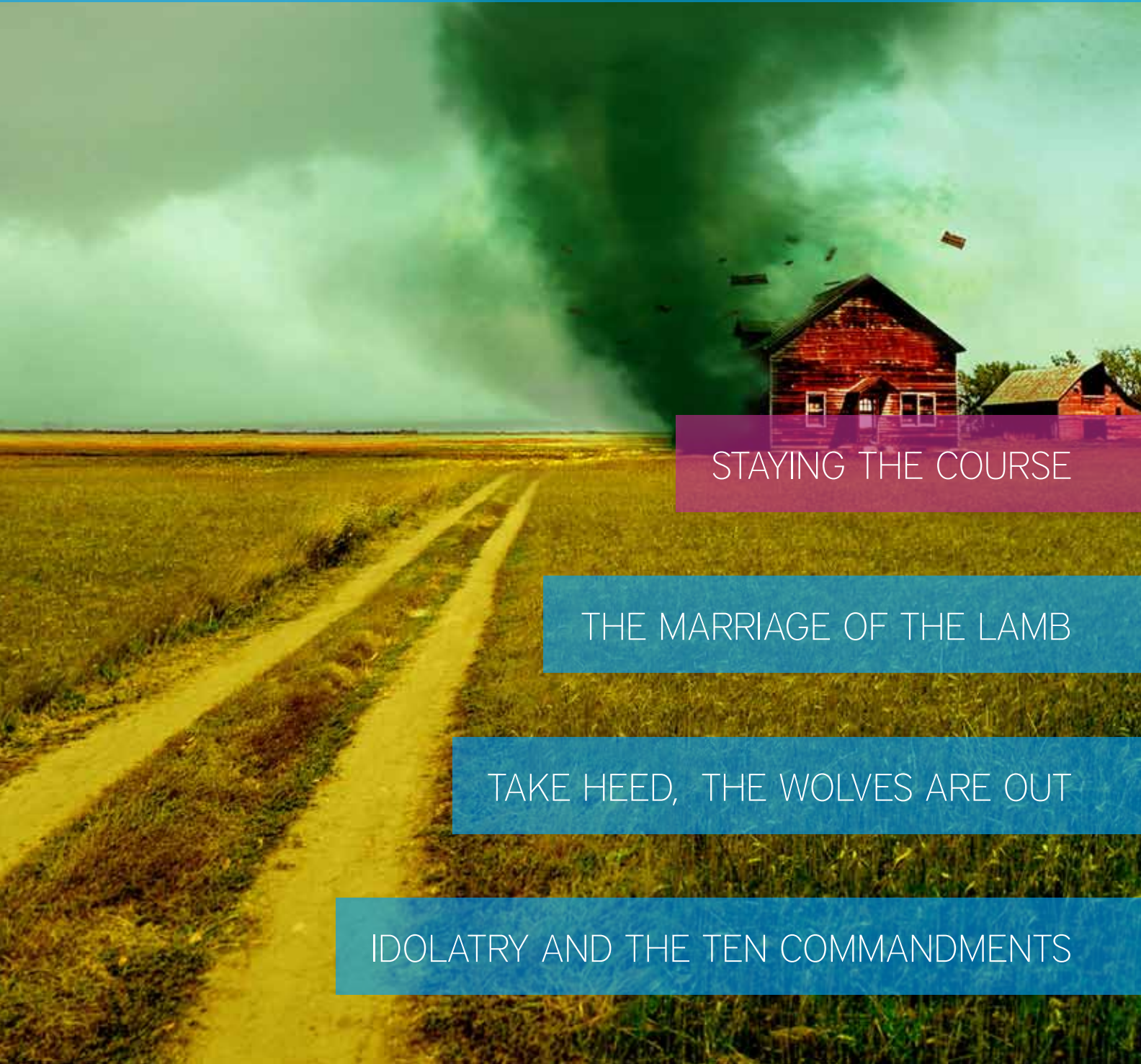


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STAYING THE COURSE

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

TAKE HEED, THE WOLVES ARE OUT

IDOLATRY AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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EDITORIAL: THE CHANGING FACE OF GOVERNMENTS

by Horane Smith

The world is witnessing as never before unprecedented events in some Arab nations that are bound to have widespread implications for the geopolitical, religious, and social climate of this so-called "postmodern era."

Hosni Mubarak, had been Egypt's military strongman since 1981 after the assassination of Anwar Sadat by Islamists militants. Mubarak himself survived six assassination attempts. He could dodge the bullets of his assassins, but couldn't ignore the cries of his countrymen. Egyptians said Mubarak's time was up and they demanded change. Today, he's no longer the president of a once mighty country whose history stretches to the days of the great prophet Moses, the biblical Pharaohs, and enslavement of God's chosen people, Israel.

Mubarak was only continuing what began in January of this year, when Zine-el-Abidine Ben Ali, President of the North African nation of Tunisia, was also forced from office because of the vociferous cries of his people to step down. He had been in power for twenty-three years.

There are on-going unrests in Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen, as their people are demanding sweeping political changes from their monarchs and dictators. Some political observers believe it's merely a matter of time before more of these national political leaders bow to the pressure of their people to surrender power to a more democratic process after many years of autocratic and oppressive political rule. Nations such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Iran, whose leaders hold a tight grip on the reins of their respective governments, could very well witness changes never seen before.

The significant changes unfolding before our very own eyes cannot be ignored, and have a profound message in them for every child of God. The message is simple: no matter how powerful, rich, and superior a government may seem, one day it will fall. Human history has witnessed, and in some cases, to its horror, world-ruling governments that have risen and

subsequently fallen to dust. There is one government coming that won't fall though – it's a government/Kingdom that will reign forever!

The book of Daniel, which is set around 605 B.C., records world-ruling governments/empires, which will befall humanity in Daniel's time and out into the future. God revealed to the prophet Daniel many empires (of which the most notable being Babylonian, Medo-Persia, Greco-Macedonian and Roman) and how they would impact the social, cultural, and political life of their people down through history. Amazingly, God's revelation to Daniel regarding these empires was right on.

But what God also revealed to Daniel was another significant prophecy regarding an empire that would emerge on the world scene

At first, conditions may appear to be heading for better times through Satan's deception, but everything will be setting up for a great fall. Why? Because, only God's Kingdom/government will last forever, while the resurrection of this false Babylonian system under a new name is destined to fall once more. It will fall because your Holy Bible says so! Whatever God says will happen is going to take place eventually, and the might and power humanity thinks he has, cannot stop God's Word from fulfilling His will.

The faces of governments are indeed changing and will continue to change until Christ returns. Mankind's endless search to find answers to the problems of today will mean change in our political, economic and social systems, but the unfortunate news is those changes still won't solve the problems of today.

Instead, we have the Good News – the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of Jesus Christ! The only solution is the return of Jesus, the Christ, to put a stop once and for all to all of mankind's misery, sorrow, and pain. Jesus said He has gone to prepare a place for us and He will come again. He is indeed coming to fulfill that promise.

Because, only
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government will
last forever..

shortly before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Dan. 2, 7; Rev. 13). The influence of this resurrected empire will be felt around the world; the consequences of having such a government in this information age will be enormous; its influential affect will be felt near and far; its actions will be globally cataclysmic.

Many will see hope in this coming empire, formulated as a kind of United States of Europe, believing that it will solve all their problems. An unsuspecting populace will not realize that the architect behind this world-ruling movement is none other than Satan the Devil, who will continue to deceive the whole world (Rev. 12:9). Many will put their faith into this false system, hoping it will deliver the world out of its sinful and corrupt quagmire which has been brought on by man's own inability to govern himself and his failure to acknowledge YAHWEH as God.

Daniel 7:18 records,

"But the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom [God's Kingdom] and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever."

That's what has been recorded for us to read, understand, and be comforted by; that no matter how many times the face of governments change, it won't make a difference within the human realm. The only significant and *world saving* difference that will be made is the return of Jesus Christ and His eternal Kingdom! Watch and pray God speeds that day!





TAKE HEED, THE WOLVES ARE OUT

by Louis Anane

Photo by Tambako / flickr

Parents are just too good at giving their “last words” to children as they venture outside the safe confines of their homes—be it for school, marriage, or work. Parents get nervous wondering what may happen to their children in unfriendly, uncharted environments. The same could be true of leaders. Leaders also give their “last words” as they part with their followers.

David, in 1 Kings 2, had “last words” for his son, Solomon. Moses and Joshua similarly had parting words for Israel recorded for our learning (Deut. 31:3-7; Josh. 23, 24). Last words are important because people pour out their real concerns in matters of personal growth or in matters of life and death. What can the body of Christ learn from last words recorded in Scripture?

One classic case of last words in the New Testament is that of Paul, the apostle, when he met with the elders of the church in Ephesus. His departing words were to warn and admonish them about possible challenges for the church in the future.

*“Therefore I testify to you on this day that I am pure from the blood of all. For I did not keep back from declaring to you all the counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He has purchased with His own blood. **For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also men shall arise from your own selves, speaking perverse things in order to draw disciples away after them.**” (Acts 20: 26-30; emphasis added)*

Paul was seriously concerned about deception in the church (2 Thess. 2:1-2; 1 Tim 4:1-5) and knew that it was already at work even before his death (2 Thess. 2:7). Paul’s concern was reiterated by his contemporary Peter when he wrote in 2 Peter 2:1,

“but there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies...”

In fact, Christ had already cautioned the early disciples, foreknowing that savage wolves would enter the flock. He expected a great deception in the last days and did not want the disciples to lose sight of it as they got consumed with the signs of the times. In Matthew 24: 4-5, He said:

*“...Take heed that no man deceive you. For **many** will come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and will deceive **many.**” (emphasis added).*

If we take Christ at His Word we know that we are in for some real trouble. Many will come and many will be deceived. When churches

Israel wanted to be like the other nations. They were deceived by what they saw on the other side of the fence.

want to grow, they usually encourage each member to invite at least one person to their evangelistic meetings. For the churches, one brings one. By contrast, Satan will send many out to bring many into his deception! Therefore, this requires super vigilance on our part in two ways—we have to be about our Father’s business to reach the many [the world] with the Gospel of the Kingdom before the many of Satan [the false Christs] mislead them with their deception; and secondly, to protect ourselves and one another from this deception so we can endure to the end.

What can we learn from Israel in the Bible about deception?

LONGING FOR THE WORLD

In the event of any difficulty, we hear Israel continually referring Moses to their alleged good life in Egypt (Exod. 14:11-12, 16:3, 17:3 etc.). How they felt life was so much better in Egypt, even when it really wasn’t. The allures of the world are strong and appealing—pride of life, lust of the eyes and of the flesh—even- tually derail our walk with God (1 John 2:16). They are deceptive.

DESIRE TO BE LIKE OTHERS

We read in 1 Samuel 8:5 that the elders of Israel conspired to ask Samuel for a king saying, “now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (also Deut. 17:14). Israel wanted to be like the other nations. They were deceived by what they saw on the other side of the fence. Not even the downside of their desire could change their mind. Their conscience was seared. How about us: do we desire to be like others in the Christian community?

DOCTRINAL DECEPTION

Christ cautioned the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees which was their doctrine (Matt 16: 5-12). The Pharisees maintained strict adherence to the matters of the law such that they could not see where their own traditions conflicted with the Law of God. In Mark 7, Christ confronted them when they thought the disciples were not law abiding. The Pharisees were puffed up by what they thought they knew. Do we have personal “doctrines” that make us feel puffed up because we think we know something others do not?

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IDOLATRY AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

by Oddeth Burton-Hall

Idolatry is a theme that is consistent throughout the Bible and is closely tied to the Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai. The New Testament teaches us that the law was added because of transgression (Gal. 3:19). What is transgression? We know that Adam and Eve disobeyed God but, can this disobedience be seen as idolatry?

Paul in Romans 7: 7-8 states:

"I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law said, You shall not covet."

How does the Word of God define covetousness?

According to Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5, covetousness is idolatry. Covetousness in the Hebrew language is *"be'sa," the desire for dishonest gain or selfish desire*. In Greek, the word is *"pleonexia"* and means *ruthless self-assertion*. In essence, it is the worship of self and is labelled idolatry. Idolatry can be defined as the placing of another in a position of authority in one's life that the other does not deserve or merit. It is the placing of any force, person or thing that becomes paramount or is given allegiance to one's life instead of the Highest Authority—God. It is an aberrant psychological condition that disables an individual from finding his/her own true course or destiny. It is the spiritual violation of the law (Rom. 7:14); the idolatrous spirit of the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2) that was transferred to mankind's first parents.

The command by God, in Genesis 2:16-17, states,

"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

However, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit because they coveted the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:5). Originally, Satan did this by redefining God's command to Eve (Gen. 3:6; 1 Tim. 2:14). She then went ahead and convinced Adam to do the same (Gen. 3:6). But, notice why she became originally convinced; we are told she *"saw"* it was good for food (the

lust of the flesh), that it also was *"pleasant"* to the eyes (lust of the eyes) and would *"make one wise"* (the pride of life). All of these three categories of appeal are fundamentally idolatrous because they are rooted in covetousness. They put their own interest before the interest of God, rejecting Him, in place of their own passions; thereby, replacing God with their own sovereignty. This is what *"be'sa"* and *"pleonexia"* are: the desire for dishonest gain or selfish desire, or ruthless self-assertion. This is the spirit of Satan's rebellious and idolatrous attitude.

Paul uses metaphorical language to describe our first parents as the *"first Adam."* He claims the first *"Adam"* was earthy, coveting power and then compares the second Adam—Jesus Christ who was spiritual; and according to Philippians 2:5, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. But the difference between Adam and Eve is, they *wanted to be equal with God* and considered their own interests as more important than God's command not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was this manner in which they wanted to attain immortality that was wrong—it was idolatrous for them to disobey the spiritual command of God.

The sin of the first Adam stirred all forms of evil desires as Paul explained in Romans 7; these evil desires are what the codified law summarizes. In 1 Corinthians 10: 7-11, Paul, speaking of the children of Israel who left Egypt, said,

"Do not become idolaters as were some of them...Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

Again, why would Paul mention their deeds in relation to law? Because all these admonitions speak to some aspect of the codified law given to the children of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Notice how the first four commandments set forth the principles for guiding Israel's relationship with Yahweh, while the last six commandments outline the principles for guiding Israel's relationship with the covenant community, and more broadly, the human family. In looking at the second, third, and fourth commandments,

we will see in many ways extensions of the first commandment; and thus, the first four set the stage for the final six commandments.

EXODUS 20: 3

"You shall have no other gods before me..." Not that there are any other gods (1 Cor. 8:5) but God demands that nothing in life be placed before Him. They are called such not because they are so, either by nature or by office (Psa. 82:6), but because the corrupt hearts of men make and esteem them that way." This commandment speaks to idolatry.

VERSES 4-6

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth..." This second commandment builds on the first; God is spiritual, invisible, and can be realized only by a spiritual principle. John 4:24 declares God is Spirit and has no semblance of anything, therefore, making any image to represent Him in worship amounts to idolatry.

VERSE 7

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." God has a purpose for all that He does, therefore, taking the Lord's name in vain is termed as swearing because mankind of and by himself does not have the right, or authority to invoke the name of the Living God for the sake of enhancing ones credibility, or self-importance. God's name is not to be used for the purpose of "name dropping." God is God man is not! Therefore, we stand by our own words, making our nay's nay, and our yea's yea. Anything else is evil (Matt. 5:33-37; Lev. 19:12). The name of God must be held in reverence (Deut. 28:58); it is idolatry that sees mankind belittling the name of God to suit their desires for belief and trust.

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STAYING THE COURSE

by Bill Watson

There is a warning for Christians in the latter days that if ignored, could cause them to fail. It's simply known as "burnout." Christians are admonished to beware, "the love of many will wax cold." We are also advised that some will allow themselves to grow "lukewarm." The alarm has sounded; Christians must be cautious not to abandon God's ways and "become weary in well doing." But how can we be sure we will "stay the course" and not be affected by today's social pressures and forfeit our eternal life?

In Matthew 10:22 we are told, "he that *endureth* to the end shall be saved." This is repeated again in Matthew 24:13 and Mark 13:13. In Revelation 2:10, Christians in Smyrna were encouraged to be *faithful unto death*. This first-century exhortation is appropriate for present day Christians as well: "...be thou *faithful unto death* [natural or not], and I will give thee a crown of life."

Unquestionably, Christ is clear on what He expects from all of us. The level of commitment is total and complete, including, if necessary, your life. Anything else is not good enough. We are instructed to be living sacrifices for God (Rom. 12:1–2), dying daily on His behalf (1 Cor. 15:31), and mortifying the flesh (Rom. 6:13), because of the sacrificial death He experienced which allows us to live for Him (1 Pet. 2:5). Living the life of a Christian requires and demands a personal renewal and change of one's lifestyle. It's all about the renewing of our minds, which ultimately changes the way we feel, think, and act (Rom. 6:3–19). This is an important concept to grasp and accept as part of the required cost that comes with being a Christian. When considering the Christian way, be assured: *it is a challenge!*

The challenge starts when the *conversion process* begins. The reason is because as soon as an individual starts to make some drastic changes in his life, he finds himself confronted with new and sometimes unexpected social and personal pressures. Notice what Peter explains concerning what one can expect upon allowing God to change the direction of one's life:

"...for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live

the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God [your life is taking on a noticeable change]. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they [perhaps your friends and relatives] think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot [anymore], speaking evil of you" (1 Pet. 4: 1–4).

We must remember that those who cease from sin will suffer possible abandonment, mocking, accusations, disbelief and suspicion, personal loss, physical harm, mental and emotional anguish, etc. in the flesh, but this should not be a surprise, since Jesus also suffered in the flesh (1 Pet. 4:1).

We are admonished *not to think it strange* to be confronted with trials once becoming a Christian. Undeniably, it should be expected, and Peter reminds us of this (1 Pet. 4:12–13). Christ also explains through the Apostle Peter that trials will make us stronger, more resolved, resilient, and dedicated to accomplishing the commitment that will result in the salvation of our souls. Notice what Peter says,

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season [temporarily], if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: [why?] That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:6–9)

COMPARING TODAY'S CHURCH WITH THE BIBLE

Christians today are no different than Christians of the past. Their objectives and goals are the same. In summary, they want to obey God and be good people, but with a particular distinction—to be good people as God defines goodness, *not* as the government, culture, or manmade traditions define goodness. This distinction throughout the centuries

has caused conflict to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the times, location, and cultures Christians have found themselves in. The result—countless numbers of the faithful died through the ages, committed to the faith God called them to.

Unfortunately, the historical record confirms many Christians contending for the "faith once delivered" have been hurt, disenfranchised by government; ostracized by family and friends; and even killed as entertainment. It's quite a disturbing legacy, especially when one considers these to be God's chosen, called-out ones—those He considered His sheep. Today's "health-and-wealth" gospel stands in direct opposition to the Christian experience in early church history. In fact, much of traditional Christianity represents a stark contrast to the Biblical description and record of God's true *called-out ones* that define His true church (Luke 6:26, 12:51–53; John 15:19, 17:14; Heb. 11; 1 John 3:13).

Many of today's traditional Christian denominations and *mega-churches* have ingratiated themselves into the hearts of teeming multitudes by tolerating and legitimizing lifestyles, liturgy, traditions, and doctrines that would surprise and disappoint even Jesus Christ Himself. Today's traditional Christian community is an aberration of today's pop culture, controlled by the politically correct environment that has emerged in our present secular humanistic society, which in general, is led by a *compromised moderate ministry* committed to teaching non-offensive expectations. By contrast, notice what the Apostle Paul advised the young evangelist Timothy to do:

"I solemnly implore you, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is about to judge the living and the dead, and by His Appearing and His Kingship: proclaim God's message, be zealous in season and out of season: convince, rebuke, encourage, with the utmost patience as a teacher. For a time is coming when they [lay members and society in general] will not tolerate wholesome instruction, but, wanting to have their ears tickled, they will find a multitude of teachers to satisfy their own fancies; and will turn away from listening to the truth and will turn aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:1–4, Weymouth New Testament).

Unfortunately, this is a sad commentary on exactly what has been and is currently happening within the general Christian community.

HOW DO WE MAINTAIN THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED?

Some years ago, my wife and I went on a Caribbean cruise. For the first six days of this eight-day trip, the weather was just outstanding. However, during the last 36 hours, a tropical storm developed, causing the waves to increase enormously, aggravating the “rocking of the boat.” Many of the passengers and crew, including my wife, became extremely seasick. As the hours dragged on, she appealed to me repeatedly that it would be better if I just threw her overboard and put her out of her misery. Amused by her request, I responded with a smile that this wasn’t a good solution. She obliged and conceded to “toughing it out.” In other words, *she endured the storm!*

This example may appear insignificant compared to the variety and enormity of life’s potential problems and confrontations, but it illustrates a point: sometimes there are no options but to “endure the storm.” Occasionally, enduring is our *only* alternative.

Sometimes, there’s nothing more we can do. We have reached the end of our ability to do anything—the proverbial “end of our rope.” We must deal with conditions and emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually handle the circumstances we’ve been dealt and go through them, liking it or not. Some may view this as passive behaviour, but I can assure you, depending on what we are enduring—accident, marital issues, health concerns and addictions, misbehaving children, relationships, vocational or career problems, etc.—it can be enormously and painfully *proactive*.

Jesus said we must *endure* to the end. He also mentioned,

“The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third

day [Jesus also willingly endured much!]. And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily [enduring the Christian requirements and demands], and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake [endures the pain and suffering, consequences and costs], the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?” (Luke 9:22–25)

Also, when addressing Timothy, the Apostle Paul chooses an interesting characterization. He told Timothy to “*endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*” (2 Tim. 2:3). This is a curious request, unless, of course, you realize the life of a Christian is much like that of a soldier. This admonishment is very cogent when one comes to embrace the life of a Christian. The similarities of a soldier’s life and a Christian’s are quite related, metaphorically

...sometimes there are no options but to “endure the storm.”

speaking. Both are aware, or at least should be, that circumstances can be difficult. Life can get uncomfortable at any time. Unimaginable inconveniences may be experienced, and tests, trials, or temptations can be enormous occasionally. But for the Christian soldier, when considering the reward promised and defined by the *true gospel*, we are assured the challenges of this life are not worthy to be compared to the gift of immortality God has prepared for us (Rom. 8:18). Therefore, *enduring occasionally*, though it may be uncomfortable for the time, is a small price to pay for such a remarkable benefit from God.

Clearly, we must embrace the fact that enduring is going to be a part of our Christian experience. Consequently, it becomes obvious that endurance must be part of our character, our frame of mind. Developing this frame of mind is

not necessarily easy to do; but it is achievable when considering Paul’s instruction to Timothy. Notice what he says:

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” (2 Tim. 2:4)

And further down in the text he says,

“Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Tim. 2:10)

And James mentions,

“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (Jas. 5:11)

A firm resolution to willingly endure is a *type of spiritual inoculation* that has a long-term benefit: eternal life! It is the evidence of faith that is pleasing to God, because it is reassuring to Him that regardless of what shakes, you will not be *shaken*. Notice,

“And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:27)

When you decide to be a Christian, you are asking God to become intimately involved with your life. This is a wonderful thing, but is also very challenging, because you are no longer your own. He now is in charge of your life.

In making this point more poignant, let me suggest reviewing the first two chapters of Job. As you read this narrative, three things become obvious. *First*, Job was a very blessed and affluent man. *Second*, God was steering Job’s life, and He, God, chose to *allow Satan* to have his way with Job and his family. *And finally*, the circumstances that erupted left Job in a condition he could *not control*. Job had

only one option: *to endure* the pain and suffering due to the loss of his family and health.

Those of us familiar with the story know that the circumstances defining Job's journey to the *self-actualization* God had in mind was merely a means to an end. Further, the point that God *is in control* of the lives of His servants is plain to see. This should resonate with those of us who are baptized and/or considering baptism. Paul explains,

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-6).

This illustrates that we are expected to live a *renewed life* fashioned after Christ's example by allowing God to have His way with us. Upon being baptized, we have invited God into our lives, conceding to His intervention in directing our lives as He sees fit for His purposes. Notice:

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?" (Rom. 9:20-21)

Giving our lives over to God can be a fearful thing, because we don't know what He may have in mind for us. But one thing is sure: *He has our best interests at heart* at all times. We should realize that although anyone can walk with God when times are good, it is assured that our character will be *tested and tried* to ensure God we are indeed sincerely with Him, for better or worse (1 Pet. 4:12-13). God knows us better than ourselves. He knows what we are capable of doing, even when we think otherwise. Like a good coach, He is looking for ways to maximize our God given skills by giving

us opportunities to multiply our talents for the benefit of others; and that may require some occasional intervention on His part to motivate us beyond what even we thought ourselves capable of.

Assuredly then, we must recognize that in the course of our lives we may be confronted with challenges that will require a certain degree of *endurance*. None of us are immune to hardships. All of us, while in this flesh, are vulnerable. It's important we are not fearful, terrified, or afraid to live our lives knowing that at some point we may be dealt a test, trial, or temptation that *temporarily* may seem enormous, or overwhelming in scope. But remember, God is watching how we are reacting to conditions, hoping we will respond in such a way to

Giving our lives over to God can be a fearful thing, because we don't know what He may have in mind for us.

inspire, reprove, instruct, or correct our course He has us on, while at the same time expecting us to glorify Him with that response. Knowing we are committed to *endure*—and if necessary, outlast the trial—should serve to ensure we would overcome it. Clearly, a *commitment* to endure makes that possible!

Understandably, this awareness can be daunting. Yet, we are discouraged from fear, because we know fear can paralyze an individual's growth in love. And love is essential in the life of a Christian. This is why we are reminded *"love casts out [displaces, replaces, eliminates] fear"* (1 John 4:18). Our enemy, Satan, wants us immobilized, dysfunctional, doubting,

questioning, tentative, and hesitant, ultimately giving up and quitting. He does not want us to have the faith in God to stay the course. He knows if we begin to fear and doubt, allowing these negative characteristics to encroach on our faith, *we will not endure*. That is why we must always remain steadfastly connected to God when confronting these stresses, fully knowing He has our best interests at heart; and if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (Jas. 4:7-8).

The Apostle Paul unequivocally assures us that God will always be "measured" with what He allows to come our way. Notice what he says:

"There hath not temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer [permit] you to be tempted above [beyond] that ye are able [capable]; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able [capable] to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Do you realize what you just read? This is undeniably one of the *most reassuring* scriptures in your Bible. It reveals that God will *never allow* a test, trial, or temptation to confront you that is beyond your abilities to handle. This means that regardless of the trial, test, or temptation you're contending with; the fact you are in this confrontation is *evidence* you

can be victorious. However, *endurance* must underscore your commitment to the challenge you're facing.

IN SUMMARY

We understand that if we don't endure life's difficulties as a Christian until the end of our life or until Christ's return, we will *not be rewarded* with eternal life as an immortal son, born of God. As Jesus explained many times, only those Christians who *endure to the end* shall be saved.

Admittedly, the conversion process is a difficult one. Why? Because it *requires change!* That's what conversion means. Therefore, the crucible of "fire" is an appropriate metaphor, since fire is used on so many physical materials for the purpose of converting different elements into something they were not (i.e., water into steam, iron ore into molten steel, liquid gold into different jewelry, etc.). Certainly, it would only seem appropriate that God would exercise His prerogative in our lives to assure Him of the "crucible development" we need, to qualify for His kingdom with the maximum reward. God reserves the right to be God! Therefore, He is *not* our "co-pilot." Instead, *He is our Pilot.* It's *His* salvific program. *He* makes the rules and the laws defining the course. It's *His* mission! We have only to accept the requirements and commit to endure what our particular "Christian Role Development Program" demands to succeed in our calling. Notice what the writer of Hebrews says about this possibility in our lives:

"...My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. 12:5–8).

Paul encourages the Christians at Philippi, in the context of persecutions and being surrounded by adversaries, that they have been given a privilege, a gift: *the gift of "sharing in the suffering"* of Christ (Phil. 1:28–30).

Did you grasp what Paul said? Let me re-emphasize this very important point. Paul says

we have been given a tremendous opportunity, a gift to share not only in our belief in Christ, but "also to *suffer for His sake.*" That's right! The one least-appreciated gift in our Christian walk is the *gift of suffering for His (Christ's) sake.* And yet, is it right we should think any differently, since *He suffered* so much for us?



He is not our "co-pilot."
Instead, He is our Pilot. It's His salvific program. He makes the rules and the laws defining the course.

Anyone who commits to living a life dedicated to exemplifying the attributes, characteristics, and values of what Jesus Christ represents *will suffer* because it requires making decisions that cut across our nature and society like a two-edged sword. Remember, the nature of man is enmity toward God and not naturally subject to the laws of God (Rom. 8:7).

We should always recognize the example of how our Lord finally succeeded in His passion: *He endured.* He could have called a legion of

angels to stop the whole event and rescue Him from this unjust execution; but instead, *He willingly endured.* His life was dedicated to paving a way that would result in redeeming us from the penalty of death that the law laid claim. Everything depended on our Lord's success and His *willingness to endure.* He had only one option. And He chose to accomplish it by *enduring,* staying the course, and outlasting the humiliation, pain, and suffering. Yes, He surrendered Himself to the cause by simply *enduring the circumstances* that confronted Him so that we may have life.

We, too, must be prepared to *endure anything.* As Paul was committed not to allow anything to separate him, so we should commit to the same degree of love for Christ (Rom. 8:35–39, 2 Cor. 4:8–18, 11:23–33). Unquestionably, our Lord expects us to develop and have this frame of mind.

To better assure yourself you won't become weary in well doing, wax cold in love, or become lukewarm, commit and dedicate yourself to enduring whatever life may throw at you.

Surely, God will welcome you into His kingdom as a good, faithful, and righteous, born Son of God!



DECEPTION BY ASSOCIATION

God warned Israel not to mingle with the nations especially through marriage so that they could stay pure to Him (Deut. 7:3-4). Paul states, “be not deceived: evil communication corrupts good manners” (1 Cor. 15:33). Any one of the above three points can lead one into some level of association with a person or group of persons. Keep in mind there is no racial component in this warning (as often mis-applied). One is not a Jew outwardly, “But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” The issue at hand is about being equally yoked with the other person or group of person. With the unbeliever, the association becomes unfavorable because as stated in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18, the temple of God has nothing to do with idols. We serve a jealous God who does not want to share His glory (Isaiah 42:8). Knowing that “evil communications corrupt good manners,” (1 Corinthians 15:33) God warned Israel not to engage the Canaanites in ways that will corrupt their true worship of Him alone. Unfortunately, Israel did not heed God. One citizen after another, one king after another, was corrupted by his heathen wives—and God brought judgment upon them. We too need to think about not only who we associate with but also why and how. It is critical we don’t knowingly compromise our relationship with God in order to preserve our association with the unconverted.

What are the lessons for us in these last days? Simply, that it was not only Israel who was deceived. Clearly, we too cannot totally be untouched by the onslaught of Satan and

his agents. Thus, we need to be on the offensive. It is interesting to observe the extent of deception in some of the Seven churches of Revelation.

The church of Ephesus dealt with “those who say they are apostles and they are not, and have found them liars” (Rev. 2:2). In the church of Smyrna, there were “those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9). In Pergamos, they dealt with doctrine of Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:14). Also, there were “those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit fornication” (Rev.

We need to have a cautionary hedge around the elect “for false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive...” (Matt. 24:24)

2:14). And in Thyatira, there was “Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20).

What is the Church of God dealing with in our day and age? Among other things, the so-called emerging church has far reaching implications. In describing his book, Faith Undone, Roger Oakland had this to say about the emerging church:

“Grounded in a centuries-old mystical approach, this movement is powerful yet highly deceptive, and it draws its energy from

practices and experiences that are foreign to biblical Christianity. The path the emerging church is taking is leading right into the arms of interfaith perspective that has prophetically profound ramifications.”

Thus, the family of God must be admonished to take heed because Satan’s many are already working non-stop and have deceived most of the many. We need to have a cautionary hedge around the elect “for false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive...” (Matt. 24:24)

There are many areas of Christian life in which the deceivers are actively working in the world today. These areas/issues require our spiritual investigation and discernment when we are confronted with any of them. One clear reason many will be deceived is because Satan’s many, will come in the name of our Saviour, under the guise of a false Christianity (Matt. 24:5).

So, to take heed, we need to look closely at the fraternity of persons who use the name of Christ. We refer to this commonly assumed fraternity as Christians. But, this can be a grave mistake because many perceived “Christians” (in the name of Christ) will deceive many Christians (actual) and prospective Christians, sending them into confusion and

damnation.

Suffice it to say, to ward off deception, we can stay on the purity of the Word of God devoid of any postmodernist or liberal cajoles. We need to savour the Word as a newborn baby does breast milk (1 Pet. 2:2).



The image features two interlocking gold wedding rings positioned in the upper half. The background is a sunburst pattern of radiating lines in shades of gold and brown. A solid blue horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title text in white. The rings are highly reflective, showing bright highlights and shadows.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

by Ken Allen

The world was abuzz with excitement on April 29th at the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton (now the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge). But there is a wedding in the making that will be more significant than any other this world has ever or will ever see! We are talking about the marriage of the Lamb of God, Yeshua to His bride, the Church.

In order to really appreciate the marriage analogy used in the Bible, we need to divorce ourselves from the Western concept of marriage and consider the traditional Jewish wedding. In western cultures today, the bride is the main attraction at the wedding. The groom stands at the altar and patiently waits for the bride to come. When she finally arrives, the music starts and all eyes are focused on her. In the first century Jewish wedding, it was the complete opposite. The groom was the main attraction. The bride just had to wait and prepare herself for the groom to come for her. When the groom came, the shofar (trumpet) was blown to announce his arrival. In this, we see, a picture of the Feast of Trumpets (one of God's seven annual Holy Days) when the trumpets will sound to proclaim the return of Christ (the Groom) for His bride, the Church.

As we examine the main aspects of the ancient Jewish wedding, we will see striking parallels to the betrothal and future marriage between Jesus Christ and His Church. There were two main sections to the ancient Jewish wedding: (1) the betrothal (*kiddushin* in Hebrew), and (2) nuptials and consummation (*nissuin* in Hebrew).

THE BETROTHAL

In the culture of Jesus' day, the groom or an agent would visit the father of the bride to ask for her to be his wife. He would speak with the bride's father and tell him how he would provide for the bride. If the father was satisfied, they would decide on the *bride price*. The more

the groom loved and desired his bride, the more he would be willing to pay for her. How interesting, when realizing that Christ paid the highest price possible for us by laying down his life for us (John 15:13).

The father would then tell his daughter a marriage covenant has been made and have her prepare a special meal for her future husband. When she was ready, her father would invite the groom to the door outside the room where the bride was waiting at the table. The groom would knock and wait for her to respond or not. If she was willing to go ahead with the marriage she would rise from her place at the table, open the door and invite the groom to dine with her.

Here's another interesting parallel with Christ's words to the church:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me." (Rev 3:20)

The Church of God is now married to Christ. We accepted and signed the marriage contract at our baptism..

The marriage contract was made and sealed by the shedding of blood or symbolically sharing the *wine cup of acceptance*. Now the couple was considered legally married and set apart for each other. [That's why Joseph wanted to quietly divorce Mary to whom he was betrothed when he found out she was pregnant because he thought she had broken her marriage contract (Matt. 1:18-21).]

The Church of God is now married to Christ. We accepted and signed the marriage contract

at our baptism and renew it each time we take the Passover symbols (Matt. 26:27-29). By coming under the New Covenant, we entered into a marriage contract with our Saviour and husband, Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews reminds us of this by quoting Jeremiah 31:31-33:

*"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an **husband** unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." (emphasis added)*

After the signing of the formal contract (*ketubah* in Hebrew) stating the bride's price, promises of the groom and rights of the bride, the groom would leave his bride and return to his father's

house to build a place in his father's house for his bride. Now this sheds light on Jesus's words in John 14:2-3 when he said there are many rooms in His Father's house where He has gone to prepare and will come back to take us to that place.

The groom would go away for a year to 18 months. In his absence he left his bride gifts to remember him. God gives us His Holy

Spirit and spiritual gifts to help us, to edify the Body of Christ and to glorify Him (Rom. 12:5-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; John 14:15-17).

NUPTIALS AND CONSUMMATION OF MARRIAGE

During this time away from his bride, the groom had no idea when he would go back to take his bride. He had to wait on his father to tell him when it was time to go for his bride.

It's interesting that Jesus said with reference to the time of His second coming:

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matt. 24:36)

At the appointed time, when his father gave the word, the groom would come unexpectedly by night with his entourage and with the blowing of the shofar to the bride's house to claim her as his wife. [All this is uniquely portrayed as well, in the unexpected Second Coming of Christ to claim His bride, the Church, a magnificent appearance that will be preceded with the blowing of trumpets.] After the groom claims his wife, there is a wedding procession followed by the marriage feast at the groom's father's house. This often lasted for seven days or more.

BRIDE IN WAITING FOR HER HUSBAND

Now that we are espoused to Christ, what kind of bride should we be? Here are a few of the qualities Christ's bride should have and be doing.

Purity

As the bride of Christ, we must be pure or holy in our character and conduct because He is holy. God desires a pure virgin for His Son. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, we read:

"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

Christ wants a spotless and unblemished bride (Eph. 5:26-27).

Faithfulness

God is committed to a monogamous relationship and won't share us with any other lovers. He wants our unswerving commitment to Him only.



We can look forward with great expectation to being not just guests at the greatest wedding feast, but being the actual bride at that wedding.

"You shall have no other gods before me... for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God." (Exod. 20:3-6)

Focused

Christ's bride cannot afford to be distracted by the cares of life, the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17), nor by other relationships. We must put Him first:

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his [own] father and mother [in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude toward God] and [likewise] his wife and children and brothers and sisters--[yes] and even his own life also--he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26, Amplified Bible).

Patience & Preparedness

Since the bride did not know exactly when her husband would return to take her away, she had to be ready and not be caught unprepared. The parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) illustrates this point beautifully. As we await the return of our bridegroom we should be busy developing the qualities Christ desires in us.

We can look forward with great expectation to being not just guests at the greatest wedding feast, but being the actual bride at that wedding. Revelation 19:6-9 declares:

"... Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."

What a glorious time that will be! Our marriage to the Lamb is then fully consummated as we become one with Christ (Eph. 5:31-32) and celebrate the marriage supper.



VERSES 8-11

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God...” God has declared the Sabbath a day of rest because He knows what’s best for man, not the other way around (Mark 2:27). Worshipping on the first day of the week is not what the fourth commandment requires: it explicitly requires cessation of work on the seventh day. It is idolatrous to think we can choose a day of worship and rest because it is easy and convenient and that God will understand or better yet, that the God of yesterday, today and forever, who changes not, will change the law to suit rebellious mankind.

VERSE 12

“Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” This commandment to honour parents is broader in its scope than appears at first glance. It is not to be restricted to our literal father and mother, but is to be applied to all our superiors. Children are to honour their parents in the fear of the Lord (Matt. 19: 27-30); forsaking parental guidance is seen as disobeying Yahweh and can be labelled idolatry.

VERSE 13

“You shall not murder.” Ezekiel 22:3-4 and 2 Kings 3:27 connect murder with idolatry; it is the character trait of the enemy (John 8:44). This command also prohibits all the degrees and causes of murder, such as rash anger and hatred, slanders and revenge, and whatever

else may prejudice the safety of our neighbour or tempt us to see him perish when it is in our power to relieve and rescue him.

VERSE 14

“You shall not commit adultery.” Christ showed the spirit of the law in the New Testament that anyone who lusted after a woman other than his wife commits adultery (Matt. 5:28). That desire is selfish, idolatrous and is coveting thy neighbour’s property.

Just as the first commandment is the foundation for all the other commandments, the tenth commandment is the conclusion of them all.

VERSE 15

“You shall not steal.” Stealing always begins with covetousness and is therefore, idolatry (Col. 3:5).

VERSE 16

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” False witness has to do with slander and includes gossip (Prov. 6:16, 19; Exod. 23:1) as it paints a negative picture of another person who is made in the image and likeness of God. Slandering is to report things of others unjustly. Those who participate elevate themselves above the other person in order to seek self-glory and gratification amounting to idolatry.

VERSE 17

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house...” Covetousness is termed the secret sin; it is a sin that can’t be discerned very easily. Satan coveted God’s position and what He has in store for humanity—immortality. Covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5) and should not be part of the life of the child of God.

Just as the first commandment is the foundation for all the other commandments, the tenth commandment is the conclusion of them all. It is easy for us to see the last six injunctions of the law as pertaining to covetousness, but James 2:10 says, *“for whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”* It is the one spirit that binds or breaks the law.

All the laws stand or fall together and teach us how to express our faith in God with concrete acts of love in honour of God and our brothers. Zechariah 8:16-17 shows the evidence of love for God is obedience to the law of love (1 John 3:3). This is God’s

instrument for conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ. Romans 3:19 tells us what the law speaks; it speaks in order that the whole world may be held accountable to God. All are accountable because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) which means we all have violated the law of God—the common standard for everyone (Rom. 3:20). The spirit of covetousness is what broke the law in both the angelic realm and the human race. This spirit corrupts the good in us and hinders us from keeping the law as Christ did. Beware of the idolatry that may creep into our lives.



The background consists of several white rectangular pieces of paper scattered across the frame. Each piece of paper has a large, black, stylized question mark printed on it. The papers are layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. A solid blue horizontal band is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the text.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The following questions and answers are taken from our booklet *The Q&A Book – Questions and Answers*.

Q. EPHESIANS 2:8-10 SAYS SALVATION IS BY GRACE AND THROUGH FAITH. WHAT ARE GRACE AND FAITH, AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO “GOOD WORKS.”?

A. Ephesians 2:8-10 states,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

God’s grace is His divine favour, His merciful kindness toward us. Faith may be defined simply as trusting belief in God and His promises. Salvation, then, is available to us only because of God’s merciful kindness. We obtain it by trusting in God and the provisions He has made for us. This trusting belief, or faith, always manifests itself through the actions of the person possessing it (see Heb. 11). That’s what Paul means when he says that God’s people are “*created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*”

Q. DOES HEBREWS 6:4-6 TEACH THAT A CHRISTIAN WHO FALLS AWAY IS LOST FOREVER?

A. Hebrews 6:4-6 states,

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,

and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.”

The terms used in this passage show that the writer was not speaking of the occasional slip due to momentary weakness or the temporary emergence of an old habit. To “*crucify again*” Jesus Christ and “*put Him to an open shame*” involves a deliberate and quite radical departure from the Christian faith.

Yes, the passage does teach that repentance is impossible for a certain class of people. But these two terms, *repentance* and *impossible*, provide the key to understanding how the unpardonable sin differs from the other sins.

If you think you have committed the unpardonable sin, are worried about it, and have prayed for God’s mercy, you need not fear that the door of salvation has been slammed shut for you.

If an individual, after coming to true conversion and experiencing the joy of salvation, falls into temptation and commits sin, but then “comes to his senses” and repents of his wrongdoing, he has not committed the unpardonable sin—for he has demonstrated in his own life that for him repentance was not impossible.

If you think you have committed the unpardonable sin, are worried about it, and have prayed for God’s mercy, you need not fear that the door of salvation has been slammed shut

for you. The very fact that you are concerned about it and have sought God’s mercy demonstrates a repentant attitude and, therefore, shows that you never “fell away” to the point that repentance was impossible.

Q. GENESIS 6:19-20 AND GENESIS 7:2-3 TELL US THAT NOAH WAS TO ADMIT PAIRS OF ALL KINDS OF ANIMALS, AND SEVEN EACH OF “CLEAN” ANIMALS AND BIRDS, ABOARD THE ARK. THAT’S A LOT OF ANIMALS. HOW DID NOAH GET SO MANY ANIMALS ON THE ARK?

A. According to *Genesis Flood*, by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, the ark was 437.5 feet in length, 72.92 feet in width, and 43.75 feet in height. These figures are based on the assumption that a cubit equals 17.5 inches (Gen. 6:14-16). With three decks, the ark has enough room to carry at least 125,000 sheep sized animals.

Whitcomb and Morris estimate that less than 17,600 animals would have needed the protection provided by the ark. By multiplying that number by two, and adding the estimated number of clean animals, the ark would have to house approximately 79,000 animals. That’s

46,000 fewer than the estimated maximum number. Given the probability that Noah brought young animals aboard the ark (cubs rather than full grown lions and bears, for example), and the fact that the average animal was no larger than a sheep, it becomes clearer that the ark had sufficient room for the animals as well as sufficient food storage areas and living quarters for Noah and his family.





THE KING'S DREAM

by Horane Smith

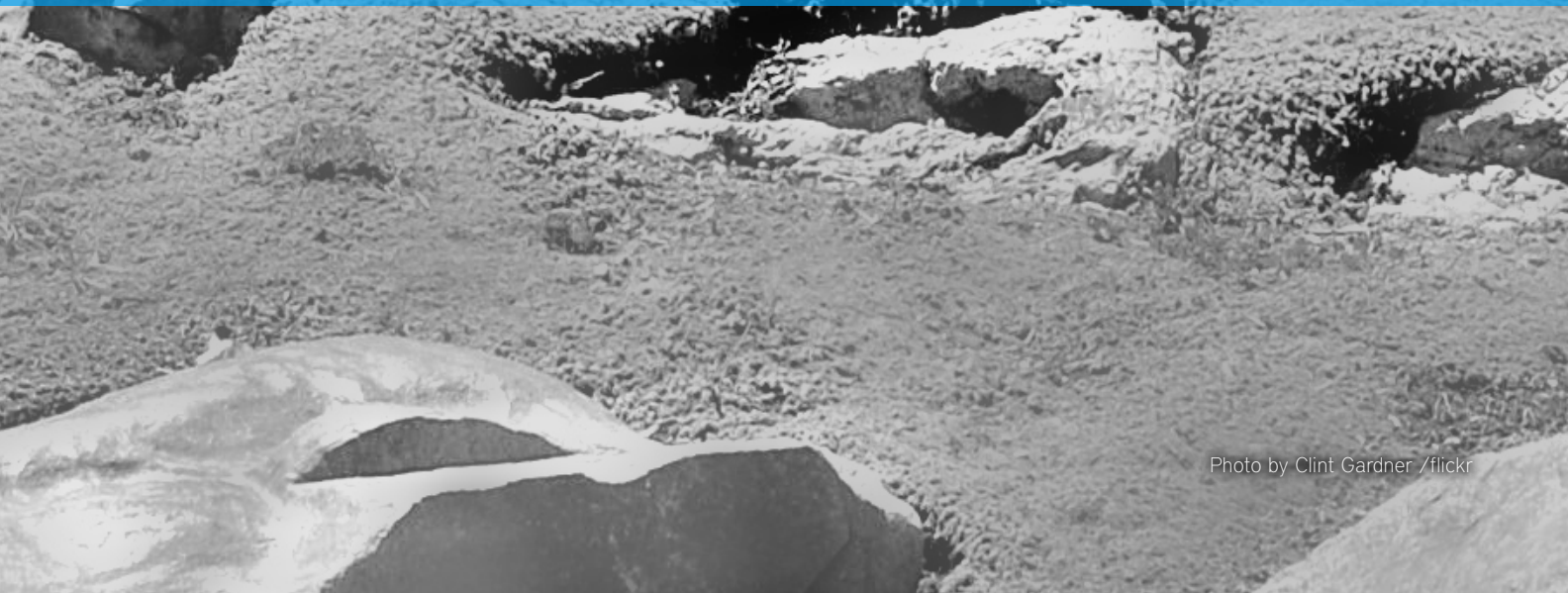


Photo by Clint Gardner / flickr

King Nebuchadnezzar was a troubled man. He ran his fingers through his grey beard several times hoping it would take his mind off that dream last night. The empire of Babylon was a headache in itself, and it was no wonder a hard day's work often resulted in these nightmares. To keep the empire intact, and for it to maintain its great power and influence over the whole region, was becoming a formidable task. He had to be mindful of insurrection, lawlessness, and anything that could undermine the influence of the dynasty.

It was not often that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that gnawed at his thoughts. His dreams were not usually out of the ordinary and he would forget them as soon as he was out of bed. Somehow, the dream last night was different. The symbols and the meaning were a puzzle.

King Nebuchadnezzar sat on his throne watching some blackbirds playing on a wall bordering the palace, as golden rays of sunlight beamed through the parted windows into the room with glittering brilliance, landing right on his face. He didn't shift his position but allowed the sun to caress his face hoping it would help him get rid of his drowsiness. The birds sang and danced about as if they had no trouble in the world. The king wished he were like that.

"Are you okay Dad?" his daughter Rebecca asked. She walked in the room taking him a cup of tea.

"Oh, it's you..." he mumbled, startled by her presence. He didn't see her walk into the room. The sandals she wore made little or no noise on the shining floor. *"I'm okay my dear. It's just that I had a rather strange dream last night and it keeps bothering me."*

"Dream, what did you dream about?" she asked, handing him the cup.

The king looked up at his daughter, noticing the concern in her lovely face. She was an attractive princess and the King wondered whether he should burden her with his dream.

"I wish I knew what the dream is about?"

"Well why not call the astrologers and magicians, she suggested?"

"That's a good idea. Why should I bother when they can tell me?"

The very next day the king summoned his astrologers, magicians, sorcerers, and the Chaldeans. They came as soon as they got his message.

"I have a dream, a very troubling dream," the king said. *"I have to know what it means."*

They whispered among themselves an indication that they were curious to know what this dream was all about. At the same time, they knew they had to give an interpretation.

"Tell your servants this dream and we'll show you the interpretation O King," the Chaldean spoke up from the group.

King Nebuchadnezzar was getting impatient and wanted to spare little time in getting the correct explanation. *"I can't remember it all. If you'll not make known to me this dream,"* he said scratching his beard, his eyes twinkling faster than normal, *"you shall be cut into pieces,"* he said in a commanding voice. *"Your houses shall be made of dunghill,"* the king added.

The so-called wise men of Babylon were shocked to hear him say that but they were not frightened. In all their time of practice they have always been able to interpret a dream. Each one of them was far from being humble about their achievements, hence their confidence that the king's threat would be in vain.

"But if you show me the interpretation, I'll give you gifts, rewards and I'll bestow a great honor on you. Now tell me the meaning of the dream," he demanded.

"Tell us the dream," they repeated. *"We have no doubt we can tell you the interpretation,"* they said, with almost a smile.

"I see you're bidding for time because you believe I have forgotten the dream," the king answered. *"Nevertheless, I still want you to interpret it and if you don't there's only one*

decree for you. I know if you can tell me the dream then you will be able to interpret it," he said raising his voice.

The Chaldean, the most talkative of the lot, spoke again: *"There's no man on this earth that can tell you this dream. There's no king, lord, nor ruler that can ask such things of any astrologer, magician or Chaldean. It is very rare that the king asks and there is no one that can tell you that dream except the gods, who aren't flesh like us."*

The king was furious and steaming with rage. His face took on more wrinkles pushing them into his forehead; his eyes glistened with anger and impatience. He turned to his captain, Arioch. *"All the wise men in Babylon must be destroyed, beginning with these,"* he said pointing to the group of frightened and trembling men before him.

Ten soldiers coming from out of nowhere marched up to them, grabbed each by the shoulder and whisked them away quickly. *"Send out this decree at once to all the relevant people!"* he snapped, strapped his gown around him and stormed out of the room.

A prophet of God, Daniel, who also carried the name Belteshazar, heard of the decree. Arioch eventually met Daniel as he carried out his mission of slaying all the wise man of Babylon.

"Why is the king moving so quickly on this?" Daniel asked Arioch. *"He should be a little more patient."*

"He's the king and what he says must be done," Arioch replied.

"I believe I could interpret that dream," Daniel said, smiling with confidence

Arioch looked at the young Daniel and wondered if this was some kind of a joke or something. Daniel looked so simple; yet there was something in that face of his that told him he could be a man of surprises. Arioch knew of King Nebuchadnezzar's desire to get the dream interpreted as soon as possible. He had little choice about whether to dismiss Daniel's offer. *"You truly believe you could?"*

"Take me to him," Daniel said.

Arioch took Daniel to see the King, who adhered to his request for some time to interpret his dream.

The first thing Daniel did when he returned from the palace was to visit his close friends Hannah, Mishael and Azariah, to seek their prayers to the God of their fathers that the king would not destroy them as he did the wise men of Babylon.

That night a troubled Daniel went to bed earlier than usual. He was burdened by the task he had taken on to interpret the king's dream, yet somehow he was confident he could provide the correct interpretation with the help of the God of Israel. He wanted to get some rest badly so that the next day he could rise early and ready to begin that strenuous task.

Within minutes, Daniel had fallen asleep. He fell into a strange dream which appeared to be real as could be. The next morning he rose to the thought of the dream and had no doubt that the God of heaven had appeared to him. Everything he had prayed for was revealed to him in that dream. As soon as Daniel realized this, he fell on his knees.

"Blessed be the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob forever and ever; for wisdom and might belong to him," Daniel declared.

"The God of our fathers changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings, he gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He reveals the deep and secret things; he knows what lies in the darkness and the light dwells with him."

Daniel clutched his chest and continued to pray fervently at the thought God had answered him very quickly. *"I thank thee and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and has made known unto me now what we desired of him; for he has now made known unto us the king's dream."*

After he had finished eating, Daniel rode to the king's palace to speak with Arioch, the captain. *"Don't destroy the wise men of Babylon. Bring me to the king and I'll tell him what his dream means,"* Daniel told him, as a little excitement built in his voice.

Arioch did not hesitate: standing before a non-attentive King Nebuchadnezzar Arioch told him all that Daniel had said. *"I've found a man of the captives of Judah that says he can interpret your dreams."*

The king, who had his head down while Arioch spoke, looked up at once at the mention of the words Judah and captives. His eyes rested on Daniel surveying him from head to toe. Daniel did not possess the physique of a war hero; he was of ordinary stature but with piercing eyes.

Daniel was bursting with confidence because he knew the God of Israel was with him.

The king rose from his seat, his eyes still set on Daniel, and made a circle around him examining him thoroughly.

"Hmmm," he said scratching his itching beard, *"Are you able to tell me my dreams and interpret them?"*

With his chin tilted a bit, Daniel looked to the heavens and prayed silently to God for the words of wisdom and guidance in what he was about to say. *"Your dreams O king cannot be known or interpreted by magicians, astrologers or soothsayers."*

The king listened attentively trying to exercise some patience because he was getting too disturbed about the dreams and wanted the interpretation at all costs, even if it meant that

a captive from the tribe of Judah could provide it.

"They can't?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"No, your majesty. But there's a God in heaven that reveals secrets and makes them known to you what shall happen in the last days."

There was a deathly silence in the palace. All eyes were turned to this diminutive figure who stood so tiny to the many faces and bodies that were converged around him. The king looked him over again: out of the mouth of this young man came some prophetic words that he had never heard before.

Daniel was bursting with confidence because he knew the God of Israel was with him. He looked around at them trying to read the expressions on their faces—they varied from concern to deep interest in what he had said.

"Go on," the king mumbled.

"You should know that this secret of your dream has been revealed to me not because I have wisdom more than any other, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to you that you might know my thoughts."

"Hmm," the king grunted, not wanting to say anything at that moment.

"O King, what you saw was a great image... a bright image stood before you and it looked terrifying. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay."

Many people looking on wondered where all this was leading to, but the king got more and more interested in what Daniel had to say. Of a truth, his interpretation must be from the God Daniel referred to, the King concluded.

"You saw a stone that was cut without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and break them to pieces."

Then was the iron, clay and brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. That is the dream and I will interpret it for you."

"It's no wonder I could not remember it," the king replied. "It's so strange...so strange," he said, his hands plucking his nose. "And you can interpret such a strange dream young man?"

"I can O King with the help of the God of Israel."

"The God of Israel, huh?"

"Yes, he's the living God that helps me in this matter. This dream comes from him to you O King."

"Go on," the king said, feeling a little more lighthearted.

"You O King art a king of kings: for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. Wherever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven has he given into your hands and has made you ruler over them all. You're this head of gold. After you, shall rise another kingdom inferior to yours, and a third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things; and as iron that breaks all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise."

There was still silence as Daniel took his time, pacing his words so they could be digested and easily understood.

"O King you saw the feet and toes, part of the potters clay, and part of iron which means the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it the strength of the iron, forasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, and as the toes of the feet were part of iron, so the kingdom shall be partly broken. Whereas you saw iron

mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break into pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

There was some mumbling in the room when Daniel said this kingdom would stand forever. However, the king said nothing. His gaze was fixed on Daniel.

"O King," Daniel continued, "you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the

There was still silence as Daniel took his time, pacing his words so they could be digested and easily understood.

brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God has made known to you what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain and the interpretation correct and true."

Suddenly, King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face before Daniel and started to say things as if he was praying. He commanded his servants to offer an oblation and sweet odors unto Daniel. "Of a truth it is true...your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing you could reveal this secret."

The king made Daniel a great man in his kingdom and gave him great gifts and made him a ruler over the whole province of Babylon and

chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Then Daniel asked the king to appoint three young Hebrew men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

Many years later King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and set it up in the plain of Durai in the province of Babylon.

In the intense heat of the day, thousands of people, including the governors, princes, captains and judges, treasurers and counsellors, sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, gathered for the dedication of the image.

A command was given that at the sound of a cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and any other kind of music, everyone should all bow down and worship the image. The edict said anyone who failed to do that would be cast in a fiery furnace.

Daniel was very disturbed when he heard the command. At one point he had thought the king was interested in knowing more about the God of heaven. The building of the image made him think otherwise.

As Daniel was thinking about the consequences of such an action, a group of Chaldeans was appearing before the king with an accusation that was bound to affect the Jews.

"O King, the young Jews you appointed to serve the province of Babylon have refused to bow down and serve thy gods and will not worship the golden image?" their chief spokesman cried.

"Do you mean Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?" he whirled around quickly to face the men directly.

"You are correct, O King."

"Bring them to me at once!" he commanded the guards.

The three young Jews marched into the room, bowing before the king in utter silence.

"Is it true?" the king asked. *"Have you refused to bow down and worship the golden image and to worship my gods?"* He rose from the throne in anticipation of a positive answer. King Nebuchadnezzar always had a liking for the three young Jewish men, and to learn they had refused to obey his command was not something he was looking forward to.

"O King, we aren't careful to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace. We won't serve your god, nor worship the golden image."

The king was driven into a rage that transformed his face into pink; his eyebrows jerked up into his forehead and his eyes twitched in anger. He was furious.

"Heat the furnace at once!" he shouted on top of his voice. *"I wanted it heated seven times hotter than you would normally do it."* The guards bowed and walked out of the room quickly.

The three young men were tied up and their coats, loosen, and were cast into the furnace. The flame grew so hot that the king's men, who had started it, were burned badly and died.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego saw what happened; instead of being overwhelmed with fear, they prayed to God to lead their way for them and to take charge of their lives. They hugged one another, praying quickly as they made each step along their way to the furnace.

The heat was felt from afar off; the nearer they got, the less fearful they felt. They knew their God was with them and there was nothing to fear. And there was no need for resistance.

The king's men grabbed them by the arms and hurled them into the furnace as soon as the door to it was opened. The heavy door



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slammed loudly, the noise it made echoed across the building.

The guards waited a few minutes, their ears listening keenly for cries and wails. There was none; they considered that strange and highly unusual. The only sound was from the flickering flames.

They looked over into the furnace quickly, and immediately their hands went over their mouths. There, standing on the floor of

the furnace, were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and they were not harmed. There was a fourth figure that made the king's men nervous and fearful, very fearful. They rushed to the king to tell him what they had seen.

"Are you making a joke or something?" an astonished King Nebuchadnezzar asked. *"Didn't you throw them in the furnace?"*

"We did, your majesty," they replied.

The king stormed out of the room and walked to the mouth of the burning furnace. *"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God come forth,"* he shouted.

The three of them walked out of the burning fire untouched. By now, all those who had followed the king to the furnace were now witnesses to the miraculous event.

"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who has sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve nor worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make a decree that anyone that speaks

anything amiss against the God of these three men, shall be cut into pieces and their houses shall be made a dunghill because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were subsequently promoted by the king to play a greater role in the affairs of Babylon. They lived their lives as an example of what it means to trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as did Daniel.



ENCOURAGING WORDS

ELISHA

Elisha the son of Shaphat,
Double portion of Elijah power he got.
Anointed by Elijah his zeal was strong,
He used the same mantle as Elijah to part the river Jordan.

Mocked by children whom he cursed to death.
Elisha was indeed a powerful prophet.
He cured leprosy and healed barren land,
He was even granted the power to perform resurrection.

Elisha played minstrel till the hand of God was upon him.
He prophesied victory to Judas, Israel and Edom king.
A Shunammite woman came to him,
For a child she was beckoning.

And it was so as it was prophesied
The Shunammite woman conceived a child.
Who later die and brought back to life
By Elisha who resurrected the dead like both Elijah and Jesus Christ.

The leper Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria
Was told to dip seven times in the Jordan River.
His flesh became as a little child.
The widower woman empty vessel became filled with oil.

Many miracles Elisha performed
One such miracle is when he made iron float from water bottom.
He prophesied restoration and destruction.
He prophesied deliverance and salvation.

Elisha fell ill and later died
And in his sepulchre a dead man fell on his bones and was revived.
Elisha was a man of God
One of the many great prophets Israel had.

By Cordel Reid

ARMOR OF GOD



Television

United States

The Word Network
Sunday,
7:30 am Pacific
8:30 am Mountain
10:30 am Eastern
9:30 am Central
3:30 pm Central - Lincoln, Nebraska,

Channel 13
Tuesday, 12:30 pm Central

Uplift TV
Saturday, 9:30 am Eastern

Philippines

Studio 23
Sunday, 7:30 a.m.

Canada

VISION (National Cable)
Monday, 12:30 am Eastern
Friday, 3:30 am Eastern

Christian Channel
Sunday, 12:30 pm Central

CIIT Channel 11
Sunday, 10:30 pm Central - Winnipeg

CHNU Channel 10
Sunday, 10:30 pm Pacific - Vancouver

Australia

Briz 31
Sunday, 7:00 am - Brisbane

Radio

Jamaica

Radio Jamaica
Thursday
4:45 am

Online

<http://www.cgi.org/>