with whom he served as a young man prior to being called into the truth and God's Church. His brethren recognized his warmth and outgoing nature, and he will be missed.

Mr. Henry “Hank” Rainbolt III, 78, died on April 17 at his home. Mr. Rainbolt was baptized into God’s Church on February 18, 1968 and ran his race to the end. He was a member of the Morgantown, West Virginia, congregation, known for his tender heart and love of God. He was predeceased by his wife Jeanne in 2013.

Mrs. Margaret Ramage, 88, died peacefully on February 28. She was a lifelong Wyoming resident and member of the Rawlins congregation. Baptized in 1970 and ordained a deaconess in 2007, she was a faithful member of God’s Church for just a month shy of 54 years. She is remembered for her love of God and His people and her service to the brethren. Many will remember her smile and her laugh. She was married to Mr. Bill Ramage in 1951 and they had six children during their 64-year

marriage. Mrs. Ramage is survived by their children, nine grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

Dr. Donald Roach, 75, a longtime elder serving in Southern California and Nevada, died on March 14 after an extended health trial. Baptized in 1969, he was a member of the Los Angeles, California, congregation. Dr. Roach is survived by his wife, Alice.

Mr. Harold Robinson, 87, died on May 28 at his home. Baptized in 2016, he was a member of the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation, though unable to attend in person for several years because of health issues. Predeceased by his wife and son, he is survived by his daughter-in-law, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. He will be greatly missed.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr and Mrs. Murray (Ida) Langille, of the Edmonton congregation in Canada, recently celebrated their **65th wedding anniversary**. They were married on January 31, 1959, and have been blessed with six children, seven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Hearty congratulations to the Langilles from all the brethren!

Mr. and Mrs. Kelly (Bonnie) Moxley celebrated **50 years of marriage** on March 2. Theirs was a double wedding with Bonnie’s sister Donna and her groom. The Church held a worldwide fast on March 2, 1974. The congregation fasted that weekend but those in the wedding party were allowed to fast the following weekend.

Kansas City Pasta Fundraiser

On March 2, 2024, the Kansas City congregation had a pasta dinner fundraiser that was served by all their youth, ages 8–20. Thanks to everyone’s work and generosity, it was a huge success!

To prepare for the dinner, a few of the ladies requested donations from local grocery stores and Olive Garden, and they received everything needed for the meal for free! The teens cooked beef and chicken, and the preteen girls made table decorations and wrapped silverware.

During the dinner, the preteen girls set the tables, served beverages, and took menu orders. The teens plated the salad and cake and served the main course of chicken

fettuccine or spaghetti with meat sauce to the members. The preteen boys busied all the tables. A few of the youth also played dinner music.

After dinner, everyone enjoyed a few games of bingo together. Each youth bought a bingo prize for the night and other members contributed prizes, too. Almost everyone won a prize.

The entire congregation was encouraged to attend the dinner and bingo, donations or not. Thanks to everyone’s help and generous donations, enough money was raised to cover over half of this year’s local congregational expenses. A special thank you to all our youth who willingly and joyfully served! It was a wonderful evening, and we hope to make it a yearly event.

—Gary Jones II

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Living Education-Charlotte: 2024 Graduation

By Editorial Staff

On May 24 at 10:00 AM, the Waxhaw Women's Club of North Carolina hosted a celebration of academic achievement as Living Education-Charlotte conducted its 2024 graduation ceremony. The event marked a significant milestone for graduates, faculty, and staff, honoring the culmination of another year's dedication and hard work.

The ceremony commenced with an opening prayer by Mr. Jerry Ruddlesden (Faculty in Business), followed by a heartwarming *Year in Review* video presentation created by one of this year's graduates, Mr. Steven Lee "Trip" Schneitman III. Attendees were then treated to a pair of reflective speeches: "The Legacy of Education in the Church" by Mr. Kenneth L. Frank (Faculty in Theology), and "Reflections and Thoughts for Graduates" by Mr. Dexter B. Wakefield (Faculty in Communication).

Reminding attendees of the history and purpose of Living Education, which began in August 2018 with 14 students, Mr. Frank explained, "Living Education-Charlotte is a continuation of the Church's dedication to education and follows in the footsteps of Ambassador College and, more recently,

Living University." He noted that the Charlotte on-site program "immerses young adults in an intensive nine-month training course, with an emphasis on understanding the Bible and its application in today's world" and that its classes "focus on giving an overview of the Bible, and understanding of the basic doctrines, and principles for a godly life" helping students "take the first step toward becoming effective Christian leaders and influencers in their congregation and among their peers."

Mr. Wakefield congratulated the graduates for developing their skills in conflict resolution and interpersonal communication. He then asked, "What are you going to do with that skill?" and emphasized that God calls all Christians to shine the light of godly character in a godless world. He encouraged the graduates to develop a wide range of relationships as they continue growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Mr. Jonathan McNair (Program Director and Faculty in Theology) presided over official recognition of the graduates and conferring of credentials. Recognizing their commitment to academic and spiritual growth, 17 first-year students received their Certificate in Biblical Foundations: Demetri Raymond Broesamle; Hyabiel Daniel; Michael James DeSimone, Jr.; Joshua Martin Godek; Nathaniel John Hunter; David Gregory Markopoulos; Hayle Jade Matheny; Alexis Mitchell; Emily Marjorie-Faye Nichols; Henry Wallace Nicholson; Jade Jovan Powell; Johann Daniel Rangel Carrasco; Lili Astrid Rangel Carrasco; Alexia Renee Sauter; Steven Lee Schneitman III; Melody Aurora Talbott; and Allen Matthew Wilson.

The five second-year students who completed the Student Leader Program were also honored: Madeline Emma McNair, Rachel Claire Price, Dawn Marie Rude, David Anthony Smith, and Harmony Aria Jewel Talbott. The Living Education Student Choir then performed "Because He Lives (Amen)" by Matt Maher and "Remember Your Creator" by Ross Jutsum.

Attendees appreciated the graduation address by LCG Presiding Evangelist Gerald E. Weston, who admonished students to further develop their commitment to God's way of life. He encouraged them to stand up for morality as exemplified by sports stars Harrison Butker and Riley Gaines, highlighting their courage in the face of adversity. He concluded by saying, "Good things can come if you recognize that you're not going to be popular by this world's standards, but that you have values that you're willing to stick to and you have the courage."

The event concluded with a closing prayer by LE guest lecturer Mr. James Populo, followed by a reception where students, faculty, and guests celebrated the achievements of the 2024 graduates. Congratulations to Living Education-Charlotte's graduating class of 2024! ^{LN}



Electronic Service Requested

Rise Above

I would be surprised to meet someone who has not felt depressed or unhappy at some point in life. How about you? True enough, some are more prone than others to fall prey to these feelings, and if we went through our lives never expecting to have problems we would surely be disappointed. But does knowing this really help? Why is it that the proverbial, “Could be worse!” more often feels like salt on an open wound?

It takes more than resignation or acceptance that “life is hard” to truly rise above discouragement and trouble. “Expect the worst and you’ll never be disappointed,” as the saying goes, or someone might say, “No matter how bad your troubles, there’s always someone worse off than you.” Not very helpful, right? Few trials seem small while you are going through them, and most of us know this by hard experience. Pain is pain, whether it comes from the “little things” or from life-changing—even life-threatening—events. But all suffering, great or small, has the potential to shape the life of the sufferer.

I know of few people who accomplish more when their feelings are crushed or depressed than when they take a positive outlook despite their troubles. So, how do you change your perspective, and avoid falling into the vicious cycle of worrying or indulging negative feelings, which in turn wastes time, clouds judgment, and leads to more worry? You do it by setting a higher goal than anything this life has to offer, and making it the main focus of your life.

What is that goal? The Apostle Paul described it:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for

which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12–14).

Paul was well acquainted with grief; he had been beaten, stoned, ostracized, imprisoned, starved, shipwrecked, and more. He described his trials quite frankly (2 Corinthians 11:23–29). Yet, as an imperfect man in an imperfect world, Paul never gave up.

God rewards those who “diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6), and He equips them with the strength and knowledge they need to control their feelings and overcome every trial (2 Corinthians 10:4–5; 2 Timothy 1:7; 3:16–17). God’s way is a provable, successful way of life, if one is willing to test it and find that out (Malachi 3:10).

Just as the cycle of worry and depression leads only to greater loss and inability to cope with future trials, our continual attention to His word and His “upward call” strengthens us against the tide of negative feelings that can so easily ensnare us. At the same time, God’s word, when properly understood, gives us a perspective that sees beyond any human struggle, great or small, reasonable or unforeseen—or self-inflicted.

This is the path to happiness, positivity, and success—in this life and beyond.

—William L. Williams