

A photograph of a wooden cabin with a gabled roof, partially obscured by snow-laden evergreen trees. The cabin's interior lights are on, creating a warm glow. The scene is set in a snowy forest under a pale sky.

GRACE & TRUTH MAGAZINE

- ***He Is Returning***
- ***The Mark Of The Beast***
- ***Saved And In Jail***

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A New Year's Challenge

Are you starting the New Year expecting to see the Lord before the year ends? That should be the hope of every believer. However, we are oftentimes so wrapped up in our activities and dreams that we lose sight of the fact that the Lord is coming. The Lord will first come for His own, meeting them “in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17 NKJV). This will be joyous for believers, however it will signal the beginning of horrible years for those remaining in this world.

If believers would be removed from this world today, the Holy Spirit, which influences the world by His presence in the lives of the Lord's people, would be gone from this scene. Evil would advance quickly, into realms far worse than anything we see today. In three and one-half years, the worst days ever possible would begin, known as “the great tribulation.” This is the time when men and women will wish to die, but God will not allow it. Among other passages, Daniel 9 and Revelation 4-19 are two that tell about what is going to happen.

Continuing the thought of the Lord taking the believers to Himself today, in about seven years a war of wars would take place in which all the armed forces of this world

would be conquered and Satan bound (Rev. 20). Then entering the 1,000 year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ over the earth after He returns again, the world will be exceedingly different, moving in a very short time from war to peace. Israel will then follow the Lord in belief, and evil will be addressed immediately, worldwide.

It would appear that any who hear the good news of salvation but do not accept it today would still have an opportunity later. However, that is not the case. All who do not accept the offer of salvation that they have already heard will face an eternity separated from God. Their condemnation is already determined, and they will end up in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (vv.7-15), forever in agony, being conscious of their sin and refusal to accept the Lord's gift of salvation (Lk. 16:22-26).

In view of these facts – the things that are coming – what manner of people ought we to be today in holy conduct (2 Pet. 3:10-18)? May the words of Scripture challenge our hearts as we begin the New Year, and let us give to Him the first place in our lives (Col. 1:18).

Paul

A Little While

“A little while! Our Lord shall come, and we shall wander here no more;
He’ll take us to our Father’s home, where He for us has gone before,
To dwell with Him, to see His face, And sing the glories of His grace;
To dwell with Him, to see His face, And sing the glories of His grace.

“A little while!” He’ll come again: Let us the precious hours redeem;
Our only grief to give Him pain, our joy to serve and follow Him;
Watching and ready may we be, as those who long their Lord to see;
Watching and ready may we be, as those who long their Lord to see.

“A little while!” ’Twill soon be past: Why should we shun the shame and cross?
O let us in His footsteps haste, counting for Him all else but loss;
Oh, how will recompense His smile, the suffering of this little while;
Oh, how will recompense His smile, the suffering of this little while!

“A little while!” Come, Savior, come! For Thee Thy Bride has waited long;
Oh, take Thy wearied pilgrims home, to sing the new, eternal song,
To see Thy glory, and to be in everything conformed to Thee;
To see Thy glory, and to be in everything conformed to Thee!

—James G. Deck (1802-1884)

Amid all the noise of politics, the hustle and bustle of the stock market, the hammering of trade, industry and commerce, the laughter of mockers, the cheers for sports men and women, the songs of performers and all jolliness and fun – yes, the excitement of our times: Never forget to listen

to the pacing, calming, assuring voice of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said, “I will come again” (Jn. 14:3 KJV). It is a promise “both sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19), for not one of His words has ever failed nor will fail. He declared, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Mt. 24:35).

“God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19). We can hang all we have on the word of the Lord, for His word is like a nail in a sure place.

The Lord has made every believer spiritually ready. The very moment we believe on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord we are ready to meet Him, ready for heaven and ready to enter the

Father’s house; but am I morally ready? Am I ready in my soul, my spirit and my affection? When I am saying, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20), is my heart truly set on things above, or am I grabbing,

scraping and reaching for all that can be gotten in this world?

Why seek for the world’s things? Will I

present to the Lord all the real estate that I have purchased? Will I tell Him how very educated I and my children are, showing to Him our certificates from various universities? Will I reveal to Him millions of dollars that I was able to save? God forbid that there should be in any of His servants such a low and wicked thought – or such behavior.

We should be careful not to fall, like the servant in Luke 12:45 who said in his heart that his lord delayed his coming, and began “to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken.” Spiritual drowsiness and moral misconduct ought never to mark those who are waiting for the Lord to come. Instead, “let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he

He Is Returning

by Milton P. Jamieson

will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them” (vv.35-37).

Our stay on earth is temporary, but not like those only to be removed by death. We who are Christians await His return, the rapture, which may take place at any moment. “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Th. 4:16-18).

We are not, as it were, to pack our suitcases, climb a high mountain, fold our hands and do nothing. No, no, a thousand times no! Instead, we ought to heed the exhortations that we find in the Word of God. “He called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come” (Lk. 19:13). Occupation with the Lord in the

glory will lead one to be occupied for the Lord on the earth.

Another exhortation to be heeded is found in 1 Corinthians 11:26, which says, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till He come.” It is the Lord’s desire that we remember Him in the breaking of bread until “He come.” We should also be spending time in the Word, as we are told in 1 Timothy 4:13, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.” There are further exhortations such as: “But that which ye have already hold fast till I come” (Rev. 2:25) and “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:22-25).

May the Lord help each of us to be obedient to these exhortations as we anticipate His return. **GT**

BEHOLD, I AM COMING QUICKLY. REV. 22:7

Watch!

by Martin Girard



Anyone who reads the biblical records of our Lord's teaching will be aware of the emphasis that He gave to His return. At the close of His discourse on the Mount of Olives, opposite the temple in Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus stressed the need for His disciples to watch. He had warned them of deceivers and false messiahs, of wars and unrest, of opposition and situations of grave danger for His people, and of unusual signs in the heavens. Repeatedly, He cautioned them to be on their guard and not to be deceived. While speaking of "the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" (Mk. 13:26 KJV), He emphasized that the day and hour of His return is known to no human being (v.32). "Take ye heed," He continued, "watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is" (v.33).

We can never be reminded too often that we simply *do not know* when Christ will return, and it is not within our ability to determine the date. Many have

attempted to do so and have failed miserably. The Lord Jesus compared Himself as "the Son of Man" to someone taking a lengthy journey. The man in His brief parable gave authority and instructions to his servants before departing. There were tasks for them to complete in his absence, and – most importantly – the porter, or doorkeeper, was to watch. Making a very practical application, the Lord Jesus said, "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping" (vv.35-36). He could return at *any* time!

Coming Again

The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. He has left us with a defi-

nite promise, “I will come again” (Jn. 14:3). We may believe the promise with our *minds*, but sometimes we do not allow it to affect our *hearts* as it should. We need reminding, often, of our responsibilities in His absence. Each believer has his or her own “work” in which to be engaged. While He is absent we must not sleep and fail to grasp the opportunities which there are for service! As we do not know *when* He is coming, it is vital that we *watch*. Shame is implied in the thought of our sleeping at His return – shame on our part as well as on His. For this reason the Lord Jesus concluded His message to the disciples with the statement, “And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (v.37). It was vital for them to remain in a state of alert, constantly aware of their responsibilities as His followers.

Those final words, “What I say unto you I say unto all,” make it plain that the teaching was not for those disciples alone. We who are living some 2,000 years later are included in this practical application. We must:

- Live our lives in the light of His return,
- Watch for opportunities to serve Him while waiting for Him to come, and
- Pray.

Signs

Although we cannot predict the day when Christ will return, we have been given certain “pointers” to consider. The Lord Jesus spoke of “the days of Lot” preceding His return (Lk. 17:28-30). Believers in many countries today are aware that, with the legalizing of sexual immorality, those days *have* returned. In Lot’s day such behavior merited the judgment of God, and fire and brimstone fell from heaven. This behavior which God detests will result in His judgment once more, but this time it will be at the coming of Christ. The emergence of “Sodom” indicates the nearness of our Savior’s return.

Another sign we have been given is Israel. After a long exile from their homeland, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14th, 1948. On the same day U.S. President Harry S. Truman gave recognition to the new nation. A new nation, yet it was an *ancient* nation which had been restored to its homeland. The Bible teaches that Israel will exist in its own land at the return of Christ, and that the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Ancient rituals have been researched and plans drawn up for a functioning temple once more in Jerusalem.

Scripture teaches that before

returning to this earth, the Lord Jesus will return in the air to gather His Church (1 Th. 4:17). We do not know when that event will take place, but many Bible scholars think that the scene is now being set for it. The Lord has not seen fit to tell us *when*, but He has told us to watch. He has enlightened us so He may not find us sleeping when He comes. We

must cling to that final word in His discourse and seek to be living in such a way that we shall be ready to meet Him, without being ashamed, when He comes. His word is this: “Watch” (Mk. 13:37). **GT**

This article has been adapted, with permission, from www.skywaymes-sages.co.uk.

TAKE YE HEED, WATCH AND PRAY: FOR YE KNOW NOT WHEN THE TIME IS. MK. 13:33

What Does The Rapture Mean For Christ?

It is the event Christ is waiting for now. He is the Bridegroom, and it will be a joy for Him to take His bride to be with Him. It is good to think about this aspect, as Paul said, “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ” (2 Th. 3:5 JND; see Rev. 3:10).

When still on earth, the Lord prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory” (Jn. 17:24 KJV).

What Does The Appearing Mean For Christ?

It will be the moment of glory and display. He had refused to be made king by men (6:15), presented Himself to Jerusalem in meekness (Zech. 9:9; Mt. 21:7-10) and had been rejected shortly afterwards. But at His appearing, He will be universally recognized (Phil. 2:10-11), “glorified” and “admired” (2 Th. 1:10). The One who once bore the crown of thorns – a curse – will then wear “many diadems” (Rev. 19:12 JND), “the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (v.16).

—by Michael Hardt



His Return And Its Purposes

by Roger Penney

The Lord Jesus now sees in us “of the travail of His soul” (Isa. 53:11 KJV¹), which gives satisfaction to Him and satisfaction and pleasure to the Father in the work of His Son (Mt. 17:5). In the prophecy of Daniel we read how the Lord Jesus is putting His victory into effect. Daniel wrote: “Seventy sevens [of years] are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness and to seal up the vision and prophecy” (9:24).

There are eight outcomes of the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin, death and Satan. These are:

1. The completion, resurrection and glorification of His body and bride, the Church;
2. The salvation of Israel and their promotion to head and to teach the nations;

3. To judge the nations;
4. To set up His kingdom on the earth;
5. To judge the world in righteousness;
6. To put His victory over Satan into effect and to put down the forces of darkness and of evil;
7. To fulfill all prophecy; and
8. To make all things new.

Let’s consider some points in connection with these outcomes.

To Take His Church To Heaven

In this age the Lord Jesus is present, in and among His people. He has sent the Holy Spirit to call out from the nations a people for His name (Acts 15:7-8,14). The Lord has promised as well that “I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:3).

The end of this age will be marked with the great and tri-

umphant sound of the trumpet of God and of the voice of the archangel. The trumpet and a voice were heard at the giving of the law (Ex. 19:19). They will be heard again calling God's people, the saved of earth from this age, to meet the Lord Jesus in the air. Our bodies will then be changed to be like His glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21). "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Th. 4:16-18).

Job, in his day, knew about this wonderful event and longed for it, saying, "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27).

To Restore Israel

Paul put a rhetorical question about Israel in his letter to the Romans: "Hath God cast away His people?" Many falsely believe that God will have nothing more to do with the nation of Israel.

Paul answered this thought by saying, "God forbid. For I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew" (Rom. 11:1-2).

Isaiah and Micah both spoke of a future time when Jerusalem will be the religious and political capital of the world. The two prophecies are identical in all but a few words. "And it shall come to pass in the last days; that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills. And all nations shall flow unto it" (Isa. 2:2; see Mic. 4:1). These passages go on to tell of a time of peace and prosperity, with Israel teaching the ways of God and the law to the nations, leading to worship.

The disciples asked the Lord in their day, "Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" His answer was that the time for that event was not for anyone but the Father to know (Acts 1:6-7). Though we do not know the times when these things will come about, we do know how: At the end of the great tribulation the Lord Jesus will step onto the Mount of Olives.

Just prior to this, the forces of darkness will gather from all four corners of the earth an army greater than has ever been seen

before. This multitude of demon led, and in some cases demon possessed, soldiers will be gathered before Jerusalem and fill the Valley of Jehoshaphat. John added a further explanation: "And I saw three unclean spirits ... come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:13-14).

As the main army marches south toward the city, the first units will already have surrounded it, destroying the suburbs and selling the children into slavery. It will be the shortest lived slavery in all the world's cruel history of servitude. The prophet Joel wrote concerning this army: "A great people and a strong; There hath not ever been the like ... A fire devoureth before them ... and behind them a desolate wilderness" (2:2-3).

This demon disciplined mass will have been called together by Satan's agents on the earth: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision" (3:14). Zechariah explained, adding to Joel's prophecy, "For I [God] will gather all nations against Jerusalem ... Then

shall the LORD go forth and fight against these nations as when He fought in the day of battle. And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem on the east" (Zech. 14:2-4). At last the Lord will go forth to judge and to defeat His enemies with a word and by the brightness of His presence.

The trigger for this cataclysmic event is that the Jews finally come to repentance for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, their rejection of the Lord their God, and their idolatry. This is also explained by Zechariah, "And it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications. And they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced. And they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for his only son. And shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem. As the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart ... Every family apart, and their wives apart" (12:9-14).

The very moment the mourning begins, God will hear them and another prophecy will be ful-

filled – the nation speaking the very words of repentance: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him ... Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:3-5). With the pouring out of God’s Spirit upon them suddenly they at last will see clearly what they were not able. The blessed truth will dawn on them, and they will be saved. Israel will see their Savior – the very one who died for them and whom their ancestors had been instrumental in putting to death. Yet future, this is real and true.

To Judge The Nations

Shortly, the world will go through terrible events: judgments poured out through God’s angels upon the unbelieving earth. They will see Him to whom all judgment is given, the Judge of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. We believers look with longing for the return of the Savior in the air to take us home, before these judgments, to be with Him forever. The apostle Paul gave us words of comfort and

assurance: “You who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe” (2 Th. 1:7-10).

Judgment is mounting and will continue until the very moment of the Lord’s presence again on earth, when the Mount of Olives will split apart. The geography of Egypt will be radically altered and the Nile River will become but seven streams (Isa. 11:15). The invading armies will be burned up and the Lord Jesus will set about cleansing the nations of the world.

The angels of His power will be sent out once again “with the great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mt. 24:31). Many of God’s dear people will be in hiding in the deserts, preserved by God along with those who refuse the mark of the Beast (Rev. 12:6,13-17). His people will greet Him with praise and jubilation, and again with the words of Isaiah, “Who is this that cometh

from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah?” (Is. 63:1). These events also fulfill a prophecy of Ezekiel: “For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean: From all your filthiness will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you” (36:24-26).

Meanwhile the Lord will send out His angels once more, this time to bring all the nations before Him. “And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left ... and these shall go away to everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt. 25:32-33,46). The sheep are the blessed who inherit the kingdom which is in the process of being set up on earth. The goats hear the dreaded words, “Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (v.41).

To Set Up The Kingdom On The Earth

Ezekiel 36 to the end of the book gives the most complete account

of events following the return of the Lord Jesus for Israel and the judging of the nations. The prophet describes the new birth of Israel and gives an account of the land, the tribal territories, the temple worship and its buildings. Other items of importance to the whole picture are found in Isaiah.

In Ezekiel 37 we read how the prophet was taken to a valley of dry bones, representing Israel’s current state. He was told, “Prophecy upon these bones” (v.4). The Holy Spirit then set to work to clothe the bones with sinews, flesh and skin. Being clothed, the living bodies stood up, signifying Israel’s imminent resurrection and restoration. In the chapters which follow we have the descriptions of the nation and the temple throughout the 1,000-year reign of the Lord Jesus. The Church has a heavenly calling while Israel is to rule on earth – a happy and prosperous reign.

We see this principle in Genesis – the garden and a river flowing out of it, dividing to go to all four quarters of the earth and bringing fertility and blessing – operating in today’s age as the Holy Spirit works through true Christians (See Jn. 7:37-39). In the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus the river which flows out from the temple gets wider and deeper as it goes, healing the land

and the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:1-12). In the eternal state we have a river also flowing, bringing joy, healing and fertility to the earth in its eternal state, and with healing leaves on trees as in Ezekiel (Rev. 22:1-2).

Isaiah and Micah both show Jerusalem as the center for the whole earth, where God is to be worshiped and out of which goes the law for all the nations of the world. The Lord Jesus “shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off. And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree. And none shall make them afraid” (Mic. 4:3-4; see Isa. 2:4).

This is by no means all that will change, for predatory animals become vegetarian and mingle happily with those on which they once preyed. Even the baby will be able to play near the lair of the deadly serpents. What is the reason for these miraculous changes? “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). Isaiah describes this blissful time: “The wilderness and the solitary

place shall be glad for them. And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing ... They shall see the glory of the LORD and the excellency of our God” (35:1-2).

To Judge The World In Righteousness

Paul warned his listeners in Athens that God “now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He has ordained: Whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

Since Adam’s fall this world has been one of violence and cruelty. Injustice and exploitation will go on while this present system lasts. Wars, plagues, lies and deceit are all around us, and they have been since those earliest times when man first disobeyed God. Nothing has changed nor will change until God wills it, for God has decreed, “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is and I will give it Him” (Ezek. 21:27).

The clamor of revolution and human discontent will only be silenced when the trumpet call of

God decrees everlasting peace. One law, one ruler and one worship will replace idolatry, hypocrisy and fraud. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11; see Isa. 45:23).

The Lord Jesus is coming to judge the world. He is the supreme Judge who rules, defends and administrates. All these roles He will fulfill perfectly with absolute authority, power and justice. In fact, God has already "committed all judgment to the Son" (Jn. 5:22).

Towards the end of Revelation we read: "And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away ... and I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ... and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them, and they were judged ... And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:11-15).

To Fulfill Prophecy And To Bring God's Purposes To Fruition

We have already seen that God has

a plan and timetable. Everything is on time and according to that universal plan which was "determined ... to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy" (Dan. 9:24).

John's vision ends with a repetition of that most beautiful word "come," as from the mouth of God. There are so many beautiful, happy and joyous scenes, but the tenderness with which our God brought His Book to a conclusion brings to the heart joy, gratitude and love. He declared, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men. And He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said. 'Behold I make all things new'" (Rev. 21:3-5). **GT**

¹ Quotations are from KJV, but there may be changes deemed more accurate according to the Newberry edition.

HE HATH APPOINTED A DAY ON WHICH HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. ACTS 17:31



THE MARK OF THE BEAST

by Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.

Many well-meaning preachers have spoken or written on this subject, generally to warn their audience against receiving this dreaded mark. Those who will be under compulsion to receive this mark in their hand or forehead will indeed be faced with tremendous pressure, for once this is required no one will be able to buy or sell without it. Life at that time will become exceedingly difficult.

Let's examine this subject and find out who will demand this of whom, and when this will be. For answers we must look into Revelation 13, a chapter in the third section of this revelation of

Jesus Christ, the part that deals with "the things which will take place after this" (NKJV) according to the outline given to us in Revelation 1:19. This section begins at chapter 4:1 and deals with things which will take place after the Lord raises His saints who have died and raptures them together with those of the present dispensation into His own blessed presence. Let's bear in mind that besides being a book that gives us a picture of the Lord Jesus in His judicial majesty, Revelation also shows us His enemies that will yet rise up against Him and their final doom.

Three of these enemies, a trinity of evil, are shown to us in chapter 13. The first is a beast ris-

ing out of the sea. The Revelation, according to its very first verse, is “signified” – meaning it is written in symbolic language. A beast symbolically is a person who, like an animal, has no personal relationship with God. In Scripture the sea often is used as a picture of the nations of the world, in contrast to the earth or the land, which is a symbol for the nation of Israel and from which the second beast rises. The third enemy is the dragon, Satan himself, according to Revelation 12:9, who gives power to these beasts.

Many people, even many commentators, confuse these enemies of the Lord Jesus with those who will be His in that coming day. But the description of the first beast shows plainly that it represents the Roman Empire which will be revived from its deadly wound received long ago. During the tribulation this empire will rise again as a great political and military power essentially in Europe. Its head is identified with it just as Nebuchadnezzar was identified with the Babylonian Empire – “you are this head of gold” (Dan. 2:38).

The second beast is pictured as a two-horned lamb – a lamb speaking as the dragon. Throughout the Church’s history there have been many antichrists, but here we have *the* Antichrist.

This second beast is also referred to as “the man of sin” (2 Th. 2:3), “the lawless one” (vv.8-9), “the false prophet” (Rev. 16:13, 19:20, 20:10), and the willful king (Dan. 11:36). He is essentially a religious leader, a Jew, the ruler of Israel who is in league with the first beast, a great deceiver who can work miracles and who causes people to worship that wicked one or be killed. He is the one who will decree that all are to receive the mark of the beast, or the number of his name.

F. W. Grant, a well-known expositor whose studies of the numbers and number patterns of Scripture are most instructive, wrote 130 years ago that six speaks “of divine limit imposed, of restraint upon man’s will, which breaks out against it and submits, as the sea against its margin of sand, which it cannot pass.” He went on to say that 666 speaks of “the full development of evil in the very highest opposition to God; while also the stamp of vanity and weakness of the creature, limited and restrained by Him, would be only proportionately the more apparent. In any case, the limitation, restraint, and perhaps judgment of evil seem to be inseparable from the number.”¹ Others like to point out that the Greeks, like the Romans, used letters of the alphabet as num-

bers, and that adding up the numerical value of the name and title of the Antichrist may well add up to 666.

Both of these beasts rise to power during the tribulation, that dreadful seven-year-long period that will be worse than any previous period in earth's history. The second half of this period will be so bad that it is termed "the great tribulation." This is when the wickedness of these beasts will rise to its full height. These wicked men and their kingdoms are mentioned in various other connections elsewhere in Scripture too. We should never forget that Scripture is one whole. Our Lord Jesus in John 10:35 pointed this out, saying that the Scripture cannot be broken.

Many preachers and people who are concerned about the mark of the beast are aware and generally alarmed that modern technology has already made tiny rice-sized implantable biochips or microchips that can be implanted under the skin. Some of these are already in use beneficially for identification of animals and people and for storage of medical history. Radio frequencies from these chips can be picked up and stored on computer databases. Miniaturization is being developed so smaller and smaller devices can do more and more

and hold greater and greater amounts of data. This can be good, but it is evident that such technology can also be used for wrong purposes. If such technology is already available through human skill, what more will the future hold, especially when energized and driven by satanic power?

These fear mongers, generally speaking, are unaware that Christians need not be afraid of such technology being the mark of the beast. The beasts mentioned in Revelation 13 will not come into focus while we Christians are still upon earth. God has made it plain in His Word that Christians will be raptured before the tribulation begins. The Lord Jesus is our Deliverer from the wrath to come (1 Th. 1:10). The Church will be kept from – *not through* – the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world (Rev. 3:10). In 2 Thessalonians 2 we see that the man of sin will not be revealed in his true character while the Church and the Holy Spirit who indwells her are still here on earth. In fact, when we look at the various Scripture portions that deal with the Antichrist and the mark of the beast, we conclude that the requirement to have the mark of the beast or the number of his name to be able to

buy and sell does not come into force until the middle of the tribulation, the beginning of the great tribulation. Furthermore, this seems intimately connected with worshiping the beast.

Continuing in 2 Thessalonians 2 we see that God will send strong delusion to believe a lie to those who did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved, but had pleasure in unrighteousness during today's dispensation of grace. There will be no such thing as a second chance for those who have rejected the salvation God offers by grace at the present time. Once the Church is complete and in heaven God will turn back to His ancient people, Israel, and save a remnant who in turn will preach the everlasting gospel to the many people who have never heard it before. The people who live at this later time are emphatically warned against receiving the mark of the beast or the number of his name.

While all salvation is based on the finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary, the everlasting gospel is not exactly the same good news that we have accepted for our salvation. It is rather, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Rev. 14:7). Many will accept this gospel and

refuse to worship the beast and to have his mark or his name. They will suffer martyrdom as a result. Thank God, these events are future and do not directly apply to us who are Christians today. We should learn from them, however, just as we can learn from every portion of God's Word.

Satan is behind the non-Christian religions of this world, for when people worship idols they are really worshiping his demons. Sad to say, Satan even has quite an effect on much of that which calls itself Christian. He is tremendously influential and powerful in the affairs of this world too, whether political, economic or cultural.

God shows us in His Word that to worship Him, our true God, cannot be combined with any other religion or religious requirement. He will not share His glory with any other being. We must serve God rather than man, and we must take our stand for Him though this may cause us to be ostracized, persecuted or even killed. May we look to our Lord to help us be faithful to Him no matter how difficult we may find this to be now, or in days to come! He has promised, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (2:10). **GT**

¹The Numerical Structure Of Scripture, pp.50-51. Loizeaux Brothers, New York, NY., 1956. This book was first published in 1887.

THE DISPENSATIONS – PART 4

The Lord's Message To The Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

by Alfred Bouter

In our three previous studies we briefly looked at the seven days of creation, the seven Feasts of the LORD, and the seven parables about the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13. Now we turn in our study to the Lord's messages to the seven churches in Asia, encouraging believers to be true overcomers.

At the time, this Asia was a province of the Roman Empire in present day Turkey. The assemblies¹ addressed by the Lord (Rev. 2-3) had their beginnings when Paul was working in Ephesus. They were probably visited by Peter, and about 20-25 years later the apostle John lived and ministered in the same area.

The book of Revelation is part of John's ministry, as are his gospel and three epistles. All of them are characterized by a special emphasis on Christ's personal greatness. John's gospel does not mention its writer by name, instead he is presented as the dis-

ciple whom Jesus loved,² with a profound understanding of the greatness of His Person. Therefore, speaking of the Lord we read of Him as:

- The Son of Man talking with Nicodemus, to whom He could say, referring to Himself, "Who is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13),
- The only begotten Son (1:18), and
- The eternal Son of God, the Son of the Father and the eternal life (1 Jn. 5:20).

John's special task was to unveil³ to the believers Christ's greatness and glory, against the background of a world-system in which the Lord Jesus has been and still is rejected.

Do we realize that this "out-cast," despised and rejected by men (Jn. 1:10-12; Isa. 53:1-3), will be reintroduced into this same universe (Heb. 1:6) and every knee will bow before Him (Phil. 2:10-11)? It is this divine program that

is unveiled, or uncovered, in Revelation. However, before John gets to write about it, he shows Christ's greatness (Rev. 1), which is a study in itself. Then, before speaking about those future events, John becomes Christ's spokesman to address the assemblies of his day, including the believers ever since – even you and me today!

How To Interpret Revelation

Much confusion exists about this, but the key lies at the door. It is found in Revelation 1:19, showing that this book has three main parts: past, present and future. Chapter 1 refers to Christ's first coming in grace when He was rejected despite His greatness. From Revelation 4 and onwards the same glorious Person is reintroduced, and in the process will be accepted by all, willingly or unwillingly. In between (Rev. 2-3), the Lord addresses the seven churches.

Furthermore, Revelation provides the framework in which all Old and New Testament prophecies fit. This helps us understand the meaning and order of all those Scriptures. In other words, having this framework we are able to put all the bits and pieces of prophecy together in an understandable outline or plan.

At the same time, Revelation's main purpose is to show that our

Lord Jesus will manifest His glory *through* and *in* the events the book describes. For this reason, even in this book of judgments, we read of a threefold blessing at the beginning (1:3) and of six more blessings afterward, in a variety of contexts. How good it is to be occupied with this wonderful and glorious Person, and to consider Him in His greatness as Judge, King, Priest, Executioner of God's judgments and the One who will be seated on the great white throne (Rev. 20). He is the Alpha and Omega, who *is* everything, *speaks* everything and *works* everything – the eternal "I Am" (22:13 NKJV). The book also shows that He is the One who is the great Lover of our souls, our Bridegroom (Rev. 19, 21-22). His voice thrills the hearts of those who read this book and know Him as their Creator-Redeemer (Rev. 4-5). It is therefore no wonder that the book of Revelation starts with an outburst of praise the moment He is mentioned (1:5).

John responded in the only right way: "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (1:17-19). In other words, there is no room left for self, the flesh, man's glory, selfishness, man's agenda, or whatever else there may be. Through his death-like experience, John had the privilege to be strengthened and instructed by

his beloved Master (v.19). Thus he was made fit to communicate the glories of our Lord to us and the whole universe.

The Seven Letters And A Survey Of The History Of The Church

Between Christ's first coming, "the things which you have seen" (Rev. 1), and His second coming (Rev. 4-22), or "the things which will take place after this," we have the "things which are" (1:19). This expression covers the period of the Church on earth linked with Christ in heaven, from Acts 2 until the rapture. However, deviations started right from the beginning of the Church's history, even while the apostles were still alive and present with the believers. Just before departing, Peter instructed his generation – and indirectly, ours today – to cling to the Lord and to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Him (please read 2 Pet. 1:3-21, 3:18).

In this context it is important to realize that John's ministry gives what is *essential*, with the purpose to preserve the believers in the knowledge and the enjoyment of God's blessings. In one word, Revelation introduces Christ and brings us back to our first love – our Lord Jesus, who has meant everything to us. The

apostle presented to his readers the One who remains until the end, who gives us all that we need to be overcomers – not overcome by the world, the devil or the flesh.

The Church as a professing body has lost this sense of "first love" (Rev. 2:4). Even worse, it – including true believers – has forsaken that love. This does not mean that we can lose our salvation, but it means we can lose its enjoyment. What about you and me?

Whenever there is failure in the public testimony, or in whatever context, John's writings instruct each *individual* believer to listen. It is not with the purpose to make him fit into a certain church hierarchy or a human ordained system, with all the good intentions that may exist. No, it is in order to restore each believer to the state of first love, and to keep him or her in this condition and relationship until the end – that is until the rapture of the Church.

Revelation is not intended to satisfy our curiosity about what is going to happen or how the Lord will return and reign in public display. Rather, the book is about the unfolding of Christ's glory that produces a *moral* result, to make the Church ready for the Bridegroom so the Spirit and the bride may say, "Come" (22:17).

Interestingly, “come” is the only word in the whole book that the bride says publicly. It is an expression of desire, longing, love and anxious waiting.

The Order Of Events

The history of the Church found in Revelation 2-3 may be summarized as follows:

1. In what was written to *Ephesus* we see that the Church as a whole left her first love. Historically, this took place at the end of the first century.
2. Because of what happened in *Ephesus*, the Lord allowed persecutions – Satan acting as a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8) – especially in the second and third centuries. *Smyrna* means “myrrh,” and this fits with the many sufferings of those centuries.
3. Perhaps because of the many faithful martyrs and since the Church kept growing, Satan attacked it in a different way, changing his strategy. He acted as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) having the plan, “if you cannot oppose them, try to join them.” Through this, the believers were placed under the protection of the world when the Roman Emperor became the head of the professing Church. This sad development is in the letter to

Pergamos, meaning “fortress,” corresponding historically with events in the fourth century and later.

4. The link with the world gradually gave rise to the desire of the professing Church to rule over the world. This ambition came to pass in *Thyatira* (sacrifice, odor of affliction). It ties to the 12th century and onward when the absolute authority of the papal system climaxed and the moral corruption worsened. The final climax will be the great *Babylon* of Revelation 17-18, after the rapture.

5. In *Sardis*, signifying “escape,” a remnant was led out of the degenerated system as in the Reformation of the early 16th century. However, the Lord’s message to *Sardis* addressed the condition that existed approximately 100 years after the Reformation, when a general state of spiritual decline characterized the national churches that often called themselves Protestant as a protest against Rome. The true believers, living or risen from the dead, will go with the Lord when He comes, but the unbelievers will remain here.

6. In sovereign grace the Lord will raise a remnant, as it were,

from among the spiritually dead, as seen in *Philadelphia* (brotherly love). That church was a glowing revival and testimony for Himself, but with little strength because of man's failure. It was a witness nonetheless and distinguished by faithfulness to His name and the Word of God, as was also seen during the 19th century, while waiting for His coming (1 Th. 4:16-18).

7. Then we come to the last phase in this development: *Laodicea*, meaning "the people decide." It is where the Lord, who was everything for Philadelphia – the church which was a collective restoration to first love – had to leave. Outside, He is knocking at the door to still reach out. Even though we know of the Church's decline, and that we are almost at the end of its long history, does it not shock us to see the Lord standing outside?

An Important Note

A true believer can be restored to first love, even in Laodicea, but the unbelievers will continue in their hardening until the day of judgment. The true believers are in four different groups, developing after Pergamos and going through Laodicea. Each group is distinct, but they are one in Christ and are

to be raptured together. The unbelievers, including professing Christians who do not truly trust the Lord, will continue on earth throughout the tribulation period. We always need to distinguish between the true Church and the Church of mere professors. At the rapture these last ones will be "left behind" on earth and develop into the great Babylon.

A Few More Points

In suggesting our outline of the seven churches we do not limit the teaching of Scripture (Rev. 2-3) to this particular flow of events. Each of the Lord's seven messages is for every believer at any time in the history of the Church. The letters contain a tremendous wealth about which many books have been and still may be written.

Another point to emphasize is that these seven local assemblies, or churches, with all their distinctive features coexisted at the time John wrote. Yet they have all disappeared, which brings us back to the point that only the Lord is, and remains, faithful. There are no failures or shortcomings with Him!

In addition, is it not encouraging to notice the patience of our Lord as He persistently knocks at the door (Rev. 3:19-20)? He does not try to force Himself inside. He does not cry or shout (see Mt.

12:19), but He shows patience, grace, gentleness, faithfulness, care and love. He is “the Wisdom from above” (Jas. 3:17), with many wonderful qualities that we need.

How solemn that this challenging message, “Behold, I stand at the door ...”, was given right after the revival that characterized Philadelphia – where Christ is everything and will continue to be until the rapture. In Laodicea, however, human resources, solutions, methods and inventions gradually replaced Him.

Today the Lord challenges us to examine ourselves in heart and conscience with the desire to restore us to first love and bring us back to Himself so that He may be everything to us – fresh, new, vibrant and wonderful. In submitting to God’s thoughts and ways, we will be brought to an acknowledgment of the LORD’s greatness, as Job experienced many years ago. We may also see a parallel between Laodicea and the days of the last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, who addressed the failure of God’s people who had returned from the Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem, God’s dwelling place of His choosing.

They were at the right place, or in the right *position*, but they were not in the right spiritual *condition*, except for a remnant among them formed by God’s grace (see Mal. 3:16). Our blessed Lord is looking for a response from willing hearts, of believers who with love answer to His gentle knocking, even though their answer may be weak. “Lord, help us!” **GT**

Pray for us as we prepare another Series for future editions!

1 “Assembly” means “a company of called out ones” – called out of Paganism, Judaism or whatever ism. As far as language is concerned, the word “church” is related to the word “Lord.”

2 John had the privilege to rest in Jesus’ bosom while here on earth and was the disciple who was most intimately acquainted with our Lord. He was the one who followed Him quietly as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn. 21:20) and the one of whom Jesus said, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?” (v.22). Is it not fitting that it was this disciple who saw the Lord in all His greatness – as the future Judge and King and as the One who walks right now among the candlesticks of Revelation 2-3?

3 The Greek word “apocalypse” is often translated as “revelation,” and it may also be translated as “unveiling.” In this book the Lord Himself unveils what is hidden, past, present and future, whether about us, the world or Himself.

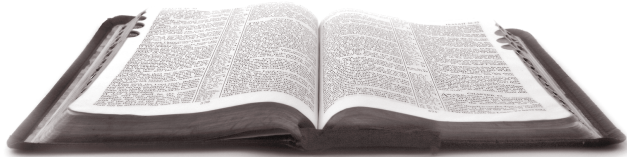
“Each of the Lord’s seven messages is for every believer at any time in the history of the Church.”



The purpose of this column is to help you study the Bible on your own. Look up the Bible references and think about them before writing your answers. Do not send this study to us, as this is not a correspondence course.

The Bible – Its Writers

by Alan Groth



The Gospel of John, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation were written by John, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Let's take a look at a few books in the New Testament to learn about John.

Read Mark 1:14-20, 3:13-19, 5:35-43, 9:1-10, 13:1-4

1. Where was Jesus preaching? _____
2. Where did He see John? _____
3. What was John doing? _____
4. What did the Lord Jesus do after He saw John? _____

5. Who was John's brother? _____
6. What was his father's name? _____
7. Who followed Jesus (Mark 1:14-20)? _____
8. In Mark 3:13-19, how many men did Jesus call? _____
9. Why did He call them to Himself? _____
10. What did He call James and John? _____
11. In Mark 5:35-43, who was permitted to follow Jesus? _____

12. What did they witness in the house? _____
13. In Mark 9:1-10, what did John see on the mountain? _____

14. What did the voice say out of the cloud? _____

15. In Mark 13:1-4, which disciples asked Jesus these two questions: "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" _____

Read John 13:18-30; Mark 14:32-35; John 19:25-27, 20:1-10,19-23

1. John 13:23 tells us about John, a disciple “whom Jesus loved,” What was he doing? _____
2. Where do we find John in Mark 14? _____
3. In John 19, what did Jesus ask John to do? _____
4. In John 20, what did John see? _____
5. What did Jesus show His disciples? _____

Read Acts 1:9-14, 3:1-10, 8:14-17,25; Galatians 2:9-10; 2 John 1-3; 3 John 1; Revelation 1:9-11, 21:2-5

1. In Acts 1, what did John see and hear? _____
2. In Acts 3, who was John’s companion? _____
3. What notable thing happened in Acts 3? _____
4. In Acts 8, where were Peter and John sent? _____
5. In Galatians 2, what did James, Cephas and John give to Paul, the writer? _____
6. To whom did John write in his second and third letters? _____
7. In Revelation 1, where was John? _____
What did he hear? _____
8. In Revelation 21:2-5, what did John see? _____

Read John 20:30-31

1. Why did John write his gospel? _____

Read Revelation 1:1-3

1. Who is the subject of Revelation? _____
2. What will happen to the reader and hearer of this book? _____

In our next study we will learn more about the Bible and its writers.



What Does The Bible Say About Fasting?

by Timothy P. Hadley

WE OFTEN HEAR OF PEOPLE FASTING in protest over something, refusing to eat while demanding that a perceived wrong be corrected. But what does the Bible say about fasting? Is fasting something for Christians to do today?

Fasting is mentioned many times in both testaments of the Bible. Moses fasted on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:28). Hannah fasted when she wanted a son from God (1 Sam. 1:7). David did so on several occasions (2 Sam. 1:12, 12:22). The entire nation of Israel fasted on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27). The Lord Jesus fasted in the wilderness (Mt. 4:2). John the Baptist taught his disciples to fast often (Mk. 2:18; Lk. 5:33), but the Lord Jesus was criticized because His disciples did not fast as frequently as others thought they should (Mt. 9:14; Mk. 2:18-19; Lk. 5:33-35).

Anna served God in the temple by fasting (Lk. 2:37). Paul fasted following his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:9). Cornelius fasted before receiving a vision from God (10:30). The church at Antioch fasted when Barnabas and Saul were sent out on their first missionary journey (13:3). On his way to Rome,

Paul abstained from food for 14 days (27:33).

There were also calls to fast such as those of Esther (Est. 4:16), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20:3) and Ezra (Ezra 8:21). These took place in relation to a specific burden. The fasts were linked to much prayer before the LORD (see Ps. 35:13; Mt. 6:5-18; 1 Cor. 7:5).

What Is Fasting?

Fasting is to put God first, wanting Him and His desires, will and mind more than food, social activities, sleep or day-to-day business. It involves not gratifying physical appetites while being persistent in fervent prayer. The widow of Luke 18:3 probably set aside many things while she pleaded repeatedly before the judge.

Fasting is the planned clearing of the way for prayer by laying aside all weights and hindrances (Heb. 12:1-2), and it is proof of our earnest fervor and faith. Faith is required, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6 NKJV). When we fast, it ought to be a spiritual exercise between us and the Lord.

Does The Bible Command Us To Fast?

Scripture does not command

Christians to fast; God does not require or demand it of them. At the same time the Bible presents fasting as something that is good, profitable and beneficial – and what could be better than to take our eyes off the things of this world to focus completely on God?

Anyone can fast, but some, such as diabetics, may not be able to abstain from food. So even though fasting in Scripture is almost always a fasting from food, there are other ways to fast. Anything given up temporarily *in order to focus our attention on the Lord* can be considered a fast (Ex. 19:14-15; 1 Cor. 7:1-5).

Fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when fasting from food. Extended periods of time without eating can be harmful to the body. Scriptural fasting is not intended to punish the flesh, and it should not be considered a dieting method. The purpose of a biblical fast is not to lose weight but to gain deeper fellowship with the Lord.

Exercises And Benefits

Help in a time of trouble often comes from fasting and prayer. God said, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will glorify Me” (Ps. 50:15). Joshua experienced this when prostrate, having fallen “to the earth on his face before the

ark of the LORD until evening” after the nation was defeated by the men of Ai (Josh. 7:6). It was a time of distress and defeat, of shame and fear! But when he and the elders of Israel fasted and prayed to discern why they were in that situation, the LORD revealed to them the sin that kept the nation from victory.

Fasting is a natural expression of grief. When faced with a civil war against the Benjamites, the nation of Israel fasted (Jud. 20:26). Israel fasted again before a fierce battle with the Philistines at Mizpah (1 Sam. 7:6). David demonstrated grief and sorrow through fasting (2 Sam. 3:35; Ps. 35:13).

Genuine repentance often involves fasting and prayer. It is possible to confess sins without repenting of them, but fasting sometimes helps to break up the fallow ground of our hearts, which leads to victory over sin.

Fasting and prayer help strengthen us spiritually. This is what the disciples learned from their experience in Matthew 17 when the Lord had returned from the Mount of Transfiguration. A father approached Him about his son, whom the disciples had tried to heal but could not. After the Lord Jesus rebuked the demon and healed the boy, His disciples asked Him, “Why could we not cast it out?” Jesus answered,

“Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (vv.19-21).

Daniel fasted and prayed when faced with spiritual hindrances (Dan. 10:2-3). Because he laid hold of the promise of God and continued in prayer, the LORD answered (v.12). Fasting and prayer discipline the body and make it a useful instrument for Him. Paul said, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27). When we fast we determine that our belly, or appetite, is not our god (Phil. 3:19). Fasting and prayer lead to victory over fleshly desires.

Fasting can also help us when we need wisdom from above. In Acts 13:1-3, a passage to which we already referred, we read of how men who fasted and prayed received direction from the Holy Spirit. It was “as they ministered to the Lord and fasted” that the Holy Spirit told them to separate Paul and Barnabas and then they fasted and prayed and laid hands on them and they sent them

away. Twice in this short passage we are told that they fasted as they prayed for wisdom and power to be upon these missionaries whom the Holy Spirit was sending out. Prayer and fasting can help secure guidance from above so decisions can be made in full confidence of His leading.

In addition, it is good to take time without the distraction of other things to pray for others – interceding for them – on a regular basis.

Types Of Fasts

Let's look at the different kinds of fasting in the Bible, of which there are at least three:

- **TYPICAL FAST.** This fast involved refraining from solid food but not abstaining from liquids. When the Lord Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, we read, “afterward He was hungry” (Mt. 4:2); we do not read that He was thirsty.

- **COMPLETE FAST or an ABSOLUTE FAST.** Involving no food or water (Jon. 3:7; Est. 4:16; Acts 9:9). This severe fast can be dangerous, as extended periods of time without eating or drinking can be harmful to the body.

- **PARTIAL FAST.** This kind of fast involves abstaining from certain foods, like Daniel and his friends did. When asked to eat from the Babylonian king's table, they

refused because they did not want to defile themselves. Instead of eating the king's meat, for ten days they, with permission, ate nothing but vegetables and water. They abstained from meat and wine because they purposed in their hearts not to defile themselves, and the LORD honored this partial fast (Dan. 1:8-20).

In the Bible we see that most fasts lasted only one day. Many would begin at sunset and go until sunset the following day (Jud. 20:26; 1 Sam. 14:24; 2 Sam. 1:12, 3:35). In Daniel 6:18, when Daniel was in the lions' den, the fast by Darius lasted only one night, perhaps because Daniel was out of danger by morning. Esther called for a three day fast (Est. 4:16). Only three times in the Bible do we read of a 40-day fast – individually by Moses, Elijah and the Lord Jesus.

The Lord revealed a special message to His people on each of those occasions. Today God uses His Word to speak to us. He may prepare our hearts through fasting, but only as a person follows the Word of God can He fast within the will of God.

Dangers Connected To Fasting

We have already alluded to the physical dangers, but there is the danger of spiritual hypocrisy that the Lord Jesus warned against,



“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Mt. 6:16). In Luke 18:12 He spoke of the pride of the Pharisee who stood in the temple boasting that he fasted twice a week. True fasting is done in secret, giving no outward appearance of it. Fasting has no merit as far as salvation is concerned. It does not give a person a special standing before God. Isaiah 58:1-7 describes a right way and a wrong way to fast. Fasting to impress others is the wrong way; fasting with a purpose, before God and with His glory in mind is the right way!

There is also the danger of being legal. Sometimes abstaining from food or certain kinds of food can be

found along a path toward legalism, which is clearly addressed in Romans 14. This can wrongly lead to trying to equate spirituality with fasting.

Biblical Principles In Fasting

Fasting involves prayer, along with repentance and the searching of our heart. It is, as Isaiah describes, “afflicting one’s soul” (58:3). Fasting shows the sincerity of our prayers – not to get our will done in heaven but God’s will done on earth!

The Bible does not give specific regulations on fasting or how often one should fast, because like many other things in the Christian life fasting is a spiritual exercise rather than a mechanical procedure. This does not mean that we should ignore or neglect fasting! When a person feels the need in their Christian life, it is good to fast.

There are biblical principles that should guide us as we fast, such as in relation to food. We should begin like David by repenting: “When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting that became my reproach” (Ps. 69:10). We must start with the right attitude of heart or our fasting will be useless before God! This is what God warned Jeremiah about as He said, “When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer

burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them” (Jer. 14:12). Fasting should begin with confessing and repenting of my sin and asking, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting,” and “cleanse me from secret faults” (Ps. 139:23-24, 19:12).

Prayer, specific and continual, should always accompany fasting. Our prayers are to be of faith (Mk. 11:24), in the will of God (1 Jn. 5:14-15) and without wavering or doubting (Jas. 1:6). Fasting should also be accompanied by the Word of God, since “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). While fasting, it is good to memorize key passages of Scripture.

Lastly, fasting ought to lead us to give thanks and praise to the Lord. One example is Anna, who “served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:37-38).

How To End A Fast

As we have already seen from Scripture we should determine the length of our fast, but when the end of that period comes, how should we end a fast? This might

seem like a strange question. Some might say, “Just go eat and stuff yourself!” But that is a good way to get sick! The human body cannot take such a shock, we need to break the fast slowly, not abruptly. In fact “break the fast” is an interesting phrase, for the word “breakfast” actually comes from it.

The disciples were discouraged (Mk. 16:14) and went back to their old occupation of fishing, but the Lord, as He always does, met them where they were and called them to Himself. They had been doing things alone and their own way! But the Lord appeared to them on the shore as they fished unsuccessfully. They did not recognize Him. He instructed them to cast their nets on the right side of their boat – following Christ is always the *right* choice – and the result of their obedience was that they had more fish than they could handle. The Lord Jesus then invited them to breakfast, or to “break the fast.” They ended their fast with Jesus Christ! No longer spiritually blinded, they knew the Lord (Jn. 21:12).

From the story in John 21, we learn that when we end our fast we should be in fellowship with the Lord and capable of spiritual insight. While fasting, there should be repenting, confessing and cleansing. Finishing the fast,

there is service to be done! After they had finished breakfast the Lord spoke directly to Peter, asking him three times, “Do you love Me?” Twice he answered I have affection for You, but the third time he could only say, “Lord You know all things.” The Lord replied to Peter, “Feed My lambs,” “Tend My sheep” and “Feed My sheep.” The Lord uses the fast for His glory, drawing our hearts to Him, to His desires for us in seeing His people the way He sees them, and to serve Him by serving them!

Fasting should also lead us to praise, even at a future time as in the case of Hannah (1 Sam. 1:7-2:11). This woman of faith was very burdened during and after her fast. In due time the LORD gave her a son. Immediately after her son’s birth we read of her in the temple praising God. Fasting leads us to give glory to the Lord for who He is and what He has done!

Conclusion

We need real exercise of heart as we live in these difficult days! The enemy is very busy and wants to cause havoc to the faith of the people of God. We see the effects of the enemy all around, much like Jehoshaphat did in 2 Chronicles

20. Looking at his path to victory, we see that he recognized the problem (2 Chr. 20:3,10-11), rejected the flesh (v.12) and resolved to seek the LORD (vv.3,12-13). During all this Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast (v.3), shutting out all other distractions. The people of God were together in one mind and complete dependence on the LORD; they had nowhere else to turn! While fasting they claimed the promises of God (vv.14-19), confronted the problem and obtained victory (vv.20-30). They could not go out to fight this enemy alone so they gave themselves to prayer and fasting.

In these closing days, before the Lord returns, the enemy is mighty, and we have no power against him, but greater is He that is in us than he that is against us. There are times when the only way to gain the victory is by prayer and fasting. Together, they open the door of praise. May the Lord help us to realize that “the night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light ... Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:12,14). **GT**

“Fasting involves prayer, along with repentance and the searching of our heart.”

Romans

by Leslie M. Grant



“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” —Romans 3:24 NKJV

Romans, meaning “strong ones,” gives truth that stands at the foundation of Christianity. Here God is the Sovereign Judge, absolute in righteousness, discovering and exposing the sin of all mankind. He allows no excuse, spares no evil of whatever degree. All are shown to be “guilty before God” (v.19).

Yet in pure righteousness He also offers complete justification from guilt, for this is based on “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” who is seen as the great Substitute in bearing sin’s penalty by the sacrifice of Himself. Every true believer in Him is thereby cleared from every charge and is constituted *righteous* before God.

The significance of the cross is seen too in reference to deliver-

ance from the power of indwelling sin. The truth is so presented as to meet the sinner where he is at the outset, and lead him through soul-exercise out of bondage and darkness into liberty and light. The feet are established in paths of righteousness.

In chapters 9-11 God’s counsels and ways concerning Israel are shown to be consistent with these truths now revealed in Christianity. God is the great Victor. Hence all who trust Him are blessed.

From chapter 12 on to the end, instructions are given as to practical conduct based on the solid and eternal foundation of God’s justifying grace.

How grand a book to establish and settle the soul, and to encourage every godly virtue! **GT**

This column is taken from the book “The Bible, Its 66 Books In Brief.” It is available for purchase from Believer’s Bookshelf USA (www.bbusha.org) and Believers Bookshelf Canada (www.bbusha.org).

Q&A

How am I supposed to live, now that I am saved? I am in jail, and not everyone is nice here. There is a lot of cussing. Should I just keep to myself? I am no better than anyone else, but I don't want to fall back into that kind of life.

I am happy to read your question for it shows that there has been a genuine change in your heart and life. You were a sinner and something you did in “that kind of life” brought you into jail. Now you’ve been saved and you are no longer comfortable in “that kind of life.” God’s Word tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (NKJV). The next verse goes on to say, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ.”

The fact of your not being comfortable with the life you once led is evidence that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your heart. Being God, the Holy Spirit is holy. Being holy, He cannot stand sin. So you feel that your life should be different from the life you used to lead, the life that resulted in your being put in jail. This is right. You have been born again and are really a different

person now. God has given you an entirely new nature and He now calls you a saint. People have strange ideas of what it means to be a saint. Some even have the unscriptural ideas that only people who have died are saints and that they can help us if we pray to them. Another is that a church or a religious official can make a person a saint. No individual or human organization is able to do this, for this is something God alone can do.

A saint is a holy person. He is someone who is separated to God. Your question shows that you realize this in your heart even if you might not express it in precisely these words. While you are still outwardly the same person you always were, a change has taken place in your heart that changes your entire outlook on life, thus your question, “How am I supposed to live now that I am saved?” God answers that question in 1 Peter 1:15-16: “But as He who called you is holy, you

also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”

I am not going to lay down a set of rules for you to follow, for God is not putting Christians under any kind of law today. But He has given us the Lord Jesus Christ, His beloved Son, first of all as Savior, but then also as a pattern or model or example to follow. We see this in 1 Peter 2:21.

You mention that there is “a lot of cussing” there in jail. I’m sure it hurts you to hear men use the name of the Lord Jesus, who loves you and died for you and who is now your Savior, in their cursing. Have you ever told men who use His name what He has done for you and what He now means to you? This might possibly speak to their heart or conscience. Perhaps it would bring questions from them or give rise to a discussion. In that way you would be a testimony to them. In any case, speak quietly and courteously; don’t argue or get mad and yell.

If they use the word “hell” in their cursing or ask God to damn someone or something, you might have an opening to ask if they understand what they’ve just said or wished. This might give you an opportunity to explain what hell is and how to avoid going there. You could perhaps explain that if God would damn someone to hell,

this would be because that person is a sinner who has sinned against God, who is holy and hates sin. Tell them too that although “the wages of sin is death, the gift of God” (which He would much rather give than pay out death as wages that have been earned by sinning) “is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). This might lead to your telling them how and why Jesus died, that He is still the Savior of sinners, and that He has become your Savior. Back up your words by your life.

If your fellow prisoners argue and don’t want to listen, don’t force the issue. It’s better to keep to yourself than to be in the company of men who are against God, who has become your Father when you got saved, and against the Lord Jesus Christ, your Savior. Read Psalm 1. In fact, read the Bible and thereby get better acquainted with God and the Lord Jesus.

Quietly show by your changed life what it is to be a Christian. Actions speak louder than words. Ask the Lord to help you. Do this each day and even repeatedly during the day. And when you mess up, for that’s easy for any of us to do, don’t hesitate to apologize for what you’ve done wrong and ask forgiveness if it’s something you’ve done to a person. Confess what

you've done to the Lord; He forgives us when we confess our sin (1 Jn. 1:9); we don't even have to ask Him for forgiveness.

Pray. Look to Him for guidance each day. Seek to please Him. Don't worry. Read your Bible daily, preferably early in the day. Don't waste time with anyone who is trying to pull you away from the Lord and back into the old ways. Don't act as if you're better than others or show off. Don't keep condemning or trying to correct others. Don't expect unsaved people to live like Christians should live.

If the Lord should lead you to a fellow believer, be thankful. Pray together. Read and study God's

Word together. Enjoy what fellowship you can. Discuss differences you may have but don't argue about different viewpoints.

The Christian life is a life that must be lived during all your waking hours each day, 365 days a year and 366 days each leap year. It does not necessarily get easier as time goes on. When you get out of jail, don't fool around with things that were a part of your old pre-Christian life. Don't hang around with the crowd with whom you used to associate, but do tell them why and what has made the difference in your life. May God bless you!

—Answered by Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.

Psalm 1

1. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful;

2. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law he meditates day and night.

3. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

4. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away.

5. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

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Have You Any Room For Jesus?



Have you any room for Jesus, He who bore your load of sin?
As He knocks and asks admission, Sinner, will you let Him in?
Room for Jesus, King of glory! Hasten now His word obey;
Swing the heart's door widely open, bid Him enter while you may.

Room for pleasure, room for business, but for Christ the Crucified,
Not a place that He can enter, in the heart for which He died?
Room for Jesus, King of glory! Hasten now His word obey;
Swing the heart's door widely open, bid Him enter while you may.

Have you any room for Jesus, as in grace He calls again?
O today is time accepted, tomorrow you may call in vain.
Room for Jesus, King of glory! Hasten now His word obey;
Swing the heart's door widely open, bid Him enter while you may.

Room and time now give to Jesus, soon will pass God's day of grace;
Soon thy heart left cold and silent, and thy Savior's pleading cease.
Room for Jesus, King of glory! Hasten now His word obey;
Swing the heart's door widely open, bid Him enter while you may.

by L. W. M.