



THE RESTORATION HERALD

On Awakenings, Revivals, and Such

By Terry L. Peer

From the seedbed of a one-hour chapel service on February 8, 2023, and some urging by the chapel speaker, fifty students remained in the Hugh's Chapel Building of Asbury University through the night praying and worshipping. The next day, they were joined by a couple hundred more as University President Kevin Brown sent out a campus wide email of two sentences: "There's worship happening in Hughes. You are welcome to join in."

Soon this gathering turned into a few hundred, then hundreds and hundreds, and eventually thousands from all over the country and even from other parts of the world. This event, which started as a concentrated season of prayer and worship, has now come to a close on Asbury's campus proper and has moved to other locations off-campus. Yet the thrust of it all continues, and the experience is beginning to be replicated at other Christian-oriented colleges and universities across the land.

Background

Asbury University has its roots in the great Methodist revivals of the past and is associated with the Wesleyan/Holiness movement in America. This most recent revival is not a new happening for the Asbury campus as they have reported revivals in 1905, 1908, 1921, 1950, 1958, 1970, 1992, and 2006. This parallels the rhythm of other charismatic revivals through the last century. Other colleges and universities have, at times across their history, reported similar types of events, including, but not limited to, Yale University in early America, Wheaton College in decades past, Cedarville University in Ohio, Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, and many others.

Unlike similar revivals in the past, the Asbury gathering has captured so much national and international attention largely due to the immediate communication capabilities of social media. Clips and messages and even livestreams of portions were sent far and wide, and people by the hundreds and thousands wanted to taste the experience of something so dynamic and soul-stirring as people, especially young people, having a fresh awakening for things of God. How great is that, is the initial impression.

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As I stand at my desk to pen this month's editorial, we have just celebrated yet another glorious Easter Sunday (or Resurrection Sunday as some prefer). This year, I had the privilege to preach both the sunrise and regular services for the Mount Olive Church of Christ in New Vienna, OH, where Kenny Zugg is the minister. It was a wonderful Sunday indeed.



However, one thing about Easter Sunday has long bothered me, specifically: why is it that certain folks only attend that one Sunday of the year? Why do they not seem to have zeal for the Lord that produces the week by week faithfulness we observe in so many others? Why do some seem to be what the Lord would call lukewarm? I confess that I think often about this, wondering what can be done to encourage others that they “may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15)¹.

While no one would confuse me with a true avid reader, I do enjoy reading classical literature. One of my favorite books is Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. It is a fascinating tale about Hank Morgan, a nineteenth-century character, who is struck on the head only to awaken and find himself among the knights and magicians of King Arthur's sixth-century court.

Twain's work brilliantly portrays Hank's life as he journeys through this experience some thirteen-odd centuries before he is born. Early in the book, Hank finds himself, through no fault of his own, condemned to die. This death, no less, by being burned at the stake! As he awaits this horrible fate, Hank posits this remarkable thought:

“In the stillness and the darkness, realization soon began to supplement knowledge. The mere knowledge of a fact is pale; but when you come to *realize* your fact, it takes on color. It is all the difference between hearing of a man being stabbed to the heart, and seeing it done. In the stillness and the darkness, the knowledge that I was in deadly danger took to itself deeper and deeper meaning all the time; a something which was realization crept inch by inch through my veins and turned me cold” (emphasis in original).

Unbeknownst to him, Twain has swerved into something profound. For Hank, *mere knowledge* he would suffer a cruel death was a far cry from the *realization* that such was indeed his fate. In other words, Hank was moving from head knowledge to heart knowledge.

Perhaps more than anything else, this concept explains the lack of commitment we see from many. They have a head knowledge of the Lord, sin, salvation, hell, heaven, and the judgment to come, but are lacking in heart knowledge—a deep seated *realization* of the truths of the gospel message.

In Mark 7, Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes for this very thing in one of His most stinging rebukes, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Mark 7:6). When asked to rank the commandments, Jesus responded, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart...” (Mark 12:30). When Peter delivered the first gospel message on that Acts 2 Pentecost day, Luke records that “they were cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37).

In Romans 10:9-10 Paul states, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” In his Romans commentary, Jack Cottrell writes, “To ‘believe in the heart’ means not only to accept the bare facts about something but also to accept its full meaning and significance and to be committed to applying its implications to one's own life.”

Admirably, our Restoration Movement heritage has been to be a people of the book, being diligent to rightly divide the word of truth. This emphasis was and is certainly necessary, for Paul warns us that the Lord Jesus is coming to take vengeance on those “who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus, it remains proper to emphasize the facts of the gospel and the need to obey the gospel through faith, repentance, and immersion into Christ.

That said, given the importance placed on the heart in the New Testament, I'd like to challenge those of us who preach and teach to make sure we are doing our best to move listeners beyond the intellectual facts of the gospel and to the deep-seated realities of the Christian message. To those involved in a plethora of other ministry activities, I issue the same challenge. As we engage in ministry, whatever its form, let us strive to produce a “cut to the heart” response in those to whom we minister.

As Peter reminds us, one day “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.” Many in our congregations yearn passionately for “the new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” coming one glorious day. Let's labor to produce similar passion in all those around us. ~RH

¹ All Scripture references are from the New King James Version.

THE RESTORATION HERALD

Editor, John R. Mitchell

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FIRST THINGS FIRST

TONY SULLIVAN



READY FOR JUDGMENT



It was going to be a party to end all parties. The host had thought of everything. There was enough food, plenty to drink, and even some really cool decorations. Some great entertainment had been planned. Everybody who was anybody was going to be there.

While the party raged on, Belshazzar the king thought, “This is going better than I expected.” The wine was good, and the girls were very pretty. Then he had an idea, the best idea he had ever had, or so he thought. He ordered, “Go and get the gold and silver vessels that my father took from the temple.” When they were brought to him, he and his guests began to drink from them.

He might as well have been saying, “Look, we’ve defeated the God of Israel. Our gods are stronger and better than their God. Let’s rub it in their faces.”

That’s when it happened. Suddenly, without warning, a man’s hand emerged and began to write on the wall. His face lost all color. His thoughts alarmed him. He became so alarmed that he couldn’t stand up and his knees started to shake.

In his fright he cried out, “Go and get the wise men.” He promised them clothes of purple, a necklace of gold, and the third highest place in the kingdom if they could read what the hand had written. Alas, they couldn’t read or interpret the writing.

The queen entered the room and gave him some bad advice. “Don’t let your thoughts alarm you and stop looking like you’ve seen a ghost.” Don’t be alarmed! If there ever was a time to be alarmed, this was it.

The queen finally did something right when she told them, “Go and get this man I know. He has the Spirit of God.” This man was Daniel. When Daniel arrived he interpreted the message for the king.

The message was, “Your days are numbered.” Here is a good thought: God’s judgment comes many times when we least expect it. The people in the days of Noah were quickly

removed from earth. The judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah came quickly. The rich fool died the night he was planning a great life for himself. Ananias and Sapphira both died soon after they lied to the Holy Spirit.

Those at the feast of Belshazzar were drunk. They had desecrated the vessels of God. They had praised false gods. They were mocking the Holy God of Israel. They turned their noses up at Him and mocked His name, like many in the United States do today. Some people seem to miss God’s anger when it shows up. I just can’t help but believe that many of the natural disasters we have faced in the last few years have been God’s way of calling us to repentance.

Notice in Scripture how God’s judgment is almost always preceded by God’s warning. Paul warns us in Galatians 3:27, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, this will he also reap.”¹

Romans 1:18-20 teaches the same lesson:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

When God’s judgment falls, we will not be able to say we didn’t know. God’s grace is what is holding back the judgment of God. However, God’s judgment will come.

Then Daniel gives the second part of the message, “You are weighed and found wanting.” There is a great void left in the world by ungodliness. To have God find us “wanting” means He finds us lacking in moral worth.

The deep desires some people have in life are a result of leaving God out of their lives. That gnawing that something is missing in their life, the yearning for the one thing they are looking for to make their lives worthwhile exists because they have left God out of their lives.

The world thumbs their noses at God and refuses to ac-

cept His Son. Sadly, the church is doing the same in some places. The clear teachings of Scripture are ignored and discarded because if they were followed, we wouldn't have the great attendance we have. We know what God wants; we just refuse to do it.

Daniel revealed to the king that he was about to lose everything he ever had. Sin had a strong grip on Belshazzar. Daniel read the words and told their meaning, but Belshazzar did nothing. He didn't repent, he didn't pray, he didn't cry for God's mercy. He kept right on mocking God.

How many of us have heard the message of Christ over and over? We've heard the good news about what awaits those who are saved, and we've heard the bad news about what happens to those who refuse to repent. We know what is coming. Yet many of us are not doing one thing to change.

God's wrath and judgment fell on Belshazzar and his lords. God's judgment will one day fall on the United States and, along with it, the lukewarm, compromising congregations.

The good news is, we still have hope. Just like Israel had a remnant we can also have a remnant (more, I hope). Let's make sure that when the judgment comes, we are found being like Daniel and not like Belshazzar. ~RH

1 All Scripture references are from the NASB.


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The East Comes West

The Challenge of Eastern Pantheistic Monism

Part 2



In part one of this discussion, I laid out five points summarizing the substance of Eastern Pantheistic Monism (EPM). In part two, we will compare these points to the biblical worldview.

1. Atman is Brahman. That is, your essence (*Atman*) is the essence of the cosmos (*Brahman*). To some, this statement appears to mirror the biblical declaration that we are made in God's image (Genesis 1:26), but it does not. God's image in us does not make us *divine* in nature, as God is. Rather, it makes us *persons*, which EPM denies (see #2, below). Jack Cottrell explains, "There is considerable agreement that the basic distinguishing essence of man is his nature as a person. We have already seen that God is personal by virtue of His nature as spirit; by creating human beings as spiritual creatures, He has shared with us His own attribute of personhood."¹

Cottrell's explanation raises another distinction between the biblical worldview and EPM. While the biblical God, Yahweh, is personal, Brahman is impersonal.² Brahman is "it," not "He." Yet, Hinduism also believes that Brahman has appeared in three physical forms (*trimurti*): Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Plus, these three "gods" have taken numerous human or animal forms, called *avatars*, to interact with the world. How the impersonal Brahman could give rise to these personal avatars is not explained.

At first glance, this trio of "gods" appears to match the biblical Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, a closer examination reveals that in EPM the three "gods" are simply three forms of the same, impersonal Brahman, while the Trinity consists of three eternally distinct persons sharing the same essence or being.³

Additionally, while the avatars of Vishnu seem to parallel the Incarnation of Christ, in none of the EPM scriptures does Vishnu become human. He merely *appears* in human form briefly, at some indeterminate time, then returns to spirit form. In contrast, the New Testament declares that the divine Word became flesh⁴ was both fully human and fully divine,⁵ lived as a human for over thirty years,⁶ died,⁷ rose from the dead,⁸ and returned to heaven.⁹

"Why do Hindus believe Krishna [the eighth avatar of Vishnu] appeared and what did he accomplish? Krishna entered the world [in some mythic time] to confront evil from both demons and the natural world. Wrongdoers are changed into loving followers after contact with the all-forgiving Krishna."¹⁰ On the other hand, Christ entered the world in real, historical time to give His life as a sacrifice for our sins so the Father could forgive us of those sins on account of our faith in Christ.¹¹

Furthermore, in EPM only Brahman really exists. The physical world is an illusion. Conversely, the biblical worldview says that the material cosmos is real, it was created by God, and it was created "good."¹² Moreover, far from being a veil, hiding the true nature of Brahman, the material creation reveals, for all to see, the existence of God the Creator.¹³

2. We are not persons. According to EPM, if everything is of the same essence as Brahman, the ultimate reality, then so are we. Consequently, in our essence we are impersonal. Here is one of the stark differences between the biblical worldview, naturalism, and EPM. Naturalism believes that you are only *matter*—a *body* without a soul. "There is only one sort of *stuff*, namely matter—physical stuff of physics, chemistry, and physiology—and the mind is somehow nothing but a physical phenomenon. In short, the mind is the brain."¹⁴ Moreover, there is no "you," per se. Your personality is simply the sum of your behaviors. On the other hand, EPM says that you are only *spirit*, the impersonal Brahman, with no actual body and no actual personhood. Only in the biblical worldview are we both *body and spirit*, created to be a unity of the two, as well as *persons*, made in God's image.

3. Only the impersonal soul (*Atman*) survives death. As we pointed out in part one, according to EPM, when a person dies, only Atman does, and is reincarnated as another person. This is where The Law of *Karma* and *samsara* (reincarnation) come in.

As we pointed out in part one, a person's deeds, good or evil, determine his future life in the next incarnation. Doing "good" (i.e., doing your class/caste duty) can result in your Atman being reincarnated in a higher caste. Doing "evil" can result in it moving down to a lower level. EPM has no concept of personal sin, much less of personal redemption. Instead, we have "bad karma," negative circumstances

(poverty, disease, social or racial discrimination) as retribution for wrong decisions in a former life. The only way to escape the cycle of samsara is to achieve *moksha* (“liberation”) by first, realizing Atman is Brahman and then totally losing self-awareness.

Contrast this system with Christianity. We all sin and fall short of God’s glory, so no one can earn their own salvation. However, those who have faith in Christ Jesus are justified by God’s grace (Romans 3:22-24). Additionally, there is no reincarnation in the biblical worldview (Hebrews 9:27). Rather, there is the promise of *resurrection* and immortality (John 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58). Finally, in EPM the eternal destiny of the impersonal soul (Atman) is to be absorbed into the cosmic soul (Brahman), absent any vestige of personality. Whatever we are or appeared to be in this life will be gone. The Bible, on the other hand, depicts heaven as a place of conscious joy and fellowship for the resurrected believers in the presence of the Trinity (Revelation 21:1-22:17).

4. There are many paths to *moksha*. Some adherents to EPM are syncretistic, believing that all religions are the same, no religion has all the truth, and any religion can lead a person to oneness with the one. Others believe that there are many spiritual exercises which can enable a practitioner to achieve enlightenment. Technique, not doctrine, is important.

Both views are at odds with the biblical worldview. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6)¹⁵. On the one hand, Jesus is saying that *He is the only means* to reach God.¹⁶ On the other hand, Jesus also says that *He is the truth*—that doctrine does matter.¹⁷ That is why Paul warned Timothy about those who would reject sound doctrine and truth, preferring myths (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

Timothy Keller exposes the logical flaws in each of these views when he writes, “How could you possibly know that no religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior, comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality you just claimed that none of the religions have?”¹⁸ Again, he says, “Ironically, the insistence that doctrines do not matter is really a doctrine itself. It holds a specific view of God, which is touted as superior and more enlightened than the beliefs of most major religions. The proponents of this view do the very thing they forbid in others.”¹⁹

Even some spiritual leaders in EPM recognize the fallacy of the “all religions are the same” claim. One of them writes, “Young adults hear their parents disclaiming their religion by saying ‘Oh, I am a Christian. I am a Muslim. I am a Buddhist. I am a follower of all religions. All religions are one.’ All religions are not one. They are very, very different. They all worship and talk about God, yes, but they do not all lead their followers to the same spiritual goal.”²⁰

5. To achieve oneness with the One, we must transcend all notions of morality. Believers in EPM claim that there is no real difference between good and evil “on the highest level of consciousness.” The absurdity of this claim is vividly exposed by Francis Schaeffer:

One day I was talking to a group of people in the digs of a young South African in Cambridge. Among others, there was present a young Indian who was of Sikh background but a Hindu by religion. He started to speak strongly against Christianity but did not really understand the problems of his own beliefs. I said, “Am I not correct in saying that on the basis of your system, cruelty and non-cruelty are ultimately equal, that there is no intrinsic difference between them?” He agreed... the student in whose room we met, who had clearly understood the implications of what the Sikh had admitted, picked up his kettle of boiling water with which he was about to make tea, and stood with it steaming over the Indian’s head. The man looked up and asked him what he was doing, and he said, with a cold yet gentle finality, “There is no difference between cruelty and non-cruelty.” Thereupon the Hindu walked out into the night.²¹

The Bible is very clear that both good and evil exist, and that there is an absolute distinction between them: “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).

In part one of this column, I mentioned that young people in the ‘60s turned to EPM partly because of their rejection of the U.S. Vietnam War effort. It should come as no surprise that American anti-war protestors found a hero in Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian nationalist who led a non-violent campaign for Indian independence from British colonial rule between 1942-1947, when Britain granted India its freedom.

Others have tried to use Gandhi’s methods in similar situations in other parts of the world, with mixed results. Why was Gandhi successful where others failed? Famed British philosopher Bertrand Russell astutely commented, “It is doubtful that the method of Mahatma Gandhi would have succeeded except that he was appealing to the conscience of a Christianized people.” Gandhi’s tolerant, non-violent approach was more effective with the British than with his own people because Christianity recognizes the inherent worth of all humans, made in God’s image, and EPM does not.²²

Ironically, the decline of Christianity in the West and the rise of EPM’s influence makes it more difficult for non-violent protestors to effect change in government sanctioned injustices. For example, in the city of Birmingham, United

Kingdom, several protestors have been arrested for silently praying outside an abortion clinic because it violates a 2022 Public Space Protection Order barring them from “engaging in any act of approval or disapproval or attempted act of approval or disapproval, with respect to issues related to abortion services, by any means. This includes, but is not limited to graphic, verbal or written means, prayer or counselling.”²³ The author adds, “Pretty much any pro-life protest you can imagine [including pro-life bumper stickers] is illegal under the city’s regulations.” Why? Because in the United Kingdom the life of the fetus is so devalued that over 200,000 abortions per year are allowed on the nebulous ground of protecting the woman’s mental health.

Thus, while Westerners are turning to the East to escape “oppressive” Christian morality, they may find the cost of this freedom to be greater than they could imagine. ~RH

(Endnotes)

- 1 Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin: College Press, 2002), 151.
- 2 Numerous Scriptures speak to God’s personality. He lives (Psalm 42:2), speaks (Exodus 3:4), thinks (Isaiah 55:8), has free will (Acts 18:21), and creates (Genesis 1:1).
- 3 While the word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible, the *concept* is clearly taught in more than a dozen New Testament texts, including Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Romans 15:30, and 1 John 4:13,14.
- 4 John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:5-7; 1 Timothy 3:16.
- 5 Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14, 15.
- 6 Luke 3:23.
- 7 Luke 23:46; Philippians 2:8.
- 8 Luke 24:1-6; Romans 1:4, 4:23-25.
- 9 Luke 24:51; Acts 1:2, 9-11; 1 Timothy 3:16.
- 10 Barbara Pemberton, “Are We Really All Hindus Now?” in *Come Let Us Reason*, ed. Paul Copan and William L. Craig (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 301.
- 11 See 1 John 4:9, 10; John 3:16-18.
- 12 See Genesis 1:31; Nehemiah 9:6; Hebrews 11:3.
- 13 Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:18-20.
- 14 Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 33.
- 15 All Scripture references are from the NASB.
- 16 See also Acts 4:12; Romans 5:1,2; Ephesians 2:13-18.
- 17 See also 1 Timothy 2:3-6.
- 18 Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 9.
- 19 Keller, 8.
- 20 “Parallel Thoughts from the Teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, *Hinduism Today*, July 5, 2005.
- 21 Quoted by Norman Geisler in *False Gods of Our Time* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1985), 85, 86.
- 22 Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 by a Hindu nationalist who was outraged by Gandhi’s opposition to religious violence by Hindus against Indian Muslims.
- 23 Emma Camp, “In Britain, You Can Be Arrested for Silently Praying Outside an Abortion Clinic,” *Reason*, February 10, 2023.

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The Authority of Scripture



Jason Cole

In the Garden of Eden, we read of the serpent tempting Eve with the question, “Has God indeed said?” (Genesis 3:1)¹. Satan’s primary tactic since the very beginning of time has been to call into question the authority of God’s words. As a result of this, Adam and Eve began to doubt what God had said and an inevitable fall followed.

Here we stand several millennia later, and the same question is being asked of people. The question is even being proposed from pulpits and places of higher learning.

Just recently, one of the most well-known preachers in the country suggested we need to “unhitch ourselves from the Old Testament” and that what “the Bible says is not an adequate starting point.” Today, progressive Christianity is making intentional attempts to call into question the authority of the Bible. Furthermore, there are many who are succumbing to the intellectual peer pressure of those who reject the inerrancy of Scripture. The undermining of the authority and reliability of Scripture is intended to attack the very foundation of Christianity. It is not just the authority of the Bible that is being held in question today, but the very concept of authority in general is being challenged by many people.

When we speak of the authority of Scripture, this means we believe the Bible has the final say. It means we find the Bible to be a reliable source of truth and that the words of Scripture should govern our lives. Our Restoration Movement forefathers rightly understood the “Bible as our only rule of faith and practice.” They elevated the authority of Scripture over that of human traditions, creeds, and man-made dogmas. In Jesus’s time, there were those who elevated the traditions of man to an equal place with the Word of God. Today, we are witnessing personal experience being

elevated over the authority of God's Word. When "I think" and "I feel" takes precedent over "the Bible says," we are on dangerous ground.

The truth is we are not free to tweak the Scriptures to fit our own ideas. We are not free to choose which parts of the Bible we accept and which parts we cast aside. When Jesus was approached about a moral question, He deferred to the authority of the Bible (Luke 10:25). It is clear Jesus and the apostles treated the Bible as authoritative. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, He relied upon the authority of Scripture (Matthew 4). When Paul wanted to reinforce a point, he often relied upon the authority of Scripture.

First, let us be clear, the Bible claims to be the very Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says, "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." This literally means that the Scripture is "God-breathed." When we speak of the concept of "inspiration" we are speaking of the fact that the Scriptures are filled with the very breath of God. This is a bold and exclusive claim. It cannot be both true and false at the same time. Either the Scriptures are the very words of God, or they are not. Either they are authoritative, or they are not. At the core of Christianity is a willing submission to the Word of God.

The Bible makes many other strong claims about itself. The Bible claims to be living and active (Hebrews 4:12), eternal (1 Peter 1:24-25), and Spirit-given (2 Peter 1:20-21). Over 2,700 times the Old Testament says, "God said." Anything God says carries a weight of authority. We can see the power and authority of the words of God on display at the time of creation. It is when God said, "let there be light" that there was light. Since God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), we must treat all the words of God as being truth. Any challenge presented to the authority of Scripture is an attempt to impugn the holy character of God and a challenge against God Himself.

The main issue then is not merely a question about theological discrepancies, it is a question about whether God said what He said and whether He meant what He meant. It is a question of whether He Himself is trustworthy. Since the Bible claims to be inspired, we also must understand it to be inerrant (without error) and infallible (incapable of making mistakes).

The Bible not only makes claims about its own authority over our lives, the Bible also is a reliable source of information. The Bible tells us about the origins of man, the entrance of sin into the world, the character of God, and the plan of salvation. The Scriptures answer many of the deepest questions of the soul. In the Bible we have information we could not have gained apart from a divine revelation. Perhaps an eyewitness could have testified to the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. They could have documented the miscarriages of justice, told of the horrors of the

cross, and recounted His words from the cross. However, without a clear revelation from God, we could not know that His death was for sin.

In addition to moral and doctrinal confusion, there are countless other consequences that come when a generation is guilty of undermining biblical authority. The reality is that a rejection of the authority of Scripture in one generation will lead to the complete abandonment of faith in the next. If we reject the Bible as being the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God, then the only way we can decide what holds weight and what does not is to make some type of subjective decision. Most likely that decision will be filtered through our own preconceived ideas. The question really is never a question of authority or no authority; rather, what will the authority over your life be? Where will your beliefs, morals, and practices come from? If that authority is not from the Scriptures, then it will come from some subjective or unreliable source.

Not accepting the authority of Scripture is at the heart of the issue behind many false teachings. The issues of the day are not merely about sexual ethics, nor about the validity of the resurrection. They are not about gender roles, specific rights and wrongs, baptism, or the Lord's Supper... rather, it is about the authority of the Bible.

We can spend time citing all the issues of the day. We can talk about all the doctrinal and philosophical issues facing the church; however, the main issue is whether we are submitting to the authority of Scripture. Once we bring into question the authority that God's Word must bind a command, elevate a principle, pass on a historical account, or teach a specific doctrine, anything becomes plausible. In a world in which relativism seems to rule the day, we are in desperate need of objective truth, reliable standards, and trustworthy information.

It is when we accept the authority of Scripture that we are given clear moral boundaries, instructions for how the church should be structured, and clarity on major doctrinal issues. We can and should pursue a unity through truth, but this cannot be achieved without first being united in our submission to the Bible as our authority. Jude described some first century apostates as "those who reject authority." There are still those who reject and refuse to submit to the authority of the Word of God. As a result, today, we as the church still need to earnestly contend for the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints. ~RH

(Endnotes)

1 All Scripture references are from the New King James Version.

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Hello, Mighty Warrior



Civil War General William Sherman is probably most remembered for his terrorizing “March to the Sea” from Atlanta to Savannah beginning November 15, 1864, and ending December 21, 1864. Sherman led 60,000 soldiers on the 285-mile scorched earth campaign that left a swath of destruction at times sixty miles

wide. The countryside through which these union soldiers passed was so thoroughly annihilated it took years to revive. Anything situated along this march, whether home, crop, or livestock, was burned, destroyed, or killed to crush the spirit of the Confederacy. Historical records document Sherman as not just a masterful military war strategist but a masterful psychological war strategist. He knew pounding at the morale of his opponent by scrubbing their very existence of lifestyle and home would have far more despairing implications than men facing men with weapons drawn on a battlefield.

This scorched earth military tactic has been around for centuries, targeting anything that might be useful to the enemy, including weapons, transportation, communication sites, civilian-owned property, and goods such as food, crops, water sources and even the civilians themselves. One need only reflect on current events in Ukraine to feel the gravity of loss as Russian invaders have demolished every monument and meaningful landmark as well as targeted civilian sites, including those protecting children. This consideration is an effective way to set the stage for what was going on among the Israelites when we first meet Gideon.

Judges 6:1-6 says:

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops,

the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help. (NIV)

Gideon’s people had become a subservient nation of idol-worshipping cliff-dwellers who, on the one hand, protected their alter to Baal under threat of death, while on the other hand cried out to God for His help. Talk about an identity crisis! We would all like to think we would be more grounded than the family and friends of Gideon but *our* delusions of trying to make idol worship and following God sympatico are shaped by our time and temptations in AD 2023 and not Gideon’s in 1184 BC. We are the same. God always finds someone, though, to do His work and that someone on any given day might be you.

I love God’s approach with Gideon. He sends an angel who takes a seat under the family’s oak tree near where Gideon was covertly threshing wheat in a winepress to avoid being robbed by Midianites. He greets Gideon like this: “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior (Judges 6:11, NIV). Now, let’s face it: Gideon can’t feel so mighty when he’s hiding in a winepress to thresh wheat. First, Gideon challenges the claim that the Lord is with his tribe, explaining back to the angel who God is and what He is capable of and what He’s not doing to make things better. Gideon’s words were not only true, but they revealed honest faith in the one true God. Gideon’s summation may have been shortsighted, but he assessed the situation correctly. Gideon next explained the “mighty warrior” designation had to be wrong because his tribe was the weakest of tribes, and he was the least of his family. I think that was most likely also true. Both truths, however, were not based on what was, but what was to become because God is God!

Once Gideon felt comfortable placing trust with the angel of the Lord who started the relationship with two claims

that ran counter to Gideon's reality, he's then instructed to go to the high area where the altar of Baal was, tear it down, and then take down the Asherah pole and use it as firewood for a sacrifice on a new altar to God. I don't think I'm wrong when I say there is a little bit of humor there when God instructs the Asherah pole to be used as kindling. This dismantling of the mound dedicated to Baal and his sidekick, Asherah, was such a big job, that Gideon brought along with him ten servants to help do it. It was done under the cover of darkness because Gideon knew it would be a disaster come the morning when everyone would see their regard for Baal had been treated with such defiance. Here's how this moment relates: There are things all around us that are competing with unbridled loyalty to God. It may take courage to defy norms that define a culture, yet offend God.

I'm always fascinated with these accounts in scripture of unlikely leaders who not only rise to the occasion but acquire followers. Possibly, Gideon's radical conduct with the altar of Baal served as inspiration to some. It is amazing to consider how contagious doing the right thing can become, so much so it becomes uncomfortable in a crowd to do the wrong thing. This can happen at work, in communities, with family and, yes, even the church.

The one thing Gideon had gotten wrong in sizing up the situation was to think God had abandoned them. God had not. They had abandoned God. Again, we are the same. Our culture defies God endlessly and we are used to it. When God took Gideon's army down from 32,000 men to only 300, He did so because as said God, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me'" (Judges 7:2, NIV). God was about to right the ship so to speak, and He wanted there to be no mistake as to how it was accomplished. God started with one unlikely man, the least in his family and from the weakest tribe and delivered Israel out of the hands of the Midianites, ending seven years of scorched earth.

We are God's people ever facing a spiritual scorched earth campaign. He's told us what we need to do. We are the church, both inside the building and outside the building. We are responsible for the continuity of the gospel shared. What we do for God's sake should come with the same humility as Gideon identifying himself as the least among the least. God wanted to be the one to make the raucous, not Gideon. We are to tear down idols and, just as quickly, offer the Everlasting alternative.

One last thing: when you see someone else tearing down an idol and offering an alternative, be a first arriver. Step up alongside that person and say, "Hello, Mighty Warrior. The Lord is with you." ~RH

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Chris Mulpas is a minister of the Gospel who, after a twenty year preaching ministry in the local church, is now traveling full-time to churches all over the country. He is available for concerts, revivals, supply preaching, and seminars.

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JIM BOOK



Judah Reminds Us Why We Need Jesus

Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation. In fact, the Muslim community looks to Abraham, thanks to Ishmael, as their father as well. Even the Christian community, by extension through faith in Christ, comes from the seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:7). Isaac was born to Abraham, and he had two sons: Esau and Jacob. Jacob's name was later changed to Israel. Over time, Jacob married a woman named Leah and later married her sister Rachel. Jacob, through Leah and her maid Zilpah, and Rachel and her maid Bilhah, fathered twelve sons. The man I want to focus our attention on today is the fourth son, namely Judah. What do we know of this fellow?

Let's start with the fact that he came from a dysfunctional family. Sound familiar? It should. Why? Because most people who will read this article will relate to it from at least one perspective. We pick up our story of this man in Genesis 37. Jacob sent his sons to Shechem to feed the herd of sheep the family owned. Over time, Jacob sends his favorite son Joseph to check up on his brothers. In verse 18, the Scriptures state, "When they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him."¹

They were jealous of him. Joseph probably did not help matters by reminding his older siblings they would eventually bow down to him. That rarely goes over well. Jacob was not shy about treating Joseph more favorably than his other sons. Story has it, he got him a sports coat. When he wore it, he looked like a walking rainbow. Later, this coat would make it into a giant musical (okay, I made that up).

Anyway, most of the brothers wanted to kill him on the spot. Judah said, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites" (vs 26-27). The brothers pulled Joseph out of the pit they had tossed him in earlier and unloaded him for twenty shekels of silver. Verse 28 ends with these words, "And they took Joseph to Egypt." Never to be heard from or seen again... or so they thought.

In order to sell their aged father on a story that was somewhat believable, they concoct one that included a wild animal attacking their brother and killing him. They present the bloody coat to their dad along with this contrived story and the Scriptures state that Jacob, "mourned for his son many days" (vs 34)

Fast forward to chapter 42. There is a terrible famine in the land of Canaan. Word on the street is there is plenty of grain in Egypt. Jacob tells his brothers, except the youngest one whose name is Benjamin, to travel to Egypt and buy food. Verse 8 records when the brothers arrived in Egypt, "Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." Joseph begins to question them and engages in what would seem like an interrogation. They explain their dilemma, and their sole purpose is to buy food and return home. Joseph accuses them of being spies and demands they go back home and bring the youngest brother back with them to Egypt.

After returning to Canaan, their needs are covered at least for a while. Over time, the famine in Canaan got worse and the food ran out. It's time to go back to Egypt. The problem is they can't go back without their youngest brother. After much debate, Jacob relents and gives permission for Benjamin to make the trip to Egypt. This is where the hero of our story comes into play: Judah makes a guarantee to his father that he will be personally responsible for Benjamin's safe return (Genesis 43:9). Later, when Joseph threatened to retain Benjamin, Judah pleaded with Joseph in Genesis 44:33, "Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers."

Judah offered his life in place of his younger brother. This man doesn't sound like the same coldhearted brother we read about earlier. It sounds like another man who was willing to stand in for us and take our place. It's rather fitting that Jesus would come from the line of Judah. Eventually, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and has his entire family move to Egypt. Before Jacob died, he blessed his sons. I want you to notice the magnitude of Judah's blessing recorded in Genesis 49:8-10, "Judah, you are whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes." This Messianic prophecy was repeated by Balaam in Numbers 24:17.

Judah's life was a checkered one. He was deceitful—he had an illicit affair with a prostitute who he later found out to be his daughter-in law. She birthed two sons. What makes this story even more fascinating is that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to include all these people in the lineage of Christ. Matthew 1:1-3 says, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: Abra-

ham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar.”

When I see the deplorable choices Judah made throughout his life, I find myself wondering why God didn't use people with far less dirty laundry hanging on the line of life. Yet it's these people with all their faults and sinful pasts who gives each one of us hope. Many people refuse to give God permission to change them simply because they feel their past cannot be redeemed, yet the Scriptures are replete with one example after another of God using the worst of people to carry out His plans. Yes, God can use you and me. Gordon MacDonald wrote, "The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church. You need not be a Christian to build a house, feed the hungry, or heal the sick. There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer grace." The world is full of Judahs—people who have made horrific choices in their life. Yet God can take a Judah, checkered past and all, and cover that same wretched soul with unmerited favor and produce the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Thanks, Judah. You and your life story remind me, regardless of my past mistakes, I can repent, and I can change. Those days when I feel like Judah are the same days I thank God that I have Jesus. ~RH

(Endnotes)

1 All Scripture references are from the New King James Version.

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LESSONS FROM THE PAST

MICHAEL HINES

Righteous in His Time



Something interesting popped out at me while I was reading Dennis Prager's commentary on Genesis. Genesis 6:9 states, "These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, *blameless in his own time*" (*emphasis added*).¹ Prager then comments, "By stating Noah was righteous 'in his age (time),' the Torah

makes it clear we are to judge people by the standards of their age, *not the standards of our age*."² Prager continues, "There is a great temptation to judge people who lived before us by the moral standards of our time. This is wrong. By doing this, we end up concluding, virtually no one who lived before us was a good person."³

In my history studies, I was taught not to judge too harshly those living in the past. It is common today to condemn those living in the past for actions or behaviors we now find repugnant or sinful. Prager is right when he says succumbing to such temptation makes all who lived before us evil. Furthermore, it makes those of us casting judgment self-righteous and hypocritical. The Apostle Paul is correct when he reminds us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Prager's comments have application to our own understanding of God's law and grace. In his writings, Dr. Jack Cottrell consistently points out the fact we are not saved by works of law, but by God's grace. What does Cottrell mean when he talks of works of law? He speaks not only of a biblical code of commands such as the Ten Commandments; he emphasizes law as *a system*, or method, by which individuals try to attain perfection according to a standard, any standard! Such a standard might be one's own conscience. There is no system or code through which obedience guarantees access to heaven.⁴ Therefore, if one seeks God's approval through a *law system*, then it is that system which is the standard whether derived from human or divine sources. A simple historical examination reveals the constantly changing nature of human derived codes. Consider

by comparison the following law codes: Sumerian Code of Ur-Nammu (ca. 2100-2050 BC), Hammurabi's Codes (ca. 1760 BC), Twelve Tables of Roman Law (450 BC), and the Justinian Code (AD 429-534) among others.⁵

You may be thinking I am raising a "red herring" here. Not so fast! Think about this for a moment. Under which "law code" did Noah live? What was the current "law code" when Abraham took Isaac to Mount Moriah for sacrifice? Genesis records several universal God-given laws prior to the Mosaic Law. While it is impossible to know for sure, one Bible chronology says Noah was born around 3078 BC.⁶ If Noah lived 950 years, he would have been 600 when the flood came. This would mean Noah's life preceded all but possibly the Code of Urukagina (2,380-2,360 BC). In other words, Noah may well have lived in a time when the only existing standard for moral action was self-determined and we know full well what that produced: "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

Despite God's judgment of the human condition during the time of Noah, God said Noah was blameless in his time (age). Noah stood out in stark contrast to the condition of his surrounding culture. Does this mean he was sinless or perfect or moral in every sense of the word? No! On the contrary, "All have sinned."

Considering what I have said heretofore, Prager writes:

Ignorance of the Bible in the Western world has led to an abandonment of wisdom in the Western world. People familiar with the Noah story have the wisdom to know that a person must be judged as God judged Noah: "in his age." At the time of America's founding, virtually every society in the world—including non-Western Asian, African, and Muslim societies—practiced slavery, often in far greater numbers than America did. Moreover, it was America and the Western, Bible-based ("Judeo Christian") civilization that abolished slavery before any other civilization did. Ultimately, the American founder's values created a nation that provided more non-whites with more liberty and more prosperity than any other society. That is how George Washington and Thomas Jefferson should be judged: the way God judged Noah—"in his age"—and by the freedom-loving and freedom-spreading society they ultimately created.⁷

Am I excusing the awful effects of sin in previous generations? Absolutely not! Am I making light of the terribly inhumane treatment of slavery in America or anywhere else for that matter? No! I am, however, pointing out that man's comprehension of evil and its deleterious effects on culture



continue to grow and change. It is a fact that the changes leading to the abolition of slavery in much of the world are due to the direct influence of the Judeo-Christian ethic.

A glance at the history of the early 1800s makes this abundantly clear. The revivals of the Second Great Awakening led to C.G. Finney and other revivalists of the first half of the nineteenth century. These revivals led to organizations designed to evangelize the American West and foreign lands. A concept of “disinterested benevolence” fostered in the revivals led to efforts to improve society. Christians actively became engaged in efforts to reform the treatment of the insane, inculcate prison reform, promote education, encourage women’s suffrage, and the immediate emancipation of slaves.⁸

Since the first half of the nineteenth century our African American brothers and sisters were not only freed from slavery’s chains, they received full citizenship, the right to vote, and increased civil rights. Does more need to be done? Of course. In the twentieth century women received the right to vote, the draft was eliminated after the Vietnam War, and continued changes guaranteed equality (not equity) in many corners of the culture. Is there more to accomplish? Absolutely.

While human concepts of morality change over time, Scripture presents only one standard—God’s standard. However, human understanding of God’s standard becomes increasingly clear over time. In addition, humanity also tends to add or subtract from Scripture as determined by human morality codes. For example, the Bible teaches capital punishment is the only appropriate punishment for murder (Genesis 9:6). We dare not dismiss Genesis 9:6 as merely another Old Testament command Jesus replaced in the New Testament. God stipulated the penalty for murder as a *universal* command for all time. It is a *creation ordinance* given because of the value God imparts to human life created in His image. Yet contemporary Western culture often sees capital punishment as inhumane and substitutes imprisonment in its place. This example is just one of many I could cite.

At the same time, humans tend to add strictures to God’s word often to assure there are no violations to God’s commands. Eve’s response to Satan in the garden is merely one example. According to Genesis 3:1, the serpent said, “Has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” Eve replied, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die” (Genesis 3:3). Eve added to God’s restrictions.

As a student at Nebraska Christian College years ago, I was nearly expelled for playing cards with a regular deck of

cards. The college permitted card playing with Rook decks, but not with normal cards. Had not all the young men in the freshman class been guilty, I would have been gone. NCC’s rules stemmed from the belief card playing with a deck of “face cards” was sinful. Granted, some games played with such cards *may be sinful*, but God’s Word nowhere makes such a statement.

For the past several years we have seen hordes of individuals destroying statues and defacing memorials for individuals of renown. Most of this comes from hate groups such as Antifa and Black Lives Matter, but many people ignorant of history and how to view the past participate as well. Much of it comes from the campuses of the nation’s major universities where secular history professors, drawing from the work of Howard Zinn and other progressive humanities instructors, consistently judge our nation’s Founders and other leaders by standards of their own invention. The standards they believe make them morally superior but are far removed from the world’s only objective moral standards, namely, the God-given morality found in Scripture. Contemporary hate mongers judge great men of the past by their own contemporary standards rather than how they lived in their own time.

Once again, I emphasize the fact of universal sinfulness found in all humans but one—Jesus. Granted, Thomas Jefferson once owned 600 slaves, but his insistence that the Creator created all men (human beings) equal reveals his unease with the “peculiar institution” and set the stage for the growing insistence for emancipation. Great men often display great weaknesses and are inconsistent. In fact, the only consistent fact one can say about human beings is they are inconsistent!

~RH

(Endnotes)

- 1 All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.
- 2 Dennis Prager, *Genesis: God, Creation, and Destruction*, The Rational Bible (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2019), p. 140 (Large Print Edition).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 See Cottrell’s treatment of this subject in *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin: College Press, 2002), pp. 311-317.
- 5 http://wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_ancient_legal_codes. If I counted right, the Wikipedia article cites twenty three such law codes.
- 6 <http://biblechronology.com/events/15>
- 7 Prager, pp. 140, 141
- 8 Michael Hines, *Later Church History: From the Reformation to Modern America* (Sun City: Hines Press, 2015), pp. 123, 124. See also Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957).

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immortal, indestructible, and independent. He cannot die, He cannot disappear; He cannot self-destruct. All this is in sharp contrast with all created being, which by the very fact of creation owes its existence to something outside itself, namely, the Creator-God. Thus all created being is contingent, whereas God's existence is necessary" (Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today*, p. 69).

This month we look at some recent commentary on this famous statement in the Bible:

God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' (Exodus 3:14, NIV)

You perhaps thought you had some idea of what this means, as have many commentators throughout the years. However, we all just might have been wrong, at least according to one professor of Old Testament. Thus, we will examine:

It's Not About Aseity

"What Does Exodus 3:14 Mean?"

Matthew R. Newkirk

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There is a longstanding view among conservative Bible scholars that understands this passage as follows:

The statement "I am who I am" can be rendered a number of different ways in English. The statement basically emphasizes the timelessness of God. He is the self-existing one, the Eternal, the one without beginning or end. The God of Israel's ancestors was to be identified by the name Yahweh (He who is) throughout the generations" (James E. Smith, *The Old Testament Survey Series: The Pentateuch*, p. 253).

There is a technical term in the title of this article that will come up as we proceed: aseity. Jack Cottrell explains this term:

The second nonrelational [cannot be shared with creatures] attribute of God is His *self-existence*. This is also called His aseity, from the Latin expression *a se*, meaning "from himself, of himself." It literally means that God derives His existence from Himself and not from any outside source. His being is not derived from anything and is not dependent on anything; He just *exists*. He is self-sufficient,

Matthew R. Newkirk, a seminary professor at a seminary in Japan who did his studies at Wheaton College, does not think Exodus 3:14 is a revelation of God's self-existence. He claims:

While we certainly should affirm the self-existence of God, we must ask if such an interpretation makes sense in the immediate context of this passage. Would Israelites suffering under the weight of Egyptian oppression truly need to be informed of God's ontological aseity? Does the flow of the narrative lead us to conclude that God would reveal this rather philosophical aspect of His identity at this particular juncture? I suggest not, and the broader context of Exodus seems to point us in a different direction.

What direction is that? According to Newkirk, "Interestingly, the most elusive phrase - I AM WHO I AM - is not the answer that God tells Moses to communicate to Israel. This answer is seemingly just for Moses."

For Newkirk, this means:

In this verse, God is assuring Moses of His faithful presence as He commissions him to serve as a vessel of salvation for Israel and judgment against Egypt. This broad background and immediate narrative flow suggest that the names "I AM" and "the LORD" pertain to God's faithfulness to His people: He is with them, will save them, and will judge their enemies.

From this Newkirk concludes:

The elusive phrase "I AM WHO I AM" most likely refers to this facet of God's identity as well... both the broad and immediate context of Exodus suggests that rather than reminding His people of His aseity, by revealing His name God is seeking to encourage His weary people of His faithful presence in their midst.

While I am not the expert in the Old Testament that Newkirk must be, there are several problems with his case: First, it is appropriate to put what we could call "the burden of proof" on the novel idea when it comes to biblical inter-



pretation. It's not that no one can ever discover anything new, but when there is a very longstanding understanding of scripture and someone now proclaims, "most people who have studied this were wrong, and here is a new idea that is correct," we are justified in requiring a powerful case in favor of the new view. However, the case here is flimsy, especially in its logic.

A key logical mistake here is that of the false choice. Newkirk concludes, "both the broad and immediate context of Exodus suggests that rather than reminding His people of His aseity, by revealing His name God is seeking to encourage His weary people of His faithful presence in their midst." The logical mistake comes when he assumes that Exodus 3:14 reveals God's "faithful presence" *rather than* "his aseity." However, it is clear this is not an either/or situation. It can easily be both.

As quoted earlier, Newkirk claims:

Would Israelites suffering under the weight of Egyptian oppression truly need to be informed of God's ontological aseity? Does the flow of the narrative lead us to conclude that God would reveal this rather philosophical aspect of His identity at this particular juncture?

Newkirk rather startlingly assumes the answers to both these questions are "no" when, in fact, everything about the situation and the context scream "YES!" God is promising to release the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. The rulers of Egypt were considered and claimed to be deities. They were, in fact, very powerful politically and militarily. Moses was going to tell the Israelites God was going to deliver them. God? What God, exactly, was Moses talking about here?

Simply claiming "God the faithful" was going to do this would be an entirely inadequate answer. There was a "god" who was holding them in bondage. The God who would deliver them would have to be faithful, but also much more than "faithful." Faithfulness would be meaningless in this context *unless* the one promising to do it were not just a faithful god but someone who had the power to do what He promised, the Uncreated One—"I AM THAT I AM."

John J. Davis says there are two possibilities for understanding the Hebrew involved. Taken one way, "it carries the fundamental idea of the self-existence of God, and means, 'I am the One who is.'" He goes on to explain that "this understanding is supported by the rendering of the Septuagint." Davis points out another understanding of the Hebrew which "gives a causative sense and would be translated as 'He who causes to be'" (*Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, pp. 72-73). But whether it focuses primarily on the self-existence of God or one of the things

that follows from that, the ability to cause things to be, it reveals a God Who is able to do what He promises.

Especially in this context, the aseity, or complete non-dependence, of God's nature is most certainly *not* just a "rather philosophical aspect of His identity." Quite the contrary—it is just what those who would hear God's words through Moses would need to know. It is the key point that would make it clear that God, the "I AM THAT I AM," could indeed faithfully perform the things He promised to perform, Pharaoh or anyone else notwithstanding. Citing Isaiah 43:12-13, Jack Cottrell comments, "Because [God] is not limited by any power or being outside Himself, He is free to carry out His purposes without fail. Those who trust in Him do not trust in vain, and those who foolishly attempt to oppose Him will be crushed" (*The Faith Once for All*, p. 69).

If God doesn't assure Moses and the Israelites of His complete non-dependence on anything else, then it is always possible that something on which God depends could change or fail and God could not be able to be faithfully present in their midst. A god who is completely faithful could very much desire to save his people and judge their enemies, but his limitations might make that impossible. Only a God Who IS independent of anything else can be trusted to have the ability to do what God promised Moses and the Israelites. This professor of Old Testament seems not to see that. However, we should not miss it. ~RH

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A MILLENNIAL MOMENT

Be That Man or Become That Man

— There is no “I” in team —



Erick Clemens

In Exodus 18, there is an account recorded where the principle of synergy can be highlighted. Synergy is a popular word these days. The term is used to promote this idea that a team working together while focused on the same goal can be more effective than the sum of the individual players. As an example, consider Exodus 18.

So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all of Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. (Exodus 18:24-26, ESV)

Within this passage, we millennials can learn a thing or two that would help the church out greatly. Don't miss this gem within this passage: Moses took the time to listen and consider what his father-in-law Jethro advised him to do. Jethro knew the burden Moses was under while having to judge every challenge presented to him. Jethro understood that what Moses was doing wasn't good. Due to Jethro's knowledge of the situation and his compassion for Moses, Jethro thought it was best to advise him on what he believed should be done. His solution, if done correctly, would help Moses and would be better for Israel as a whole.

His advice was simple—get a team together of men who are able and of good report to carry the load. Empower them to judge the people and they would be more effective together than Moses could be alone, aka synergy.

It was true for them, and it is true for us. There is a lot of work that needs to be done, but we shouldn't do it alone. Jethro told Moses in verse 18, “You are not able to do it

alone.” With that said, I challenge us to be like Moses and take this advice. Be that man or become that man!

What do I mean by such a statement? In verse 21, Jethro describes the type of person for whom Moses should be looking. Moses should look for able men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate a bribe. The qualities Moses is told to look for in men reminds me of passages found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

In Timothy and Titus, Paul describes what Timothy and Titus should look for when someone aspires to become an elder. I would argue that these qualifications, even if you don't have that aspiration, should be the expectations of all men. All men should be above reproach, faithful to our one wife, sober-minded, etc. All men should also continue to be strong in the faith and well thought of by outsiders.

Take a moment, millennials, and consider this passage and compare it to how you are living. Does this passage describe you? The jokes about millennials are endless. Sadly, it seems like the expectations for us at times are low. Don't let that be because God's expectations have never changed! If this does describe you, be the men that you are, and strive to do even more for the glory of God, to build His church, and to lead others to Christ.

The truth is the church needs men like this. Moses needed them then, and we need them now. Moses had a problem that didn't go unnoticed. We also have a problem that has not gone unnoticed. Yes, the numbers have gone down of men who want to go into the ministry. Could it also be said that the numbers have gone down for men who want to become elders? I ask because I don't see men who are millennials that aspire to become elders. Yet, the church is still in need of strong, biblical leadership.

If Exodus 18 or Timothy or Titus doesn't describe you, become that man! If you are not that man yet and if you are a Christian, it is time to act. Get moving and become that man because we need you.

What would the change look like if we practiced this idea of synergy? There is little doubt that the kingdom of God would benefit if we, the millennials in the church, would strive to live our lives with this standard in mind. The evangelist in the church cannot do it alone nor should we expect him to. It simply is too much for one to do alone. We can do more together. If we strive for the standards laid out in the Scriptures, our lives will more consistently reflect Christ, and we will shatter any low expectations laid out for us.

The advice is simple: be that man or become that man, that we can work as one for His Kingdom. Remember, there is no “I” in team. ~RH

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On Awakenings, Revivals, and Such

This leads me to think back to our own Restoration Movement beginnings. In August 1801, a similar event to the Ashbury revival took place at Cane Ridge, KY, not more than fifty miles from Asbury. Although not on a college campus, it was in the surrounding woods of a small log Presbyterian frontier church building. People gathered by the thousands, and we should remember there was no social media to get the word out. News was spread by word of mouth, and it blazed like a prairie-fire across Kentucky. Estimates recorded more than 20,000 people attended that small rural setting for a great revival. Preachers of all backgrounds and church denominations preached from wagon flats and tree stumps and around campfires, and the people meandered from one spot to another taking in various preachers.

In addition, it is well documented that accompanying the preaching was lots of excessive emotionalism. All was attributed to a working of the Holy Spirit. The Cane Ridge revival lasted about a week, and some suggest it would have extended longer, but the food supply simply ran out. It was said to be the largest camp meeting of the 2nd Great Awakening movement in America, which lasted roughly from 1790 until 1840.

The 1st Great Awakening came earlier in the eighteenth century, about 1730-1770. Bold preaching characterized this first awakening which is said to have crossed many denominational lines as well as all lines of social and economic classes in both urban and rural areas. That forty-year pe-

riod was somewhat sidelined, however, for the next two or three decades for another “happening,” namely the American Revolution and the war for independence. Some report, like Daniel Golotta in *The Journal of American Revolution*, that the 1st Great Awakening served as a “dress rehearsal” for the American Revolution.¹ Soon after the establishment of the United States of America, a 2nd Great Awakening began, featuring camp meetings and revivals with a “Back to the Bible” emphasis. Thus, as we can clearly see, revivals and spiritual awakenings are not a new phenomenon at all. They have been part of the American religious fabric back as far as colonial times.

What to Make of Asbury

Many are asking what to make of this Asbury revival. How do we evaluate such events? Are they from God? If this Asbury revival is the real deal, should Christians try and duplicate it? Should Christians participate in it? Are there any things not being covered by the press and media that tell a fuller story? Permit me to share some observations from history, Bible theology, and contemporary happenings.

No matter the origin or source, there is no question—God wants people to come to Him through His Son. Without doubt, young people today need a real awakening to spiritual values. While I would not begin to debate the source of this revival, it was seeded and prompted by chapel messages urging more devoted attention be given the spiritual disciplines. I don’t know anyone who would argue with that.

Now whether it originated in heaven or not, I wouldn’t say, but I do know this: God has this amazing track record of **using** experiences and happenings and circumstances (many of them quite unusual) to bring about a more intense focus on spiritual values. Just in the Book of Acts alone, He used a Jewish national feast day, a couple of preachers released from prison, a jail-break facilitated by an angel, a double funeral service of a husband and wife who conspired against God’s Holy Spirit, a high court hearing, and a deacon-led preaching meeting in the back-country of Samaria to spark major turnings toward Jesus as Lord. What all God **causes**, I am not informed enough to say, but I do believe He is **THE Master** of **using** times of spiritual intensity and focus to accomplish kingdom good. I see a significant difference in **causing** and **using** circumstances for heavenly outcomes. For sure, our country could use a big dose of people turning to the Lord right now.

The Scripture speaks about **times of refreshing coming from the presence of the Lord** (see Acts 3:19). Such times of refreshing, however, follow two crucial conditions—repentance and conversion. The parallel verse a chapter ear-

No matter the origin or source, there is no question—God wants people to come to Him through His Son. Without doubt, young people today need a real awakening to spiritual values. While I would not begin to debate the source of this revival, it was seeded and prompted by chapel messages urging more devoted attention be given the spiritual disciplines.

lier in Acts 2:38 is *repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*² In my research, I have not run across that specific gospel message with those two gospel actions of faith being preached at the Asbury revival or any other evangelical revival for that matter. There have been some references to repentance by some of the speakers. However, one student in attendance at the Asbury campus reported, “Attending the few chapels I have at seminary, apart from one or two chapels that preach a biblical message, it’s always been about ‘being who you are’ and God loving you ‘as you are.’ There are a lot of messages that are about being ‘true to yourself.’ I’ve watched hundreds of video clips of the “revival” and I still haven’t seen any clips show a clear preaching of the gospel.”³ Yes, God does promise “times of refreshing” coming from the presence of the Lord, but that is heaven’s response to true repentance and biblical conversion. Even Asbury’s President Kevin Brown commented that the real test as to whether this proves to be a revival or not is whether there is real life change in people when it is all said and done.

Before attributing all this phenomenon to the Holy Spirit as the prime mover in an event drawing such widespread attention, one would also do well to consider some other underlying dynamics which are part of this picture. To Asbury’s credit, their stated position on human sexuality and sexual immorality for all associated with the University takes the high road of biblical standards. Their university handbook states: “The university affirms the biblical view of human sexuality as being expressed fully in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman. Sexual immorality (including adultery, same sex behavior, and pre-marital sexual intimacy): These behaviors are expressly prohibited in Scripture.”⁴

Even with high moral standards for university life, given the open revival platform, there are those expected challenges coming from voices like the leaders of the New Evangelicals and others who have visited the revival to be a support and a voice for “progressives.” Their goal is to encourage some LGBTQ students who said that they too are worshipping and hoping that the revival will create even more “progressive change” at the school. Those students hope it will ultimately mean more rights and recognition for the LGBTQ community. Is this a movement of the Holy Spirit? Of course, one cannot judge the entire event or all the participants by a minority of some who are obviously beyond the boundaries of Christ’s spiritual ethics. Individuals and influences such as this unashamedly use their efforts to deconstruct both the Scriptures and any faith community which upholds conservative gospel ethics. Also, outside the

Still, the truth is we can experience real revival, a real time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord anywhere, anytime we turn our hearts to HIM in obedient faith, a faith guided by His Word. You don’t need to travel to Wilmore, KY, or to Cane Ridge for that matter. Just get your Bible open, repent and be converted... times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord.

mainstream of the news is the charismatic underpinnings of the revival. Some of the speakers are women preaching and testifying, professing to have received prophecies and messages from the Lord.

Additionally, there is the claim to the exercise of the supernatural gifts of exorcising demons, speaking in tongues, and faith-healing as part of the Asbury event. People claiming to possess supernatural giftedness is quite common to the charismatic revival movements over the last century. Is this a movement of Holy Spirit in this church age when those supernatural gifts were done away soon after the era of the apostles, particularly since those supernatural gifts were passed on only through the hands of the apostles themselves for the infancy of the Lord’s church? Cessationists affirm the “New Testament is all the witness one needs to the faith which comes by hearing and hearing the Word of God (see Romans 10:17). The age of the supernatural, apostolic-given gifts to men has passed.”⁵ I realize not all attending the event in Wilmore engaged in these activities, but it was reported that a substantial portion of personal worship and individual ministry to participants included these actions.

Many of us know the experience of a Galilean service by the lake at a Christian camp and how moving and stirring that was to the soul. Many have had the experience of being a part of a huge gathering of at least a few thousand when

the Lord Jesus was truly the core and center of it all. Those gatherings do happen. They happen even as part of our Restoration Movement brotherhood at times. Yet, the real test is when the people disperse, and honest evaluations must determine what becomes of all that spiritual energy then.

Consider this: When the Cane Ridge revival ended in August 1801 (the largest of the Great Revival of the West from 1797-1805)⁶ and the people got in their buggies and wagons and returned home, many went back to their same church traditions, their same Calvinistic doctrines, their same faith-only beliefs about how men are saved, and, for many, their same lives of spiritual complacency. Yet, THERE WAS A SMALL NUMBER of people who said “no more” to their synods and presbyteries and the Calvinistic pre-destination which had become so fatalistic. They became so moved by the experience of being called to the WORD of God and the conviction that required every choice of faith and life to have biblical justification that they stepped away from their denominations to be Christians only, to speak where the Bible speaks, to live lives guided by a gospel ethic, and embrace a faith-practice that is purely gospel based. If even only a handful come away from this Asbury event with that kind of a commitment to New Testament Christianity, I say AMEN to those who do! If people of any age, young or young at heart are impacted to get back to the Bible and live out a faith that is truly Bible-based and Lordship centered, I say AMEN to those who do! If any young men are called to the ministry of preaching the gospel, I say AMEN to those who do! If this produces another young Barton W. Stone to call people to be Christians only, I say AMEN to that!

True Revival is About God

Is revival a biblical happening? Psalm 85:4-8 states,

Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away Your indignation toward us! Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations? Will You not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? Show us Your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us Your salvation. Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly.

Do you see the emphasis? True revival is about God, the LORD. There are no fewer than a dozen references to God, either by name or pronoun in this paragraph. Revival is about HIM! Revival is a season of fervent prayer for restoration, for revival, for rejoicing. Revival is about His mercy and His salvation. That all comes down to hearing what God the LORD will speak. God need not and is not in

the business of new revelations and prophecies for *in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son* (Hebrews 1:2). Yes, for certain, **this** kind of revival is biblical and available to all who seek Him on His terms.

As one of my faithful colleagues at the small college where I teach said, “We are called to be shepherds, and we need to be ready to shepherd these people who have been stirred but now need guidance toward truly drawing closer to the Lord.” Still, the truth is we can experience real revival, a real time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord anywhere, anytime we turn our hearts to HIM in obedient faith, a faith guided by His Word. You don’t need to travel to Wilmore, KY, or to Cane Ridge for that matter. Just get your Bible open, repent and be converted... times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord. ~RH

(Endnotes)

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About Our Lesson Writer



Bill Joiner is the preacher at the Flippin Christian Church in Flippin, Arkansas. He has served in ministry for ten years. He is the Vice Chairman of the Trustees for the Rock Garden Christian Service Camp where he also volunteers with their summer camps.

Bill has been married to his wife, Heidi, for twenty-two years and they have three daughters and two sons. He recently received his Master of Sacred Literature from Louisville Bible College and has a Bachelor of Science in Biology and Psychology from Drury University. He is a veteran of the United States Army where he was a Counterintelligence Agent for five years.

Prior to his ordination as a Minister of Christ, he worked as a mechanic, carpenter, substitute teacher, and dairy farmer. However, his most challenging, rewarding, and memorable jobs have been as a father and an evangelist.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. — 2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV

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Stop the Chaos

Background of Text — The early chapters of the book of Isaiah deal primarily with the sin of the Israelites. The people of the nation of Judah had turned a deaf ear to the Lord, causing them to offer meaningless sacrifices to the Lord. This disobedience led to the nation's eventual exile to Babylon, which began in 597 BC. Captivity in a foreign land would no doubt add to the everyday chaos and uncertainty of life.

Isaiah 52 is written to these Jews in Babylon, and it continues in the same subject as the chapter prior, which is a focus on God's deliverance from exile. This chapter ends with the beginning of the fourth song of the "Suffering Servant," a promise of salvation through the Messiah.

52:1-2 — These verses read like a call to action telling the Jews they will need to gird themselves up to face the struggle. Instead of letting their circumstances dictate their approach to life, God is saying shake it off. This shaking off is done by consecrating themselves from the dirt and filth of the world and clothing themselves in the beautiful garments of righteousness. Christians today need to understand that our thriving in Christ will occur as we consecrate ourselves to God. Relief for those who are heavy laden and weary from sin can only be found in Jesus. What are steps you can take to consecrate yourself to God?

52:3 — When Israel is carried off into exile, they are counted as worthless. These people were God's chosen nation. They were the people of promise and yet they sold themselves for nothing. This transaction was accomplished through their idolatry and worldly living. They chased various ideologies and false gods and got nothing from it.

The statement "you shall be redeemed without money" is nowhere more clearly seen than in what Jesus has done for us on the cross. Peter explains in 1 Peter 1:18-19 that we were redeemed by something far more valuable than any earthly price. The value of redemption far outweighs sin. Why then is it so easy for us to long for the things that are worthless?

52:4-6 — Here we see God describing how at various times His name

has been blasphemed. First, it was in Egypt when Pharaoh mistreated God's people, then the Assyrians oppressed them without cause, and now God's people will be carried off to Babylon where they will be made to wail. God is saying the people will be so dispirited they will not bring themselves to praise Him, but neither will the captors. God's name is not only blasphemed in the ill treatment of His people or in their refusal to praise Him, but also when His people are disobedient to Him. In verse 6, God declares it will be a reminder to His people that He has the authority and ability to deliver His people. What are some ways we can be prepared to praise God through our trials?

52:7-10 — The Jews being brought back from Babylon is an act of mercy by God but comes with a responsibility. The first thing that should occur will be the rejoicing of both their watchmen and the people. This rejoicing will be anchored in the fact that the presence of God is what brings healing, freedom, joy, and protection. Second, they are to proclaim the victory of God in delivering His people. These responses to God's redemption are seen today as well. There is much rejoicing even in Heaven when one sinner repents. The Apostle Paul quoted this Isaiah passage in Romans 10:15 when discussing the need to spread the Word.

It is awe inspiring to notice that verses 9-10 are in the past tense even

though it speaks of future events. This is a reminder when the Lord says, "It will be," it is guaranteed as if it had already happened. There is no greater comfort than knowing that in Jesus all the promises of God find their *Yes* and *Amen*.

52:11-12 — These two verses offer a blueprint of what it looks like to be delivered by God. They continue the theme from verse 10 of freeing the people from bondage by the arm of God, which is an often-repeated image in the book of Exodus. In addition to the imagery, the procedure followed when they left Babylon was also reminiscent of their Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:31-39). The people were not to touch or take any unclean thing with them; the departure would be intentional, there would be preparations made for the journey, and God would go before them and behind them. Likewise, Christians have the assurance God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Closing Thoughts — At times, uncertainty and chaos can be as sure as death and taxes. This chaos can be confined to our personal life or stem from the community at large. It can be easy for us to not realize how the chaos in the lost world can directly impact us all. When it does, let us echo Isaiah in saying "God reigns." God offers peace to all of those who love Him, and, at times, that might only be a remnant. Are you striving to be a part of that remnant?

A Life of Hope and Peace

Background of Text — The later chapters of Isaiah are full of discussion about judgement and salvation. This leads into a remembrance of the mercy of God. In Isaiah 64 we see the completion of a prayer of penitence that leads into God's response in Isaiah 65.

Isaiah 65:1-7 begins with God again laying out the hypocrisy of the Jews and how He will have a new people. Then, in Isaiah 65:8-10, we see God promise He will preserve a remnant of faithful followers. Finally, in Isaiah 65:11-16 we see the judgment that will be upon the

wicked and a nod to the ushering in of a new covenant when God says He will call His servants by another name.

This brings us to our text, Isaiah 65:17-25. This text can be difficult as it has three different applications. First, it applies to the Jews, who it was written to, and how they would have understood and applied it. Second, it depicts the Christian Age and the peace and hope we have in Jesus. Third, it has its full completion in the second coming of Christ ushering in the New Heaven and New Earth of Revelation 21.

65:17-19 — God is reminding the people that although they are going to be in captivity, He will restore them, and they will once again have peace. God told them this to provide a sure hope in the time of their struggle. We see a greater fulfillment of this text in the Christian Era where we have a hope and peace that surpasses understanding (Philippians 4:7). Jesus offers us a peace no nation or circumstance can take from us, and it is this peace we are to rejoice in. God is not only the source of this hope and peace, but He delights in it with us and for us.

Romans 15:13 describes how God equips us to not only have joy and peace, but how we can abound in hope through the Holy Spirit. What is it that we hope for? We hope we are found pleasing to God and have our place as part of the new creation when Jesus returns. What do we as a church and individuals need to work on to be found faithful when Christ returns?

65:20-23 — This section is a reminder to us all, first to these Jews in exile and then to Christians today, that there are blessings of joy, peace, and life in the Lord. Some of these blessings will be delivered by God as He is blessing our work in Christ. For example, God can only bless our vineyard if we first plant the vines. This means we must choose to undertake the work of the Lord regardless of our circumstances or expectations.

The same is true in our Christian walk. As we go about doing the good works we have been equipped for and sowing seeds of righteousness, God will bless our efforts. In fact, the blessings are so great we will find joy in the work itself. God Himself guarantees the work will be fruitful simply because we are the Lord's. In what ways has discouragement kept you from serving the way you should? How can we keep complacency from hindering our efforts in the future?

65:24-25 — This final section focuses on the hope and peace God would offer His people and closes with a great promise. This promise was the fact that God would be so involved with the people's lives He would know what they needed before they asked (Matthew 6:8). God is showing their relationship with Him would be completely restored but there is still a need for obedience. We see a similar promise in 1 Peter 3:12.

In verse 25, we have a beautiful illustration of this principal and how God intended harmony in the beginning, of which the faithful will ultimately experience in the end. We see in Ephesians 2:13-17 peace is only restored in Jesus. This peace will restore what the curse of sin has caused. The imagery of wolf and lamb eating together or ox and lion eating straw is an astonishing picture of enemies peacefully coexisting. Such is the peace we

have in the Lord. This restoration is why we can say with absolute certainty that in Christ we have not just life, but a life of hope and peace.

Closing Thoughts — The words in this passage should cause us to rejoice, and we should be keenly aware we do not rejoice alone. Heaven rejoices over repentant sinners because God desires all to be saved, and in our lesson text we see God is excited about what He is doing, and is going to do, in the lives of the people whom He loves.

It is not just that we have a God who is willing to pardon us if we obey. It is that we serve a loving Father who is willing to meet us at our lowest point and celebrate with us the fact He alone can redeem us. Looking forward to God's future re-creation should encourage and remind us of God's presence in our lives now.

"It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; The lion shall eat straw like the ox, And dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain" says the LORD.
— Isaiah 65:24-25 NKJV

Background of Text — The book of Ezekiel is structured into three main divisions. Chapters 1-24 contain prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem for idolatry and disobedience. Chapters 25-32 contain prophecies of judgment against foreign nations. Chapters 33-48 contain the prophecies of hope and salvation. Ezekiel was a part of the first large group of Judeans carried away into exile to Babylon in approximately 598 BC.

Having firsthand knowledge of the trials of captivity, Ezekiel can relate well to the people to whom he is writing. At a time when God's people are scattered and oppressed, Ezekiel delivers a message of restoration and unity.

My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. — Ezekiel 37:27 NKJV

37:15-20 — Here God prepares Ezekiel to deliver an object lesson to the people. God not only tells Ezekiel how to illustrate it but also how to respond to the questions the people will ask. In this imagery, the stick bearing the name Judah represented the two tribes of the southern kingdom, and the stick bearing the name Ephraim represents the ten northern tribes of Israel, which were carried away by the Assyrians approximately 150 years prior to this. As Ezekiel brings the two separate sticks together to become one, I can't help but think of the Bible saying, "what God has joined together, let not man separate" though this Matthew 19:6 reference is talking about marriage. If these people had fought to maintain unity the way a couple works to maintain a marriage, things might have looked different. The same could be said about a believer becoming one with Christ. If we would work to not let sin separate what God joined together in the waters of baptism, how would our walk look different?

37:21-23 — God is promising He will bring about restoration and unity for His people. This is strictly a gracious act of love and mercy on God's part. He makes this promise to a people who have broken their covenant with Him and are being disciplined for their unfaithfulness. As God is describing this unification process, He states in verse 23 He will rescue them from their dwelling places where they have sinned. God wants to remove the people from there so He can cleanse

them and make them His. God wants to do the same for people today (Romans 5:6-11). God calls us out of the world to be united in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Unity in Christ is also the basis for the Restoration Movement, not to be divided by denominational names or creeds but to be knit together as one body by the Word of God. Unity is something every generation must continue to strive for. Unfortunately, even in the Restoration Movement some seem to have taken the stance the restoration—unity in truth—is not worth striving for. What should unity in Christ look like in the church today?

37:24-28 — The most reasonable understanding of this portion is its future application to the Kingdom Jesus came to establish. "My servant David" is a symbolic reference to the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7, where God promises an eternal king from David's line. "My servant Jacob" reinforces God's desire for the northern and southern kingdoms to be restored to one. There is an emphasis here on the fact that this new covenant will be everlasting. All manmade institutions will eventually fall, but one established by God will stand forever. This is possible because it is established on the blood of the Lamb.

The need for obedience to God's Word is obvious in verse 24, but it is followed by the description of God's dwelling place being in their midst as a result. The similarities to the terms

and results of the New Covenant are hard to miss. Once you obey the Word of God and are baptized into Christ, you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and thus become the temple of God, which is the sanctuary that will be in their midst forever. The closing statement is the world will know God is Lord when He dwells in their midst forever. The world can only see this if we are transformed by God's Word and reflect godly character. In other words, live in a way that they see Christ in us (see Galatians 2:20).

Closing Thoughts — The repeated emphasis on returning Israel to the land has contributed to the current political unrest in the region today. However, the greater meaning is seen fulfilled in Jesus when we take in to account the fact that it was on the mountains of Israel that our King of Kings was crowned Lord of all and, in Christ, we have become united (Galatians 3:28). God's desire for unity is seen throughout the Scriptures and is accomplished through obedience to His commands. Our willingness to obey is based on our love for God, and obeying God should be easy when we consider His graciousness to all generations. Even after the people divided themselves, chased after foreign gods, and rejected His laws, God extended an offer of reunification.

The dispossessed people in exile heard a promise of hope for their future. Christians today can be encouraged by the promise of the everlasting presence of our God.

A Fresh Start

Background of Text — Zephaniah was born around the end of the evil King Manasseh's reign and finished his writings prior to the reforms of King Josiah. King Manasseh had built altars to several false gods and restored child sacrifice, including sacrificing two of his own sons in the valley of Hinnom.

“Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, and weak men create hard times.” This quote by G. Michael Hopf describes the state of Judah during the time Zephaniah was prophesying.

The people are just coming through the hard times under King Manasseh, and this would create the strong men necessary to aid in the reforms of King Josiah.

Zephaniah focuses heavily on “the Day of the Lord,” a phrase used twenty three times in his short book. When Zephaniah uses this phrase, it is with the immediate application in mind. God would soon judge His people and the other nations for the sin that was abounding, and His presence would be restored with the faithful remnant.

3:14-16 — After the promises of taking away their sin in the previous verses, here we see God will also take away their troubles. When the cause is removed so is the effect. This is reason to rejoice. Those that love the Lord with all their heart have every reason to rejoice with all their heart. Because we have been redeemed, we have every reason to rejoice, and we have no reason for our hands to ever become weak or despairing.

The early portion of the book of Zephaniah contains prophecies and warnings about God's judgement against His people for their disobedience. In context, we can see God's desire is not to punish but to discipline. God's goal for people is they be restored to a right relationship with Him as seen also in Hebrews 12:7-13. As a child of God, we can remember in all things the Lord is our strength, our strength to both work and endure suffering for the Lord. Do you feel Christians today allow their rejoicing to fade with time? One benefit of rejoicing is so others will hear about our great God. How can we better use our rejoicing to evangelize?

3:17 — While the New Testament calls the church the bride of Christ, that is not a new concept. The Old Testament describes God as being a husband to His people (Hosea 2:19; Jeremiah 31:32) and frequently condemned the idolatry of God's peo-

ple as adultery against God. It is this husband-wife relationship verse 17 calls to mind. The usage of the term “daughter” in verse 14 accentuates Israel's vulnerability. With the return of the victorious warrior, she is once again protected and loved.

Think of the scenes of military service members coming home after a long tour of duty. There are shouts of joy to be sure, but there are also the long, quiet, reassuring embraces where words are not needed to express the relief and the promise of a better tomorrow. Christians today can get up every morning being renewed with a similar homecoming in mind. God, especially in the Old Testament, is often viewed as angry or controlling. How can the imagery from this verse affect our perception of God and His concern for us? How can this imagery help us to remember that although God is not with us physically, spiritually He is ever-present?

3:18-20 — Here we see God acknowledge that the very feasts and festivals that were to be celebrated in a capacity of remembrance have become a burden and a shame. Judah had done what many in our nation do today. Solemn days of remembrance such as Veteran's Day and Memorial Day have become times for furniture sales, used car promotions, and BBQs. They have lost their significance in the minds of the people celebrating them.

In a similar manner, the people in Jesus's time had disregarded the true purpose of the Temple. He drove out those who were buying and selling in a place that should have been regarded as holy (Matthew 21:12-14).

The feasts referred to in the text were originally put in place to remind the people of God's presence and faithfulness. Now when they are observed, they are set against the backdrop of the northern kingdom being carried off by the Assyrians and the idolatry and lawlessness in Judah. Not to mention the people had likely perverted the observance of these like what they had done with the rest of the covenant, and thus these observances no longer honored God. The faithful remnant is left to then sorrow over the assembly. The same way Christians today should sorrow over any irreverence or lackadaisical approach to communion and assembly on the Lord's Day.

Closing thoughts — In the final verses of the book, we have the reminder people should rejoice in God's faithfulness and in the promise that there will be times of refreshing. Considering the historical background, the people of Judah needed the encouragement Zephaniah provided just as we need it today. No matter the circumstances, God is always there to lift us up if we will only look to Him as our source of strength.

The Restoration Herald

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Calendar of Events

Events are added to the calendar as they are provided and at the Editor's discretion. Please keep us informed.

2023

Restoration Plea Family Camp.....May 26-28
Watseka, IL

Contact: klziegler@gmail.com

Rock Lake Family CampMay 31-June 3
Vestaburg, MI

Contact: terryst710@gmail.com

Preaching in the Mountains.....June 11-15
Hyndman, PA

Contact: tshaffer248@yahoo.com

Sugarloaf Family Camp Meeting.....June 23-25
Wallingford, KY

Contact: vernon.eldridge@mstcoc.org

Southern Indiana Family Rally... June 28-July 1
Madison, IN

Contact: jake.brown@live.com

Mountainview Family Camp June 30-July 2
Dansville, NY

Contact: mtviewchristiancamp@gmail.com

Delmarva Family WeekJuly 9-13
Seaford, DE

Contact: uccministermj@gmail.com

Hillsboro Family Camp July 24-27
Hillsboro, OH

Contact: p2pm_office@yahoo.com

Riverbend Men's Camp..... July 31-Aug 3
Arenac County, MI

Contact: denny@qualitycraftedhomes.com

Winning at Winchester September 1-3
Winchester, VA

Contact: ccmv4thebible@gmail.com

National Prayer Clinic..... October 10-12
Grundy, VA

Contact: jerrybliffen@hotmail.com

*"For the LORD is good; His mercy is
everlasting, and His truth endures to all
generations." — Psalm 100:5 NKJV*