



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

The official newspaper of The Church of God International

Vol. 41, No. 2

"Put on the whole armor of God"

Summer 2020

No Need to Panic Over This Pandemic



by Mike James

The present virus pandemic (epidemic of disease spreading across a large region) sweeping the world is **tragic and heartbreaking**. Many families are suffering the loss of loved ones. But it is not proof that the end of the age is near. When we look at the major scriptures (Matthew 24; Luke 21; Daniel; Revelation) pertaining to the end of this age it appears the first major thing to look for is the false Christ figure(s) followed by war, famine, and pestilence. Now they can all happen almost simultaneously, but keeping in mind the loss of 25 percent (Revelation 6:7–8) of the world population—this just isn't it. Whenever the media blows up a situation we need to look at history to get a better perspective on things. Hopefully this synopsis of major pandemics throughout history will help alleviate the concern some of you may

have. But one major point we can make is how quickly a bigger pandemic happening in the world of the future can easily lead to the destruction of society as we know it.

Peloponnesian War (430 BC)

This event may have begun in Libya, Ethiopia, and Egypt, but it entered into Athens from their port in Piraeus. Estimates are that **75,000–100,000** Athenians died during this pandemic. The plague also helped seal the Spartan victory in this first Peloponnesian war. The disease was suspected to have been typhoid fever. You can contract the infection if you eat food handled by someone with typhoid fever who hasn't washed carefully after using the toilet. You can also become infected by drinking water contaminated with the bacteria.

Antonine Plague (AD 65–180)

This plague was one of the things that helped end the Roman Empire. Historians are not sure what the dis-

ease was, but the strongest suggestion is smallpox and measles. They believe the disease got to Rome through armies and tradesmen returning from Asia. **Five million** died from this disease outbreak.

Plague of Justinian (the First Plague, AD 541–542)

Named after the Byzantine emperor who was in power when it struck, this was the bubonic plague. Bubonic plague is an infection of the lymphatic system, caused by the bite of an infected flea. The fleas were carried by rats. **Thirty to fifty million** died from this plague.

The Black Death (the Second Plague, 1347–1352)

The Black Death was also caused by the bubonic plague. Estimates of the dead range from **75 million to 200 million**. The enormity of this plague was exacerbated by modernization of shipping and trade routes. The plague may have originated in Asia and moved to Europe through trade caravans.

New World Smallpox (1520–Unknown)

Explorers arriving in the Americas brought smallpox, measles, and other viruses which decimated the indigenous populations. An estimated **25–55 million** people died. Eighty to ninety-five percent of the Native American population was lost within 150 years after Columbus arrived.

Great Plague of London (1665)

This was another attack of the bubonic plague which killed between **75,000 and 100,000** Londoners. Again, blame the rats and fleas, but hundreds of thousands of cats and dogs were also killed to stop the spread.

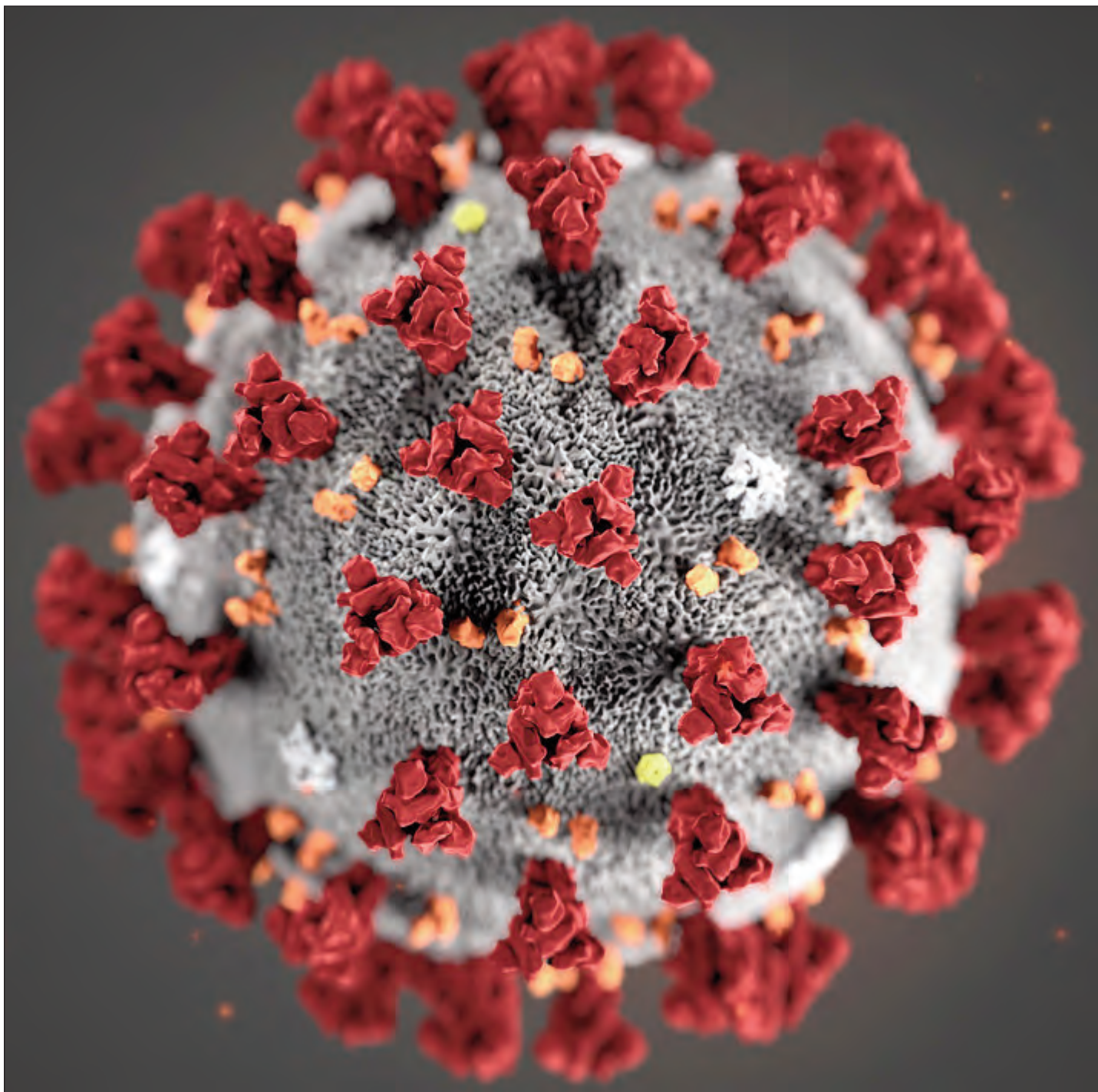
The Cholera Pandemics (1817–1923)

Cholera is caused by highly infectious bacteria that are transferred via feces-infected water or food. It causes severe diarrhea and vomiting. Seven major outbreaks occurred during this time frame killing **1–2 million** people. Outbreaks occurred in Russia, England, Indonesia, India, Spain, Africa, China, Japan, Italy, Germany, and America.

Yellow Fever (late 1800s)

A viral infection caused by female mosquitos that usually occurs in South

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CGI Website: www.cgi.org
CGI E-mail: info@cgi.org
Phone: (903) 939-2929

The Pale Horse

by Mike James

As the world continues to experience the ravages of the coronavirus, we need to put everything in the proper perspective. In Revelation 6:7–8, we read the following, “When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” I looked and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.” The coronavirus (SARS-COV-2, the virus that causes the disease COVID-19) is nowhere near killing a fourth of the earth, nor will it. But there will come a time when pestilence, war, and famine will ravage this earth in a way we have never seen before. To give you an idea of what to expect at that time, I’d like to take a look back at the worst pandemic the modern world has thus far experienced, the 1918–1920 influenza which killed an estimated 50–100 million people worldwide.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse we read about in Revelation 6:1–8 are similar to the signs of the end-time we read about in Luke 21:8–11. The first horse in Revelation 6:1–2 is connected with the false Christs in Luke 21:8. The second horse in Revelation 6:3–4 is connected to the **Wars** in Luke 21:9–10. The third horse in Revelation 6:5–6 is connected to the **famine** mentioned in Luke 21:11. Finally, the fourth horse—the pale horse—in Revelation 6:7–8 is connected to the **pestilence** (disease) mentioned in Luke 21:11. What is interesting about the three final horses is how the order in which they are mentioned fits perfectly with what happened in the world during the 1918–1920 pandemic.

Before we delve into the connection of these three horsemen, I’d like to make you aware of how the pandemic of 1918–1920 was the worst killing machine in modern human history. The plague in the 1300s likely killed more and a larger percentage of the population, perhaps a third of Europe, but the population was much less at that time. The experts in this field of study believe the influenza pandemic of 1918–1920 killed at least 50 million and perhaps as many as 100 million worldwide. Six-hundred and seventy-five thousand died in the United States. What made this even more devastating was the fact that influenza usually kills the old and very young, but the 1918 virus killed everyone with equal ferocity. Two-thirds of the dead died within a six month period.

Influenza is a virus that usually kills in two ways. It can kill by causing a violent viral pneumonia that has been described as a “burning of the lungs.” Or it can kill—in a slower way—by breaking down the body’s defenses and allowing bacteria to invade the lungs.

For the remainder of this article, I’d like to focus in on what we read in Revelation 6. It mentions the pale horse rider killed people by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild animals. It’s interesting how all four of these items do have a connection, and this was evidenced by the pandemic of 1918–1920.

Let me begin with the **sword (war)**. As we all know when the pandemic struck we were near the end of WWI. But what you may not know is one of the things that helped launch the pandemic was the fact influenza spreads rapidly when many people are in close proximity. The pandemic of 1918–1920 is sometimes known as the “Spanish Flu,” but that is a

misnomer. The Spanish press was very open and transparent back then, and many thought that the flu might have originated there due to all the reporting coming from Spain about the virus at that time. But many scholars on the subject today believe the virus originated in Haskell County, Kansas, early in 1918. The virus moved east across the state to a large army base, and from there to Europe through the movement of troops going to war. In early 1918, a violent strain of flu was noticed by a doctor in Kansas. The doctor was surprised by the violence of this flu strain that was striking even the strongest and healthiest in his county. A soldier on leave from Camp Funston, 300 miles east, visited the county during this flu outbreak. Camp Funston was the second largest cantonment in the country, with about fifty-six thousand troops.

Since the **camp** was put together quickly, army regulations written for health reasons were not followed. This led to **overcrowded conditions** that were rife for a disease outbreak. In March, an influenza outbreak occurred in the camp, but the death toll was not too high as to draw attention. The



problem is influenza viruses mutate constantly, and many of these men were moving to other US bases and then to Europe.

This was the first worldwide war, which probably added to the speed of the killing. Large volumes of men were moving from place to place, infecting each other and then infecting civilian populations. Besides the military camps, which were a primary breeding ground of death, the transport ships moving men across the seas became moving caskets. Here are a few excerpts from John M. Barry, author of the *The Great Influenza*, that will give you a sense of what it was like: Colonel Gibson, commander of the Fifty-seventh Vermont, wrote of his regiment’s experience on the *Leviathan*: “The ship was packed.... Conditions were such that the influenza could breed and multiply with extraordinary swiftness.... The number of sick increased rapidly, Washington was apprised of the situation, but the call for men for the Allied armies was so great that we must go on at any cost.... Doctors and nurses were stricken. Every available doctor and nurse was utilized to the limit of endurance. The conditions during the night cannot be visualized by anyone who had not actually seen them.... Groans and cries of the terrified added to the confusion of the applicants clamoring for treatment and altogether a true inferno reigned supreme.”

It was the same on other ships. Pools of blood from hemorrhaging patients lay on the floor, and the healthy tracked the blood through the ship, making decks wet and slippery. Finally, with no room in sick bay, no room in the areas taken over for makeshift sick bays, corpsmen and nurses began laying men out on deck for days at a time.

At first, the deaths of men were separated by a few hours: the log of the *Leviathan* noted, “12:45 P.M. Thompson, Earl, Pvt 4252473, company unknown died on board...3:35 P.M. Pvt O Reeder died on board of lobar pneumonia....” But a week after leaving New York, the officer of the day was no longer bothering to note cause of death; he was writing only a name and a time, two names at 2:00 A.M., another at 2:02 A.M., two more at 2:15 A.M....

The burials at sea began. They quickly became sanitary exercises more than burials, bodies lying next to one another on deck, a few words and a name spoken, and then, one at a time, a corpse slipped overboard into the sea. One soldier aboard the *Wilhelmina* watched across the waves as bodies dropped into the sea from another ship in his convoy, the *Grant*: “I confess I was near to tears, and that there was tightening around my throat. It was death, death in one of its worst forms, to be consigned nameless to the sea.”

According to John M. Barry, epidemic disease not combat is the biggest killer during war. Throughout history more soldiers often died of disease than in battle or of their wounds. During war, disease often spreads from armies to the civilian population. In the Civil War in the United States, two men died from disease for every battle related death. In the Boer War (1899–1902), ten British troops died of disease for each combat-related death. In the Spanish-American war of 1898, six American soldiers died of disease for every one killed in battle.

It’s not just the soldiers who suffer from disease during a war either. In the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, measles killed 40 percent of those who got sick during the siege of Paris. Isn’t it interesting how in Luke 21:8–11 wars come first, then the famine and pestilence.

Not all **famines** are preceded by war, but it is one of the main causes of famine. In simple terms, famine is a scarcity of food. This can happen for a variety of reasons: a lack of rain, disease in the crops, locusts or other pests, and war. In the case of war, famine can happen in a couple different ways. When one country or army attacks, it may lead to the movement of the civilian population out of their home region in order to flee the attacking army. By moving into another region in large numbers, these people are now going to find it difficult to find a food source in an area that may not be well suited for providing food to so many new people.

A second way famine can occur during war is when an opposing army may blockade trade routes or shipping to a city or region. The trade routes (highways and ports) now are no longer open to the food shipments that come in. This is another way people can begin to suffer starvation during armed conflict.

One terrible example of a famine during World War I was the famine of Mount Lebanon. In what is today modern day Lebanon, 200,000 of an estimated 400,000 people died. The famine took place from 1915 to 1918 and was exacerbated by the Allied Powers blockading the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Ottoman Empire, allied with the Central Powers, blocked any food from Syria moving into this region in order to keep their troops supplied. Locusts also struck the area of Mount Lebanon during this time, and the result was the demise of half the population.

The third item Luke 21 mentions is **pestilence**. The pandemic of influenza was something the world had never experienced. A couple of examples will explain. Most of the people who got this influenza survived. Millions and millions of people were infected, but they survived. But many of those who did not survive died due to the terrible pneumonia

Continued next page

they received. Here is another excerpt from Barry's book that helps describe what happened. Dr. Roy Grist, an army physician, wrote the following to a colleague: "These men start with what appears to be an ordinary attack of LaGrippe or Influenza, and when brought to the hospital they very rapidly develop the most vicious type of Pneumonia that has ever been seen. Two hours after admission they have the Mahogany spots over the cheek bones, and a few hours later you can begin to see the Cyanosis extending from their ears and spreading all over the face, until it is hard to distinguish the colored men from the white."

Cyanosis happens when a person turns blue because the lungs can't move oxygen into the blood. Blood-carrying oxygen appears red, but without oxygen in veins it is blue. The cyanosis during this plague was so extreme many victims took on the color of what the veins in your wrist look like.

Another macabre manifestation of this disease Barry mentions in his book was described by a British doctor who noted the following: "one thing I have never seen before—namely the occurrence of subcutaneous emphysema"—pockets of air accumulating just beneath the skin—"beginning in the neck and spreading sometimes over the whole body."

The air pockets were created due to the lungs rupturing. When these patients were rolled onto their sides, they made a crackling sound. A navy nurse compared the sound to eating a bowl of Rice Krispies.

Now to the fourth item in Revelation 6:7–8—the **wild beasts or animals**. Some argue that the beasts will begin to attack humans due to the war and famine that may erode their usual feeding sources. But there is another way to understand this when you look at the Greek of this scripture. According to Dr. Alan E. Kurschner, the first three entities, "sword, famine, and pestilence," are in the grammatical construction called the "dative of means/instrument." The fourth entity, "the beasts," is found in the grammatical construction called "ultimate agent," or more probable, in this context, the "intermediate agent," with the ultimate agent being "Death and Hades." In other words, this indicates the beasts are agents themselves, and may be using the sword, famine, and pestilence as means to achieve an end. Now Dr. Kurschner believes the beasts here are referring to the Anti-Christ power which is called the beast in Revelation a number of times. Since Satan enters into the Beast power (2 Thessalonians 2:5–10 and Revelation 13), Kurschner's theory could fit. But since the beasts or animals are plural here, many other commentators believe we are talking about real animals. Can we reconcile the Greek in regard to real animals? I believe we can. Beasts (locusts, grasshoppers, and other pests) can be an intermediate agent for famine. When we think of a beast influencing men to make war, we can easily have Satan's influence fit that scenario. Let's not forget Satan is called a beast and is likened to wild animals (Genesis 3:1; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9) in Scripture. Satan is also the power behind the Beast power and the demons who bring war upon the earth (Revelation 16:13–14). That just leaves the pestilence which is the most obvious fit for the wild beasts.

Flu viruses don't originate in humans. Their natural home is in birds. Many more variants of influenza exist in birds than in humans. In birds, the virus resides mainly in their gastrointestinal tract. Bird poop can contain large amounts of a virus if a bird is infected. A big exposure to an avian virus can get into man, but it's harder to move from man to man unless it mutates in some way. This does not happen often, but it does happen. A more common way of this happening is for the bird virus to infect another mammal and then move to man. A very good candidate is the pig. It can more easily move from swine to man. The theory on the 1918 pandemic was the

virus may have started on a swine farm in Kansas.

I don't mean to pick on pigs, but I found some interesting information on them and disease spread. First of all, we know pigs are unclean biblically (Leviticus 11:7), but some virologists believe pigs provide a perfect "mixing bowl." The reason for this has to do with how the virus attacks a cell. Imagine the virus as a little cell with spikes sticking out of it. The spikes are called hemagglutinin. When they come up against the cells in our body they brush up against sialic acid that juts out from the surface of our cells in our respiratory tract. Hemagglutinin and sialic acid have shapes that fit tightly together—like a hand in glove.

Back to the pig—the sialic acid receptors in pigs can bind to both human and bird viruses. Not many mammals have that capability. Whenever an avian virus enters pigs at the same time a human virus does, a reassortment of the two can happen. A brand new virus can mutate that can infect man. In 1918, vets found outbreaks of the flu in pigs and other mammals, and pigs today still get the flu from a descendant of the 1918 virus. We don't know if pigs got the disease from man or man got it from pigs.

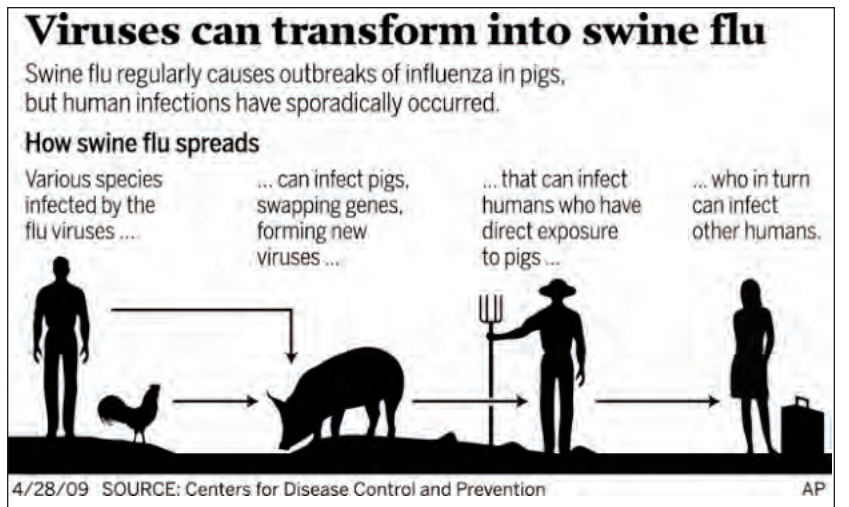
The Pale Rider will ride again—this time with a ferocity never before seen—prior to the Second Coming of Christ. The most likely method with which pestilence will infect humanity will be from an animal source. The most likely source of the recent COVID-19 virus was a wild animal market in Wuhan, China. There is speculation the virus could have come from a viral lab in Wuhan also, but thus far intelligence sources have not been able to confirm this. If the market was the source, an animal there was likely infected by a bat. How might that happen? Bats might feed on fruit that grows in a tree and drops to the ground. Some other animal could then eat the food off the ground. Another possible way of transmission could be through bat droppings getting on another animal. If transmission originated in the Wuhan virus lab the transmission occurred from a bat to a human, but that is not as easy as having transmission from an intermediary animal.

Bats (biblically unclean) have an incredible immune system that allows them to become "reservoirs to many pathogens that do not impact them but can have a tremendous impact on us if they're able to make the jump," according to Thomas Gillespie, a disease ecologist at Emory University.

It's easy for disease to spread in these open-air markets due to animal cages being stacked on top of each other. The animals may urinate or defecate, which can transmit the virus. But the virus could transmit due to butchering of the animals in the market too. It should be pointed out God warned us not only not to eat these animals, but not to touch their carcasses (Leviticus 11:8).

Regardless of how the virus started the source was zoonotic. This means transmission of disease to humans through an animal source. Because the new virus is not the same as any known bat virus, the belief is the virus mutated in an intermediary animal. Likely suspects include wolf cubs, civet cats, snakes, and the pangolin (scaly anteater). Genetic analyses suggest the coronavirus, officially SARS-COV-2, is most genetically similar to a germ found in the pangolin. All of these animals are considered unclean by the Bible.

Going back a bit in history, we find that most of the plagues were caused by flea-infested rats (unclean animal). In more modern times, we believe HIV began due to humans eating chimpanzee (unclean animal) meat. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) began much like the present coro-



navirus did in China. The SARS outbreak of 2003 was linked to horseshoe bats (unclean animal). Scientists think the bats somehow infected palm civets (unclean animal)—catlike mammals sold for meat. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) began in the Middle East, but once again the suspect is a bat with an intermediary animal being the camel. Camel meat and milk consumption is common in Saudi Arabia where MERS began in 2012. Once again, camels are an unclean food (Leviticus 11:4). Even Ebola is believed to have originated in a bat in Africa. Bat soup is a delicacy in parts of Africa. Are you seeing a pattern here?

Humans are causing these diseases by bringing the animals to market, but also by encroaching in the natural habitat of the infected animals. In 1998 Nipah virus killed hundreds of people in several outbreaks in Asia. In this example the clearing of rain forest for palm oil, lumber, and livestock to graze displaced fruit bats. The displaced fruit bats fed on mango trees located on pig farms. The bats would eat mangos and some of the mangos would drop to the ground. The pigs below would do what pigs do and eat the mangos becoming infected with the bat virus.

Wildlife populations usually decrease because of human activity, but a few of them grow. Out of thousands of mammals studied, 58 species increased their populations when human activity changed their environments. "It's mostly rodents and some species of bats," according to Christine Kreuder Johnson, a professor of epidemiology at the University of California at Davis. Rats were the primary carriers of plagues during the Middle Ages, and bats have been the carriers of many of our more modern disease epidemics.

As population increases, we are more likely to experience virus spillover from the animal kingdom. The Wildlife Conservation Society and other groups are calling on countries to outlaw the trade in wild animals for food and to close "wet markets" where these animals are sold. Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease doctor in the United States, said, "It just boggles my mind how, when we have so many diseases that emanate out of that unusual human-animal interface that we don't just shut it down."

Proverbs 4:19 says, "The way of the wicked is like darkness. They do not know what makes them stumble." God obviously knew what would eventually happen to man if we did not follow His ways. What we are going through with the present virus is just a foretaste of what is to come with the Pale Rider of Revelation 6.

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Lessons From Job—Coping In a Crisis

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

by Bill Watson



The encouraging words above from the apostle Paul to the church at Philippi in chapter 4:6–7 ring loud and clear. But, as many of us would agree, *it's easier said than done*. I think all of us would admit, if we were really honest, our thoughts and emotions are hard to control during a crisis. As they say, once the *adrenalin kicks-in*, and perhaps actions need to be taken or comprehension needs internalizing, there may be no telling what will be done, said, or felt, based on the type of crisis you're facing.

We all have different thresholds of “crisis tolerance.” And though our limits may vary from one person to another, the fact of the matter is, all of us have *coping limits* when facing particular crises. Undoubtedly, some of us can cope better under greater stresses and pressures than others, but that doesn't dismiss the need to know how *all of us can improve our tolerance* for coping with the stresses, fears, and anxieties that come with the circumstances and conditions of a full-blown crisis.

What Are Some of the Insights?

Every one of us will be confronted with a crisis at some point in our lives. Depending on what we do determines how often we may be exposed to a “crisis management” *opportunity!* If we're prone to make wrong or rash decisions, or behave in a reckless manner, obviously this could cause more crises in our life than, perhaps, someone else who is more thoughtful in their behavior and cautious about their choices and decisions.

On the other hand, if you're a first responder, like a paramedic, fireman, policeman, or in the military, like a paratrooper, combat soldier, or maybe in special ops, chances are you “feed on and enjoy” the challenges that high pressure and stressful conditions present. There are people that do well under stress and are in their comfort zone while in “adrenalin highs.” And therein lies some of the *contrasting differences* of each of our demeanors and temperaments. As I often said, it takes a special person to be

a nurse, brain surgeon, fighter pilot, swat team member, or special needs teacher. The reality is, we are not all equipped the same for handling a crisis, or tense conditions; and its only right we recognize these differences.

However, in determining just how well we're suited, we need to consider what we do when faced with some disturbing event that disrupts our status quo—our routine—and sends our life spinning out of control and off into a different direction, *outside of our comfort zone*—completely upsetting our spiritual and emotional equilibrium! So, ask yourself: How did I feel? How did I respond? What was it I did? *How did I cope* with the situation and make my adjustment from the initial shock and surprise, to a more calm approach to soften and resolve the effects and make my way toward tolerance and, finally, acceptance?

Interestingly enough, most of us don't realize just how adaptable we are when “under fire” in a crisis. In some situations individuals are actually able to find the *coping mechanism* required to embrace the circumstances confronting them during events that change our world and necessitate a mental or emotional adjustment. This is not true of every case, but it does happen. And it is during these times of crisis that we need to look more closely on how we “felt” and “responded” because they are *growing opportunities* for us to use as a “catalyst” for added spiritual improvement in our lives—assuming, of course, we have the “*courage*” to *respond beyond* how we would normally react.

The stress charts indicate different events cause varying degrees of stress, fear, and anxiety levels. There are low, mild, and high stress levels that are associated with different circumstances. For example, these all vary in potential, but can also have a variety of effects depending on the particular set of conditions and circumstances driving the event. These stress-inducing events include the death of a spouse, a divorce or separation, being arrested and jailed, the death of a family member, personal injury, some kind of abuse, or accident, job or health loss. The list also includes getting married, moving to a new area, a change of job, or, finally, retiring from a



A familiar sight in these times

career. All of these different situations can affect us in dissimilar ways, predicated on why these situations occurred and how we emotionally and mentally process the circumstances.

For instance, a divorce can be much more traumatic and the associated stress harder to cope with when a mate is blindsided by betrayal, compared to a *chronically* toxic or abusive environment. The latter could actually result in reducing stress with a separation or divorce. The same thing applies with the death of a loved one who dies of a disease over a period of time, compared to an unexpected surprise death that occurs from an accident, heart attack, or stroke, etc.

In addition, there is *compounded stress* that comes with multiple crises over a short period of time. With these potentials of compounded stress and anxiety come the *increased risk* of depression, panic attacks, mental exhaustion, or just overall dysfunction. This type of *crisis event* can be very debilitating and is able to overwhelm an individual rather quickly. So, what can we do to help ourselves be better prepared to deal with the stresses, fears, and associated anxieties that come to us in the course of our lives?

Consider Job—A Case Study

The book of Job is quite the story of a man of God—a patriarch—of the Bible. The book is a testament to certain tactics and methods that are explained for our consideration on how to cope with *compounded crises*. Assuming we are somewhat familiar with the content of the book, we understand Job was exposed to some *extreme crisis events*—actual tragedies—that really don't get much worse than what he experienced.

The back story involves Satan propositioning God to allow him to have his way with Job for the purpose of proving Job's love for God was conditional. God allowed the event with certain stipulations. However, for the purpose of this article, I'd like to stay focused on the crises that Job experienced in the first few chapters only, and how he handled them as they played out.

So, in the opening chapter, we read what tragedies unfolded. There were four major losses Job was informed of within minutes of each other. The Sabaeans stole his oxen and asses and killed his servants. Then fire came down from heaven and burned all his sheep and killed those servants. Next, the Chaldeans stole all his camels and killed more of his servants. And finally, a great wind came and killed all his children while they were eating and visiting at their older brother's house. All this happened before Job could mentally and emotionally process each event—one after another—within minutes of receiving the news of each one (Job 1:13–19).

Job's reaction was stellar. Notice what happened.

Continued next page



All of us eventually have to deal with the grief associated with the death of a loved one.

“Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this *Job sinned not*, nor charged [or, attributed folly to] God foolishly” (Job 1:20–22).

He just lost his sons and daughters, along with a major part of his assets, and upon receiving the *compounding news* within minutes of each other, one upon the other, he reacts by tearing his clothes, shaving his head, and falling onto the ground—prostrates himself—and begins to humbly beseech God and makes obeisance, and begins reverently praying. **Wow!** What a display of faith, commitment, and resolve to God!

But Satan doesn’t give up. He returns and presents a new proposition, and God again allows it, but, as before, with certain stipulations. And in chapter 2, the Bible describes Job as being smitten with boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. Interestingly enough, he takes a potsherd (a piece of pottery) and begins to scrape his skin while sitting in some ashes. His wife comes along and demands he curse God and die! Imagine that—his wife turns on him and orders him to give up his integrity and relationship with God! Clearly, we now know he has a marital crisis going on, too! Talk about being compounded with stress and anxiety—this combination of events had it all!

But Job resists the demand of his wife and pushes back at her, claiming she sounds like “one of the foolish women.” He tells her that if God can bless, He also rightly *reserves prerogative* to take away. And the Bible says; “In all this *did not Job sin* with his lips” (Job 2:7–10). This is stunning! Many people would have turned on God, claiming He’s out to get me and lost faith, after all this *compounded tragedy and crisis*.

After some time three friends of Job came to visit him. And after seeing him, they could hardly believe their eyes and were so moved; they wept and cried out loud while mourning and sharing in his grief and sorrow. The four of them sat for seven days and nights, not saying a word to each other, knowing full well that Job was overwhelmed with grief, stress, and sorrow over his losses (Job 2:11–13).

Lessons Learned In the House of Crisis

The story of Job is an illustration of the words of Solomon, when he said, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.... Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth [feasting]” (Ecclesiastes 7:2–4). These words of wisdom from this ancient king of Israel are *truisms of life*. And why do you think that is?

In answering this, we must understand how a crisis affects us. Clearly, these events have a tendency to slow us down and sometimes stop us in our pursuits (as it did for Job), allowing us time to reevaluate our situation—our life’s course—and possibly redirect our attention and effort for a renewed approach in our life. A crisis could be described as an “*exciting time of distress*” that can cause sleepless nights, reflective thought, or analytical and searching considerations for the reasons, the “wherefores,” the “how’s and why’s” that precipitated the circumstances and conditions you find yourself confronted by. It’s in this “*zone of self-actualization*” that clarity and answers are often realized.

In the story of Job, though there are many lessons we could describe that he learned, for this article I’d like to focus only on his *initial responses* God confirmed favorable enough to say, “he [Job] sinned not.”

Continued next page



Tragic accidents (above) and massive destruction from fires (below) and natural disasters (bottom) occur frequently and are among the many challenging crises human populations have to endure in the present world.



It's these initial reactions he exhibited that we find the keys, which point us in the direction for *improving our crisis toleration and coping mechanisms*.

In the first chapter, Job is described as *immediately humbling himself and, secondly, proceeding to pray*. He concedes to God as his "superior provider" and clearly states God had the right to determine what was necessary in his life. Job was in complete agreement that God gives and He takes away as He (God) deems necessary. *Job was all right with this!* As a result of this *mental and emotional approach*, we read, "Job sinned not" by not attributing folly to God (Job 1:20–22).

In Job 2, we see Job's health became the target, and though he did what he thought was right to alleviate some of the discomfort by scraping the boils, he again humbled himself and sat in ashes, waiting on God. However, his wife insisted he give up on God—to curse God—and die! But, to Job's credit, he stood his ground and doubled down, telling his wife she spoke as a foolish women, reminding her that God has the prerogative to provide good as well as evil, if He should see fit. And again we are told, "in all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2:7–10). He was perfectly comfortable with the idea God was

indeed the potter, and he was merely the clay (Romans 9:20–21).

Some of the lessons we see presented here at the outset of Job's crises are: **1)** He humbled himself. **2)** He talked with God immediately. **3)** He did what he could to help himself. **4)** He remained resolved in his faith that God had his best interests at heart. **5)** Regardless of the criticism, or outside pressures to persuade him to give up on God, he remained committed and did not waver in his belief God was indeed for him.

One Last Thing

But, there is *one overall lesson* we need to understand about *crisis management* that God would like us to *recognize and internalize—embrace—for* the value it can provide. It is a simple trait all of us need to learn that, if adhered to, will enhance our faith as we go through the crisis for the *growth opportunity* it presents. In Hebrews, we see it mentioned: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews 10:38).

Having the courage, confidence, and assurance that God is for you, how can you allow yourself to

draw back, doubt, or retreat in fear and allow yourself to waver and hesitate in uncertainty? Brethren, if God is for you, who can be against you? *And this is at the basis when facing life's crises!*

We must all strive for a level of faith that gives us the *sense of security* that we have God's approval, regardless (Romans 8:1, 24–29)! Fully acknowledging He has our back and wants us to succeed in this Christian lifestyle of conversion. Our goal is to achieve the salvation He has given us access to, knowing He is saying, if you come to me, I will give you rest and you shall find rest unto your souls (Matthew 11:28–30).

So, if you believe this, then ask yourself as the apostle Paul asked: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ" (Romans 8:35)? Go ahead, read the rest of the chapter through verse 39. It's a testament to our "*Job-like resolve*" that God is supreme in our lives and there is nothing—no crisis bad enough—in this world that can rob us of our destiny, which is ours to have if we endure to the end!

Now, do we believe enough—are we completely convinced—that no crisis we face will ever subdue or stop our endeavor to obtain our inheritance and destiny? I pray we are!

Seeking God In the Midst of Calamity

by George Roper



The universal scope of recent events has been unprecedented, or so we would be inclined to believe. Oftentimes, the presumption is that the things that we face are unique to our modern day. Contrastingly, the Bible is filled with narratives of people and nations encountering societal altering turmoil, much like today. Many would not have been able to fathom a global crisis that contemporaneously affected the world with a pandemic, interrupted daily routines, and pivoted the financial markets towards an economic depression.

The evolvement of this plight is proving to be catastrophic, leaving governments and their citizens alike in a quandary. As individuals themselves navigate the extent of their personal experiences, many are left attempting to rationalize the causality of it all. Are recent cascading events simply due to the natural emergence of a virus? Are they due to mismanagement by governing administrations and a delay in responding to epidemiological forecasts? Or is there a nefarious scheme driving developments behind the scenes?

Various impressions exist as to the origins of recent unfoldings and the possible motives behind them. Many question if such happenings are calculated. Yet, what is paramount is how each of us are to personally respond through all of this. The accounts of calamities, conspiracies, and fact-based antidotes that are preserved in the pages of the Bible are there as examples for us to learn from.

Calamities have been a part of the human experience from the beginning of man's civilization. These occurrences are relayed to us in great detail through the accounts of the Bible. The purpose of journalism in God's Word is not meant to scare us. Rather, the cumulative history of the Scriptures is intended for us to learn from and assure us that maintaining a relationship with God is the optimum way to live (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Many of the biblical calamities detailed share the same economic repercussions and are accompanied by the same emotional unsettlement that we are witnessing in our time. The tendency, though, is to discount those stories as being out-

dated and not applicable to our present-day experience. King Solomon criticized this very viewpoint in his observations.

"What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them" (Ecclesiastes 1:9–11, NIV throughout).

So, it is in our best interest to be circumspect and heed the cautions derived from the accounts of times passed.

There are many examples of calamities referenced in the Bible that caused great upheaval to everyday life. One such report surrounds the famine that took place in Egypt during Joseph's tenure as a high ranking official. An economic forecast prognosticated that there would be an initial downturn in Egypt's financial markets brought on by famine to the region. As a result, steps were taken to ensure that the nation would be prepared in the event of a catastrophic collapse of its economic structure (Genesis 41). During the years of positive gains in the Egyptian financial markets, monies were allocated to a relief fund to be implemented in the future. After a seven-year cycle of gains in the Egyptian financial market, a famine took hold in the area. These conditions of famine extended for seven years. The nations of the Mediterranean, who were agriculturally based societies, essentially saw the international economies crash. Egypt was impacted as well. However, due to the Egyptian administration's preparedness, governmental assistance programs and stimulus packages were able to give support to Egyptian citizens and the surrounding nations. People were allowed to mortgage and refinance their properties by way of federal loans, government supportive housing was established, welfare programs were implemented, new tax categories were imposed, and loan forgiveness programs in exchange for government service were constituted. Egypt also had advantageous international trade agreements due to its position of abundance. All of this helped stimulate the economy and made the monarchy very wealthy moving forward (Genesis 47:13–26).

What is interesting to note is that the forthcoming solution to this challenge for the sitting Egyptian administration was coming from God—not polls, not tracking statistics, not partisan politics. After experiencing a dream that appeared to have greater implications, Pharaoh called a special counsel meeting. Pharaoh was briefed on approaching adverse developments, whereby it was made clear that the countermeasure was disseminating from God.

"Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.'

"I cannot do it,' Joseph replied to Pharaoh, 'but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires'" (Genesis 41:15–16).

At the onset, Joseph made it known that direction comes from God. Pharaoh embraced that view and recognized God's authority. At the behest of God, Pharaoh looked to implement the policy actions relayed to him through Joseph.

"So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?'

"Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you'" (Genesis 41:37–39).

Pharaoh found himself at the epicenter of an upcoming catastrophe. He recognized that God delivers direction and that heeding God's implementations was the best approach to addressing the challenges that his nation faced. If this modality were implemented today, collectively and individually, we would all be better for it. We may not always be privy to the root causes of the dilemmas that we face. Nevertheless, a God-centric response is indisputably the best way to address them.

In its recounting, the biblical narratives are not naïve to the disingenuous behaviors demonstrated by some in positions of influence. Such individuals are not averse to disseminating information to the masses that is inaccurate in order to ensure or protect their personal gain. As a result, the public can receive information with degrees of falsehood that inconspicuously hide a true agenda, thereby hampering the public's ability to judge the pros and cons of rel-

Continued next page

evant topic points. Such is the nature of a conspiracy. Incidentally, conspiracies that were propagated are acknowledged by the Bible. One of the most obstructing conspiracies addressed by the Bible centers on the resurrection of Christ.

Following Christ's death, the chief priests and the Pharisees recalled Christ's assertion that He would be raised to life after the passing of three days. The Jewish leaders had concerns that Jesus's followers would seek to remove His body and feign his revival, in attempts to gain credibility. The religious authorities approached Governor Pilate, who had previously sentenced Christ to death and requested an armed presence at the burial site. Subsequently, Christ's tomb was sealed and a security detail of soldiers was posted (Matthew 27:62–66).

After three days had elapsed, the guards posted at the burial ground were witness to an earthquake and observed an angel remove the stone at the entrance to the tomb (Matthew 28:1–4), all of which accompanied Christ's resurrection. In turn, they reported these occurrences to the Jewish leaders.

"...some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day" (Matthew 28:11b–15).

Even though this conspiracy was propagated, it did not change the truth of what occurred. It did not change what was accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection. It did not change the barrier that was removed between us and God by Christ's sacrifice. Nor did it change our continuing opportunity and responsibility to maintain a relationship with God. Likewise, although a conspiracy may be valid, it does not change the onus upon us to continue to engage God as we should.

The Bible is a book of fact-based anecdotes that,

when applied, enables us to have a healthy relationship with God (John 17:17). In the course of our lives, we can become distracted by the calamities that we encounter. We can become distracted by the fallacies associated with the origin of those calamities. Our response to those aspects entails that we do not deviate from nurturing our relationship with God. That is our primary pursuit. It does not change when calamity falls upon us and it does not change if pertinent disclosures prove to be less than transparent. Christ pointed this out as he referenced incidents that occurred in the recent events of his day.

"Now there were some present at that time who

As we calculate how to respond in this current atmosphere, it is contingent upon us not to lapse in investing in our relationship with God.

told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish'" (Luke 13:1–5).

Christ's audience tended to shift focus away from the fact that working on a relationship with God is the most important aspect in any scenario. Christ explained that their relationship with God being the most relevant concern is not offset by the actual calamity or any conspiratorial bent. Many of Christ's day believed that dire experiences only happened to sinful people. It was believed the more catastrophic a person's experience was, the greater that person's

sin. Christ undercuts any reason to think that some have less of a need to emphasize their relationship with God as their greatest objective than others do. In responding to the fatal experience of the Galileans, He referred to the Judean fatalities at the tower of Siloam. Judeans comprised the audience that He was then speaking with. The Judeans believed themselves to be more righteous than those who lived in other communities because they lived closer to the temple and had greater access. Again, Christ pointed out that people of all circumstances have sustaining a relationship with God as their greatest concern, irrespective of who they are, where they live, what type of calamity they experience, or the degree of conspiracy that may surround an event.

Current events have proven to be tumultuous for many. Some have experienced greater hardships than others. In our midst, people have fallen ill, lost loved ones, lost employment, and experienced financial distress. Still, others find this precipitous climate of turmoil to be very taxing and worrisome. As we calculate how to respond in this current atmosphere, it is contingent upon us not to lapse in investing in our relationship with God. Doing so involves *study* (exposing ourselves to the medium of God's Word), *prayer* (continual), *fasting* (at our discretion), *action* (applying God's precepts), *endurance* (practicing these things against the current of life), and *repeating* (repeat this cycle).

Amid the catastrophes that we may encounter, the shortcomings that occur—in the dissemination of information and governmental policies or our elected officials—must not be allowed to deter us and cause us to abort pursuing a relationship with God. This is our primary objective. This objective is always in season—pre-calamity, mid-calamity and post-calamity.

In giving an overview of what His followers would have to contend with, Christ admonished all of us: "but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13).

Despite the angst around us, we should take comfort in what awaits us as we continue our resolve to fortify our relationship with God, enacting the spiritual facts of God's Word in our life.

Is *Sola Scriptura* an Essential Doctrine?

by Vance A. Stinson

In his article "Ten Thousand Chickens for One Thousand Bibles: Some Practical Problems for *Sola Scriptura*" (<http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/ten-thousand-chickens-for-one-thousand-bibles-0>), Catholic apologist Jimmy Akin, toward the end of the piece, writes: "In summary, *sola scriptura* presupposes (1) the existence of the printing press, (2) the universal distribution of Bibles, (3) a cash-based economy, (4) universal literacy, (5) the universal possession of scholarly support materials, (6) the universal possession of adequate time for study, and (7) a universal education in a high level of critical thinking skills."

Actually, *sola scriptura* presupposes *none* of these things. "*Sola scriptura* [or "Scripture alone"] simply means that all truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life is taught either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture" (<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-sola-scriptura-mean/>). The truth of *sola scriptura* does not depend on the availability of Scripture. If there were only one Bible in the world, and that one Bible was sealed in a vault 200 feet below the floor of the deepest part of the Atlantic Ocean, *sola scriptura* would still be true. All truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life would still be recorded in written form within the pages of that buried book.

Essential truth can be conveyed through different media, not just a book. Christians who embrace *sola scriptura* do not believe that essential truth depends on the availability—or even the existence—of a collection of inspired documents. It's just that they reject the view that the Church or a particular institution within the Church is an infallible source or interpreter of divine revelation.

Akin continues: "Needless to say, this group of conditions [the above seven points] was not met in the crucial early centuries of the Church, was not met through the main course of Church history, and is not met even today. The nonexistence of the printing press alone means *sola scriptura* was unthinkable for almost three-quarters of Christian history."

This is faulty logic. The availability of Scripture is unrelated to believing that "all truth necessary for our salvation and spiritual life is taught either explicitly or implicitly in Scripture." Men bled and died to make Scripture universally available because they knew it contained the words of eternal life. Would Akin argue against papal infallibility on the basis that it was unthinkable for the first several hundred years of Christian history? No! He would argue that papal infallibility was true from the beginning but came to light through the centuries-long process of the "development of doctrine." If that's the way the

Holy Spirit works in bringing truth to light, why is it so unthinkable that *sola scriptura* could be true though Bibles were not widely available for the greater part of Christian history? Is it possible that the present availability of Scripture is due to the Holy Spirit working in the lives of godly men?

The apostle Paul, speaking primarily of the Old Testament, says, "All Scripture is *BREATHED-OUT* of God..." (2 Timothy 3:16). The people who devoted their lives to printing and distributing the Bible believed this to the core of their being. That's why they did it! The fact that the Bible was not widely available in previous centuries says absolutely nothing about its value.

Akin concludes: "But if God expects the average Christian to obtain and maintain the Christian faith without using *sola scriptura*, then *sola scriptura* is not God's plan."

Who says it is? The Bible is valuable because it contains the words of eternal life. How those words are distributed is inconsequential. Whether the gospel is delivered orally or through the written word or by sign language makes no difference as long as the message is understandable and recipients can respond to it.

The "gospel of Christ," says the apostle Paul, "is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who

believes” (Romans 1:16). The “gospel of Christ” is not synonymous with “Scripture.” It is contained within the pages of Scripture, but Scripture contains far more than the gospel of Christ. The saving “gospel of Christ” is “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The faith was “delivered to the saints” before Jude wrote this short letter. In fact, it was delivered before there was a New Testament, so the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation, does not include the New Testament

canon. Neither *sola scriptura* nor the canon are doctrines of the gospel of Christ. Both are important, but neither are a part of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

The gospel of Christ is not so complicated or complex that it cannot be delivered and responded to in a brief space of time. Just read the account of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16. The gospel—the good news of the Messiah and His Kingdom—was proclaimed and received in various places down

through history *in spite of* widespread apostasy, high rates of illiteracy, and a serious shortage of Bibles.

Today, thankfully, the Bible is widely available; it’s more available than ever before. The poorest among us can acquire a copy, or even multiple copies. We even find Bibles in lobbies and hotel rooms.

We are fortunate in this regard, so let us be *exceedingly thankful* for this blessing—and let us *make the most of it!*

Here Come the Firstfruits of the Harvest!

by Horane Smith



In these days of a pandemic, and as another annual Sabbath approaches, the true Bible-believing people who seek to worship God in Spirit and in Truth have their minds now set on the Feast of Firstfruits, better known as the Day of Pentecost, which will be on May 31, this year. (Many of you may have already observed this feast by the time you read this.)

There are many who claim today to be a Bible-believing church; there are many who will observe Pentecost as well, but not as an annual Sabbath as it truly is, but a day when many erroneously believe was the first “Sunday service” in the New Testament Church or when speaking in tongues began.

Pentecost is rightly the birthday of the New Testament Church, no debate about that, but Pentecost is more than the church’s birthday. It’s a pity people who claim to attend a Bible-believing church, a term you often hear from the popular televangelists, don’t take up their Bibles and read it, rather than depending on others to teach them what is not in there.

Let’s get some aspects of what Pentecost is from your Holy Bible and not what is uttered from pulpits—mostly based on traditions that are not biblically-based or beliefs that are not sound doctrine.

The first question I’d like to pose: If Jesus Christ and His apostles were to return to Earth today and decided to observe Pentecost, what reason would they have to do that? What was the reason Jesus Christ told them shortly before His ascension, “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). This was the promise of the Comforter, His Holy Spirit, and truly that Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost—another meaning and another promise fulfilled.

Jesus Christ knew His followers would be attending or gathered for the annual Sabbath or High Holy Day of Pentecost (Leviticus 23), which was only ten days away. They were going to be there because, as



Jesus did while he was on Earth, His followers observed these days as well. PENTECOST WAS NOT THE FIRST SUNDAY SERVICE. It was an annual Sabbath, or Holy Day, God’s “appointed time” (Genesis 1:14), which are outlined in Leviticus 23. Pentecost, or the Feast of Firstfruits, is one of these seven annual Sabbaths or Holy Days outlined in the Old Testament. God describes them as “my feasts,” or “feasts of the LORD,” not a feast of the Jews, as many teach erroneously.

Some Christians believe Pentecost is about “speaking in tongues” and they leave it there. Unfortunately, their speaking in tongues is far from what happened at Pentecost. In fact, it bears no resemblance to what happened on that annual Sabbath. Yes, a Sabbath! Some Christians don’t like to hear the word *Sabbath*, because it is supposedly done away with, or it’s for the “Jews” and has no place in Christian worship? Really? That’s another story. If you haven’t heard this before, you will hear it now. Neither Jesus nor His followers, before and after His crucifixion, observed Sunday as a day of worship. They observed the weekly and the annual Sabbaths. Luke 24:53 tells us they continued in the temple worshipping as they were doing before. That’s for another article.

Do you notice another name for the Holy Day? Most people refer to it as the Day of Pentecost; another name is the Feast of Firstfruits. Firstfruits? In agriculture, it usually refers to the “first fruits” of the grain harvest. However, there is a deep spiritual meaning to the concept of firstfruits. Why? Jesus Christ is regarded as firstfruits. Yes, He

rose from the dead to become the FIRST OF FIRSTFRUITS of all those who have died and will die.

Read this from 1 Corinthians 15: “But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ’s at His coming” (verses 20–23). Read it again to grasp this amazing truth!

The concept of firstfruits and the meaning of this this Holy Day, or annual Sabbath, is so clear. If you are a follower of Christ, “the First of Firstfruits,” then why are YOU not observing this festival and the six other annual Sabbaths with all their true meaning?

It’s not about speaking in tongues! This festival pictures the great harvest of human beings that is coming and how Christ, through His death, burial, and resurrection, makes it possible for those who repent and accept Him as LORD and Saviour, can become firstfruits in the first resurrection, which has been described as “the better resurrection.”

Certainly, there will be more than one resurrection, but just as the “first fruit” of the harvest is usually the better, so it will be for those in the first resurrection—the first of firstfruits.

My friend, if God is calling YOU, now is the time to turn to Him and to repent and believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ and His coming Kingdom.

For more information on this subject, request your FREE copy of our brochure, *Answers to Questions About the DAY OF PENTECOST*. You can download it from our website, or send for a paper copy.

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3900 Timms Street
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(903) 939-2929
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Holy Day Calendar for 2020

- New Testament Passover: April 7 (Observed at sundown)
- Feast of Unleavened Bread: April 9–15
- Pentecost: May 31
- Feast of Trumpets: September 19
- Day of Atonement: September 28
- Feast of Tabernacles: October 3–9
- Last Great Day: October 10

Holy days are observed beginning at sundown the previous evening and ending at sundown on the days listed. Passover is observed at sundown on the day listed.

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When you find yourself at the crossroads, look and ask for the ancient paths

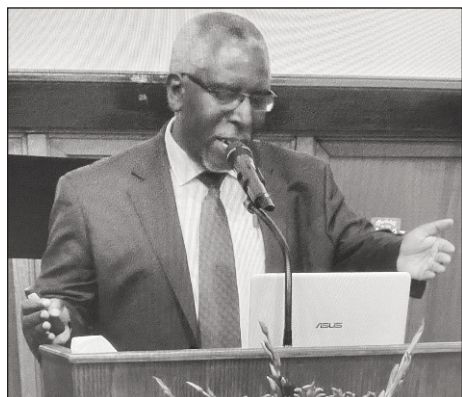
by Robert Onsando

Greetings!

I would like everyone to meet Robert Osando from Kenya. One of my new tasks since I began working for the Church last fall was to deal with our ministries overseas, especially in Africa and India. Recently, I came into contact with Robert Onsando. Robert will be assisting me in organizing our work in Kenya and, along with others, in Africa. I asked Robert to provide us with a short article on his journey to finding the Church of God International.

—Mike James

I was born 53 years ago in a remote village of Kisii county, in the western part of Kenya, to a military man working for Kenya Air Force and a housewife mom. Mom was a practicing Adventist, while my dad was a member of the Lutheran church just by name. I never saw him attend church



Robert Osando of Kenya

even once. Mom taught us Christian ways, while dad was away on duty. In our community, we had three dominant religious organizations—Catholic, Lutheran, and Seventh-day Adventist. The Catholic Church was liberal, the Lutheran Church was slightly strict, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church was very strict on its doctrines.

My call to ministry started manifesting at age 28. I had graduated as a mechanical engineer. My cousin brother, who was a powerful preacher with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, influenced me to register as a literature evangelist. I was later trained on evangelism skills and approaches. I participated in door-to-door evangelism, distributing of church literature, open-air meetings, and planting churches. I was ordained as an Elder in 1998, due to my “selfless and astounding” performance. In the year 2000, the church appointed me to be in charge of a girl child and women empowerment program with Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), which was a non-governmental organization (NGO) for the church, dealing with development projects, relief during disasters, and reaching out to places within which the church was not allowed to preach.

The church was starting a television station in the year 2010, and I was picked to spearhead the project. I established the first church-managed television in Kenya, called Hope Channel Television Kenya, which is an

affiliate of Hope Channel International. I had the opportunity to attend several international meetings. I was appointed to be in charge of television program production for Africa. Thereafter, an opportunity came up to attend theological training in one of the international universities based in Kenya (Baraton University). I was registered as a theology student. All was well in the first two years. It was in my third-year that “hell broke loose,” when I openly disagreed with my lecturer on doctrinal issues, among them the Trinity, Jesus’ crucifixion on Friday, and over relying on Ellen G. White’s writings. I disagreed with a statement I found in the church doctrines, and I quote, “her writings being a continuing and authoritative source of truth.” When I wanted to understand about the annual feasts I was told to do what I am taught and not direct the lecturers. I was reprimanded for disown-



Robert at work with Hope Channel TV Kenya

ing the Ellen G. White concept of 1844 prophecy and Investigative Judgment, which form the pillar of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My course was discontinued on doctrinal disobedience—they used the word *heresy*. A letter was circulated in all the Seventh-day Adventist churches in Kenya, about 1,300 in number, with clear instructions not to allow me to preach in any of the churches.

As I was pondering the next move, I started searching for a church through the Internet but with specific characteristics: 1) keep the seventh-day Sabbath; 2) baptize by immersion; 3) keep the Ten Commandments; 4) believe in both Old and New Testaments; 5) Christ-centered. I, therefore, landed into two churches

with those qualities 1) Church of God (Seventh Day) and 2) Church of God International. Based on my personal judgment, I found myself picking Church of God (Seventh Day), and after contacting their Denver office, I was referred to the African representative who oriented me and embraced me into the Church of God (Seventh Day) family. I embarked on serious study of Church of God (Seventh Day) literature. I got more and more excited.

I visited the headquarters in Denver, Colorado in the year 2016. While there, I met Elder Robert Coulter, one of the church historians and former President of General Conference, who ordained me in Denver, Colorado. I was blessed with the important information about the church. The church identified my gift of developing organizational structures, and I swung into action developing a strategic plan for the international Ministerial Congress of the Church of God (Seventh Day). Because of the magnitude of involvement in the work of God and travels, I resigned from my government job as a County Liaison and Diaspora Affairs advisor. I visited the United States as well as other international countries several times to train ministers.

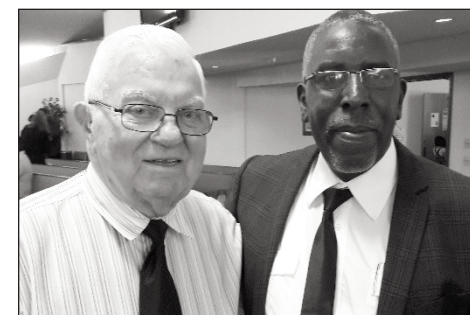
It was at this point in time I encountered two challenges that I tried to address silently—but to no avail. One was hierarchical leadership, where some leaders felt they were more powerful than others and nothing would happen without their endorsement. Another challenge was even more serious, and this was keeping the Lord’s annual feasts. I had been convicted that we had to keep all seven of the Lord’s feasts, based on several major points: one, they were the Lord’s feasts; two, they were to be celebrated at appointed times; three, they were lasting ordinances, forever, generations to generations; four, Jesus Christ participated in the feasts as did the apostles whom we are supposed to emulate as they followed Christ’s example; and finally, this forms God’s calendar of events when it comes to the plan of salvation.

I now realized that it would be difficult to please God while not following His instructions. One day while I was meditating and thinking about my relationship with my God, something told me that I may have taken a wrong path. You need to revisit your options, to be honest.

I went back to my memory lane and asked myself: Why did I judge the Church of God International on face value? I revisited my communications with CGI through the *Armor of God* postings in my email, which of course I was less committed because of my serious commitment with the Church of God (Seventh Day), as I did not want to mix myself. I opened the website once again and there I was, going

through the statements of faith. For the first time it seemed to me like I was reading my own script. What a coincidence! It was what I believed in and was looking for. I blamed myself for having not picked the Church of God International from the beginning. Why, I asked myself, did I judge it from face value? It was time to get to the right path, though I was worried how many times I was going to make wrong turns. What if this is wrong again!

This time I had to seek for God’s intervention just to be sure of the path before I make this move. Albeit all signals were directing me to the right path, I had to ask my director (Holy Scriptures) with the help of the Holy Spirit. I embarked on serious study of the statements of faith once again. This time I was certain. I shared the same with my wife and my children, and we all agreed that it was time to approach



Mr. Osando and Robert Coulter

the Church of God international. I prayed a lot for God’s direction, and I found the answer in the book of Jeremiah 6:16, NIV. This is what the Lord says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask for where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.” And, of course, I did not want to ignore this call.

Mike James responded to my email, and there is where my journey with CGI reconnects. What excites me most is the servant leadership biblical concept and the keeping of the seven annual feasts. It does not matter how long it has taken you to reach your destination; what matters is, are you finally there and doing the will of the LORD?

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Church of God International will be hosting a Feast of Tabernacles site in New York this year. Information about the site can be found at cgi.org/fot and at cginewyork.org/fot. For additional information, you may contact Mike James by email. His address is: mhames6044@gmail.com.



FEAST OF TABERNACLES NEW YORK

Catholics, the Orthodox, and Protestants (Calvinists and Arminians alike), believe that God knows the future perfectly. The point of disagreement usually begins with the question of *how* God knows the future.

Some say that God literally looks through the corridors of time and sees all future events in minute detail. He (figuratively) looks into a heavenly crystal ball and sees the future. But the majority opinion appears to be that God is outside time, that the entire history of the universe—past, present, and future—is present to Him. This means that both the first day of creation week and the last day of human history are equally present to God. Thus there is no before or after in God; He dwells in the “eternal now.”

The “eternal now” concept, however, is theoretical; it cannot be considered a biblical teaching. Some cite Isaiah 57:15, which describes God as “the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity,” as scriptural support for the “eternal now” concept, but the verse simply means that God lives forever. It should not be understood as a revelation on the nature of time.

There are competing theories on the nature of time, and theologians attempt to align biblical data on the nature of God with one or more of these theories. What follows is my view, which is based on my present understanding of the biblical data and the nature of time.

Here is a summary of my views on the past, present, and future, and how God relates to them:

- The past and future are not dimensions of reality that exist side-by-side with the present.
- The future exists only conceptually.
- The past exists only in memory.
- There is no time other than now.
- God lives in the same now we live in.

It is true that God lives in the eternal now, but only in the sense that He always exists and it is always now. There is never a time when it is not now. Time travel—jumping into the past or the future—makes for great science fiction, but it is utterly impossible, even for God. Some have supposed that God has the past, present, and future before Him and can reach into any point of time and change whatever He wants. No, He cannot. He can influence future outcomes by actions in the present, but (1) He cannot enter into realms that do not exist, and (2) He cannot change the past. Even if He could, He could not do so without changing the future.

If God reached into the past and killed the three-year-old Adolph Hitler, a whole new world would emerge. Many who died in war and in the Holocaust would go on to have children, and their children would have children, and on and on it goes. And many who exist in this world would not exist in that world, because the chain of events that led to their existence would be different. Changing the events—correcting mistakes and eliminating evils—of the past would result in the creation of multiple, seemingly infinite, worlds.

Besides, if the past, present, and future are side-by-side dimensions of reality, and if you had a time machine that allowed you to go into the past, then you could travel back to yesterday and meet the you of yesterday. But would the person really be you? When Mr. Spock of the future went back in time and met his younger self, he was a different self. They were two people conversing with each other. So if time travel were possible, then it would appear that the life of every person is really a succession of persons. The “me” reading these words will soon be replaced by a different “me.” The question is, where does the self of one moment end and the self of the next moment begin? And suppose you jumped into yesterday and killed your self of yesterday. What would happen to you as soon as you killed your yes-

Is God Outside Time?

by Vance A. Stinson

terday self? Would you pop out of existence? If so, then who killed yesterday’s self? There would be no tomorrow’s self to do the job.

The past does not exist as a dimension of reality. The future does not exist. If it did, it would not be the future; it would be the present. And that’s all there is—the present—and it’s now!

God’s foreknowledge, therefore, is really *fore*-knowledge. He looks ahead and sees what is coming. The future is just as much the future to Him as it is to us. But the future, being conceptual and not a settled reality, is a vast sphere of *possibilities*. God, being infinite, knows the future perfectly, but knowing the future perfectly means knowing all possibilities *as* possibilities, not as settled events. It also means having perfect knowledge of the options He has in how He may respond to each of the seemingly infinite possibilities. There is no possible event or possible response He is unaware of. So He is never caught off guard without a backup plan. He is not a nail-biting, hand-wringing God who worries that things could get out of control and cause Him to fail.

This view is often called open theism, or openness theology. I prefer to simply call it the biblical view of the Creator and His creation. In Scripture, God hopes, grieves, changes His mind, waits to see, expresses disappointment, and even has regrets. Many claim these are merely anthropomorphic expressions, but why assume they are anthropomorphisms? Why not take them as meaningful (rather than convenient) descriptions of God interacting with the creatures who bear His image and likeness?

The classical (traditional) view of how Creator and creation relate, in my opinion, fails to reconcile the following two propositions: **1)** God loves all humankind and desires all to be saved but grants to humans the freedom to choose whether or not to love Him. **2)** God freely created this world but knew from eternity who would be saved and who would be lost. Openness theology provides a solution by revising the second proposition, positing that God knows the future as partly settled and partly open.

Calvinists and Arminians alike believe that God freely created the world. This means He could have created a different world or no world at all. Yet, both theological systems teach that God, from eternity, has had exhaustive knowledge of the future, including knowledge of your ultimate destiny as well as knowledge of every detail of your entire life. In both systems, the future is fully settled. God knows only facts, not possibilities. Calvinists, however, believe God knows the future because He predestined all things. Arminians, on the other hand, believe that God simply knows the future, and that predestination is based on foreknowledge.

Arminians emphasize that God’s foreknowledge of an event is not the cause of the event, just as one’s knowledge of a past event is not the cause of that event. But that’s sidestepping the issue. No one is claiming that knowledge of an event causes the event. The issue is this: If God freely chose to make this world, though He could have made a different world or no world at all, and if He knew from eternity that in this world Bob would choose salvation and Bill would not, then how is it that God’s decision to create this world instead of a different world or no world was not an act of predetermining the destinies of Bill and Bob?

Some Arminians would respond by saying that God did predetermine the destinies of Bill and Bob, but His predestining of Bill and Bob was preceded by His knowledge of Bill and Bob’s free-

will choices, so God is not at fault. I get that, but if God chose to create this world, then He freely chose to create a world wherein Bill’s salvation was *never a possibility*.

There is also a problem with understanding God’s freedom. Most believe God “most freely” chose to make this world; He could have made a different choice. It seems to me, however, that if God, from eternity, knew with infallible certainty that He would choose to make *this* world, not some other world or no world at all, it was impossible for Him choose to make any other world, for it is impossible for God or anyone else to do something different from what God knows.

For me, the most rational—and, I believe, biblically sound—solution to these problems is the system usually known as open theism, but also known as openness theology and free-will theism. Gregory A. Boyd, a widely recognized proponent of openness theology, did an excellent introductory presentation on this view. You can watch it on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyZQySJeg4g>.

I also recommend Greg Boyd’s book, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*, and John Sanders’s book, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*.

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Is there hope for Judas?

QUESTIONS: I have just finished listening to a...very powerful sermon [on Judas Iscariot]. My questions:

1. Did Judas commit the unpardonable sin?
2. Did God select Judas for destruction or does Judas yet have an opportunity for salvation in the Second Resurrection?
3. What of the fact that Judas was possessed?
4. What of the scripture in John 13:18?

While this sermon opens very deep, deep questions, my questions are:

1. What is the unpardonable sin?
2. Can a person commit this if he is unconverted?
3. What is it that God will not forgive?

I certainly don't want to commit such a sin and ask God in prayer not to allow such a thing. Please give me some clarity.

ANSWER: Your first question—"Did Judas commit the unpardonable sin?"—is a difficult one, as some scriptures seem to indicate there may be hope for Judas, while other scriptures seem to indicate there is no hope for him. We'll come back to this question later, but before we can even begin a discussion on the fate of Judas and whether or not he committed the unpardonable sin, we'll need to answer the first of your second set of questions: "What is the unpardonable sin?"

Simply stated, the unpardonable sin is the *unrepented* sin. God cannot forgive sins if the sinner is not repentant, but He is quick to forgive the sinner who turns to Him in genuine repentance. As John states, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

To "confess our sins" is to admit our sins and turn from them. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever *confesses and forsakes* them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

Writing to fellow believers who may have given in to evil desires, James urges, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:8–10).

God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Repentance is the key. God forgives the sinner as soon as he repents, but where there is no repentance, there is no remission of sins.

The writer of the book of Hebrews warns, "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4–6).

The reason "it is impossible...to renew them again to repentance" is not because God has thrown them in prison, slammed the prison door shut, and locked them in. Rather, it is because they have locked themselves in the prison. *The door to the sinner's prison is locked from the inside.*

If a "backslider" repents—if he is sorry for his sins and wants his relationship with God restored—then he obviously has not fallen so far that repentance is now impossible for him. Such a person can be, and *will* be, pardoned upon genuine repentance.

Can an unconverted person commit an unpardonable sin? Of course! The sins of the unregenerate remain unpardonable until repentance occurs. The sinner who hears the true gospel and is thereby called to repentance and faith still has free will; he

can still choose *whether* to repent and accept God's provisions for salvation. As long as he refuses to repent, his sins cannot be pardoned. They are "unpardonable" *only* because the sinner refuses to meet the conditions God requires. But they are *not* unpardonable in the sense that God will not pardon them under any condition.

Jesus had certain unregenerate Pharisees in mind when He said, "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31–32).

The Pharisees had just attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to "Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (verse 24). Why is speaking against the Holy Spirit unforgivable, though speaking against the Son of Man is not?

Many people who spoke against Jesus (the "Son of Man") would later repent and become truly converted believers (see Acts 2:36–41; 8:1–3; 9:1–19; Galatians 1:13). But the Pharisees' "blasphemy against the Spirit" was particularly grievous because this kind of sin can only come from a heart so hardened that repentance is either unlikely or impossible. Jesus knew the hearts of these Pharisees. He knew their accusation was not from simple ignorance, but was from *willful* ignorance. They *deliberately ignored* the reality that was right there before their eyes! This was *clearly and unmistakably* the power of God at work, but these men chose to openly accuse Jesus of exercising the power of Satan! There was no room in their hearts for repentance—and *that's* why their "blasphemy against the Spirit" was unpardonable.

Again, we see that the key is *repentance*. Where repentance is possible, remission of sins is possible.

The third of your second set of questions, "What is it that God will not forgive?" is answered above. To reiterate, God will not pardon any sin if the person committing it refuses to repent.

And that brings us to your first question: "Did Judas commit the unpardonable sin?"

If Judas truly repented, then his sin, as serious as it was, was not unpardonable. So the more important question is, Did Judas really repent?

One passage *may* suggest that Judas repented once he came face-to-face with the consequences of his sinful actions.

"Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, *was remorseful* and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' And they said, 'What is that to us? You see to it?' Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:3–5).

Judas "was remorseful" and confessed he had "sinned by betraying innocent blood," but was this genuine repentance, or was it self-pity? The fact that he committed suicide only tells us that the emotional consequences of what he had done were overwhelming, but it does not tell us whether or not his

remorse reflected real repentance. His act of returning the silver may suggest real repentance, but it is impossible to know precisely what was in Judas's heart at that moment. At best, Matthew 27:3–5 shows there *may* be hope for Judas.

On the negative side, Judas is called the "son of perdition" (John 17:12), the same title given to the end-time "man of sin," the "lawless one" will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:3–8). "Son of perdition" means "son of *destruction*," a title that connotes the fate of the person to whom it is given.

Further, Jesus, speaking of Judas, says "woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24).

The difficulty here is determining whether the "woe" Jesus pronounces on Judas pertains to his ultimate fate or to the miserable state Judas created for himself through his betrayal of Christ. By taking his own life, Judas was expressing his own remorse-driven disgust with his life. From *his* perspective, at that moment, it would have been good if he had not been born—so he took his own life. It is possible, then, that Jesus was referring to Judas's temporal fate, not his eternal fate. But, again, we cannot be certain.

I could answer your first question only if I could know for certain what was in Judas's heart. Only God knows for sure, so we'll have to leave the matter in His hands.

You asked, "Did God select Judas for destruction or does Judas yet have an opportunity for salvation in the Second Resurrection?"

The White Throne Judgment is a day of *judgment*. For each individual, judgment results in one of two possible outcomes: eternal life or eternal death. The incorrigibly wicked will prove their incorrigibility and will meet their fate in the lake of fire. Others, however, will turn to God with their whole hearts and will receive eternal life. What will the outcome be for Judas? We do not know with any degree of certainty.

But we *do* know that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). If "all men" includes Judas—and I'm sure it does—then God did not "select" him (or *anyone*, for that matter) for destruction.

Some believe that Judas's treachery and fate were prophesied centuries ahead of time and were therefore predetermined by divine decree. The problem with this, however, is that it assumes the Old Testament prophecies the New Testament applies to Judas are *specifically* about Judas and no one else. This is a false assumption.

Peter shows that Judas "fulfilled" certain Old Testament scriptures, but when we read the scriptures Peter cites we realize Judas "fulfilled" them in the sense that Judas's treachery and fate *echoes* descriptions in those passages. These clearly are *not* specific predictions about the one man, Judas Iscariot.

Read Acts 1:15–20, and then carefully read the scriptures Peter applies to Judas:

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, 'Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.

"(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let

no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'"

Peter quotes Psalm 69:25 and 109:8. Let's carefully notice the wording of each:

Psalm 69:25: "Let their dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in their tents."

Psalm 109:8: "Let his days be few, and let another take his office."

In Psalm 69, the psalmist describes the bitter anguish he experiences as his many enemies seek to destroy him. While he is innocent of the charges they bring against him, he admits he is not without sin (verses 4–5). He speaks proverbially when he says, "They [his enemies] also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (verse 21). His enemies are wicked men, and the psalmist does not hesitate to ask for their death: "Let their table become a snare before them, and their well-being a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see; and make their loins shake continually. Pour out Your indignation upon them, and let Your wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in their tents. For they persecute the ones You have struck, and talk of the grief of those You have wounded" (verses 22–26).

New Testament writers apply the psalmist's distress to the suffering Jesus experienced under the hands of wicked men. Much of Psalm 69 is echoed in events associated with Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. This is the sense in which these things are "fulfilled" in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Notice that the psalmist does not speak of a single enemy. He says, "Let *their* dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in *their* tents." Peter applies this verse to Judas, using "his" instead of "their." Judas *did* fulfill this scripture. He "fulfilled" it in the same sense that other statements in the Psalm were fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We find many such statements in the book of Psalms. While some speak specifically of the Messiah, most of them are not specific predictions about the Messiah. They apply to Him and are "fulfilled" by Him in the sense that significant events in His life and ministry echo the persons and events described in those passages.

Psalm 69:25, then, does not specifically single out Judas. The psalmist's prayer is "fulfilled" *every time* a wicked person's treacherous plot is foiled and his "dwelling place" is made "desolate." This scripture "had to be fulfilled" through Judas only because Judas, by his own choice, was the kind of person described in this passage. No doubt, given the political climate of the day and the hate-driven desperation of Jesus' enemies, if Judas had chosen not to go through with the plot, someone would have "stepped up" to do the job. Remember, Satan was also very active in this situation, so, if Judas had changed his mind, the Devil would have been able to "pull it off" through another one of Jesus' many enemies.

Peter also applied Psalm 109:8 (quoted above) to Judas. Here, the "his" refers to *any* of the accusers referred to in verses 2–5. Notice the psalmist's use of "they":

"For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; *they* have spoken against me with a lying tongue. *They* have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause. In return for my love *they* are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer. Thus *they* have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love."

The psalmist then prays that the one (whoever he may be) who accuses him falsely receive the punishment for the crimes he alleges (cf. Deuteronomy 19:16–21): "Set a wicked man over him [the false accuser], and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him be found guilty. And let his prayer [his plea for help] become a sin. Let his days be few, and let another take his office" (Psalm 109:6–8).

While the psalmist speaks of an individual accuser, it is clear that he has in mind *all* his accusers. After expressing his strong feelings against his accuser, he sums up by saying, "Let this be the LORD's reward to my *accusers* [plural], and to *those* who speak evil against my person" (verse 20).

Psalm 109:8, then, prophetically pertains to Judas in the sense that Judas's actions and their consequences echo that of the "accuser" of this verse, but it does not pertain exclusively to the death of Judas and appointment of Metthias to take Judas's place. The "shoe" fits, so Judas has to wear it!

(Editor's note: Let me emphasize that I am not suggesting that there are no specific prophecies about the Messiah and His ministry. Indeed, there are *many*! But it's important to realize that even sections of Scripture that do not specifically speak of the coming "Son of David" are prophetic in the sense that they are echoed in events surrounding Jesus' life, mission, ministry, death, resurrection, and reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.)

This brings us to your question about Matthew 13:18, where Jesus says, "I do not speak concerning all of you [disciples]. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, '*He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.*'"

Again, we need to examine the scripture Jesus is quoting. In this case, He cites Psalm 41:9 and applies it to Himself and Judas. But we would face serious difficulty if we tried to attribute everything in Psalm 41 to Jesus, for not only did the psalmist say, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me," but he also said, just a few verses earlier, "I said, LORD, be merciful to me; heal my soul, for *I have sinned against you*" (verse 4).

As with the other passages we have examined, this one, too, applies to Jesus and Judas in that Judas's treachery echoes the treachery described in it. If Judas had chosen not to go through with the plot to betray Jesus, this passage would not apply to him. But, since he did choose to betray Jesus, this description of the psalmist's experience with a treacherous friend was "fulfilled" through the actions of Judas.

You also asked, "What of the fact that Judas was possessed?" Luke 22:3 and John 13:27 state that "Satan entered" Judas, who then went and conferred with the chief priests and captains on how he might betray Him to them. This means that, at that point in time, Satan took control of Judas. But Judas wasn't an innocent victim; the Devil could not have taken control of him had Judas not already chosen the path that leads to destruction. Satan found a willing agent in Judas Iscariot.

Does the fact that Satan took control of Judas make a difference in the question of whether Judas might still be saved? Perhaps, but we must remember that Judas was a willing participant in Satan's efforts and continued to be a responsible agent. Satan may have been Judas's "partner in crime," but Judas still had his share of the blame. As we have shown, other scriptures identify Judas as the betrayer. He, not Satan, is called the "son of perdition," and Christ is speaking of the man Judas, not the "spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2), when He says, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

Will the real "watchman" please stand up?

QUESTION: Ezekiel 33:1–9 speaks about the work of the watchman. Verse 2 seems to say that a watchman need not be a rabbi, pastor, or even holy. It just says he must be "a man." Then it says he must be "a man of their coasts" (KJV). Some of the OT prophets were just common men and at least one of them didn't want to do the job when God demanded it. This scripture also suggests he can choose him-

self or be popularly chosen by the people as well as God since it says "if the people of the land take a man of their coasts and set him for their watchman." It says it, so must all that be the case? If so, no watchman can be a true or authentic watchman unless he was born near the seashore. So we all need to verify where they were born first before we even go to the next step in our interrogation. Right? Verse 9 follows by saying even if the people do not heed a watchman's message the watchman will not suffer harm due to the punishment delivered by God. Couldn't this also mean he could be a sinner or ... personally flawed, but still be considered a valid watchman in God's eyes or he'd get "a pass" on certain unholy acts or weaknesses not expected from an "agent of God"? This brings me to my question, which is as follows: "What are the qualities God needs on a watchman's resume in order to be chosen, and how can the people know that he is a divinely authorized watchman?" Your answer needs to touch on these Ezekiel passages as well as any others you want to use since I am making this question due to these verses.

ANSWER: Carefully read Ezekiel 33:1–6. This part of the text is not about a spiritual, prophetic, or ecclesiastical office; it's about the responsibilities of the man whose job was to watch for approaching enemy forces. If the watchman saw the enemy approaching, he was to sound the alarm so the people could prepare themselves. The consequences were bad for the people if they ignored the warning, bad for the watchman if he failed to sound the alarm in the first place. This was standard procedure for the nations of that time.

Then, beginning in 33:7, Ezekiel's God-appointed role is *compared to* the job of the man who watches for enemy threats. This section reiterates the prophet's call as "watchman" for the house of Israel (see 3:16–21).

The watchmen in ancient times were usually stationed in towers or on city walls. Their job was to simply observe those approaching the city in order to discern a possible enemy threat before they got too close. The job didn't require them to be priests or prophets or men of outstanding holiness. Many were no doubt military men. And they didn't have to be "born near the sea shore." The expression "a man of their coasts" means "a man from within their *borders*" (see Young's Literal Translation). Most modern English translations capture the correct meaning of the passage. The English Standard Version, for instance, translates Ezekiel 33:2 this way: "Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man *from among them*, and make him their watchman..." (emphasis added).

But, again, this is simply a *comparison* between the responsibilities of the watchman of Ezekiel 33:1–6 and Ezekiel's God-ordained mission. Just as the "watchman on the wall" was to sound the alarm upon seeing the enemy approaching, so Ezekiel was to warn the people upon receiving a warning message from God. And just as the watchman would be held accountable for failing to sound the alarm when a threat appeared, so Ezekiel would be held accountable should he fail to deliver God's message to the people.

With all this in mind, let's answer your question: "What are the qualities God needs on a watchman's resume in order to be chosen, and how can the people know that he is a divinely authorized watchman?"

I believe you are confusing the "watchman on the wall" with the office to which Ezekiel was called. Men choose the former, but not the latter. The former had to be proficient in recognizing enemy threats and sounding the alarm to give the people time to pre-

Continued next page

pare; the latter was called of God to announce God's judgments and call the people to repentance and holy living. As a preacher of holiness, he was to exemplify holiness.

Are there moral, ceremonial, and civil distinctions within the Old Testament law?

QUESTION: I have a question regarding the three law distinctions mentioned in a recent sermon. I have struggled for years to understand the references to moral and ceremonial aspects of the law. Many Sabbath-keeping churches break the law up into two categories: moral and ceremonial. It is my understanding that CGI doesn't use these terms to separate the 10 Commandments (moral) and the remainder of the 613 laws as ceremonial. My question is how do you separate the law into categories or roles, while providing sufficient biblical proof for your assertion?

ANSWER: The three categories of law you refer to are moral, ceremonial, and civil. There is no passage of Scripture that explicitly distinguishes these three categories of law, but when we pursue a careful study to discern the purpose and intent of each law or grouping of laws, we soon discover that some laws are universal (apply to all people at all times), some are covenant-specific (pertain only to people living under the terms of the Old Covenant), and some are judicial (pertain to maintenance of justice in society).

The ceremonial category of law is virtually self-defining. The law of the sin-offering, for instance, existed only because a higher law was being transgressed. Obviously, the sin-offering was not instituted for the purpose of making atonement for persons guilty of failing to present sin-offerings.

Some believe that the civil law is simply an amplification of the moral law. While I would agree that there is an element of truth in this view, it is more accurate to say that the civil law is the *application* of the moral law in Israel's society. For instance, the law regarding the selling of one's daughter (Exodus 21:7–11) is not a universal moral standard; it very clearly belongs to the category of "civil law." The law reflects the social and economic conditions of that day, but its primary purpose was to protect the rights and well-being of the daughter—and that's where the "moral" category of law comes in. So we see that Israel's civil laws are founded on the higher moral law. The same can be said of laws regarding divorce and remarriage, slavery, indentured servitude, etc. These laws, which clearly belong to the category of "civil law," reflect both the societal norms of the day and the good and perfect will of God regarding respect for the rights, properties, and lives of others. The law permitting a man to sell his daughter was, ideally, a beneficial arrangement for both the man and his daughter. He received economic relief, and she benefited by becoming the wife of someone who could provide for her—a poor girl marrying into a wealthy family. However, in our culture, a man could not sell his daughter without violating her rights, so the moral principle underlying this law would be violated. For us, the application of the underlying moral law would be very different. So this law, unlike moral laws, is not a universal law. It does not apply in all times and all places. It belongs to the "civil law" category, and in it we see the application of a moral law.

Scripture itself all but spells out the distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws. Please read 1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6; Psalm 40:6; Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11–17; Jeremiah 6:19–20; Micah 6:6–8; Romans 2:25–27; and 1 Corinthians 7:19. These are but a few; the distinction is everywhere understood and taken for granted.

The two "roles of the law" mentioned in the sermon you referred to are clearly revealed in Scripture,

though there is no text that explicitly defines these roles in just this way. It is clear that the law teaches us how to live (it's a light to our path, a lamp to our feet), and it is equally clear that the law identifies and condemns sin/sinners. I call these the 1) educative role of the law and 2) the judicial role of the law. For a full explanation, request your free copy of the article, "Paul and the Law: Understanding the 'Hard Sayings.'" Or, if you prefer, you may read it online. On our website (cgi.org), click on the "Media" tab, and then click on "Literature." It's the last item of the "Law" section.

What is "conversion"?

QUESTION: Could you please explain conversion to me from a Biblical standpoint?... [My understanding is that] conversion is a process, and it starts with believing. The lady at the well started her process of believing by proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah after communication with Him. Was she at the starting point of being converted? When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church on Pentecost...the salvation process by way of dedication was formed. But don't you have to start [the process] by believing?... To convert...in this context it means to believe and to hold on to that belief. The lady at the well proved she was a changed person because she believed, or was converted, by Jesus so much so that she went to proclaim Him to be the Messiah. Correct? Please help me if I'm wrong in this.

ANSWER: You are correct in noting that "conversion" is a process. I would add that the word "convert" (with correlates "converted," "conversion") can be properly used in reference to *any step* within the process. For example, at some point you *converted* from unbelief to belief. It may have happened as soon as you heard the gospel, or it may have taken more time, but the point is you experienced conversion, though this was not the last conversion experience you would have. You would go on to reform your life. A big conversion experience occurred right away, as you immediately turned from breaking God's law and resolved to obey Him. But, of course, it's not the last conversion experience you had or will have, as you came to realize that the old habits of the "old man" still have a tendency to show themselves under certain conditions, and you have taken (and are taking) steps to prevent that.

Indeed, the Samaritan woman at the well was "converted" by her encounter with Jesus, and presumably she went on to have more conversion experiences in the process.

The term "conversion" also refers to God's act of giving the repentant believer His Spirit. At the moment he receives it, he is miraculously *converted* into a "new creation" in Christ Jesus. We often—perhaps usually—have this meaning in mind when we speak of whether or not a person is "converted." A person who does not yet have the Spirit is not yet converted. A person who does have the Spirit is converted. This is a good and useful definition, but not an exhaustive one.

The ultimate conversion, of course, does not take place until "this mortal puts on immortality" at the Second Coming of Christ.

So, in summary, "conversion" is something that 1) has happened, 2) is happening, and 3) shall happen to each member of the Body of Christ.

Do we believe that calling upon our Creator's name is unimportant?

QUESTION: I don't understand why you and your organization believe that calling upon our Creator's name is unimportant. "Whether they use the Hebrew name or other names and titles to

express this truth is unimportant. What's important is that the names and titles that are used emphasize and uphold God's character, attributes, and good reputation."

The word God means a molten image. Lord is like a husband. Jesus is a Greek and Roman name. The letter J never was invented way back when the Scriptures were written and inspired. I am bothered by this fact and that it's a direct disobedience to the 3rd commandment. I want to be called Richard, just like you would want to be called Vance. Not hey you or human being (just a title). We cannot rely on the translations completely since things were added and taken away from the original Hebrew. It's extremely important that we call upon His name. Our Heavenly Father's name is YHWH, which is pronounced Yahweh, and his only-begotten son came in his name Yahshua, meaning (Yahweh saves).

I am not trying to be argumentative, but I have to stick with what he expects of us within his commandments. Anything else is taking his name in vain.

ANSWER: Read the statement you quoted again. It does not say that calling on the Creator's name is unimportant. I call on His name all the time. In fact, I call on His name even without pronouncing the Hebrew name Yahweh.

You are assuming a person's "name" is simply a verbal label—a particular enunciation (such as "Richard" or "Vance"), irrespective of the meaning behind the label (I'm Vance; that is my name—*regardless* of what Vance means). That is true in our culture, but it was *not true in ancient Hebrew culture*. When Moses asked the Creator, "When the children of Israel ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" the Creator answered, 'I AM THAT I AM. Thus you shall tell them, I AM has sent me to you.'" The Hebrew for "I AM" is *eh-yah*, which, in its verb form, means "shall be." Note that God says plainly that His NAME is *eh-yah*. This NAME is related to, but *pronounced differently from*, *Yahweh*. Essentially, God tells Moses, "My name is I SHALL BE." Then Moses reports to the Israelites, "His name is HE SHALL BE." These two words—*eh-yah* and *Yahweh*—refer to a particular quality, but they are pronounced differently. Yet, *one is just as much God's name as the other*. The quality of character these terms refer to is God's EVERLASTING FAITHFULNESS. It's a reminder to Israel that God SHALL BE what He swore to Abraham that He WOULD BE to Abraham's descendants—hence, "I SHALL BE WHAT I SHALL BE." In other words, God *would be known by His actions on behalf of Israel*. For Hebrew-speaking people, the words *eh-yah* and *Yahweh* capture that meaning.

The word *God* does *not* mean "molten image" any more than the Hebrew word *Elohim* means "molten image," though either word can be used in reference to a molten image or pagan deity or anything that is worshipped.

The word *lord* had multiple meanings. Its Hebrew counterpart is *baal*, which means husband, lord, master, ruler, etc. The pagans *hijacked* this term, applying it to their agricultural deity, but in truth Yahweh was a "husband" (*baal*) to Israel, just as He was Israel's Lord, Master, and Ruler. I'm not guilty of applying pagan names/titles to the true God. Instead, the pagans are guilty of applying names/titles that belong to the true God to their idols and false deities.

Jesus is simply a form of Yeshua (much as Richard is Ricardo in Spanish), which is the name He most likely used when He was on this earth. I am confident that He *fully approves* our use of this pronunciation. It is doubtful that anyone ever called Him Yahshua. He was probably known as Yeshua (YeSHUa), or perhaps as the shorter form, Yeshu.

Jesus instructed His disciples to address Yahweh

as “Father,” and that’s what they did—and *it’s what we should do*. The term “Father” (for English-speakers) captures precisely who and what Yahweh is in His relationship to believers under the New Covenant. If you want to be consistent with Hebrew thought, then you should want to use names and titles that most appropriately describe who and what God truly is.

I’m fine with using the name Yahweh. I do it all the time, especially when I’m covering material from the Old Testament. If you have listened to many of my sermons, you know that. But there is no command telling me that I have to do this. Jesus consistently referred to and addressed God as “Father” without adding “Yahweh” to it—and He tells us to address Him the same way.

What is the “mark of the beast”?

QUESTION: What is the mark of the beast? Is it a chip or something else?

ANSWER: The second beast of Revelation 13—the two-horned beast that arises from the earth—“causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has **the mark**, that is, **the name** of the [seven-headed] beast or **the number** of its name. This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six” (verses 16–18).

Notice that the “mark” is the same as the “name” of the beast, and the “number” is the “number of its name,” which is 666. The mark/number, therefore, is the *name* of the beast. To have the mark (name) of the beast on “the right hand or the forehead” is to wear the beast’s mark of ownership. This means simply that the person who voluntarily receives the mark has formally acknowledged his loyalty to the Antichrist system/leader described as a seven-headed, ten-horned beast that originally arose from the sea.

Whether the “mark” turns out to be a tattoo or an implanted chip or something else is unimportant, in my view. What is important is that the person receiving it will be aware that he is submitting his will to an ungodly system, so he will be involved in *voluntarily* persecuting the saints.

You will note that the next chapter speaks of those who have God the Father’s name written in their foreheads (14:1). This shows their allegiance to the Father, just as the mark (name) on the foreheads of those who follow the beast shows their allegiance to the beast. The most important thing here is the contrast between the two groups—the followers of the beast and Satan, and the followers of the Lamb and His Father. And, no doubt, one of the purposes of this vision (chapter 14) is to encourage the latter group, which is persecuted by the former, by giving them a glimpse of the final destiny of the faithful.

In ancient times, the first beast was the Roman Empire, while the second beast was the imperial cult that promoted worship of the emperor. At that time, the symbol (“mark”) of loyalty was a reef on the front of the home or a little bit of incense burned to demonstrate one’s allegiance to the emperor god. Failure to abide by this could result in economic deprivation, or worse. We can see how this would be problematic for followers of Christ. We don’t know what manifestation this “mark” will take in the end-time, but we do know that it will involve a conscious decision to obey man rather than God.

Figurative language in Scripture

QUESTION: Will you please give some biblical illustrations of a metaphor or an analogy?

ANSWER: First, let’s consider the dictionary definition of *metaphor*, *analogy*, and *simile*.

The *Mirriam-Webster Dictionary* defines **metaphor** as “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in *drowning in money*).”

An **analogy** is “a comparison of two otherwise unlike things based on resemblance of a particular aspect” (*Mirriam-Webster*).

A **simile** is “a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that is often introduced by *like* or *as* (as in *cheeks like roses*)” (*Mirriam-Webster*).

Mirriam-Webster adds: Many people have trouble distinguishing between *simile* and *metaphor*. A glance at their Latin and Greek roots offers a simple way of telling these two closely-related figures of speech apart. *Simile* comes from the Latin word *similis* (meaning “similar, like”), which seems fitting, since the comparison indicated by a *simile* will typically contain the words *as* or *like*. *Metaphor*, on the other hand, comes from the Greek word *metapherein* (“to transfer”), which is also fitting, since a metaphor is used in place of something. ‘My love is like a red, red rose’ is a *simile*, and “love is a rose” is a *metaphor*.”

An *analogy*, says Brian Clark (copyblogger.com), “is comparable to metaphor and simile in that it

Christ is the “bread of life” (John 6:35), “lamb of God” (1:29), “light of the world” (18:12), “door of the sheep” (10:7), and “good shepherd” (10:11). Of course, Christ is not literally bread, a lamb, light, a door, or a shepherd, and His disciples are not literally sheep. These are all metaphors.

shows how two different things are similar, but it’s a bit more complex.” He explains, “Rather than a figure of speech, an analogy is more of a logical argument. The presenter of an analogy will often demonstrate how two things are alike by pointing out shared characteristics, with the goal of showing that if two things are similar in some ways, they are similar in other ways as well.”

We find many metaphors and similes (among other literary devices) in Scripture. Here are a few examples of metaphors:

Christ is the “bread of life” (John 6:35), “lamb of God” (1:29), “light of the world” (18:12), “door of the sheep” (10:7), and “good shepherd” (10:11). Of course, Christ is not literally bread, a lamb, light, a door, or a shepherd, and His disciples are not literally sheep. These are all metaphors.

Similarly, God is not literally a “rock,” “fortress,” or “shield” (Psalm 18:2). The Psalmist knows God is his protector, so he describes Him, metaphorically, as things that provide protection from harm.

These are just a few examples of biblical metaphors. We could multiply this number many times over, but these examples should give you a good starting point for recognizing metaphors when you come across them in Scripture.

Here are a few examples of similes in Scripture: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field...a merchant seeking beautiful pearls...a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind” (Matt. 13:44, 45, 47).

All the “kingdom of heaven is like” statements are examples of similes. The scribes and Pharisees, says Jesus “are like whitewashed tombs” (23:27). “Every teacher of the law who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house” (13:52).

Do you see how a simile differs from a metaphor? Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” That’s a metaphor. If He had said, “I am like bread,” that would have been a simile.

Old Testament Slavery Laws

QUESTION: The Old Testament law sanctions slavery (Leviticus 25:39–46), even permitting a man to sell his own daughter (Exodus 21:7). Doesn’t this show that the Old Testament law is inadmissible as a guide for today?

ANSWER: The Law of Moses reveals the will of God and, at the same time, reflects the cultural norms of the day. Slavery was less than ideal, but it was woven into the economic fabric of the ancient world, and both slaves and slave owners benefited from the arrangement.

When we think of slavery, we think of human beings being hunted down like animals, chained and shackled, torn from their families, and hauled off to another country, where they are further dehumanized through forced labor and severe disciplinary measures. But the slavery laws of the Bible put restraints on these dehumanizing elements.

An Israelite could “sell himself” to another Israelite, but he was an indentured servant, not a slave, and his obligation ended in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:39–43). The Israelites were permitted to buy slaves from other nations, and they could buy the children and families of foreigners dwelling among them. These were permanent slaves (verses 44–46).

While the Law of Moses does not forbid slavery, it does secure certain rights for slaves. Runaway slaves were not to be captured and returned to their masters, but were permitted to dwell wherever they chose among the Israelites, who were not to oppress them (Deuteronomy 23:15–16).

No doubt, many of the “strangers” who dwelt among the Israelites were runaway slaves from other nations. The Israelites were expressly forbidden to mistreat them (Leviticus 19:33). “The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (verse 34).

The law of Exodus 21:1–11 concerns Hebrew servants. The next section (verses 7–11) concerns a girl whose father sells her for marriage. She is a servant, not a slave, and if the master/husband is not pleased with her, he must allow her to be redeemed. He is not to sell her to a foreign nation. This law protects the rights of the girl.

In summary, the Old Testament law permits slavery, but this permission pertains only to a world that has slavery built into its economic structure. The same law sets forth regulations designed to protect the rights of slaves and servants.

The law does not *require* slavery; it simply recognizes it as an existing institution and regulates it according to universal principles of fair treatment and protection of rights, including giving asylum to runaway slaves. Any attempt by moderns to reinstate slavery under the banner of “getting back to biblical law” would actually be a violation of these underlying universal principles.

So, yes, the Old Testament law may still be used for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It’s a matter of being able to distinguish the cultural norms reflected in and acknowledged by the law from the universal standards of justice and righteousness contained in the law.

Resistance and Adaptability

by Michelle Algarra



When going through trying circumstances such as failures in an endeavor, all kinds of persecution, different types of stressful situations, emotional burdens, etc., one must learn the value of resiliency. There is an anachronistic but continually relevant saying that tells people to look at the silver lining in every cloud. All periods of affliction teach determined individuals to persevere, adapt to circumstances, and look for practical solutions to problems as well as alternative or substitute means by which difficult dilemmas may be resolved. Learning to react positively while seeking viable solutions to unforeseen and trying situations teaches one to become a more resourceful, persevering, and determined person.

In addition, the lapse of time can lead to acceptance of burdens that seem impossible to carry and to healing of the pain associated with such burdens. Forgetting the past does not mean eradicating memories from our memory banks, but rather the realization that bad memories can no longer affect the present adversely or cause psychological disability. Even when the pains

and problems do persist and seem unceasing, one can look forward to a hopeful future when our Saviour will grant total spiritual healing and triumph over our humanity.

agement and defeat, choosing to drift while walking on a treadmill, the harder it is to overcome. One can actually get used to suffering and failure and accept them as an inevitable reality.

But the Bible teaches hope, a positive frame of mind, having a courageous spirit, and reliance on a power whose greatness far exceeds the limitations of humanity and the frantic world we live in.

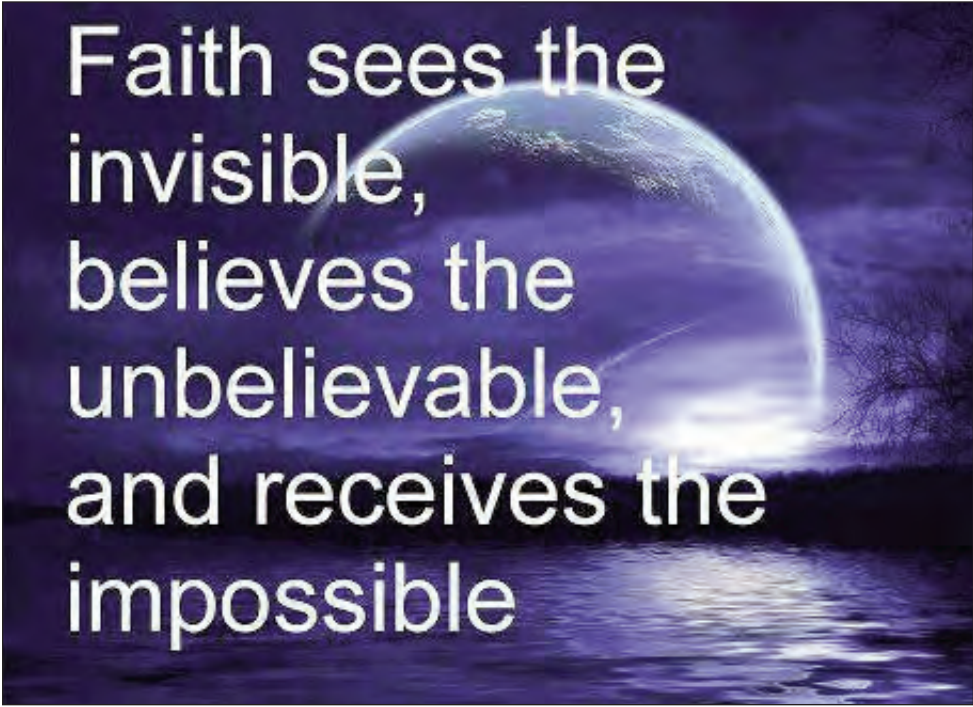
During dark and dismal times, contact with the Creator through prayer and asking for wisdom to solve one's problems, and following the good examples of great Christians in the Bible can strengthen one's resolve to find adequate means to find a way out of seemingly impossible situations.

If the great men of faith in the Bible can accomplish such great feats, human as they are, so can weak Christians in God's church. Jesus Christ can provide the strength for a person to be indefatigable, along with the resources of the human spirit.

"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again, but the wicked shall fall into mischief" (Proverbs 24:16).

Nothing is impossible with God.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen" (Hebrews 11).



It is really difficult to be a human being. But Christians must continually fight against the downward pulls of human nature, various trying circumstances, and the temptations and tribulations Satan casts upon our way in order to prevent us from realizing our goals. The more a person gives in to discour-



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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Published by The Church of God International

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Summer Issue
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