



# THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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"Put on the whole armor of God"

Summer 2025

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### Counting to Pentecost in 2025

In 2025, should we have begun our count to Pentecost on the Sunday following the Days of Unleavened Bread? Or does our tradition of counting from the Sunday that occurs within the Days of Unleavened Bread more closely align with the biblical data? **Page 1**

### Turning Adversities Into Blessings

Facing adversities in life is inevitable. They come in the form of accidents, disease, and setbacks of all kinds. We all experience them throughout our lives. But with God's help, we can turn those adversities into opportunities for growth and spiritual development and, in the process, find hope and encouragement. **Page 1**

### Change

The world is perpetually changing. And so is every person in the world. Life is made up of changes—some positive, some negative. And all the changes we see going on around us are reminders of the necessary changes that we must undergo to have the kind of relationship with God He wants each of us to have. **Page 1**

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God is zealous for His people. He loves the world so much He gave His Son to die for us so we could be reconciled to Him. And now, as He looks down from His holy throne in heaven, He wants to see His children being zealous for Him. **Page 8**

### Does the Didache Support the Eucharist and the Sunday 'Lord's Day'?

The Didache, an early-church document also known as "The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles," is often used by apologists to support the claim that the Eucharist and the Sunday "Lord's Day" traditions of later centuries were not later developments but were handed down from the apostolic church itself. But does the evidence support this claim? **Page 10**

And Much More...



## Counting to Pentecost in 2025

By MIKE JAMES

This year, some Sabbath-and-Holy-Day-keeping groups are keeping Pentecost on June 8, and most others (including CGI) are keeping it on June 1. Let's understand why.

The reason there is more than one way to look at this is because, in most years, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread does not fall on a Sunday, which then places the Last Day of Unleavened Bread on a Sabbath, like this year.

Typically, we begin our count to Pentecost the day after the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. However, some argue that since the only weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread this year is the annual Sabbath of the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, we should start our count after that Sabbath.

If we were to begin our count on that day, it would mean starting *after* the Days of Unleavened Bread have ended. There is no scripture in the Bible that explicitly states what to do if Passover (for the Jews) begins and that day happens to be a weekly Sabbath. Therefore, we need to make a judgment based on Scripture.

Let's take a closer look at this.

In **Leviticus 23**, we read about each of God's Holy Days. Let us begin there by figuring out how CGI makes this determination. In **Leviticus 23:4-8**, we read the following:

*These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the*

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## Turning Adversities Into Blessings

By KENROY ALLEN

Life is full of ups and downs. Some persons are born into adversity in countries torn by war and ethnic conflicts, or laboring under the burden of poverty and other social ills. Some people are born *with* adversity, such as congenital disease or crippling deformities. Some *have been* through adversities while others are *currently going through* adversity such as severe and long-standing health problems, marriage problems, financial woes. And if you have not been through some adversity, or are now going through one, rest assured, you *will face* some form of adversity in the future.

We are admonished to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

It is difficult when we face adversities, tragedies, and setbacks. However, with God's help, we can turn adversities into blessings and use them as opportunities for growth and success, and in the process find hope and encouragement.

### Biblical Heroes who Defied Adversities

The Bible records the lives of many heroes who snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. Here are a few of them:

**Job** endured terrible suffering, inflicted by Satan with God's permission. His trials included the loss of his health, criticism and blame from his friends while he was going through his trials of physical affliction, death of his children, rejection by his wife, loss of his livelihood and wealth. But he patiently endured and remained faithful to God even when he did not

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## Change

By GEORGE ROPER

Change is a condition that many resist from occurring, while others make efforts to bring it about. From a personal perspective, change can be bittersweet. In our youth, aspects of change are often highly desired. Wanting to grow older, be taller, to take part in more mature activities that our age may have alienated us from. Believing that some exclusive circumstance was being withheld from us as we grew up, "change" was the solution that would rectify everything.

In growing older, with the anticipation of what lies ahead, change couldn't happen soon enough. Yet, as time passes, we may realize that change may actually be taking place far too quickly for our liking. We soon recognize in our adulthood that change was not the liberator that we thought it to be. As we reflect on our lives, we see change in action through the lens of a mixture of fond remembrances, painful recollections, nostalgia, and regret. Nonetheless, life's experiences impress upon us that change indeed is impossible to avoid.

The evidence of change can be seen in popular culture. Staples once prominent in our daily practices are no longer as relevant. Linear TV broadcasts are struggling to reach the audience they once did, slowly being eclipsed by streaming. The United States postal service's volume has dropped drastically, with preference falling more and more to digital communications. Retail stores that were once dominant are going out of business, thwarted by Amazon and the ever-growing ease of online sales. Even the necessity of the physical dollar and bank check are declining, as digital transactions increase among consumers. These various services have all succumbed to change.

Many assert that there is a hidden, wide-sweeping agenda serving as the impetus for social and economic change. Regardless of the factors that drive such change to occur, be they organic or manipulative

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same month is the feast of **unleavened bread** unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

One important point to consider here is that Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread are inextricably linked together because they fall one day after the other. The 14th day bleeds into the 15th. Yes, they are distinct, the Passover is not an annual Sabbath, but they were so interconnected the whole eight-day period is sometimes called the Passover by the Jews and the Bible. This connection will be important to consider later when discussing the reasoning behind our conclusions.

There is some evidence of this in **Deuteronomy 16:1–8**. Notice what it says:

*Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover unto the LORD thy God: for in the month of Abib the LORD thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night. Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the Passover unto the LORD thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the LORD shall choose to place his name there. Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days; neither shall there any thing of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst the first day at even, remain all night until the morning. Thou mayest not sacrifice the Passover within any of thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the Passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt. And thou shalt roast and eat it in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go unto thy tents. Six days thou shalt eat unleavened bread: and on the seventh day shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work therein.*

Note what I have placed in bold black print in the previous verses. **Deuteronomy 16:1–8** is using the word Passover for not only the event involving the killing of the lamb, but also the seven days of unleavened bread. But don't take my word for it; notice what a couple commentaries say about this.

"In Deuteronomy the whole Passover Festival is in mind, including the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and so the sacrificing of the Passover animal (or animals) includes the sacrifices of animals from the herd as well as the sacrifice of a lamb from the flock for the main Passover meal." *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House,*

1992), pg. 108.

"In v. 2, and in v. 1, the word 'Passover' is employed in a broader sense, and includes not only the paschal lamb, but the paschal sacrifices generally, which the Rabbins embrace under the common name of *chagigah*; not the burnt offerings and sin offerings, however, prescribed in Num. 28:19–26, but all the sacrifices that were slain at the feast of the Passover (i.e., during the seven days of the *Mazzoth*, which are included under the name of *pascha*) for the purpose of holding sacrificial meals. This is evident from the expression 'of the flock and the herd,' as it was expressly laid down, that only a [Hebrew letters omitted], i.e., a yearling animal of the sheep or goats, was to be slain for the paschal meal on the fourteenth of the month in the evening, and an ox was never slaughtered in the place of the lamb. But if any doubt could exist upon this point, it would be completely set aside by v. 3: 'Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it: seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith.' As the word 'therewith' cannot possibly refer to anything else than the 'Passover' in v.2, it is distinctly stated that the slaughtering and eating of the Passover was to last seven days, whereas the Passover lamb was to be slain and consumed in the evening of the fourteenth Abib (Ex. 12:10)" (*Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 1, The Pentateuch*, [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 2001], p. 921).

A second important point to note is the Feast of Pentecost is never given a specific date on the calendar like the other holy days because a count had to be conducted to get to the date based on when the Wave Sheaf would be offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Now, remember that the count to Pentecost under the Old Covenant was based on the agricultural cycle in Israel thousands of years ago. The counting and performance of rituals, sacrifices, and offerings under the Old Covenant were made by the priests. When Christ the Wave Sheaf came, the Old Covenant was gone, and the New Covenant began. Christ is now the only priest and the duties of the priests pertaining to the Wave Sheaf are no more because the Wave Sheaf was fulfilled when Christ went to heaven after His resurrection. Important point; remember that. There has been a change in the law (**Hebrews 7:12**) with Christ in His role as High Priest taking over the role from the Levitical priesthood, and Christ has taken over the sacrificial and offering system in the law through His sacrifice and offering (**Hebrews 10:11–18**).

Now, let's focus in on the language pertaining to the count to Pentecost in **Leviticus 23:9–14**:

*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without*

*blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD. And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.*

Now, note that this was to begin when they came into the land—the Promised Land—which God was giving them; they were not there yet when they received the instructions. But, more importantly, notice that the emphasis is on the day that was the "morrow after the Sabbath." Often, we focus on the Sabbath day in this count and surmise that the Sabbath is the Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread. In most years that is true, but as we know, there are some years when the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread is on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. Note also that the priest is involved in this ritual. Remember, when Christ died and rose, He took over the role the Levitical priests had (**Hebrews 8:6–7**).

The assumption from these scriptures is that the "morrow after the Sabbath" would fall within the Days of Unleavened Bread. Remember, that is what the context is in **Leviticus 23:4–8**. What we are reading in verses 9–14 is within the context of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. Note that Passover, which is not one of the Days of Unleavened Bread, is inextricably part of the Days of Unleavened Bread, and Passover precedes those days; it does not fall after those days. This is the beginning of God's calendar, just like the Last Great Day follows the Feast of Tabernacles but is also inextricably linked to the Feast of Tabernacles and ends God's calendar.

Remember, the symbol of the lamb (Passover) is Christ, but also the symbol of the Days of Unleavened Bread is a symbol of Christ (unleavened bread) also, since He was sinless and not puffed up. The death of Christ (Passover lamb) is very important, but also the resurrection of Christ (Wave Sheaf) must occur also, and all of this—in context—would fall during these eight days.

One other important point to make here is that when Christ died, He was symbolically waved before God's altar in heaven **DURING THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD**. The "morrow after the Sabbath," the year Christ died, fell within the timeframe of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Would it make sense that the Wave Sheaf would be offered *after* the Days of Unleavened Bread? I think not.

Yet another fact about the original count is that the Wave Sheaf had to be ready for the counting to begin. You could not start Passover unless the barley harvest was ready, and the sheaf had "green ears." Sometimes, they would delay the holy day until next month if the sheaf was not ready. The point here is, once the sheaf was ready, you could wave it the next day because it was ready. There is no biblical evidence they ever cut the sheaf after the Days of Unleavened Bread. This is further proof of a linkage between the cutting of the sheaf and the waving being inclusive of the Days of Unleavened Bread and not outside that time.

There has been disagreement in history over what was meant by "the morrow after the Sabbath," as to whether the Sabbath was the weekly Sabbath or the Holy-Day Sabbath of the Feast (first or last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread). We have a good booklet on this subject titled *Should We Observe Pentecost on Sivan 6*. You can find this booklet on our website under "Literature," which is under "Media."

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One reason the Bible might not mention the weekly Sabbath or the Holy-Day Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread may be because God knew the count might have to commence the day after a Sabbath that falls on the 14th day of the first month, as is the case this year (2025). This might be why the Word of God does not specify the weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread because, in certain years, this situation would occur.

An Old Testament scripture that supports our understanding on how to start the count this year is found in **Joshua 5:10–11**. Notice what the scriptures here say:

“And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the **Passover on the fourteenth day** of the month at even in the plains of Jericho. And they **did eat** of the old corn of the land **on the morrow after the Passover**, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day.”

Remember what we read earlier in **Leviticus 23:9–14** about them not being able to eat of the harvest until **AFTER** the Wave Sheaf was waved? The evidence here is that this day was most likely “the morrow after the Sabbath,” with the Sabbath being Passover this year. This is not 100 percent certain—we will investigate that later—but this is good evidence for starting the count as we do when Passover is on a Sabbath before the Wave Sheaf offering.

A number of biblical commentaries agree with this viewpoint, though not all. Here are just a few: *Benson Commentary*, *Barnes Notes on the Bible*, *Matthew Poole's Commentary*, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, *Pulpit Commentary*, and *the Keil & Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*.

It is possible that this evidence is provided in the Bible to help clarify this issue. Why would this first Passover, when they finally came into the Promised Land, coincide with Passover falling on a Saturday? Possibly to let us know the count to Pentecost had to begin within the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Our understanding is that the key is the count **MUST ALWAYS BEGIN WITH A SUNDAY** in the Days of Unleavened Bread to arrive at the “**MORROW AFTER THE SEVENTH SABBATH**” for Pentecost. You only get one Sunday within the Days of Unleavened Bread. Some have focused on the word *Sabbath* in these verses to argue that it is more important to emphasize to begin the count. In other words, the weekly Sabbath falling within the Days of Unleavened Bread. But again, look at the context; the emphasis is on the **MORROW AFTER the Sabbath**—the day after the Sabbath and not the Sabbath. That must be within the Days of Unleavened Bread. It is not explicitly stated, but the implication seems to be there since the context of the verses in **Leviticus 23** refers to the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread when we read about the “morrow.”

Let us now deal with a minority view within the Church of God movement. The major premise in this view is that the counting must begin with the **SABBATH** that occurs during or within the Days of Unleavened Bread.

But remember, the scripture does not say the Sabbath must be within the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Those who promote this view argue God uses consistent patterns, so having this rule establishes a pattern we can always use. However, we could argue the pattern is consistent by beginning the count “on the morrow” after the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Our pattern stays consistent that the count will always commence *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread; their count can fall outside the Days of Unleavened Bread. Our method is tied to the Passover (Christ) and Wave Sheaf (Christ) within the eight days; their method can start the count after the Feast of Unleavened Bread is over, where there is no linkage to the symbols for Christ.

Those that hold this view are “upside-down” on this. They are following the wrong pattern. Christ trumps this controversy. What did Christ show us? He showed us He ascended on a Sunday **DURING** the Days of Unleavened Bread! No question about it. Also, when did Christ observe the Passover and insert the emblems, embedding Himself as the substitutionary Lamb of God? At the beginning of the 14th. And when was “Christ our Passover” sacrificed? On the 14th, at the time the Passover lambs were killed. No question about it. It's the same thing. We follow His example. How many times a year do we conduct this memorial service of His death? We do it once a year. But why? Because He did it that way and instructed us through Paul to do it that way. So, why would we consider changing a crystal clear and plain pattern and begin the count *outside* of the Days of Unleavened Bread? It would make no sense. Stay with the patterned example our Lord illustrated.

Another argument this group makes is never in history do we have evidence of other Jews keeping the Wave Sheaf day on an annual Sabbath day. Well, we could argue we do by citing **Joshua 5**, but remember, this situation only occurs on average about once every 10 years and, in some instances, we go 20 years without this occurring. So, most of the limited historical records we may have are more likely to address what normally happens. But we should also keep in mind the Jews don't accept Christ as the Wave Sheaf. It's non-essential as to their methods and rituals, especially since Christ fulfilled the Wave Sheaf.

Another major point the alternative position makes is that **Joshua 5** may not be addressing a Wave Sheaf situation. One writer for this position argues that the relevant scriptures in Joshua do not mention an altar, a priest, or the other offerings required on this day (**Leviticus 23:12–13**), no mention of a harvest, and no mention of the Wave Sheaf. That is true, but why might that be? Perhaps because many times in Scripture every detail about a situation is not addressed. They already knew what the law said about entering the land in Leviticus. They were also well aware of why they had not been able to enter the Promised Land and had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years (**Deuteronomy 8:2**). Don't you think Joshua would follow God's law to the

letter? In fact, we have evidence he would do what the law said (including the Wave Sheaf offering). In **Joshua 1:7–8** we read this:

“Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe **to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left**, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. **This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein:** for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

It seems to me, Joshua was aware of what the law had to say, yes, even the law about the Wave Sheaf. Also, note **Deuteronomy 31:1–6** and **Deuteronomy 32:45–47**, where Moses admonishes Israel to follow all the words of the law right before they set out into the Promised Land.

Continuing to try and pick apart the idea there was a Wave Sheaf offering in **Joshua 5**, the contrarian view addresses **Exodus 23:16**, which tells us that the firstfruits of their labors which they have sown in the field should be used. But this might be referring to Pentecost and not the Wave Sheaf offering. The argument is when Israel under Joshua came into the Promised Land and kept that first Passover, they could not have a Wave Sheaf offering because they had not labored in the fields and sown their own crop to use. The problem with this argument is the writer of this view is not addressing **ALL** the verses that deal with what God said. If we turn back to **Leviticus 23:9–11**, notice what it says there once again.

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “**When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest**, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.”’”

Why didn't the other writer address this additional information? Notice God is speaking about what Israel is to do when they enter the Promised Land. God gave them that land, so it belongs to them. In that first entry, they would reap “**its harvest**”—in other words the harvest that was already there in that land. Remember to look at all relevant scriptures on a subject before you decide how to analyze it. Just like there is additional information on the Sabbath commandment in different parts of the first five books, there is additional information on how to observe the Wave Sheaf. In Leviticus, we get information on the initial entry into the land and the Exodus scripture seems to be referring to the Pentecost harvest.

The other view also used **Leviticus 22:18–25** to argue that Israel could not give a free-will offering from a stranger to God. They argue that taking a harvest from what the Canaanites may have planted would have soiled Israel. What they don't realize is God told them to do it (**Leviticus 23:9–10**)! Just like Passover was a little different the first year it happened compared to

other years, the same is true with the Wave Sheaf, in my opinion.

Another point can be made here about the harvest when they first entered the land. In **Leviticus 25:2**, we read that when they were first to come into the Promised Land it would be a sabbatical year, meaning that in the sabbatical year, they did not sow and prune the land. So, the argument that they could not harvest what the Canaanites had sown could be overcome by the rule that the first year in the land was a sabbatical year. Anything in the land that they found was able to be used since they had to begin fresh.

This might explain why the heave offering mentioned in **Numbers 15:17–21** would not be required until the year they actually started their own planting. The other viewpoint argues that no heave offering is mentioned in **Joshua 5** either. The reason no heave offering may have been offered is because in these verses it mentions “your dough,” meaning maybe that they had planted and made it. Remember **Joshua 5** mentions they ate the food of the land. The scripture in Numbers may be emphasizing what to do with the first crop they produced, while **Joshua 5** and the Wave Sheaf (with it being a sabbatical year) would refer to any crop that was in the field (they did not have to produce it).

The author of the viewpoint that the **Joshua 5** incident was not a Wave Sheaf observance used **Deuteronomy 12** and begins to speculate with it. **Deuteronomy 12** addresses various rules and regulations for Israel to follow when they enter the Promised Land. They were to destroy all the places the Canaanites used to worship their gods. The writer seems to believe Israel could not keep the Wave Sheaf offering until all this work of taming the land was done. Nothing in this chapter states that Israel could not observe all of God's law once they were in the land.

They argue that **Deuteronomy 12** says they have to offer their offerings and sacrifices at the place of God's choosing once the land has been cleansed. They seem to think this did not happen for seven years after Israel entered the land, so they could not keep the Wave Sheaf when they first entered. But wait a minute. The Passover itself involves a sacrifice to God. So obviously they did that when they entered the land. And the context of **Joshua 5** implies the Wave Sheaf occurred too. **Deuteronomy 12** could be emphasizing they would have a central place of worship in the land once they had completely controlled the land.

Listen, if they want to believe that, it's fine with me, but we have more support that **Joshua 5:10–11** is a Wave Sheaf offering which we will provide soon. Remember we can also go back to **Leviticus 23** (see above) and note that when the Passover occurred the Wave Sheaf had to follow **WHEN THEY ENTERED THE LAND**. In the first few chapters of Joshua, they **ARE ENTERING THE LAND**. It would make perfect sense that Israel would rededicate themselves to God here through the

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Passover and Wave Sheaf symbolism which represented what Christ would do in later history. And isn't it ironic that in **Joshua 5:13–15** there is a possible theophany of the Son of God right after the two symbols (lamb and Wave Sheaf) that represent our salvation in Christ? Israel is about to be saved in battle by this mysterious figure at the end of the chapter. Why was the ground mentioned as being HOLY in verse 15? Very similar to what happened at the burning bush. Does the salvation symbolized by the Passover and Wave Sheaf then find more symbolism in the mysterious figure who appears right after these events take place? Notice, in verse 14, Joshua bows to worship at the feet of this figure and is not reprimanded unlike the angel in Revelation who tells John not to bow before him (**Revelation 22:8–9**). Is this the One who became Jesus Christ?

Yet another objection raised to having the Wave Sheaf day on the First Day of Unleavened Bread is that Israel would be profaning the Sabbath by working on it. They suggest that the Wave Sheaf day was the first day that their harvest began. Well, first of all, no scripture says Wave Sheaf day could not be on a Holy Day Sabbath. Second, could they not start the harvest one day later in the infrequent years that the Wave Sheaf might be on a holy day? We just have no information to prove this either way, so let's keep all the data in mind as we make up our minds. We could argue that **Joshua 5** is proof that they did. Also, remember the priests were permitted to do work on a holy day and the Sabbath. But we also need to realize as Christians today the harvest issue does not affect us at all. We live in totally different times than they did back then. More to say on this later.

The proponents of the other view also speculate that Israel did not observe the Wave Sheaf in **Joshua 5** because the food they ate there could have been food they had brought with them or food that they confiscated in the land. So, since they didn't cut their own grain there could be no Wave Sheaf. We agree they could have used the food in the land, as Scripture says. They could have cut some of it, too, as we addressed above. We don't see any problem with them using the food in the land due to it being a sabbatical year and the fact God gave them that land—they now had control of the food regardless of who had planted it.

In **Deuteronomy 26:1–3**, we read about Israel giving of the firstfruits of the land to God after they had "entered," "possessed," and "dwelt" in the land. The argument is since they did not completely possess the land until seven years after they first entered, the Wave Sheaf would have to take place at this time—seven years later—so **Joshua 5** was not a Wave Sheaf offering. The problem with this idea is **Leviticus 23:10** says they only need to be in the land and reap the land's harvest. The Deuteronomy and Leviticus scriptures are not necessarily talking about the same thing.

**Joshua 1:10–11** tells us that Joshua

told his men to prepare food because within three days they would be going into the land. The idea here is IF this is three days before the 10th day, then it must be a Sabbath if the 14th is a Sabbath. They then ask, "How could they do work in gathering food on the Sabbath?" The problem with their argument is it says within three days they would be going in. They could have waited till the Sabbath had ended if they had much work to do in gathering.

**Leviticus 22:24–25** is addressed to say a foreigner could not be involved in an offering that went to God. Once again, remember, **Leviticus 25:2** tells them when they enter the land it was a sabbatical year which allowed taking the crop that was already there. Also, **Leviticus 22:24–25** could be addressing a foreigner offering an animal primarily due to the context of the earlier verses, but regardless of that, **Joshua 5** is not addressing an offering from a foreigner for a number of reasons already addressed above.

The alternative view makes an interesting claim that the primary significance of **Joshua 5** was about eating food because God was stopping the use of manna as a means of providing food to Israel, rather than being a Wave Sheaf offering. One of the reasons they say this is because the scripture mentions the manna stopping. So, they believe the phrase "selfsame day" in **Joshua 5** pertains to the day the manna started 40 years before (**Exodus 16:1**). **Exodus 12** uses the same phrase "selfsame day." But "selfsame day" can merely mean the same day. They are trying to link the beginning of the manna and end of the manna as being linked through the use of the wording "selfsame day."

Another interesting theory the other view has is this. In **Joshua 4:19**, it is clear they were in Gilgal on the 10th day of the first month. In other words, four days from keeping the Passover on the 14th. Then we read, in **Joshua 5:10**, they kept the Passover on the 14th day. It seems obvious this was a few days later.

But they go on to say, since they were circumcised in **Joshua 5:2** before the Passover they could not have been ready to perform the Passover requirements due to having been cut within five days of the ceremony. Verse 8 mentions them staying in their places in the camp till they were whole. They also had to walk around Jericho soon after this so the men would not be ready. Some believe they had to wait an entire month and take the Passover in the second month due to waiting for the men to become whole before they could lift wood to burn for the Passover service.

But what they miss is that **Joshua 5:2** mentions this circumcision was a "second" circumcision. In other words, during the wilderness wanderings of 40 years, there were people under 20 years of age who did come into the Promised Land. They were obviously circumcised. The older generation did not go into the land. So, the group being circumcised at Gilgal was another group that had not been circumcised since the last circumcision. So obviously there were men who could do all the work to prepare the Passover and circle Jericho. But they

also make a big deal that these men would be out of commission for three weeks. Not necessarily! I found evidence that you could be back to work after a week with adult circumcision.

Another point to make here as to why this would not be a Passover in the second month and therefore no need for the Wave Sheaf is whenever a Passover in the second month is mentioned in Scripture, we are told it was in the second month. This Passover occurred in the first month, requiring the Wave Sheaf to be offered.

To summarize, the Bible states the Wave Sheaf must occur after "the Sabbath." It does not say the weekly Sabbath, and it does not say the Holy-Day Sabbath; it just says the Sabbath. It also does not say "during the Days of Unleavened Bread." Obviously, most years it will occur during the Days of Unleavened Bread, but it makes more sense to me that we can begin counting if Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath because of Passover's connectivity to Unleavened Bread (as mentioned above). When you begin counting on a Sunday after the Days of Unleavened Bread, you have lost your connectivity to the eight days of Passover/Unleavened Bread.

But, most importantly, we are no longer under the Old Testament Covenant. We are under the New Covenant, because Jesus fulfilled the Passover and the Wave Sheaf two thousand years ago. Since we cannot be 100 percent sure about **Joshua 5**, we should follow the example of Christ being waved during the Days of Unleavened Bread and pick the Sunday ("morrow after the Sabbath") during the Days of Unleavened Bread to begin the count. The Sabbath is important of course, but in the year that the wave sheaf was fulfilled, it occurred on a Sunday during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

The alternative view is arguing from Old Covenant laws that can be debated and argued against. But more importantly, those Old Covenant laws that are being emphasized are focusing on sacrifices, offerings, the priesthood, the tabernacle, etc., that are no longer required since Christ's coming has superseded those aspects of the law. Those laws are still there, but now in Christ. The book of Hebrews makes this clear. And that gives us the license to shift to Christ's example and illustrations since He was all the sacrificial law was pointing to. He was the Reality of the shadow, which was the Old Covenant.

Keep this point also in mind. If the Wave Sheaf Sunday must follow a weekly Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and the only Sabbath that week is the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, then you defeat the purpose of making the unleavened bread cakes from the Wave Sheaf. Remember the Festival, beginning with Passover, cannot begin until the grain is ready in the field. Why in the world would we then do the Wave Sheaf ceremony when we lost the relevance of being within the Days of Unleavened Bread?

Look at **Joshua 5:11** once again; it says they ate "unleavened cakes." Why would it mention them being unleavened if this was not the first month or had no significance in con-

nection to the Wave Sheaf?

Even if we don't use **Joshua 5**, we have greater reason to begin the count within the Days of Unleavened Bread than outside because we are no longer under the Old Covenant but the New.

One other argument I recently heard regarding starting the count after the Last Day of Unleavened Bread if it occurs on a Sabbath pertains to **Acts 20:6–7**. Here, we get an interesting account of the travels of Paul and some other disciples from Philippi to Troas during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

**Acts 20:6** reads: "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days."

Many have read this passage without considering why it took five days to travel from Philippi to Troas, when in **Acts 16:11–12**, the same journey took the apostle two days.

Some scholars surmise that the difference of three days was probably due to gale-force winds that slowed down their travel. Some argue that since this was in the spring there were probably no gale-like winds. But this is not the case. Although the winds can be harsher in the Mediterranean from September to January, gale-like winds can occur year-round, with the calmest period being in June and July.

In this view, some believe this text is not counting the number of days it took them to travel from Troas to Philippi, but instead the apostles were keeping an account of the Days of Unleavened Bread as they traveled.

To support this theory, some look at the Greek rendering of this text in a different way.

Looking at **Acts 20:6** once again, we find the Greek word *μετά* (*meta*) translated "after." Some think this is misleading. The Strong's number for this word (3326) can also mean "amid." But make no mistake about it, the word can also mean "after," depending on the context.

This view also argues that the Greek text *hemera pente*, translated "five days" in **Acts 20:6** can also be translated "day five." The words are Strong's numbers 2250 and 4002. Those who hold to this view say you can translate the words literally as "day five" rather than "five days." Additionally, the Greek term *hemera hepta* is literally translated "day seven" and not "seven days." For the sake of argument, let us say this is possible. All the translations I consulted do not render it that way, and even Young's Literal Translation renders it as "five days" and "seven days," not "day five" and "day seven."

In **Acts 20:7**, we learn that the next day was the first day of the week. The point is then made that since Paul is speaking to them on this day, it could be the Wave Sheaf day. Once again, there is no solid contextual proof here to go in that direction. Since Paul was getting ready to leave the next day he obviously wanted to speak to the brethren as long as he could, since he could not easily get back to speak again.

A college level Koine Greek teacher was consulted on these verses. In their opinion, **Acts 20:6–7** cannot be used to support the idea that the context pertains to a count toward Pentecost.

In summary, although there are other

possible reasons for counting differently to Pentecost this year, there is nothing in the other possibilities that leads us to override our long-standing judgment on this matter. We believe the scriptural evidence leans toward our present understanding.

*For a recent sermon on this subject please go to [cgi.org](http://cgi.org) and look under "Sermons" (under "Media"), "2025" listing, for "Why We Count Pentecost As We Do" by Bill Watson (April 26). You can also find it at [rumble.com](http://rumble.com) (enter *cogmedina* into the search bar and click on the *cgi Medina* logo, and that should take you to all our postings).*

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### Turning Adversities Into Blessings

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understand the reason for his severe trials.

In spite of all the suffering Job went through, he remained faithful to God. **Job 13:15** records his commitment: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face."

At the end of his ordeal, Job concluded: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (**Job 42:5-6**). Before his trials he had an intellectual perception of who God is. But after what he endured, he came to the point of truly experiencing who God is. Now God was not merely Someone he had heard about but One with whom he now had a personal relationship and whose love and mercy he had personally experienced.

**Joseph** was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and unjustly imprisoned in Egypt. His master Potiphar's wife made sexual advances at him. He refused her and she falsely accused him of trying to rape her. He was thrown in prison. He suffered for doing the right thing. His integrity and godly wisdom eventually led him from the prison to Pharaoh's palace to become second in command over the land of Egypt where he saved many lives during a time of severe famine, including the lives of his brothers who sold him into slavery.

In retrospect, Joseph was able to see that God's hand was in it all. **Genesis 50:20** gives us Joseph's conclusion of his experience when he said to his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

**Moses** was given up by his mother in order to save his life from Pharaoh's pogrom against the Hebrew male babies. By divine design he was "adopted" into Pharaoh's palace. His fortunes changed when he intervened by killing an Egyptian who was beating one of his fellow Hebrews. His crime was later found out and he had to flee Egypt. Hiding out in the desert as a fugitive and murderer he had a personal encounter with Yahweh who called him to become the liberator of his people out of Egyptian bondage. He persevered through rejection, opposition and the rebellion of his people as he led them in the wilderness

towards the Promised Land.

**Hebrews 11:24-26** tells us that "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."

**David**, the little shepherd boy, despised by his brothers, became a national hero when he slew the Philistine giant Goliath. He was first adored by King Saul, who later had him on the run as a fugitive and bitter enemy. But God turned it around by making David the greatest king of Israel and described him as "a man after his [God's] own heart" (**1 Samuel 13:14**). What a lofty tribute!

### Our Disabilities Can Become our Stairway to Victory

Many people, whether or not they are aficionados of classical music, recognise and appreciate Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, *Ode to Joy*. But how many know that this renowned musical genius wrote this, his most well-known and perhaps best-loved symphony, at age 40 when he was completely deaf?

Disabilities, setbacks and adversities should not stop us from living successful lives. They can actually empower us to greater achievements.

"You can't step out and do great things every day, but you surely can do little things with great passion and persistent devotion on a daily basis," says **Muniba Mazari**, the Pakistani woman who was left crippled from an auto accident but is now a renowned artist, model, and motivational speaker ([Turning adversity into opportunity | Muniba Mazari | TEDxIslamabad](http://www.turningadversityintoopportunity.com)).

### Benefits of Turning our Adversities into Opportunities

While on the surface we may tend to see adversities in a negative light, the truth is we can learn great lessons from them and turn the adversities into blessings. Let us look at some of the benefits or blessings we can draw out of adversities.

• *Adversity can be a catalyst for Growth and Personal Development.*

As we face our challenges, limitations and pain, they can help us develop new coping strategies so we do not just survive but even thrive under adversity.

Look at **Nick Vujicic**, for example. He was born in 1982 *without arms or*

*legs*. His mother refused to see him or hold him immediately after his birth; instead, she and her husband left the hospital unable to bear the sight of their deformed child. They eventually took him home and cared for him. As a child he was bullied at school because of his medical condition. At one point, Vujicic attempted to commit suicide by drowning himself in a bathtub, but by God's grace he was saved. While his parents initially struggled with grief and confusion about his condition, they "raised him to look at the bright side of life."

Today Nick Vujicic is a Christian evangelist, motivational speaker, advocate for the disabled, and author of several inspirational books. He is also happily married and the father of four lovely children. This is a man who has shown great courage by not allowing his adversity to stop him but propelling him to grow and develop himself ([Nick Vujicic - Wikipedia](http://www.wikipedia.com)).

Nineteenth century American self-help author Napoleon Hill (*Think and Grow Rich*) was right on point when he said, "Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit."

• *Adversity can help us develop Strength and Resilience.*

Adversity can strengthen our ability to bounce back, so instead of dying from our adversity we rise from the ashes of defeat to the beauty and joy of victory.

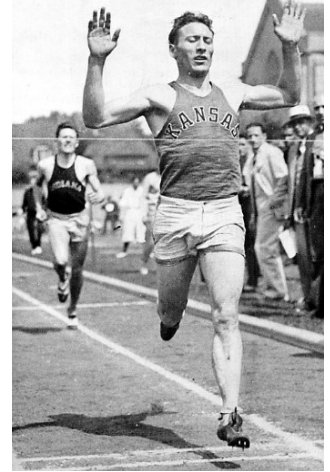
**Proverbs 24:10** tells us, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small."

Let's look at another example of someone from recent history who used his adversities to develop strength and resilience. One such individual who exemplifies this benefit of adversity is **Glen Cunningham**, whose life story has been dubbed *From Flames to Fame*.

Glen Cunningham was born in Elkhart, Kansas in 1909. Tragedy struck one cold winter morning on February 1916 when he and his brother Floyd went to light the wood stove to warm up the one-room wooden schoolhouse. They poured fuel on the wood and struck a match.

The stove exploded, knocking both boys to the ground and engulfing them in flames. Unbeknownst to them, someone had put gasoline into the kerosene oil can. Within moments, the old wooden structure was completely ablaze.

Floyd died a short time later despite everyone's best efforts to save him. Glen suffered severe burns, so severe that the doctor told his parents he would most likely die also. Seven-



Glen Cunningham

year-old Glen heard the doctor's remarks. However, he was determined to live.

The doctor advised his parents to amputate both of his legs, because they were burned beyond hope of ever being useful again. He would never walk. His parents declined the amputation, and Glenn determined he would walk again!

When Glenn was finally sent home, he was placed in a wheelchair. Both legs were badly scarred and required painful massages to help restore and maintain circulation and to keep them from growing permanently stiff.

He had lost all the toes on his left foot. His right leg was grossly misshapen and was now fully two inches shorter than the left.

His mother left him out in the backyard in his wheelchair so he could soak up some vitamin D from the sunshine.

A little while later she looked out the window and was horrified to see Glenn on his belly on the ground crawling toward their picket fence, and she rushed out to help him. She later discovered that he had not fallen but had purposefully slid out of the wheelchair and was dragging himself around the yard, trying to make his legs support him and walk. This became his daily exercise, forcing his legs to work again. Before the summer was over, he had worn a path smooth all around the yard. Ever so slowly his efforts began to bear fruit, and his feeble, scarred legs began to respond.

After he began the torturous process of walking, he made another discov-

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## Turning Adversities Into Blessings

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ery. "It hurt like thunder to walk," he said, "but it didn't hurt at all when I ran. So, for five or six years about all I did was run."

Out of this painful and life-altering tragedy, Glen defied the odds to become one of the United States' most accomplished athletes, breaking the records for the 800-meter, 1500-meter, and mile races. In 1934, he set the world record of 4 minutes, 6.7 seconds for the mile race.

Dr. Cunningham represented the United States in the 1932 Olympics and was captain of the American track team that toured Europe in 1933. All this, and he graduated from the University of Kansas with highest academic marks.

### • Adversity demands a Paradigm Shift.

To benefit from adversity, it often demands a change of attitude, a paradigm shift where we start seeing the positive aspects of a negative or terrible situation. So, when life hands you the proverbial lemons, don't give up, this could be the start of your lemonade franchise business.

Well-known evangelist and author Charles Swindoll observed that "Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."

So, when we can't change the things we are looking at, we can certainly change the way we look at them.

There is a song called "Blessings" by Laura Story, a few lines from which says:

*What if your blessings come through raindrops*

*What if your healing comes through tears*

*What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know that You are near*

*What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise*

*(Blessings - Laura Story [With Lyrics] - YouTube)*

Now let me share with you the story of a young man I know who has been dealt a tragic blow by life. But instead of being angry at God or wallowing in self-pity, he is giving thanks and making a paradigm shift as a result of his adversity.

This young man is now faced with a severe adversity, but it has forced him to confront his limitations and learn new skills or ways of thinking and coping. It has also helped him to appreciate what he has and develop a greater sense of gratitude and appreciation.

The name of this young man is **Chace Singh**, from Trelawny, Jamaica. On January 9, 2025, he was electrocuted when the metal in the poll he was using to pick fruit from an ackee tree came in contact with a high-tension power line. He suffered severe burns which penetrated to the bones in his hands and feet and even seared some of his internal organs. The severity of his injuries resulted in the doctors amputating both legs above the knees, the right arm above the elbow, and the left arm right in the shoulder. So here it was, a strong, active 34-year-old young man was left severely

burnt and having lost both his arms and both legs in a freak accident.

When we first visited him in the hospital on January 25, he was in heart-wrenching pain from the recently amputated limbs and the burns on the rest of his torso as they changed his bandages.

In the midst of his pain, he was strong in his faith, saying, "While there is life, there is hope." While he was in hospital and desiring to be discharged so he could go home and continue recovering, his attending physician wanted to make sure he was mentally ready to face the reality of life without limbs. The doctor tried to explain to him that he would be experiencing phantom pains and how that could affect him mentally. He went on to tell the doctor that he understood and that though he had lost his arms and legs the *whole* and *real* person was still there in him.

Chace is determined to not let this tragedy make him a victim. He shows not an ounce of self-pity but is determined to turn this trial around for good. He is not giving up but hopes to use his condition to inspire, motivate, and help others who are suffering. He was determined to leave the hospital and in fact is now home where he is busy educating himself as he goes through this journey of self-discovery and quest to be used by God to help others. I recall with fondness how he used the tip of his nose to dial numbers and scroll through screens on his cell phone. And he did it much faster than I am able to do with my two hands and all ten fingers in tact!

Please remember Chace in your prayers as he navigates this new and challenging course of life without limbs.

In those moments when we are challenged, we should remember what Paul writes in **Philippians 4:13**: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Be grateful for what you have. There are many others who have much less than you do.

### • Adversity can help us Grow in Empathy and Compassion

Going through adversity equips us to become more compassionate with the sufferings of others. It can make us more empathetic. Rather than allowing your tragedy to make you *bitter*, make room for it to make you *better*.

**Second Corinthians 1:3-4** states, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

When we have gone through tragedies like the death of a loved one, a serious accident, or battling some life-threatening disease, it helps us to feel with and for (empathy and sympathy) others who may be going through similar difficulties.

There's an old pop song from yesterday titled "Walk a Mile in My Shoes" with these telling lines:

*Walk a mile in my shoes  
Walk a mile in my shoes  
And before you abuse, criticize, and accuse  
Walk a mile in my shoes*

The adversities we face should equip us to better identify with others as they go through their difficulties.

### • Adversity should help us Grow Spiritually in a Deeper, Closer Relationship with God

God often uses trials to mold and shape us to make us better soldiers in His army.

**Job 23:10** says, "But He knows the way that I take; *When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.*"

From the Apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus, chapter 2 and verse 5, we are told: "For gold is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity."

God is training us as students in the "University of Adversity" and is patiently waiting for us to graduate so he can award us our degree.

When God allows us to go through adversities, His purpose is always to help us become better persons. On the surface, our trails may seem hurtful, but that is never God's intention. The adversities God allows us to go through are never meant to harm or destroy us but to perfect us.

**Jeremiah 29:11** puts it this way: "For I know what I have planned for you," says the LORD. "I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope" (New English Translation).

The writer of Hebrews uses the suffering that God the Father allowed Jesus to go through as a backdrop for the place of suffering in the life of the believer by quoting **Proverbs 3:11-12**. "My son, do not scorn the Lord's discipline or give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts" (**Hebrews 12:5-6**).

A.W. Tozer must have had the above scripture in mind when he said, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply."

The early church, which endured much persecution, was strengthened and encouraged by the truth that "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (**Acts 14:22**).

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, endured rejection, abuse, persecution, and adversities of all stripes and intensity. And so, he writes in **2 Corinthians 4:8-10**:

*"We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."*

Our predecessors went through much adversities and so while it is okay to pray that God would spare us from the hour of tribulation that is yet to come, we should cultivate a mindset that we are resolved to go through whatever adversities God may send our way and to use them as opportunities for growth and blessings.

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (**1 Peter 4:12-13**).

**Romans 8:28** says, "And we know that all things work together for good

to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

So, God can and does use all the experiences of our lives, the good, the bad, and everything in between, ultimately for our good and for His glory.

### Conclusion

We are heading into a time of unprecedented trouble and never before seen adversities. A time when the survival of the human race will be at stake.

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened (**Matthew 24:21-22**).

If we are not in a close relationship with God our Father, walking in union with him, we will not be able to make it through those trying times that are yet to come.

God's purpose in allowing us to go through adversities is all about making us better, not bitter. As a master potter crafting a piece of pottery will put it back into the kiln over and over; take it out and pummel it over and over, turn it on the wheel and shape and reshape it until all the flaws are eliminated and it becomes what he wants it to be, so God uses adversities to perfect us.

In the words of that old familiar hymn, *Have Thine Own Way, Lord*, we are admonished to submit to God, the Master Potter:

*Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!*

*Thou art the potter; I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me after thy will,  
while I am waiting, yielded and still.*

We serve a God who is right there with us in the midst of our trials, showering us, not with a pampering, but rather a **perfecting love**.

We can rejoice in the face of trials and adversities when we understand God's purpose in bringing such into our lives. His ultimate purpose is to make us perfect or complete, that His character may be formed in us.

With this knowledge in mind we can face adversity, not with fear and trepidation but with hope and courage that God will work it all out for our good.

And so, we can "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [endurance]; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (**Romans 5:3-5**).

Some of us may be going through severe adversities right now. Others of us will have ours later. But whatever the timing may be or the nature and severity of those adversities, we can rest confidently and be at peace in this truth:

"God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (**James 1:12**, New Living Translation).

Request your FREE copy of our booklet, *How You Can Be an Overcomer!*

### Change, continued from page 1

influences, change is a certainty.

When we observe change from the perspective of the Bible, we find that change is a recognized force. This force of change is often forecasted to affect personal, social, economic, and geo-political components. In such an environment, followers of God are encouraged to pursue personal change. With the assurance, that God can illicit change outside of the boundary of the natural order. Making anything possible for God to achieve.

Throughout the Bible, God shows his ability to evoke change unhindered by the laws of physics, chemistry, meteorology, and molecular biology. Providing ample supportive proof of his capability to achieve change even in the realm of our own personal dynamics.

The Bible shares many examples of God bringing about change through the feats of Moses. Here we find instances of God changing the physical properties of matter. As seen in the book of Exodus, God displays His ability to transform by turning a staff into a snake (**Exodus 4:3-4**). God further details to Moses His power to enact change on a far broader scale. Whereby God issues an edict where all water in Egypt will be changed into blood.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, "Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone.'" And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the LORD commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood" (**Exodus 7:19-20, NKJV**).

God's ability to transform physical properties is a reminder to us of His ability to change statuses and conditions. In the book of John, we observe Christ, similar to Moses (**Deuteronomy 18:15**), perform one of His first public acts of change.

"Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!'"

"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (**John 2:6-11, NKJV**)

Christ's gesture of turning water to wine was more than some amazing parlor trick. It was a calling card, introducing who He was. It incorporated symbols that pointed to what He was to accomplish. The representation of these symbols established His brand, as one who could change the spiritual status of man.

Christ's mission was to live a sinless life, void of incurring any spiritual penalties or sanctions (**1 John 3:5**). Then, in turn, use His own lifespan to satisfy the penalty that every human being has incurred from sin (**1 Peter 1:18-19; Ephesians 1:7**). Specifically, that penalty consists of separation from God and death (**Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23**). Christ used His life, which ended prematurely, to pay for the sins of all mankind. He willingly sacrificed His life to gain the lives of humanity. It is this great sacrifice that made possible a monumental

change in the status of all humanity.

This action paved the way for an agreement or covenant to be established between man and God, where one could reengage with God and pursue a life of obedience to Him. In exchange, the penalties associated with sin would not be attributed to that individual.

Paul reminded his audience of these very same sentiments.

"In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it'" (**1 Corinthians 11:25, NLT**).

Prior to His crucifixion, Christ originally explained the relevance of these symbols related to wine and blood.

"And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, 'Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many'" (**Matthew 26:27-28, NLT**).

Christ's sacrifice has paved the way for a change in status of all humanity. The opportunity to claim this change in one's condition is something to be pursued and celebrated.

"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God" (**Romans 5:8-11**).

The changes that we observe that take place in our lives and the world around us are microcosms of the change that is to take place within ourselves, in our consciousness, in our thought process and our very being. They are reminders of the necessary changes that we need to undergo to have a relationship with God. This is a change that shouldn't be avoided. This is not a change that one should be apprehensive about. Nor is it a change that should be accompanied with regret about our newfound status. A status of being connected with God, without impediments. Rather it is a change that we are to be thankful to have the opportunity to undergo.

## Open Church Policy

### The Church of God International is an open church.

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

## Journey to the Kingdom

*Life is what you do in preparation for what the Father has planned for you.*

By OLIVIA DOYLE



I trust that you had a blessed Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread and are counting the days to the Feast of Pentecost. The Spring holy days gave us an encouraging start to the Festival Seasons. These are the times when God's people gather today to lovingly obey His holy appointments.

Moving forward, the interlude between Pentecost and Trumpets may seem like a long stretch of time. You may be wondering, is there anything significant about this expanse of days? Is there something we should be doing as we progress through it? Maybe God squeezed in a little down time to give us a chance to relax and recuperate.

After all, our God is not a slave-driving taskmaster. On the contrary, He rescued Israel from slavery and Jesus redeemed us from the slavery of sin.

We know there is nothing insignificant or trivial in the plan of God. True, He did set his people free. Everything that God is working out has a reason and a purpose and there is joy in discovering what that important purpose is for us. For Israel, it was their opportune time to become a nation, a holy people of God that was to be the supreme judicial and worship center in the promised land of Canaan. The people fell very short of that goal. But God had the solution: His Son.

Passover is the celebration of this magnificent masterful plan where Jesus' sacrifice would ultimately bring His people Israel back to Him, even better than before. Now they would be completely forgiven and their minds renewed in a way that animal sacrifices never could. Right now, there is also a new people being created. A new priesthood that will

join with their High Priest Jesus in governing this new Kingdom of God—a Kingdom to be established after the rule of man is finished.

Before we arrive at this destination, one of the most important concepts that believers in Christ should always keep in mind is that we are now the children of our Father's Kingdom. Whatever point in time that we find ourselves in, we need to remember that we are ultimately on our journey to the Kingdom. As society spins itself on the merry-go-round of global events, we can have peace and assurance because we're already citizens of the Government of Heaven.

In **Philippians 3:20-21**, the apostle Paul tells us, *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

We are brought into the family of God, as symbolized by the Passover,

Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost. This period we're in now, before the last feast days begin, is the optimal time to bring into focus the purpose for which God has brought us here. The final destination is the Kingdom, but before we arrive there, we have training to go through.

When you are just beginning this journey, your starting point is a lot like boot camp. This is where you get your basic training, the foundation of Christ. Gradually, you build bigger and better as your knowledge and understanding grows. What you gain is directly proportional to the effort you put in. It was never meant to be easy, but it is exactly what you need to keep you moving forward. Even mistakes have a rewarding outcome. Dealing with them teaches you wisdom. That is priceless.

The author of the book of Hebrews says it this way: *For the moment all*

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## Journey to the Kingdom Continued from page 7

discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).

Don't be anxious about the word *discipline*. Discipline is not punishment. Rather, it's a systematic routine to learn new things. Discipline is the process that develops habits. Athletes discipline themselves by using various training methods to prepare themselves for events. In the same way, we are being trained on a day-to-day basis. Our new identity in Christ opens our eyes to the futility of self-achievement according to the standards of this world. Instead, we are faced with the impossible standard of holiness in the presence of our holy God.

Our Lord Jesus exceeded those standards, and the Father was well-pleased with Him—and Christ did it all in the flesh.

In Hebrews 4:15–16, we are told: *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and*

*find grace to help in time of need.*

Jesus is our training instructor who is well prepared to guide us right through to the end.

Now is an especially good time to develop the character of Christ. If we view our time here on earth as the gymnasium we work out in, we'll have many opportunities to demonstrate that Jesus is the object of our loyalty and we live lives that are pleasing to Him. He is our Lord and we call Him Lord.

The apostle Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:9–12: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

The apostle Paul is also a good study. He expresses so well the struggles, his training that he had in the flesh against the godly desires of the Spirit. His letter to the Romans is a

vital read during our times of weakness when we need the most encouragement. Remember that when Paul wrote Romans, it was at the end of his ministry. In his life, he saw Christ and was personally instructed by Him, saw people healed and raised from the dead, and yet he still struggled with this dichotomy of wills within him at the very end of his life. The will of his flesh warred against the will of the Spirit.

*For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am!*

*Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin (Romans 7:14–25).*

The conclusion that Paul came to was that as long as we are in the flesh, the battle will never end. Paul used his time for the betterment of his godly character. He was Kingdom-minded. He relied on Christ to empower him to overcome temptations. We should also be Kingdom-minded people. Yes, these are the days of trials, hardships, and unexpected challenges, but it all makes sense when your goal is the Kingdom and your leader is your Lord Jesus.

It's interesting that these days of our training, also known as our sanctification, comes just before the last festivals. The Day of Trumpets announces the reign of our King Messiah Jesus, but before that there will be a call to warn of the tribulation to come, the time of Jacob's trouble, and the mourning that follows. We don't know when, and we don't know how, but we should know that we need to be prepared as best we can.

Beloved brethren, redeem your time and use it wisely. God works all things for His good purpose. We are the focus of His love as we journey to the Kingdom. May your journey bless you every step of the way.

## The Dangers of Becoming a Complacent Believer

By CAROLYN DAHL



It has been told to me that in the US Marine Corps, there is a motto that says, "Complacency Kills." The one time a marine fails to check and see if their gear is on right, or goes one day without cleaning their weapon, or thinks they can cross a bridge without stopping and doing an immediate action drill for an IED, will be the day their whole crew gets blown up.

If a marine becomes complacent in their duties or combat, it can cost them their life and the lives of their unit. That's a fact.

Can this same motto be applied to our spiritual life in serving our Lord, King, and Saviour Jesus Christ? Can we stop our spiritual growth? The answer is YES. Let me show you from the Bible how dangerous complacency is and what we can do about it as believers.

First of all, what does the word *complacency* mean? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, it means "self-satisfaction, especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies." Dictionary.com defines it as "self-satisfaction or smug satisfaction with an existing situation, condition, etc."

The following scriptures speak about complacency:

**Proverbs 1:32–33:** "For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."

**Isaiah 32:9–10:** "Rise up you women who are at ease, hear my voice; you complacent daughters, give ear to my speech. In little more than a year you will shudder, you complacent women; for the grape harvest fails, the fruit harvest will not come."

**Zephaniah 1:12:** "At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.'"

These are passages that merely contain the word *complacent* or *complacency*. What about other scriptures on the subject of complacency? Let's go a little deeper.

### The Complacent Servants

If you are a seasoned reader of the Bible (most of you reading this article certainly are) and study the Scriptures, you've probably noticed, as you read the above passages, that they sounded familiar. Where have you read passages similar to Zephaniah?

You will find one such passage in the famous chapter 24 of the book of Matthew.

**Matthew 24:48–51:** "But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This wicked servant was complacent! He was unaware of his deficiencies and the danger of Christ's imminent return, which fits the definition of

complacency we read earlier.

In **Matthew 25:24–25** we read the response of the servant who was given one talent to his master: "He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.'"

This servant was complacent also. He did nothing with what he had been given. Clearly, he was unaware of the danger of his actions (or in this case, his inaction), or else he would have acted differently. Furthermore, he did not know his Master. His response was phony, and his master calls him out on it.

**Matthew 24:26–27:** "But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.'"

In other words, what the master said to the servant was, "Listen buddy, if you really believe what you said about me and how austere I am, you wouldn't have sat around and done nothing."

The consequence for the complacent servants in both instances was being cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth! This is not a trivial matter!

Well, you might say that these were wicked servants and that this wouldn't apply to us believers. Fair enough, they were wicked. So, if those are the consequences for unbelievers, what

are the consequences for those who are in the truth and become complacent?

### Complacency in the Churches

Let's start with the letters to the churches in the book of Revelation. The church in Ephesus is warned that they are in jeopardy of having its lampstand removed. "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (**Revelation 2:4–5**).

The church in Thyatira received words of warning from Jesus. Why? Because they "tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols" (**Revelation 2:20**).

The church in Sardis also receives a warning from Jesus to "Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you" (**Revelation 3:2–3**).

Lastly, we have the church in Laodicea. This is the infamous church that Jesus warns of being lukewarm, and because of this He threatens to "spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (**Revelation 3:16–17**).

So what are we looking at in these passages? Churches that became complacent. Churches that abandoned their first love, tolerated sinful members and behaviour, fell asleep on the job, and lost all zeal for the way, the truth, and the light.

Is it a small matter to have Jesus Christ Himself say He will come against a church? Extinguish a church's lamp? How about being spat out onto the ground or having Jesus vomit you out of His mouth as described in other translations (Mounce Reverse Interlinear)? Clearly, there are severe consequences for churches that would also affect believers in those congregations. How could they not affect them?

### Complacency of the Israelites

In the Old Testament, we read about the account of the Israelites entering into the promised land on the other side of the Jordan River in the book of Joshua. As a student of scripture, you would know that aside from the laws and the judgments and statutes, Moses also gave clear instruction (as did Joshua later) to completely remove from the land the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Caananites, Hivites, and the Jebusites (**Exodus 23:23**).

The directions to the Israelites when entering the promised land were clear and explicit (**Exodus 23:24-33**):

- They were not to bow down to their gods or serve them.
- They were not to follow their customs.
- They were to utterly destroy their pillars.
- They were to make no covenant with any of them. They were not to marry them or any of their children.
- They were to completely drive them out.

Joshua's parting words to Israel were no different. He warned them of the consequences of failing to do as the LORD commanded them:

"Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you" (**Joshua 23:11-13**).

What did the Israelites do? When they entered the land, all twelve tribes failed to utterly remove the inhabitants and, as a result, were greatly influenced by them, which led them to all sorts of sin, the worst being idolatry against the one true living God.

The first chapter of Judges gives a summary of how each of the tribes did when they first entered their allotted piece of land. Judah did the best as far as removing the inhabitants, but even they fell short (**Judges 1:19**).

This is how the rest of the tribes fared:

"Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants... Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites... Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants... Asher did not drive out the inhabitants... Naphtali did not drive out the inhabi-

tants... the Amorites pressed the people of Dan back into the hill country... and the Amorites persisted in dwelling in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor" (**Judges 1:27-36**).

Why didn't they obey? Because they became complacent.

Were the iron chariots of the inhabitants of the plain *really* too difficult? Didn't the LORD promise to be with them always? Why would He tell them to be of good courage if removing the inhabitants would be too difficult? It would appear that they were perfectly fine with settling.

What was the result of their complacency? The LORD told them that any nations they fail to remove "shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you" (**Judges 2:3**).

When the next generation of Israelites was born in the land, they abandoned the LORD and did evil in His sight by going after other gods and bowing down to them, among other things (**Judges 2:11-13**).

### The Opposite of Complacency

If complacency displeases the LORD and has terrible consequences, what then is the opposite? Zeal. If being lukewarm is the same as being complacent, being cold would be the equivalent of not caring or rebelling against the LORD. Being hot or on fire (not physically, of course) is being zealous for the LORD.

But what does that look like?

It looks like a man named Phinehas in Numbers chapter 25.

While Israel lived in Shittim, certain men chose to hook up with the daughters of Moab. These were no ordinary date nights. These Moabite women were sent over to entice the Israelites to come and join them in the sacrifices to their gods. It must have seemed like a super fun idea to these men because some of the leaders joined right in! As a result, the "fierce anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel" (**Numbers 25:3**).

Then, to make matters worse, in front of the tent of meeting where Moses and the whole congregation of Israel were weeping (those who were not taking part), some guy went and brought his Moabite sweetie to his family's tent right where everyone could see!

Well, as soon as Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw this, he immediately jumped into action. He got up, grabbed a spear, and went after the man of Israel into his tent and thrust it through both of them in one move.

This instantly stopped the plague on the people of Israel that had broken out on account of God's wrath. Not only did his action turn back the wrath of the LORD, but it greatly pleased the LORD so much that He granted to Phinehas His covenant of peace.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore, say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall

be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel'" (**Numbers 25:10-13, NKJV**).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul exhorts the believers in Rome, "Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in the Spirit, serve the Lord" (**Romans 12:11**).

Likewise, in his letter to Titus, Paul explains how the grace of God brings salvation and that this same grace trains us how to live our lives as believers. Part of this training is to make us zealous for good works.

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (**Titus 2:11-14**).

In three of the Gospels, Jesus warns us to be watchful in our day-to-day lives, especially as we get closer in the timeline to His return:

"Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (**Mark 13:35-36, NKJV**).

"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (**Luke 21:34-35**).

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (**Matthew 25:13**).

Lastly, Jesus Christ Himself gives a warning and instruction to the complacent church of Laodicea and individual believers, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" (**Revelation 3:19**).

God Himself is zealous. Though His steadfast love and mercy endures forever, He is zealous in His love toward us and His people. He wants to look down on us from His holy throne in heaven and see us being zealous for Him.

Do we not serve the LORD of hosts? Is Jesus Christ not our battle commander? Does He not return riding a white horse wearing a white robe dipped in blood, ready to strike the nations with a rod of iron and the sword that comes out of His mouth? Of course!

As our battle commander, He is telling us to suit up, ladies and gents! Stay awake! Make sure your spiritual armour is properly fitted! Be ready for Him at any moment.

If you think I'm exaggerating, let me ask you this: Why did God choose those three hundred men for Gideon who drank water at the river by bringing the water up to their mouths instead of lapping it like a dog in **Judges 7:5-6**?

Because God wanted the glory, you say, and you are partly right. But look

at the wording used in this instance. God wanted to "test" the men. What is He testing them for? To see who is watching, paying attention, and ready for battle at all times. That is why He tested them.

Brethren, let us no longer be complacent but rather like those three hundred men and be watchful at all times. Let us remember that we serve a God who is zealous for us, so that we can do what is necessary in our lives to be zealous for Him as Phinehas, son of Eleazar was.

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat: Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet! Our God is marching on.*

**Glory, glory, hallelujah!** (Battle Hymn of the Republic)

(All scriptures used in this article are from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise specified.)

## Hello God—It's me, Aida....

Grief is here again, and this time it has a grip on me and will not let go. I know you know my mom went to rest on June 15, 2022. When I lost my mom, I lost the one person who knew everything about me and still loved me. She was the one who taught me about You and Your Son. She was the one who taught me the Ten Commandments and how important it was to love my neighbor as myself. She was the root of my tree. Now, my tree is not as strong. It is so hard for me to be the root of my son's tree. She was the one who gave me the words of encouragement I needed to survive in this mean and cruel world. She was the one that reminded me daily that you made me and loved me no matter what. She was the one that explained to me that my purpose in life was to help you show others love. She taught me that I was here on earth to serve just like Jesus. I want to tell you that my mind understands that we are made from dust and to dust we will return, but how do I explain that to my heart, which appears broken beyond repair? It has lost its reason to be. I have so many questions such as when will the pain end? When will I feel whole again? When will I get used to not seeing her, hugging her, and kissing her? Oh, Lord, when will the pain stop? Oh, Father, when will I feel normal again? When will this hole in my heart fill up? When will I feel like myself? I try, every day I try. I pray every day. I have been praying for two years and six months. My heart knows how long it has been since I got a kiss, a hug, a blessing, or a smile. My friends and family have tried to make me feel better by telling me that time heals all pain. It is sad, but I must tell them that it is a lie. Time does not heal everything. It has not healed my heart. It has not helped me to continue to be the way I used to be.

I was told to reach out to my church, to my siblings in Christ, and my leaders. I tried. I could not bear to hear one more time that they were sorry for my loss. I know that they meant well, but

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that was not enough. It felt like that was the only thing to say. It left me feeling more alone than ever. I could not continue to be as if nothing had happened because my strength was gone. I reached out to others for prayer, but they too did not understand that my mom was my everything that brought me and kept me close to you. Her part in my life was only number two to you.

So, what do I do? To whom do I talk? The church has not helped. My brothers and sisters in the church are loving and kind, but they appear to be uncomfortable talking about what is on my mind and in my heart. They advise me to take the time I need to grieve. No one knows how to do that. The church has been wonderful for explaining the Bible to me, but the piece that is missing is "How do I apply what I hear to my life?" How do I explain to those in my church family that I need prayer and that I need to talk about how I feel without making them feel bad?

I understand that Jesus also experienced grief, but the Bible does not explain what He did to overcome it and control His emotions. How do I channel my grief into something positive? How do I overcome my sadness?

I talked to my friends, but they tried to comfort me by telling me that my

mom is an angel now and that she is watching over me. I know that is not true. I explained to them how that is not true and not biblical. They were so confused and disappointed by what I said that many say hello, talk about what is going on in their lives, ask how I am doing, and then shut down.

I tried counseling but it did not help. The counselor kept focusing on ways for me to suppress my feelings and ignore my thoughts. It was as if I had to deny the importance of my mother's role in my life. It was like I should ignore that piece of me. It was so uncomfortable.

I talked to You, but You feel so far away. I need a hug, but Your arms are out of reach. I need a kind word, but I cannot hear Your voice. No one understands that this world is hard, so we all need love here. My mother was the loving thing in this world I could touch, hug, and kiss.

Again, I know You love me. Thank You for everything, and I am sorry if I sound ungrateful. Father, I need you. Where are You? I look for You, but it takes too long for me to find You. I read your words, but its influence on me does not take away my pain and sorrow. It keeps coming back, especially at night. Please, Father, send me help. I will continue to love my neighbors because I honor my mom.

So, Father, what is next for me? How do I learn to set goals that help me understand my feelings and work through them? How do I overcome my

feelings so that I can continue to follow the path You have set for me? I need to prioritize my health and my family. I need to be able to show my son support because he too is grieving. Where do I go? Who do I turn to for guidance? Why does grieving have to be a lonely path? Death is a part of life so why do we shy away from talking about it except when we talk about being with the Father. How do I explain to others that like everything in life such as work, relationships, family life, death too needs to be expressed? We pray for health, family, and finances. Why don't we pray more about how death affects us?

Would it be too much to ask my church family to make a prayer group where we could talk about what is heavy on our hearts and pray for each other? It could be women with women, men with men, or as a group. Should I approach them to let them know that sometimes I just need to talk about my feelings and how they are affecting my daily life? A kind or positive word could have an influence, especially when it comes from someone else. I try to talk positively to myself, but it does not always work.

Should I explain that it is great to learn about the Bible, but where is the part that shows you how to apply it to your life? What does that look like? I think about how the Bible says love your neighbor. What does that look like in real time? Is it holding the door for someone whose arms are filled

with packages? Is it saying hello to someone who looks sad? Is it saying hello and have a wonderful day to those that pass you on the street?

Should I approach others in my congregation who have experienced loss and ask if they want to talk? I love talking about my mother. I have millions of stories. Will others want to share their stories? Is that like loving my neighbor when I let them know they are not alone, and you are willing to listen so they can unburden their hearts? Oh, Father, where are You? Who can tell me what is right to do at this time? I pray for guidance because I know You are listening, and help is on the way.

Father, I will continue to write to You because it is my only way to vent now. Thank You for listening. Love, Your daughter, Aida.

Loss is difficult to talk about. I wanted to share it, and this letter was the best way to do it because grieving is not an easy subject. This is my truth. It is part of my pain. I would really like to be there for others who want to share. You are not alone. I am here. If you would like to contact me or just share your story, please feel free to contact me at [smile4ac66@yahoo.com](mailto:smile4ac66@yahoo.com). Put in the subject—I want to share, or I want to pray. It will be my pleasure to be there for you. We are family.

Aida Colon

## Does the Didache Support the Eucharist and the Sunday 'Lord's Day'?

By HORANE SMITH



Theologians, scholars, and members of the clergy, have much to say about the Didache, an early church document regarded as one of the oldest preserved writings of the Christian Church that predates the canonization of the Holy Bible. It was regarded by some early Christian apologists as, "...next to the Holy Scriptures."

### What is the Didache?

The Didache is not a long document. It consists of about 2,300 words and sixteen chapters. It is also referred to as the **Teachings of the Twelve Apostles** and **The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations**. The Didache is regarded as "the first manual for Christian life," and it gives a glimpse of early Christian ritual and liturgy. The authors are unknown. The document was lost for many centuries, but a Greek manuscript of the Didache was rediscovered in 1873 by Philotheos Bryennios, Metropolitan of Nicomedia, in the **Codex Hierosolymitanus**, which is a compilation of texts written by the Apostolic Fathers found in the **Most Holy Sepulchre** in Constantinople. A Latin version of the document was also found by Dr. J Schlecht in 1900.

After its find, writes one church historian, "the Didache was immediately seen to be one of the most important literary remains of early Christianity

outside of the New Testament." However, it was rejected in later years when the final decision was made about which books should be included in the New Testament. The Didache was lost from view from around the fourth century until it was rediscovered in 1873.

"The Didache is not considered authoritative enough to be included in the New Testament canon, though some Church Fathers considered it to be part of the New Testament. The Didache is a second-generation Christian writing, also known as an Apostolic Father. Some Church Fathers rejected the Didache as non-canonical or spurious," according to one Catholic commentator.

The date the Didache was written is in dispute among many scholars and theologians, a position that is critical to how the treatise is viewed as it relates to the development of Christian thought and doctrines. With the Holy Bible yet to be canonized, the formulation of church teachings, and practices, often drew reference from the Didache.

### When was the Didache written?

Many scholars have concluded that the Didache could have been written from as early as 70 CE. Nevertheless, others placed it in the mid-second century. According to the online encyclopedia, **Wikipedia**, "Apart from these fragments, the Greek text of the *Didache* has only survived in a single manuscript, the **Codex Hierosolymitanus**. Dating the document is thus made difficult both by the lack of hard evidence and its compos-

ite character. The *Didache* may have been compiled in its present form as late as 150, although a date closer to the end of the first century seems more probable to many."

Historians and Bible scholars generally agree that the primitive church of the first century was Hebraic in nature regarding its doctrines and practices. If the Didache was written in the first century, then in all probability, much of what it was conveying would be from a Hebraic perspective. The document has a lot of biblical quotations. And even if it was written in the second century, chances were some of those Hebraic practices would be followed as Christianity and Judaism didn't part ways until after the **Bar Kochba Revolt** in 135 CE under the Roman Emperor Hadrian.

A scholar of the historical Jesus, Professor Geza Vermes, in his work *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea AD 30-325*, says "the work transmits anonymously a primitive form of Christian message attributed to the twelve apostles of Jesus and most of the material implies that the audience or readership was of Jewish rather than Gentile background" (Page 136).

The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford University Press) states, "The author, date, and place of origin are unknown. The work is quoted as scripture by Clement of Alexandria, and is mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea and by Athanasius. Although in the past, many English and American scholars (J.A. Robinson, R.H. Connolly) tended to assign it to the late 2nd century,

most scholars nowadays place it in the first century, including J.P. Audet, OP, who dates it to AD 60."

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says, "Hermas, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen (church historians) seem to use the work, and so in the West, do Optatus and the 'Gesta apud Zenophilum'. The Didascalia Apostolorum is founded upon the Didache. The Apostolic church ordinance has used a part, the Apostolic Constitutions have embodied the Didascalia. There are echoes in Justin, Tatian, Theophilus, Cyprian, and Lactantius."

### The Didache contains four parts

The Didache can be divided into four parts, which most scholars agree were combined from separate sources: the *Two Ways*, the Way of Life, and the Way of Death (chapters 1-6). The second part is more ritualistic as it deals with baptism, fasting, and communion (chapters 7-10). The third part relates to the Ministry and how apostles, prophets, bishops, and deacons should be treated (chapters 11-15). The final portion (chapter 16) features prophecy, mainly the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ.

The time the document was written plays a key role in how the early church leaders viewed what it was trying to convey to the growing Christian community. And that is understandable because of the lack of a compilation and authentic written or documented guide on teachings and practices. The Bible resources site *Biblica* says, "In the first and second centuries after Christ, many, many writings and epis-

ties were circulating among the Christians. Some of the churches were using books and letters in their services that were definitely spurious. Gradually the need to have a definite list of the inspired Scriptures became apparent. Heretical movements were rising, each one choosing its own selected Scriptures, including such documents as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, and the *Epistle of Barnabas*."

#### The importance of the Didache in early church teachings

There's no doubt that the Didache was held in high esteem by the early Church leaders and those responsible for the development of Christian thought. Eusebius, an early church historian mentions the Didache in his *Church History* 111.25.4., "Let there be placed among the spuria the writing of the Acts of Paul, the so-called Shepherd and the Apocalypse of Peter, and besides these the Epistle known as that of Barnabas, and what are called the **Teachings of the Apostles**, and also . . . the Apocalypse of John, if this be thought fit . . ."

#### The Didache in Christianity today

What is interesting in mainstream Christianity today is the often-heard attribution to the Didache as the earliest example of Sunday worship (supposedly the Lord's Day reference) and the mention of keeping the Eucharist. The Didache covers other subjects such as how to be baptized, prayer and fasting, teachers, apostles and prophets, and the end-time.

The first question one needs to ask, assuming that the Didache is accepted as a very important document on early/primitive church practices, and authentic as well, is whether some of the writings should be treated as doctrinal positions. The question is relevant because of the emphasis placed on the Didache by the early church leaders and now modern-day Christianity.

Popular Bible scholar Professor Bart Ehrman in one of his blogs says, "My sense is that the Didache was not meant to be a theological treatise and so it's very hard to know what its author's theology actually was. The eucharistic materials are very interesting for lots of reasons, one of which is that the eucharistic prayers are very different from what one might expect and clearly come out of a Jewish-Christian environment (vine of David, and so on). I don't see these as contradictory to what one finds in Paul and the Synoptics—just different. (The NT passages do not indicate what prayers should be said at the eucharist; and the Didache does not indicate what Jesus did at the last supper—so they are talking about different things."

#### The Eucharist

This brings me to the question of the Eucharist, a very important ritual in mainstream Christianity. The Didache doesn't describe the actual celebration of the Eucharist. Interestingly, the Greek word *eucharistia* is translated as "eucharist" in the Didache 8. The passage states, "But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name."

The word "Eucharist" comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means "thanksgiving." It is a central act of mainstream Christian worship that commemorates Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples. The Eucharist is also known as Holy Communion, and the Lord's Supper. These are the two references to the activity now known as the Eucharist or Holy Communion in the Didache.

#### Chapter IX

"1. And concerning the Eucharist, hold Eucharist thus: 2. First concerning the Cup, 'We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy servant, which, thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy servant; to thee be glory for ever.' 3. And concerning the broken Bread: 'We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy servant. To thee be glory for ever.' 4. As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, but was brought together and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever. 5. But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's Name. For concerning this also did the Lord say, 'Give not that which is holy to the dogs.'"

#### Chapter X

"1. But after you are satisfied with food, thus give thanks: 2. 'We give thanks to thee, O Holy Father, for thy Holy Name which thou didst make to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which thou didst make known to us through Jesus thy Servant. To thee be glory forever. 3. Thou, Lord Almighty, didst create all things for thy Name's sake, and didst give food and drink to men for their enjoyment, that they might give thanks to thee, but us hast thou blessed with spiritual food and drink and eternal light through thy Servant. 4. Above all we give thanks to thee for that thou art mighty. To thee be glory forever. 5. Remember, Lord, thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it together in its holiness from the four winds to thy kingdom which thou hast prepared for it. For thine is the power and the glory forever. 6. Let grace come and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If any man be holy, let him come! if any man be not, let him repent: Maranatha, Amen."

What is noteworthy is the Didache refers to a "thanksgiving" (the meaning of *eucharistia*). The two places where it's mentioned in Chapter 9, it could very well be used for "thanksgiving," or thanking God for the sacrifice of His Son Jesus. Yes, the cup is mentioned, and the broken bread is also referred to, which obviously point to the sacrifice of Jesus. The important message here is what Jesus did on the night when he gathered with the twelve disciples to partake of these new symbols of bread and wine representing His broken body and His shed blood. He was leaving an example for us to follow as Paul instructs us in **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I

delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

The event, now invariably called, the LORD'S Supper, the New Testament Passover, and Passover, also took on a new meaning in some sections of Christianity; today we also have Holy Communion or the Eucharist. It has become a weekly activity by some churches, based on verse 26: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Of course, many churches overlooked the fact that it was to be done as a memorial—"this do in remembrance of me." How come? Christ's death was the supreme sacrifice putting an end to what the High Priest did in the past, "Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (**Hebrews 9:25-26**, emphasis mine).

Since that "Passover" night, we were to memorialize His death till He comes, but not every week or every quarter, as some churches do, but as a memorial—once a year.

Jesus Christ became the new Passover and rightly so, as Paul stated clearly in **1 Corinthians 5:7**, "Christ our PASSOVER is sacrificed for us" (emphasis mine). The High Priest no longer needs to do this because Jesus, the Christ, is our new High Priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. He's now our Passover, not our Easter or Eucharist.

This new ritual of the Eucharist differs from what Christ did that night, which is supposed to be a memorial or once-a-year event. Professor Geza Vermes again has an interesting take on the Eucharist mentioned in the Didache. His book, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea AD 30-325*, was described by former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, as "A beautiful and magisterial book." Professor Vermes says this:

"The communal Eucharist was a real meal and not just a religious ritual. Its purpose was to feed the participants, and it went on until they all had enough to eat. At the same time, it was a symbol reminding the members of the spiritual food and drink, and the internal life that Jesus promised to the church. In connection with the 'breaking of bread,' let it be stressed that neither the parallel accounts of Acts nor the Didache discloses knowledge of any theological symbolism linking the sacred communal meal of the early church with the Last Supper. For Paul, however, the ritual of the Lord's Supper was a reiteration of the sacrificial death of Jesus and implied a mystical participation in his immolated

body and blood. The Eucharist ideas transmitted in the Didache are definitely non-Pauline and may even be pre-Pauline."

Furthermore, there's also a not-so-spiritually healthy link with the origins of the Eucharist. Some critics link the Eucharist with pagan origins as the notion to appease the gods often involved bread and other offerings. The Roman poet Albius Tibullus commented, "A little cake, a little morsel of bread, appeased the divinities." The "Eucharist" and the "Sacrifice of a godman" were popular rituals among pagan religions. The ritual called for the consumption of the godman. Osiris, Dionysus, Attis, and many other gods were ritually eaten symbolically through these offerings. As human sacrifice was spurned and became grotesque over the centuries, animals were then substituted and sacrificed as the ritual identifier of the god. Grains were offered, bread shaped into the form of the god, sometimes in the shapes of the sun, moon, and stars.

The point question then is, does the Didache carry the same message of the New Testament in honoring Christ our Passover? Or does the problem lie in the interpretation of the writings by early church leaders?

#### The Lord's Day in the Didache

Another mention of note in the Didache as far as doctrinal positions are concerned is Sunday being termed the Lord's Day. I have often heard preachers, bishops, and other church leaders emphasizing that the observance of the Lord's Day was from early New Testament times, as it's both mentioned in the Didache and Revelation 1:10. Regarding the latter, it's very critical to this notion to question whether the concept of a Lord's Day was prevalent or known when John wrote the Book of Revelation some time in the 90s AD. If the first day of the week was already accepted by the apostolic church and Sunday had become the new day of worship, the Lord's Day, representing His resurrection, then those are strong arguments to support Sunday worship, they argue (despite the Bible not sanctioning a change in the seventh-day Sabbath). The arguments continue despite the non-scriptural authority to transfer the Sabbath to Sunday or the fact that Jesus had forty days on Earth after His resurrection to make the change. He never did, and the apostles maintained the Hebrew roots of the church, including Sabbath observance. That picture is painted all over the books of Acts.

On the other side of the coin, why would John consider it important to mention the Lord's Day or a day of worship when he was about to see a vision revealing to him what the Day of the Lord (or Lord's Day) would be like? When the same John heard behind him "the voice of a trumpet," what does a day of worship have to do with that when it's long-established the meaning of the trumpet in Scripture as exemplified in **1 Corinthians 15** and **1 Thessalonians 4** and all over Revelation.

Both Revelation 1:10 and the Eucharist mention of the Lord's Day

**Continued on page 12**

### Does the Didache Support...? Continued from page 11

have to do with the interpretation of the Greek renderings of the words translated Lord's Day.

The Didache mentions most of the commandments, which says a lot. Yet it never mentions the Sabbath. In his work, *The Lord's Day in the Didache*, Dr. Frank W. Hardy, argues that "The Didache comes from an extremely early period of church history. As such, we can't automatically assume that 'Lord's day' meant then what it means now, or even what it would mean in the second century. I argue here that when the church first started using this term it was a Christian code word for the Sabbath and was later adapted for use with another day as the Christian day of worship gradually shifted from the seventh day to the first. The key word here is gradual. The day of worship at first was very clearly the Sabbath."

Some Bible scholars argue that the Didache draws a lot from Jewish sources, for example, the book of Matthew. But this has not stopped Sunday worship adherents from claiming the Lord's Day means Sunday. What does the Didache say exactly about the Lord's Day?

*"On the Lord's Day of the Lord [kata kuriak-n de kuriou] come together; break bread and hold Eucharist, after confessing your transgressions that your offering may be pure; 2 but let none who has a quarrel with his fellow join in your meeting until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice be not defiled. 3 For this is that which was spoken by the Lord, 'In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great king,' saith the Lord, 'and my name is wonderful among the heathen'" (Didache 14).*

Note that the Greek phrase *kata kuriak-n de kuriou* is a double possessive that translates to "On the Lord's of the Lord." What does the phrase *kata kuriak-n de kuriou* mean? It translates "[the] Lord's of [the] Lord." The translator inserted the word "day" after *kuriak-n*, and thus the phrase is rendered "On the Lord's [Day] of the Lord." And what does "On the Lord's of the Lord's" actually mean? In the context of what the Didache is pointing to, the phrase can be rendered "According to the Lord's [command] of the Lord, which is to observe the Passover according to the Lord's instructions. There are also questions about the usage of the word "on" as it relates to the Greek word *kata*. The essence of what the passage is trying to

convey is not about gathering to worship on Sunday. Considering the Hebraic nature of the primitive church, the instructions here would expectedly be in accordance with God's commandments. Lord's Day, if it were Sunday, doesn't seem a fit in this scenario.

This takes us back to Revelation 1:10, the only Bible passage with a Greek phrase translated "Lord's Day." If indeed, the phrase *t kuriak- h-mera* means Sunday, what would be its relevance to what John was about to witness about the coming Day of the Lord? To say John coined a new phrase, Lord's Day, because the Sabbath had now been transferred to Sunday as the new day of worship is without any biblical foundation. Again, Sunday being the day in question, has nothing to do with the catastrophe that would befall humanity on the Day of the Lord.

#### Conclusion

How should we see the Didache then as it relates to these two modern-day teachings—the Lord's Day and the Eucharist? The evidence is clear that it cannot be taken for granted that it's an all-clear-cut proposition that the Didache indicates that the concept of the Lord's Day being Sunday came as

early as the first century. First, no one can say for certain that the Didache is a first-century document, and second, the insertion of the word "day" to read Lord's Day robs the phrase of authenticity or accurate translation, because "On the Lords of the Lords," the literal translation of the phrase, seems to have no link with a day, or a day of worship for that matter.

It would appear the Eucharist (which translates as thanksgiving) of modern times is at odds with the early practice of holding communion in accordance with the admonition from Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 to observe Jesus' death "till he comes." The early Jewish Christians kept Passover once a year on Nisan 14 from all accounts in accordance with the biblical instructions, and not a weekly or quarterly observance called communion. We know from the Quartodeciman Controversy involving the great Polycarp, a student of John, that the Hebraic practices of the church were still being observed up until about 150 AD. Therefore, Paul's instructions about the New Testament Passover compared to what mainstream Christianity does today about Jesus' death, are not the same, whether it's Easter, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist.

## To Vote or Not to Vote...That is the Question

By JEAN DIONNE



I've wrestled with this article for a very long time. I know it is a controversial issue. I have been in church for a very long time, but I personally have never heard of voting in a positive light. Maybe you have? I will share one story of a sermon I heard at a local COG just before a national election at least eight years ago.

I remember after the sermon on why we as Christians should not vote, we were given a 22-page handout explaining the reasons why the church does not vote. We were told at the end of that sermon that if we did vote, we did not sin. Hmm...I had to really think about that, and that I did.

I did read the handout and did agree with most of the good and valid points that were given, but the question was, did it apply, was it a matter of conscience, and did the minister/church have the right to take a stand against it? Since that time, and in view of what has been happening in our nation, I must say...I have much to say.

Maybe you have never heard anything about voting at all in church? We tend not to discuss political topics. I can remember not feeling comfortable discussing this with the brethren as it was not a spiritual matter. It was an unspoken thing. You just knew not to bring it up; like when you were young and told not to talk about religion or politics. It could bring discord, or it just wasn't polite. Of course I get that. So, please know that this is not my intent. Whatever the case, the problem was not the topic or the subject, but rather the

emotion or lack of emotion.

Before 1920, voting was encouraged from the pulpit, and it was not a taboo subject. What happened? Of course, I'm talking about mainstream religion, but that's not the point. The point is they would encourage their members to vote against unrighteous and ungodly laws.

Later, the "Johnson Amendment" (named for then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, who introduced the preliminary draft for the provision in 1954) would prohibit 501 (c)(3) non-profit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates. I believe that because churches were afraid of losing their exemption, they went silent. Hence, we were told "separation of church and state." Was that the ploy of the enemy? Money versus God? Do we now believe that we are to be silent about evil? I do not believe "separation of church and state" was meant to keep God out of government, but to keep government from forcing one religion on the people.

We know from Scripture that the future Kingdom of God will replace all the governments of this world.

I realized, at this last election, we as a nation were at a tipping point. Emotions were high and we were a very divided nation, and the stakes were high too. The integrity of our voting process was in question, and major voting reform was an issue. An article I recently read said that 104-million people of faith were unlikely to vote in this last election. Now, if that is true, that makes a big difference! Could it be that our blasé and anti-government attitude is part of the problem?

Here are the reasons why I voted as a Christian. They may not be yours; that's a matter of conscience and our God-given right.

First, in America, we as a church have

entertained the belief that we are modern-day Israel. I happen to believe this. Our government is not run by a dictator, but we, as a people, select. As a freedom-loving people, we have the privilege to vote, if we so choose, for godly principles and reject anti-God principles. To preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God, we need religious freedom. Question: Does the gospel flourish under a free nation, a socialistic nation, or a dictatorship? I think we know that answer.

America was founded on the ability to self-govern and is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Our founding fathers believed in God and His Divine Providence. Would they even recognize America today? Certainly, they would be against socialism and that would not even be up for discussion. Is it our duty as an American citizen to vote? The Apostle Paul knew his rights as a citizen. Do we know ours? If we choose not to vote, should we also choose not to complain? It's not being against one party or the other, but rather against ungodly principles.

Do you remember in school being taught "no taxation without representation"? We do pay our taxes (Jesus did). We do have our little say with the vote. Sometimes it may not make a difference, but sometimes it does. We basically go to the polls; we do not take to the streets. I do not believe that the Jews during Jesus's day had a say or a vote.

Some feel it is our duty as a citizen. Others believe a vote either way is against the coming Kingdom of God. And still others believe their vote would make no difference one way or another, and it would only make them part of the world that they came out of. Only you know where you stand. Voting, whether local or national, is a matter of con-

science. It is a privilege and our right as a free people, which we should be very grateful for. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance" (Psalm 33:12).

There is a biblical principle in the church that we are to choose out from among us, leaders (Acts 6; 1 Timothy 3). If it applies to the church, why not to a nation? Our freedom is precious. We know the whole world is under the sway of Satan, and all governments are corrupted.

"He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding" (Daniel 2:21). So, God is still in control. We await God's Kingdom and Jesus our Lord and King, but in the meantime, we are to occupy.

If we are to pray for our leaders that we may live a peaceful and quiet life (1 Timothy 1:2), would we not want leaders who proclaim biblical principles like: pro-God, pro-family, pro-life, pro-liberty, pro-freedom, pro-constitution, pro-law and order, pro-business and anti-corruption, anti-crime, and anti-everything that is not biblical or of God? Would God not want us to have a say or care about the character and beliefs of those leaders that we are to pray for? How much peace and quiet would we have without our freedom and constitution?

That is why I believe that churches have been wrong to teach not to vote, especially in America where we still have our freedom and constitution. So, by not voting could it be possible that we have contributed to the problems that we face as a nation and share in the responsibility?

SO, TO VOTE OF NOT TO VOTE...THAT STILL IS THE QUESTION! Everyone must decide for themselves.

# In the Percentage of Christians in the US Population Falling?

By MIKE JAMES



In the past, I have written a couple blogs on the decreasing impact of religion and Christianity in the Western world and some other places. This trend has been ongoing since the 1950s in the United States (US) and is even more dramatic in some predominantly Christian nations in other parts of the world. Back in the 1950s, over 90 percent of the US population claimed to be Christian, with those numbers down to over 60-some percent claiming Christianity now.

According to a recent Pew Research Center, a study conducted from 2023–2024 on 80,000 individuals in 36 countries, “a fifth or more of all adults have left the religious group in which they were raised,” with Christianity and Buddhism taking the biggest hits.

According to David Closson, director of Family Research Council’s Center for Biblical Worldview, “The Pew study is significant for a number of reasons. First, it shows that, worldwide, churches and Christian parents are having a difficult time retaining their children when it comes to passing down the faith.”

In a 1948 Gallup poll, only 2 percent of the US population claimed “no religion.” By the late 1960s about 4 percent of the US population claimed no religion. This number shot up dramatically by 2020 when over 20 percent of the US population claimed no particular religious affiliation. Researchers believe something occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s that led to this dramatic shift.

What happened?

One possible reason for this increase is that more people are being honest with pollsters about their religious affiliation. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, when most people were Christian in the US, those who may not have been completely committed to Christianity may have acknowledged the religion even if they were only nominally committed. As times changed and Christianity lost its popularity, more people may have felt comfortable to admit they were not truly engaged in the religion.

This is an important point. Many who were previously nominally Christian were surrounded by friends, family, and social cues that promoted Christianity. But as things changed over time it became socially easier to not be Christian. This would then be like a rolling snowball effect getting larger. The more you see people who are not Christian the easier it becomes for you to not be Christian.

Another interesting theory has to do with the Cold War. Some suggest that since the primary enemy of the United States from 1945 until 1989 was the Soviet Union, the atheism of the USSR may have played a role in promoting the role of Christianity in America. Keep in mind that the words “under God” were added to our pledge of allegiance in 1954 under President Eisenhower. This was influenced by the Cold War mentality prevalent at the time. Two years later, in 1956, the “In God We Trust” motto became official in the United States. The influence of us versus them—the Christians versus the godless communists—may have locked some people into sticking to their Christianity.

Listen to some of the rhetoric at that time from influential politicians.

In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy delivered a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia and said this: “Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity.... Can there be anyone who fails to realize that the communist world has said, ‘The time is now’—that this is the time for the showdown between the democratic Christian world and the communist atheistic world?”

In 1954, Representative Louis C. Rabaut said this to Congress: “You may argue from dawn to dusk about differing political, economic, and social systems, but the fundamental issue which is the unbridgeable gap between America and Communist Russia is a belief in almighty God.”

The United Kingdom (UK) was also actively engaged in the Cold War at the same time, but their rhetoric was not based on religion. Gallup surveys from 1946 to 1963 in the UK showed their “no religious affiliation” numbers ranged between 4 percent and 11 percent, which were low, but still 2 to 6 times higher than what was happening in the US.

The biggest rise in people not affiliated with Christian Church groups comes from our most recent generations (Millennials and Generation Z, both born after 1997). Both of these groups were born after the Cold War ended in 1989, and they were not influenced as much by Cold War messaging.

A third reason for a decrease in Christianity in America may be due to experimentation with new religions in the 60s and 70s. Some of this experimenting started with the hippie and counterculture movement but it also grew into new age religion, UFO cults, native American religion, paganism, and more.

Paganism is one of America’s fastest-growing religions with an estimated 1 million followers of various Pagan sects in the United States. According to the 2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study, 0.3 percent of Americans identify as “Pagan or Wicca.” In 2008, there were just 340,000 Pagans in the US.

Paganism (also called Neopaganism, Contemporary Paganism, or just Paganism) is a revival movement that encompasses a wide variety of polytheistic religious traditions: Sumerian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman practices, as well as Wicca (modern witchcraft), Ásatrú (the worship of Norse gods, goddesses, and land spirits) and Druidism.

A fourth reason some suggest is that the mainline Churches began to alter due to the fact less people were interested in church. The growth of the megachurches downplayed doctrine and focused on feel-good messaging. The old hymns were replaced by more contemporary music and less structure. The evangelical movement grew, but the mainline church groups that tried to alter things may have upset some of their people. As doctrines got watered down, mainline Protestant groups began to split.

There have been a number of exposes in the media that cast a negative light on Christianity. Yet another reason people leave. The sexual scandals of famous pastors and the Catholic Church have cast a negative light on organized Christianity.

The dating of these scandals is also significant. Two of the biggest Protestant ministers of the 1980s were brought down by sexual scandals in the later half of the 1980s, and the Catholic Church sexual scandals began to be reported on in the late 80s as well, with an increase in the Catholic abuse scandal reporting through the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Even the Church of God movement has been rocked by sexual scandal in the mid-1990s and the second decade of this century.

Here is how one ex-Catholic put it: “I have decided to leave. I have lost trust and belief in the Catholic Church because of the staggering number of sex abuse crimes committed against children and adults over the last seven decades. I am not a victim of these crimes, but as a person of faith, I believe it is important to speak out against these abuses, to stand firm with those who suffered at the hands of men who are mouthpieces for God.”

Another ex-Christian, who was involved with Bill Gothard’s Fundamental Institute in Basic Life Principles, had this to say about the hypocrisy of Gothard: “For decades, Gothard taught that men are animals who cannot control their urges; that women are to guard their bodies and their manner of dress to keep men from lusting after them; that daughters are to be submissive, orienting their lives around pleas-

ing their fathers as practice for pleasing their future husbands. In 2014, Gothard resigned from his post after being accused of molesting 34 teenage interns and staffers.”

Many books and articles have been written about this hypocrisy. One thing that really sets some people off is people who are hypocrites. If a pastor preaches against adultery and fornication and then is proven to have committed those sins, it can really send some believers into a tizzy. Another element of this is when these types of things are covered up. The Catholic Church tried to hide many of the sins of their clergy. The lying and the cover up also led to many Catholics giving up on their church.

Another point could be a reaction to a Conservative Christian message that began to formalize through men like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson in the 1970s. As a reaction to liberalism of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s the Moral Majority and the 700 Club began to war with the counterculture movement. There is evidence that a rise in those with no religious affiliation was influenced by this.

Another interesting idea is that, after 9/11, the greatest threat to the US for a time was an ideology based on a radical religious ideology. Some thinkers and writers began to promote the danger of radical conservative religious ideology of any stripe. This may have moved some away from religion in general.

Yet another negative indicator for Christianity in the US is the idea that countries that are more developed and wealthier are showing less interest in religion. For a long time, the US bucked this trend until about 2007. But beginning in 2007, the US has shown a more secularizing rate than any other country being researched, according to one study.

This idea makes sense on the surface. When things are bad, you tend to think about God more. We see this example with Israel in the Bible. Only after 70 years of exile in Babylon did Judah get serious about God when they returned to their land. When you have all you need in a physical sense, you tend to get complacent.

The final example I will give is the rise of the Internet—possibly the biggest reason for this change. When we look at the timing of when things really began to change with the popularity of Christianity in the US, 1990s to early 2000s, one of the greatest changes in humanity was just starting. How could the Internet play a role? By providing more knowledge and ideas at anyone’s fingertips than ever before.

Not only can you see the promotion of all religion, but also the criticism of all religion. For example, let’s take the example of a Mormon in a small town in Utah. In this small town, all your family, friends, and acquaintances are predominantly Mormon. You don’t hear any negative things about Mormon theology or Mormon history. But in the age of the Internet, if you have a smart phone or a computer—as most people do—you are just one click away from reading reams of information that will challenge and shock your Mormon beliefs.

With the increase in data and information, it is so much harder for people to find the truth and to be influenced by errors. Think about this for those of you who were alive before the coming of the Internet. It was much harder to access information. You had to go to the library and look for things, but first you had to have an idea of what you wanted to look for. You had to pay for magazines and newspapers to be brought to your house. We still have to pay for online subscriptions, but all the topics and ideas are available online for free too. Any question you have can get an immediate response online, where before you had to seek and find experts to answer questions.

The message the Church of God brings to the Internet can easily be found, but it is now in competition with so many more messages than ever before.

*Continued on next page*

### Is the Percentage...Falling? Continued from page 13

Think about the world before cable TV. I grew up in that world. I can remember having access to five or six TV channels and, of course, radio programming. The message of God's truth could more easily be found due to much less competition. Today, we have gone way beyond that, with the assortment of cable TV channels with streaming. In fact, you can now get radio stations from everywhere on the Internet too. And this is all on top of the unbelievable numbers of websites on things that would dwarf what could be found in a library.

Also, any fringe or niche group or idea can be promoted and find an audience by clicking into the worldwide web. Think about how some of us use Google. You hear about someone or something you are not familiar with, and you do a quick Google search, and—Bingo!—you have access to a plethora of information on your topic that then provides you with more links and possibilities to investigate. Children who are confused about their feelings about various things immediately find answers that can take them down the wrong rabbit hole. This is yet another reason for a move away from Christianity.

Church used to provide a sense of community for people in the past. The rise of the Internet has expanded the number of communities that are now available to people.

So, is Christianity in danger of disappearing? No, Jesus Christ told us in **Matthew 16:18** that He would build His Church, and the gates of hell could not prevail against it. God will keep His Church going until Jesus Christ returns, there is no doubt about that.

We must also keep in mind that, numerically, today there are more Christians in the United States than there were in the 1950s. But that is because there are so many more people alive today than back then.

Some recent polling data sees some uptick in religious interest among young people. It is too early to see a trend with these results, but those who are more spiritual in the younger generations are not as interested in the mainline churches or Christian dogma.

Some examples of this new Christianity include the Post-Evangelical Collective, with branches in 14 US cities. According to its website, it features church leaders, artists, and others "who find ourselves estranged from the dominant expressions of

## In Loving Memory

### Roland Clarence Baus

October 8, 1936 – April 18, 2025

Roland Baus, 88, of Morrilton, Arkansas died on Friday, April 18, 2025. He passed away peacefully in a room full of love with family and friends.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Roxy Baus; his parents, Edwin and Gertrude Baus; his brother, Melvin Baus; and his great-granddaughter, Lillian Henson.

Roland was a member of The Church of God International in Jacksonville, Arkansas. He retired



from the U.S. Marine Corp. in 1959. He retired from Wayne Smith Trucking Company in 2022.

He is survived by his two daughters, Rayna Baus and Rena Baus, two granddaughters, Jaris Whitbey and Reyanna Baus, and three great grandchildren. He also is survived by many friends, including a close personal friend, Colleen Crump of Cabot, Arkansas.

Roland loved the outdoors, animals, books, poems, and his family and friends.

American Christianity." Another example of this "new Christianity" is the Current Collective, a community in Carlsbad, California, that describes itself as "rooted in the mystic Christian tradition" with a dogma-free theology. "We ultimately believe that our living and being is far more important than our statements of belief," its website reads.

But what these trends do show is that there is some movement away from strict adherence to biblically based Christianity. As more people leave Christianity, they are creating a new spirituality and, for some, a belief in a god that is not necessarily the biblical God. Only time will tell what these major shifts will reveal in the next 50 to 100 years.

So what can we do about it? Well, not much. But what you must do as a Bible-believing Christian is don't leave your faith. Don't become like some of those who are losing their religion. It is important that you keep believing and maintaining your faith in the biblical God and endure till the end (**Matthew 24:13**).

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## Perspectives on Faith

By ARNIE FONTAINE



### First up: Of Faith and Boxes

How does someone come to hate a person that restores sight, heals the lame, and so much more? Religious people wanted to kill Him. Of course, I am referring to Jesus and the religious establishment of the day.

The Jews had endured a lot going back to the 70 years exile and the on-again, off-again efforts to restore the temple and Jerusalem. People in the surrounding areas tried to stop them from completing their tasks. Sometimes their own attitude was their worst enemy. They were embattled people. Superpower after superpower oversaw and controlled them to a degree.

On top of that, there were internal struggles to "keep the faith." Recall the emergence of the Jewish teachers filling the vacuum left by the Levites leaving the faith.

Scan the world of religion today that

claims Christianity as its faith. One could pick and choose what flavor they like and proceed to fellowship with that group. Even within the Church of God, what do we have? Well, we know, don't we?

In Jesus' day there were the Essenes with one doctrine, the Qumran community isolated down by the Dead Sea marginalized. The political structure had a two-party system with smaller "third parties." Sound familiar?

Enter Jesus posing a problem they hadn't faced before. What was it about His message and teachings that was a problem? Was it healing the sick and lame? Feeding thousands? No.

It was when He began to teach; it was when He was outside the box of established doctrine, established faith. They hated Him because He wasn't their version of orthodox.

What do I mean by orthodox? Conforming to established doctrines neatly packaged, placed in a box and settled, never to be challenged. How dare Jesus challenge their settled faith and doctrines! He was a non-conformist.

Down through the ages, we have seen how established faiths deal with

these troublemakers, haven't we? The Romish church is but one glaring example.

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew chapters 5–7**, supported the law and gave it deeper meaning. He supported the written law and hence challenged tradition embodied in the mountains of oral law. The New Testament writers used the term "tradition of the elders" in this regard.

Note how He phrases His position: "Again, you have heard that it was said to those in ancient times, 'You shall not forswear yourself, but you shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne" (Matthew 5:33–34).

He placed the written law above tradition. They hated Him to the degree of wanting him dead.

Pontius Pilate was not the best of man, mind you, but he realized something about Jesus and the Jewish ruling class. Mark notes the underlying motive of the Jews that Pilate saw.

"For he knew that the chief priests had delivered Him up because of envy" (Mark 15:10).

He saw it clearly.

The common people loved Him, for what was not to love? Wherever He went, there would be an entourage. There is something else too. Could it be that the common folk saw how He tweaked the establishment and found just a bit of pleasure in Him taking it to "the man"? The smug, authoritarian establishment being challenged by a single Man! Well, now isn't that something? Jesus had no earthly establishment to advance. After some three-plus years of teaching and assorted miracles, He had 120 followers and the twelve by Pentecost. Not even His own siblings were on board yet.

Why do established religions act so violently at challenges to the established faith?

Fear. So, what do they do? They intimidate their followers so that they do not listen to "those" people. They may even try to shut that person or those people up if they can? Even Paul was dealt with harshly, wasn't he?

It must be very frightful to realize you may have been wrong for a good part of your life. Add to that the fact that it is your career on the line; it pays the bills. Now it's serious. Termites eating away at your building? Call

Terminix!

Here's the thing though. We have nothing to fear from the truth. If it's true, I need to accept it and not fear it. I've seen persons see biblical truth clear as day and turn away for fear of what friends and relatives will think, even after being baptized.

Judaism of the second-temple period leading up to Jesus' arrival and the second-century period of Christianity were plagued with heresies.

Case in point was the Arian problem by Arias. This had to do with the nature of the Godhead. Was it one, two, or three? This led to creating neat packages of theology to shield the believers from such heresies. It may seem a logical step, but it leads to a closed system with no room to grow in grace and knowledge. This is our belief/faith period! A creed was created by the Romish church. In the case of Jesus, they didn't address His message for they had no answers. Result: get rid of the trouble maker.

In both cases the faith is put in a box and tied up with a ribbon, never to be opened. If you do not believe its contents, you are not part of "us."

This effectively ends growth.

Each branch of Christianity has its own orthodoxy, right or wrong. If you don't agree, you must make a choice of staying or branching off. Recall Martin Luther.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, laid the groundwork for proper growth and also the problems to follow.

"Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, am exhorting you to walk worthily of the calling to which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love" (**Ephesians 4:1-2**).

Our attitude, as he writes, is to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:22**). As long as we deal with issues in that way, we will not stray too far from the tree. What happens too often though is the contents of the faith box does not contain those fruits. Presumed authority leads to arrogance and power plays. Church governance becomes church control.

Paul goes on to explain the proper approach in **Ephesians 4:3**:

"Being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

This is an inclusive way of thinking rather than exclusive. Paul is building a case or a methodology to become more Christ-like. Continuing in **verse 7**:

"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

Beginning in **verses 11-13**, he places a nugget:

"And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists and some, pastors and teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; Until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Sometimes a single word can be overlooked and its implications for us. The word is *until*. He is saying that this journey is a process not achieved at a particular point in time. We have truth now; close the box and put it on the shelf.

Am I there yet? No. Is anyone?

Through all of this, there is something foundational. We are not talking about questioning and hence growing away from the basic Faith as the Torah taught and Jesus expanded upon. There are no new truths, only ones we haven't fully grasped yet. Enter the five groups of men tasked with that very important job in **verse 11**. They must be diligent, Spirit-led men bearing the fruits of the Spirit to properly teach, if that is their gift, or to pastor a congregation, and so on. Note another important point in **verse 11**. Jesus determines those roles, not men. That is profound to ponder.

The unity of the Faith is a goal not attained yet.

Paul continues to explain in the verses that follow. The purpose of this unification in Spirit is to protect each of us from "winds of doctrine" that will crop up, and they did even at this early stage of the Church.

With every good thing such as unity, there is a down side. Orthodoxy cannot easily change. Recall the Pentecost issue? It was settled, put in a box never to be opened. Well, we know what happened.

Growth demands change and some aspects of orthodoxy squelch it. "Nothing to see here, move along."

Jesus' attempt to challenge orthodoxy led Him before Pilate for judgment.

It is so clear that one's orthodoxy is another's heresy.

Too many churches develop their own orthodoxy and slam the door on growth. Whether we are talking about Protestants or the Churches of God, we see an orthodoxy within each split off.

What we are dealing with is a need to have a secure faith we can rely on to be true and put in a neatly packaged box. That box, though, needs to be open and available for us to grow spiritually as we see deeper meaning in Scripture.

The Jews desired this, so they tightened the reigns around them to such a degree that they couldn't see the truth.

So, what about those other Churches of God of which there are many?

"Then John answered Him, saying, 'Master, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbid him because he does not follow us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not forbid him; for no one who does a work of power in My name can easily speak evil of Me. And the one who is not against you is for you. For whoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you are Christ's, truly I say to you, he shall in no way lose his reward. But whoever shall cause one of the little ones who believe in Me to offend, it would be better for him that a millstone be put around his neck and he be cast into the sea'" (**Mark 9:38-42**).

Consider who is an insider. Paul was called, not from among the early Church's orthodox members, but when he was an enemy of the Church. One never knows how new blood can cause the Church to grow and thereby need a bigger box.

Growth can be frightening, but it is necessary. It comes in stages and with plateaus along the way. An old joke is that you can't get there from here. An aphorism alternative is, you can't get there without leaving here. Faith is a journey requiring us to forsake safety as we "go where no man has gone

before." Trekkie alert.

### Next up: How Faithful Are We?

The sense of what I'd like to examine is how faithful we are to God's Word. Further, what is faithfulness? Does God look down and observe how we run our lives? Seems like an obvious answer, doesn't it? How does our faithfulness affect the legacy to our family? Is it just to God's Word, or is it more? These are some questions that I'd like to examine.

There is a family in the Bible that exemplifies faithfulness. The time setting is in Jeremiah's day and the Jewish nation's soon captivity. We begin in Chapter 35 of Jeremiah with the Rechabites. Who? Well, we shall see. Before we go there, we need understand their relationship to the Jews; we need to find out their ancestry. They were descended from the Kenites. Going through the Scriptures we can see their connection to the Jews.

"And the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up out of the city of palm trees with the children of Judah into the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad. And they went and lived among the people" (**Judges 1:16**).

So, in essence, Moses' in-laws chose to live with the Jewish tribe of the larger group of Israel. Note this in **1 Chronicles 2:55**:

"And the families of the scribes who lived at Jabez were the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, and Suchathites. These are the Kenites who came from Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab."

This was written by Ezra as the Chronicles of Ezra. Jehu purged the Baal worshippers in **2 Kings 10. Verse 15** gives us another link of the Rechabites:

"And he departed from there and found Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him. And he greeted him and said to him, 'Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart?' And Jehonadab answered, 'It is.' 'If it is, give your hand.' And he gave his hand. And he took him up to him into the chariot."

Jehu and company purge the Baal worshippers but he eventually fell into the sins of Jeroboam. This moving forward and then backsliding by God's people has been well documented. Did Jehonadab witness Jehu's backsliding and take steps to protect the Rechabites?

It is this stark comparison between the Rechabites and Israel and then Judah that reveals a level of faithfulness.

Judah was caught in the geopolitical struggle of the surrounding powers. Babylon would soon be the big dog conquering Assyria and Egypt and in so doing take over Judea. The pagan influence on the Jews was so deep that they were taken into captivity. This was a violation of the first four Commandments and the relationship with God.

When we worship something, we take on the values and traits of that which we worship. We become what we worship, God or a replacement for Him. Staying true to God's ways is faithfulness.

Society today worships Hollywood stars and sports figures by dressing like or emulating their behavior. It's one

thing to appreciate and admire skills of an individual, but we need to temper that with God's values.

This is where the Jews failed. They took on the values and practices of the pagan countries surrounding them to their demise as a sovereign nation.

Jeremiah tells the Jews why adversity will befall them.

"And it will be, when they shall ask, 'Why does the LORD our God do all these things to us?' Then you shall answer them, 'Just as you have forsaken Me and served strange gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours'" (**Jeremiah 5:19**).

They did not repent.

In **Jeremiah 7:1-7**, He tells them to amend their ways:

"The Word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 'Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this Word, and say, "Hear the Word of the LORD, all Judah, who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD." Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your hurt; Then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever.'"

**Isaiah 10** addresses this time some 100 years earlier, and note they were to treat people fairly and kindly.

Now let's go to the Rechabites, who were not even a tribe of Israel. Jeremiah is inspired to challenge their faithfulness.

We pick it up in **Jeremiah 35:2**:

"Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers. And give them wine to drink."

Now that seems innocent enough. So, we continue in **verses 5-6**:

"And I set pots full of wine, and cups, before the sons of the house of the Rechabites. And I said to them, 'Drink wine!' But they said, 'We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, "You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons forever.'"

Now that is being faithful to an ancestor long dead. Jehu's reign began around 841 BC in **2 Kings**. Simple math tells us these Rechabites had kept this command by Jehonadab over 200 years! What harm would it be to just have a sip?

Let us continue in **Jeremiah 35:7-10**. We see that this was a gesture by Jeremiah, not God.

The lesson here is not one of abstinence from alcohol, but a lesson in obedience for Judah. The Rechabites were prepared to obey a human progenitor who had died many generations before. How much more should Judah have been willing to obey God Himself, their divine parent, who was still alive and still instructing them?

Jehonadab also instructed them further.

“Nor shall you build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant a vineyard, nor have anything; but all your days you shall live in tents, so that you may live many days in the land where you are strangers.’ So we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he has commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; Nor to build houses for us to live in. Nor do we have vineyard, nor field, nor seed. But we have lived in tents, and have obeyed and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.”

Amazing! They were relegated to a life of a nomad. Reason? Maybe they wouldn’t stay in an established community to be influenced by bad customs? Maybe.

What follows is amazing. This test of the Rechabites serves as a slap in the face of the Jewish nation. Let us read on in **verses 11–19**:

“But it came to pass when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, we said, ‘Come and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the Chaldean army, and for fear of the Syrian army.’ So we are living at Jerusalem.’ Then came the Word of the LORD to Jeremiah, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem, ‘Will you not receive instruction to hearken to My words?’ says the LORD. ‘The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons not to drink wine, have been kept. For to this day they do

not drink any, but obey their father’s commandment. Yet I have spoken to you, again and again, but you did not hearken to Me. I have also sent to you all My servants the prophets, again and again, saying, ‘Return now each man from his evil way, and make your doings good, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers.’” But you have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened to Me. Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have done the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people has not hearkened to Me, Therefore, thus says the LORD, God of hosts, the God of Israel, “Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the people of Jerusalem all the evil that I have spoken against them. Because I have spoken to them, but they have not hearkened; and I have called to them, but they have not answered.” And Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and have kept all his precepts, and have done according to all that he has commanded you; Therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever.’”

A non-Israelitish family is more faithful than Judah. Did not Jesus make a similar pronouncement about Sodom and the Jewish leadership of His day in

the future resurrections?

Back in Deuteronomy, Israel was warned to take heed. God was very patient with His people, and yet we see their repeated backsliding. God admired these Rechabites and promised their lineage to continue on and on.

The Mishnah indicates that in the Second Temple period a special day was set aside for the Rechabites to bring the wood offering (Ta’an 4.5). (Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, editors, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993, “Rechabites,” p. 643).

Are there lessons here for us? But of course. God recognizes our faithfulness to parental guidance (Fifth Commandment).

God includes non-Israelites in His blessings, for the Rechabites were the progeny of Moses’ father-in-law. In the New Testament, we see that the New Covenant is open to all mankind that are called, chosen, and become Christians. Does it seem odd that the Jews had such animus towards non-Jews and yet the Rechabites lived amongst them? Relying on the Mishnah rather than God’s Word may have had something to do with it. What does the Psalmist say?

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God!’ They are corrupt; they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God” (**Psalm 14:2**).

What does God see when He looks down on His Church? What we are doing is important. In **Psalm 33:12–15** the theme continues:

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, and the people He has chosen for His own inheritance. The LORD looks down from heaven; He beholds all the sons of men. From His dwelling place He looks intently upon all the inhabitants of the earth. Together He fashions their hearts alike; He considers all their works.”

What of consequences to descendants? Reviewing King Saul’s fall from grace shows us a rather stark reminder that our behavior can have long-term consequences. His children and their children were denied royalty.

Jesus in **Matthew 22** gives a parable showing He will replace invitees to the Marriage Supper with another group chosen out of mankind. They will have the proper garments, which signify righteousness.

“And it was granted to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, pure and bright; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. And he said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God’” (**Revelation 19:8–9**).

Yes, we need to be faithful to God and thereby be faithful to our parents and brethren. Take on that fine linen of righteousness each day.



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