

GRACE IN FOCUS

THE DANGER OF APPLAUSE

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Bashing of
Belief**

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Always a
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or Peace for
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*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*

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The book of Judges has much to say about important women in the life of Israel. Caleb's daughter, Achsah, illustrates a wise woman who secured an abundant life for herself and her family. Jephthah was a mighty warrior and a faithful man who made a foolish vow that hurt his daughter. The Levite's concubine of Judges 19 illustrates the nation's moral collapse and lack of godly leadership.

Letter from the Editor



You may have noticed some changes to the magazine over the last few issues. This issue continues that trend. You will notice that we've moved some things around. We changed the way the cover and the back cover look. We've added short abstracts on what each article is about in the contents section.

We want the look of our magazine to be as attractive as our content. Debbie does a great job with the design and Sam and his sister Anneliese have been designing the cover. (If you have ideas, let Sam know.)

Grace in Focus magazine is designed to teach. We want our magazine to be very edifying to those who read it. You may not love every article in every issue. But we hope you love some of the articles and like all of them. Every one of us who writes, edits, typesets, designs, and proofs this magazine is doing so to bless you.

Keep grace in focus. ■

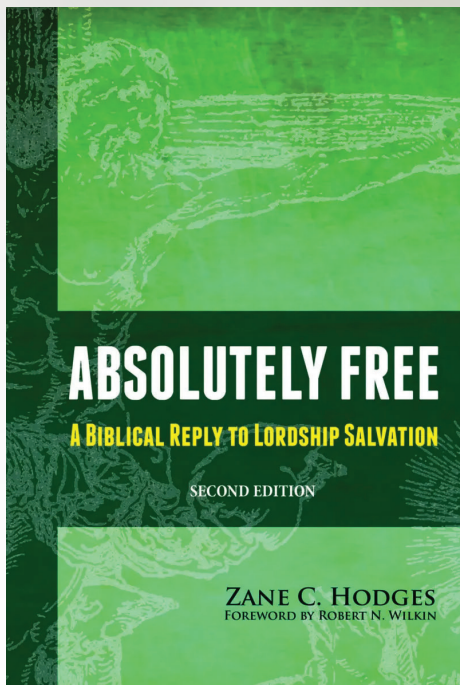
Robert N. Wilkin

The Baleful Bashing of Belief

By Zane C. Hodges

*The following is from the conclusion of chapter 2 of *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, pp. 31-32.

Lordship Salvation holds a doctrine of saving faith that is in conflict with God's Word.



Available in the Bookstore!

In a justly famous passage about Abraham, the great Biblical model of saving faith, Paul writes these words: “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness’” (Rom 4:3).

The utter simplicity of this should be apparent to all. Abraham...believed what God said—and this...was put down to his account as righteousness. In other words, he was justified by faith.

Faith, then, is taking God at His Word. Saving faith is taking God at His Word in the gospel. It is nothing less than this. But it is also nothing more.

The effort to make it more is a tragic blemish on the history of the Christian church. The roots of this effort run deep into certain types of post-Reformation thought. And in the English-

We must not fail at this crucial point. Simply stated, we must allow faith to be just that—faith.

speaking world, this radically altered concept of saving faith can, with considerable fairness, be described as Puritan theology. Lordship Salvation, in its best-known contemporary form, simply popularizes the Puritanism to which it is heir. This is practically admitted by MacArthur (*The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 98). His second appendix (“The Gospel According to Historic Christianity,” pp. 221-237), relies heavily on Puritan theologians. But MacArthur seems unaware of the current literature, which has demonstrated that Puritan theology, especially in the area of faith and assurance, did not at all reflect the doctrine of John Calvin himself and is a distinct departure from Reformation thought.

It is also worth observing that the Reformed theologian Robert L. Dabney pointed out long ago (1890) that he and his fellow Reformed theologians rejected the view of Calvin and Luther that assurance was of the essence of saving faith. That is, Dabney denied that assurance of salvation was an essential part of what it meant to believe in Christ for salvation. He states, “The source of this error [about faith and assurance] is no doubt that doctrine concerning faith which the first Reformers, as Luther and Calvin, were led to adopt...”

Later he also says:

It is very obvious to the attentive reader that these views of faith and assurance which we have examined ground themselves in the faulty definitions of saving faith which we received from the first Reformers. They, as we saw, defined saving faith as a belief that “Christ has saved me,” making the assurance of hope of its necessary essence. Now, the later Reformers, and those learned, holy and modest teachers of the Reformed Churches...have subjected this view to searching examination, and rejected

it (as does the Westminster Assembly) on scriptural grounds (“Theology of the Plymouth Brethren,” in *Discussions* by Robert L. Dabney, pp. 173, 183).

Let it be said clearly: *Lordship Salvation holds a doctrine of saving faith that is in conflict with that of Luther and Calvin and, most importantly, in conflict with God’s Word.*

Faith, then, is taking God at His Word. Saving faith is taking God at His Word in the gospel.

But today, as always, when the Scriptures are permitted to speak for themselves—and when the church has ears prepared to hear them—the simplicity and freeness of salvation can reemerge as a vital force in the consciousness of God’s people.

Nothing is more desirable than this result. But for such an aim to be realized, there is one thing we must be most careful to do. We must not fail at this crucial point. Simply stated, we must allow faith to be just that—faith. ■



Zane Hodges taught New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary for 27 years, authored over a dozen books, and was passionate about the grace of God.

Joe's Favorite Verse and Its Incredible Promise

By Rich Christianson

*The following is a slightly edited version of the message Rich delivered at the funeral of his father-in-law, Joe McDowell. Joe was ninety four when he passed.†

If I were to ask you what you think the best-known verse in all of the Bible is, which verse comes to mind? I think that for very many of us, that verse would be John 3:16. And, as it turns out, John 3:16 was Joe's favorite verse in the entire Bible.

Now I'm not surprised that John 3:16 was Joe's favorite verse, nor am I surprised that John 3:16 is the best-known verse in all the Bible. That's because, in one way, the Gospel of John is the most important book in the Bible, and also because the central message of this important book is summarized perfectly in the sixteenth verse of its third



chapter. Think about that! In one verse, John 3:16, we have a concise summary of the central message of the most important book in the Bible.

Now why is the Gospel of John so important? Well, Joe's recent passing is a stark reminder that because of sin, each of us is facing death. But ever since sin entered the world—and death through sin—God has extended to mankind His offer of eternal life. And nowhere is this offer presented more clearly than in the Gospel of John. In fact, John's Gospel is the only book in the Bible which expressly states that it was written for the purpose of leading its readers into possession of eternal life, the very life of God (John 20:30-31). Perhaps you've seen people at one time or another handing out Christian tracts. Well, the Gospel of John is the only evangelistic tract that was written by God



Abundant life is available only to those who have first received God's gift of eternal life by simply believing Jesus for it.

Himself! And so we certainly need to pay close attention to what it says!

And as important as it is for us to read the whole of John's Gospel, we can understand the central message of that Gospel by considering carefully just one of its verses: John 3:16. Before we look briefly at that one verse, though, I want to encourage you as strongly as I can to read the whole book! You *owe* that to yourself!ⁱⁱⁱ But now, here is

John 3:16, Joe's favorite verse, as it appears in the NASB:

"For God so loved the world,
that He gave His only Son,
so that everyone who believes in Him
will not perish but have eternal life."

Notice that the first line of the verse says that God *loves* the world, and that's a good thing because, as we've already noted, the world has a huge

sin problem, and the solution to that problem is rooted in God's love.

Notice next the word *everyone* in the third line of the verse. This word lets us know that the verse is relevant to everyone who lives in the world. Therefore this verse is relevant to you, and it is relevant to me.

The Bible repeatedly calls eternal life a gift (John 4:10, 14; Eph 2:5, 8-9; Rev 21:6).

Now we need to consider the world's big problem. Notice the word *perish* in the last line of the verse. Because of sin, everyone who lives in the world is in danger of perishing—that is, of being separated from a perfectly holy God for all eternity. Think about what that means. When you die, your body goes into the ground, but your spirit continues to exist forever. And if you are separated from God forever, then you exist forever completely separated from the only One who is able to give meaning to existence. Now that is terrible! But remember: God

loves the world. And so perhaps there is something He can do about our sin problem.

And indeed, God has already done something. Long ago, He sent *His Son*, Jesus, into the world to deal with our sin problem. As the Son of God, Jesus lived a perfect life and then died on a cross to pay for our sins. He was buried and then rose from the dead on the third day. His payment for sin on the cross and His resurrection from the dead are two major proofs that He is able to save you from being eternally separated from God. And there is only one thing required of you: You need to *believe* in God's Son, Jesus. And believing in God's Son means believing what He says.

Now what He says in John 3:16 is that the one who believes in Him will not perish—will not be separated from God for all eternity—but will instead have eternal life, the very life of God, life that goes on with Him forever, even after our time on earth is over.

And having eternal life means not only living with God forever, but also being rightly related to God right now, from the very moment you believe that Jesus will give you eternal life freely. In fact, the Bible repeatedly calls eternal life a *gift* (John 4:10, 14; Eph 2:5, 8-9; Rev 21:6). Believe that Jesus will give you eternal life, and the moment you do, you have it. And eternal life can never be lost, no matter what happens in your life. Because you do nothing to earn it, nothing you do can cause you to lose it.

Now that does not mean that a person who has received eternal life can then live in open and flagrant sin without any consequences. God, as a perfect Father, knows very well how to administer corrective consequences to His children whenever such consequences are needed, but those consequences, severe though they may be, never involve retracting His gift of eternal life. Remember that it is, after all, a gift. Remember, too, that the gift is not called *probationary life*—"We'll have to see how you're doing!" God's gift does not depend at all on how you are doing, but wholly on Jesus and



Why is the Gospel of John is so important?

what He has already done. God's gift is not probationary life; it is *eternal life*.

Now if you understand what I am saying, surely you will agree with me that the message of John 3:16 is stunning and incredible and hard to believe. But many other verses in John's Gospel convey exactly the same message! For example:

"Most assuredly I say to you, the one who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and will not come into judgment, but has already passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

"Most assuredly I say to you, the one who believes in Me has eternal life" (John 6:47).

Please note that in these three verses in John's Gospel—and indeed in every other passage that presents eternal life as a gift—there is only *one* condition for receiving eternal life, namely, believing Jesus' promise to give it to you freely. Nothing is said about committing, nothing is said about submitting, nothing about following, nothing about confessing, nothing about obeying, nothing about repenting, nothing about being baptized. While all those things are important for one who has already received eternal life, they often become huge barriers for the person who has not yet received it. Receiving eternal life is the first priority, and there is only one condition: believing Jesus' promise to give it to you freely.

Very often, people try to substitute something they can *do* for their seeming inability to *believe* Jesus' promise. They'll say, "Well, I really am sorry for my sins and I am willing to try hard to obey Jesus from now on and I'm even willing to be baptized. Surely, that's good enough, isn't it?" And the Biblical answer to that question is a resounding *No*. There is no substitute for simply *believing* Jesus' promise, for simply resting on His word alone.

Now you might say, "Well, *how* can I come to believe Jesus' promise?" The answer is: by immersing yourself in God's evangelistic tract, the Gospel of John, and asking God to open your eyes to see that Jesus' promise really is true. God will always honor that kind of immersion in His Word and that kind of request for His illumination.

Now as we finish, let me also mention that God graciously offers so much more than eternal life to those who have already believed Him for it. Jesus says in John 10, verse 10: "I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly." And that abundant life is described in some detail in the later chapters of John's Gospel. But once again, first things first: Abundant life is available only to those who have first received God's gift of eternal life by simply believing Jesus for it.

Hopefully, we all understand now why John 3:16 was Joe McDowell's favorite verse in the entire Bible. In his early teenage years, Joe came to believe that Jesus' promise of eternal life in John 3:16 was true for him, and so he knew that his eternal destiny was certain and secure. And everyone who, like Joe, has believed Jesus' promise of eternal life will see Joe again one day in a transformed body, overflowing with joy and gratitude and praise for our gracious and loving God. ■



Rich Christianson is a retired community college mathematics professor who lives with LeAnne, his wife of fifty-two years, in Lee's Summit, MO, a suburb of Kansas City.

¹ Editor's Note: Rich credits Lucas Kitchen for the approach he used to explain John 3:16. See Chapter 36 of *Eternal Life: Believe to Be Alive*.

² Following the funeral service, twenty-five attendees chose to take with them a free copy of *Living Water: The Gospel of John with notes*.



Peace for Israel or Peace for Me?

(Romans 10:15)

By Ken Yates

*And how shall they preach unless they are sent?
As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those
who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad
tidings of good things!"*

INTRODUCTION

Many Evangelicals believe that almost everything in the Bible was written to tell people how to be saved from the lake of fire. They tend to interpret verses according to that view, even when those verses address another issue. The book of Romans is a case in point. It focuses on Christian living, but many use it to tell unbelievers how to go to heaven.

The way people handle Rom 10:15 is a good example of the near-automatic tendency of many

Christians, seeing verses as evangelistic. In the verse, Paul quotes from the OT: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things."

Many believers read these words and assume Paul is talking about how a person receives eternal salvation. The word *gospel* is understood to mean the message we are to preach to unbelievers. When a person believes in Jesus for eternal life, he has *peace* with God. The message of eternal life is one of *glad tidings* for the unbeliever.

A popular commentary on Romans reflects this view. The author recognizes that the OT passage Paul quotes originally had nothing to do with eternal salvation. But he says that Paul applies this verse to the message he and the other apostles preached to unbelievers. According to the commentator, Paul did not hesitate to remove verses from their OT contexts and place them in different NT settings (Mounce, *Romans*, 211).

Is the *peace* Paul speaks of in Rom 10:15 the kind obtained by believing in Jesus for eternal life? Is that the good news he is talking about? Or is Paul talking about a different kind of peace?

WHAT DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT SAY?

Since Paul quotes from the OT, we should at least consider what the words originally meant. Two prophets use these words.

Nahum tells the people of Judah that God will destroy their arch enemy, Assyria. For years, the Assyrians attacked them. But the Lord heard the prayers of His people. In Nah 1:15, the verse Paul quotes in Rom 10:15, Nahum says that somebody would soon come over the mountains with a message of peace. The message was that the Assyrians had been defeated.

Isaiah 52:7 also uses the words Paul quotes in Rom 1:15. Isaiah is prophesying about another of Israel's enemies. The Babylonians would defeat Israel and take the people captive. The Babylonians would blaspheme the name of God (Isa 52:5). But the Lord would deliver His people and bring them back to the land. One day, somebody would come

over the mountains with the good news that Israel would have peace because God had destroyed the Babylonians.

The OT prophets whom Paul quotes were not speaking of the peace that comes to the one who believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life. God had used the Assyrians and Babylonians to discipline His people because of their sin. But both Nahum and Isaiah prophesied that God's discipline would not last forever. God would bring peace to the nation of Israel. The good tidings were that Israel's enemies had been defeated.

Did Paul understand that the verse he was quoting spoke of peace for the nation of Israel when her enemies were defeated? Was that the context he had in mind?

WHAT DID PAUL MEAN?

Paul knew that both Nah 1:15 and Isa 52:7 were addressed to the nation of Israel. In Romans 10, Paul, too, has Israel in mind. He starts the chapter by mentioning that he prays for Israel (v 1). He refers to Israel again in v 19, as well as in 11:1, where he points out that he himself is part of the nation of Israel. In 11:26, Paul says that the entire nation will one day be delivered. We find many references to Israel in Romans 9–11.

Paul quotes from two prophets of Israel. Those prophets spoke of two times when God delivered the nation from its enemies. His people had experienced war at the hands of their enemies, and their sin had caused much pain. But God brought peace to His people.

It is a tragic mistake to think that it is the message of the whole Bible.

Did Paul understand that the verse he was quoting spoke of peace for the nation of Israel when her enemies were defeated?

Wouldn't it make sense for Paul to be referring to the same thing, especially in a context where he repeatedly refers to the nation of Israel? He is looking ahead to the day when the nation will once again be surrounded by its enemies. The people will cry out to the Lord, and He will deliver them (Rom 10:13, quoting from Joel 2:32).

Many Evangelicals believe that almost everything in the Bible was written to tell people how to be saved from the lake of fire.

This will happen in the last days, during the Tribulation. The armies of the world will threaten Israel with extinction. The nation will be made up entirely of believers. They will ask the Lord to save them from their enemies. Christ will return and bring the nation of Israel into His kingdom. The nation will be at peace. That is indeed "glad tidings"!

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Paul did not take the words of Nahum and Isaiah and give them an entirely new meaning. The words of those prophets fit what Paul is writing about in Romans 10. In the future, God will once again bring peace to Israel.

Some will ask, "Is this important?" What harm is done if many in the Evangelical world see Rom 10:15 as being addressed to unbelievers today rather than to a believing nation of Israel in the future? Does it matter if we interpret the *peace* in this verse to mean the new believer's peace with God rather than the peace Israel will have when Christ returns? If they have good intentions, why can't evangelists use the verse in a way that neither Nahum, Isaiah, nor Paul intended?

This issue is important for at least three reasons. First, we should not spiritualize the Scriptures. If we can say that God's promise of peace for the believing nation of Israel is the peace an unbeliever can receive, we have changed the meaning of God's Word. We are then free to make the Scriptures mean almost anything we want them to mean.

Second, Paul's words in Rom 10:15 are a beautiful reminder of God's faithfulness to His people, Israel. He has promised that they will be His people forever. He showed His faithfulness to that promise in the days of Nahum and Isaiah. His past acts on the nation's behalf point forward to the day when He will give Israel peace once and for all. God keeps His word.

Finally, even though the offer of eternal life as a gift by faith in Christ alone is the greatest news ever proclaimed, it is a tragic mistake to think that it is the message of the whole Bible. Most of the NT deals with Christian living. If we assume that a verse deals with how an unbeliever is saved from the lake of fire when it does not, we will miss what the Scriptures are really saying.

Romans 10:15 has an application for church-age believers. The Lord has given us many wonderful promises. Just as the nation of Israel called upon Him for deliverance from her enemies in the past, so the nation will call on Him in the future. We can do the same. When our sins have brought God's discipline into our lives, we can go to Him for His grace and forgiveness. God has always been faithful to His people.

We will miss out on the wonderful counsel of God's Word if we use a verse such as Rom 10:15 to refer to eternal salvation. Even though it is common to do so, let's not make that mistake. ■



Ken Yates is a retired Army chaplain (Lt. Col). He has many theological degrees, including a Ph.D. from D.T.S. in New Testament. He leads the GES international ministry, cohosts the daily podcast, and assists Bob in all aspects of the GES ministry. His new book, *Mark: Lessons in Discipleship*, is a wonderful explanation of Christ's call to discipleship. He and his wife, Pam, live in Columbia, SC.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



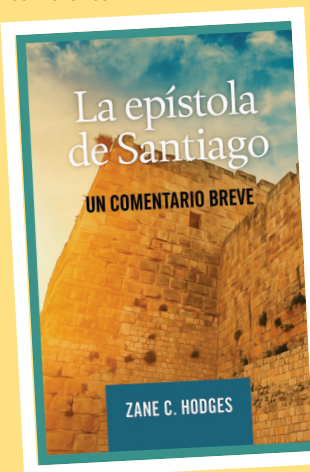
Ken with the Indy Bible Study that may become a home church



Ken Pierce helping us get ready for the conference



GES Partner Denny Miller sent this picture of a group of Nicaraguans holding up Zane Hodges' *The Gospel Under Siege* in Spanish



*Zane Hodges' Commentary on James available in nine languages



Ken with Flip and Cheri Burrera at their Bible Study



As discussed in “Introduction to the Plagues of Egypt,” the first nine plagues can be viewed as occurring in three cycles of three plagues each. The second cycle includes plagues four, five, and six. These plagues were somewhat more severe than those in the first cycle.

Because these plagues were more severe than the first three, they caused much pain and irritation in the lives of the Egyptians, but they did not cause human death.

The plagues in the second cycle can be found in Exodus 8:20–9:12.

THE FOURTH PLAGUE: SWARMS OF FLIES (EXODUS 8:20-32)



This plague was a demonstration of Yahweh’s absolute power over the physical health of both humans and beasts.

THE PLAN

As in the first plague, Yahweh commanded Moses and Aaron to confront Pharaoh *early in the morning* (v 20) when he bathed in the Nile River (see Exod 7:15). The command to Pharaoh was the same as in the first plague—free the Israelites so they can serve and worship Yahweh.

Moses was to describe to Pharaoh what would happen if he was disobedient (again). Huge *swarms* of insects (v 21) would cover the land and invade

people's houses. However, the insects would not appear in Goshen where the Israelites lived.

All of this would be done to show Pharaoh again that Yahweh was the sovereign God and that the things the Egyptians worshipped were not God.

THE PLOT

It happened just as Yahweh said. Moses came to Pharaoh as he emerged from the Nile River. He related Yahweh's command to release the Israelites and described what would happen if he did not let them go. Pharaoh was also warned that if he did not obey Him, a *swarm* would cover the land, humans, and beasts (v 21). However, the swarm would not appear in Goshen, the region where the Israelites, Yahweh's covenant people, lived (v 22). All this would be done so that Pharaoh would know that Yahweh was the sovereign Lord of creation.

Pharaoh did not let the Israelites go. Yahweh responded by sending *thick swarms* (v 24) of insects to enter all the houses of Egypt, including Pharaoh's palace! The word for *flies* is not in the Hebrew text, so no one knows for sure what kind of insect these were. However, because the fly was a symbol of Egypt (see Isa 7:18), these were probably swarms of flies. Apparently, there were so many of them throughout Egypt that they caused extreme misery.

Pharaoh became so desperate that he told Moses he would let the Israelites go to worship their God, provided they stayed within the borders of the Egyptian kingdom (v 25). Moses replied that this was not a workable solution because the Israelite sacrifices would offend the Egyptian people, who would then want to *stone* (kill) the Israelites (v 26).

Moses said that the only solution was for the Israelites to go a *three days' journey* (v 27) into the desert to worship and sacrifice to Yahweh. The problem for Pharaoh was that this would put the

Israelites outside Egypt's borders and thus outside Egypt's control. Pharaoh responded that he would let them go, but not *very far away* (v 28) so that he could keep them under his rule. Pharaoh also asked Moses to *intercede* (plead, entreat) for him with Yahweh. This gave Pharaoh the appearance of submitting to the God of Israel. Moses then told Pharaoh that he would ask Yahweh to remove the plague the next day. He also warned him not to go back on his word.

*This plague
was also a
demonstration that
Israel's God,
Yahweh, was
sovereign over all
animal life.*

Moses left Pharaoh's presence to ask Yahweh to eliminate the flies *tomorrow* (v 29). True to his word (unlike Pharaoh), Moses asked Yahweh to remove the plague from the Egyptians (v 30). Yahweh answered Moses' request completely; amazingly, *not one remained* (v 31). Only a powerful Sovereign can command flies to leave.

Despite this incredible show of Yahweh's power, Pharaoh again became stubborn (v 32) and, going back on his promise (see v 29), did not let the Israelites go. This decision would later cost him dearly.

THE PURPOSE

This plague targeted the following Egyptian deities:

- Ra – the sun god, the main god of Egypt.
- Uatchit – a goddess of flies (with the head of a fly) who guarded life in the Nile River.

This plague demonstrated that Yahweh had the power to inflict physical suffering on the wicked and to preserve and protect His covenant people.

THE FIFTH PLAGUE: DEATH OF EGYPTIAN LIVESTOCK (EXODUS 9:1-7)

THE PLAN

In this fifth plague, Yahweh commanded Moses and Aaron to go to Pharaoh and once again demand the release of the Israelites. They were also to warn him that his disobedience would cause his kingdom much more misery. This time, a disease would



This plague demonstrated that Yahweh had the power to inflict physical suffering on the wicked and to preserve and protect His covenant people.

afflict the Egyptians' livestock. The livestock in view here were cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep (v 3). All these animals were worshipped in Egypt and were considered a measure of one's wealth. Yahweh also warned that this plague would be a *very severe pestilence* (v 3).

They were to tell Pharaoh that none of the Israelites' livestock would be affected by this plague. Yahweh also set the time that the plague would begin: *tomorrow* (v 5)!

THE PLOT

Pharaoh decided not to do what Yahweh said (again!), so *the hand of the LORD* (not His finger—see v 3) was on Egypt's livestock *the next day* (v 6). The result was that *all* the livestock of the Egyp-

tians died, while not one of the Israelites' livestock died.

Pharaoh even sent some of his officials to verify that Israel's livestock survived, but it did not change his attitude toward letting Israel go. His heart was as *stubborn* (hard, v 7) as ever.

THE PURPOSE

This plague showed the Egyptians the powerlessness of their deities:

- Hathor – goddess of love, beauty, music, sky, and fertility. She was pictured as having a cow's head. Cows, along with other livestock, were considered wealth in Egypt. The more livestock one had, the wealthier he was, so the destruction of livestock was a severe blow

to the nation's economy and the people's personal prosperity.

- Apis – the bull god. Bulls were sacred in Egypt because they represented strength and power, especially pertaining to Pharaoh.

This plague was also a demonstration that Israel's God, Yahweh, was sovereign over all animal life, including those animals worshipped by the Egyptians. He can control when a plague begins and when it ends.

THE SIXTH PLAGUE: BOILS (EXODUS 9:8-12)

THE PLAN

The previous plague targeted Egypt's livestock. This plague added humans to the list of sufferers. Yahweh used boils (or some similar skin disease) to inflict painful suffering on the Egyptians and their livestock.

Like the third plague, this one was not announced to Pharaoh.

THE PLOT

Yahweh told Moses and Aaron to take "handfuls of ashes" (v 8) from *furnaces* and throw them into the air. This was to be done in Pharaoh's presence so he could witness the miracle as it happened. It would appear that the plague had come from heaven.

As Yahweh commanded, Moses and Aaron collected ashes from special *furnaces* used to make pottery and bricks, then threw them into the air (v 10). Yahweh then turned the ashes into tiny particles of dust that in turn caused *boils* (painful sores or blisters) on both *man and beast* in Egypt. Even Egypt's magicians could not avoid being afflicted, and it was so bad that they could not stand before Moses and Aaron (v 11). This made it appear that Moses and Aaron were sovereign over the religious leaders of Egypt.

One would think that after being an eyewitness to all these miraculous events, Pharaoh would have been convinced that the God of Israel was overwhelmingly powerful and could not be defeated; thus, Pharaoh would obey Him. But in spite of all this, Pharaoh's heart was stubborn.ⁱ



THE PURPOSE

The plague of boils targeted the following Egyptian deities:

- Serapis – god of healing
- Imhotep – god of medicine
- Sekhmet – goddess of disease
- Sunu – god of pestilence

This plague was a demonstration of Yahweh's absolute power over the physical health of both humans and beasts (Exod 15:26; Deut 32:39; 2 Chron 7:14; Matt 4:23f). Egypt's deities could in no way control what Yahweh did.

CONCLUSION

The second cycle of plagues was more severe than the first. Even though these plagues did not cause any Egyptians to die, they all suffered. However, not a single one of God's people were afflicted. God's control can be seen clearly in this cycle.



David Renfro and his wife Linda live in Highland Village, TX. He is a native Dallasite and has a Th. M. degree from D.T.S. in Old Testament Semitics. He is currently busy with writing projects as well as occasionally filling the pulpit in the Dallas area.

ⁱ Pharaoh hardened his own heart several times (Exod 8:15, 32; 9:34). In this instance, God hardened (made stubborn) Pharaoh's heart (Exod 9:12).

Is Suffering Always a Bad Thing?

By Georgiana Paleanu

If you're walking through something hard right now, I just want you to know—you're not alone.

The question in the title may sound odd—but stay with me.

If you're dealing with physical pain, chronic illness, or carrying a heavy burden no one else can see or understand, I just want you to know: You're not alone. I'm not sharing this because I've figured everything out or reached some perfect ending. I'm still in it, still walking through it. But it's in the midst of all this that I've come to know God in a deeper, more personal way than I ever thought I would.

My health struggles started when I was a kid. I had a lot of digestive discomfort—bloating, stomach pain, and a sensitivity to certain foods. It wasn't debilitating back then, but no one could really explain what was going on. I simply adapted and kept going.

I also had epilepsy as a child, and that was a lot harder to deal with. I didn't really understand what it was; I just knew it sometimes made me feel

different and left out. Even though it no longer affects me, it left its mark. It showed me early on how fragile and unpredictable our bodies can be.

As I got older, the digestive issues got worse. At one point, I was diagnosed with an *H. pylori* infection. I went through the treatment, but the symptoms didn't go away. Later, I had my gallbladder removed, which brought its own complications. Even this surgery didn't bring the relief I was hoping for.

Over the years, I've tried just about everything: elimination diets, enzymes, supplements, natural remedies, and countless doctor visits. I've had so many tests, but not many clear answers. Some days are better than others, but the symptoms always seem to come back. And honestly, not knowing how I'll feel from one day to the next is one of the hardest parts.

On top of it all, I deal with persistent foot, hip, and back pain. I can't walk



for very long without discomfort, nor can I stand or sit for extended periods. These limitations aren't obvious to others, but they affect nearly every part of my daily life. I've had to let go of things I once loved, like taking long walks. Socializing has changed too. I can rarely eat what others eat, and I often just avoid restaurants altogether. My relationships, routines, and sense of freedom have all been reshaped.

Staying positive isn't always easy. I do smile a lot, but behind that smile is a slower pace, careful planning, and a kind of pain I've learned to carry quietly. Living with chronic illness can often feel lonely, not because people don't care, but because so much of what I'm dealing with is invisible, which makes it harder to feel understood.

But in the midst of all this, God has been gently teaching me something: We're not meant to go through life alone. As part of the Body of Christ, we're not just called to encourage others—we're also called to let others encourage us.

That second part hasn't been easy for me. I love encouraging others, but I've had to learn how to receive encouragement as well.

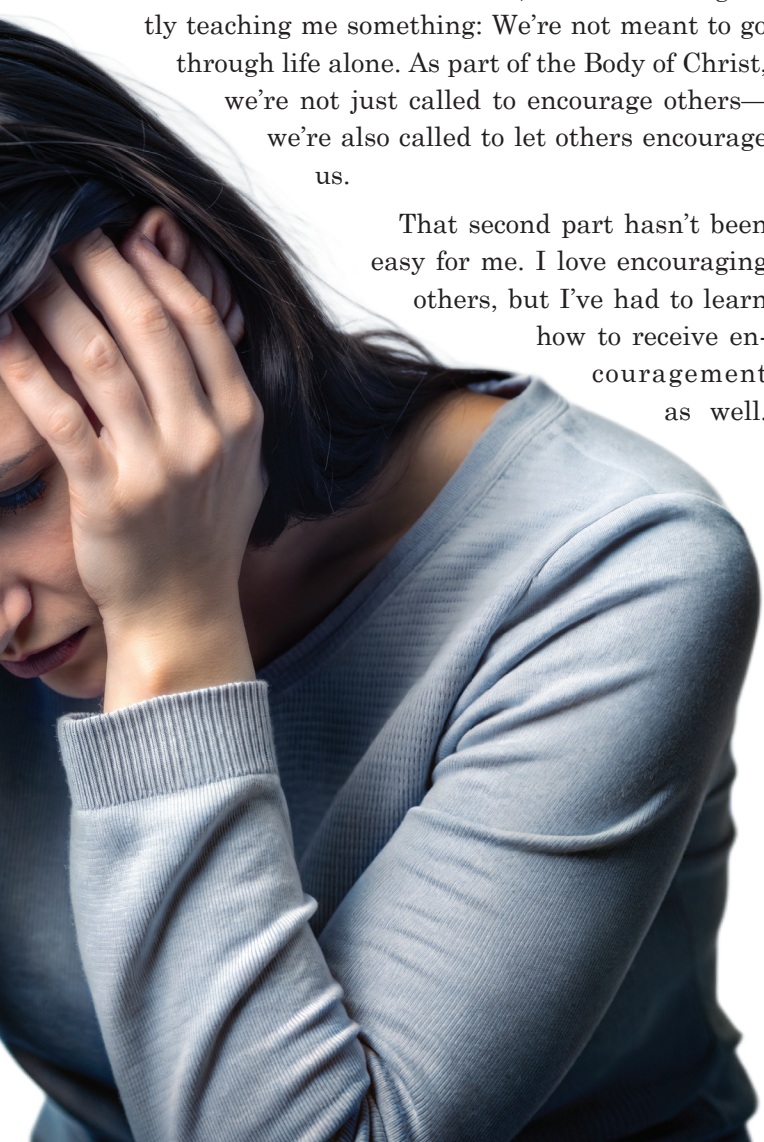
When I pretend I'm fine, I miss out on the comfort God often provides through others. And I've realized that I'm not doing anyone any favors by hiding my struggles.

In some church circles, there's an unspoken message that if you're sick or going through a hard time, maybe your faith isn't strong enough

Sometimes we ask God for help and expect it to come in a specific, perhaps dramatic way. More often than not, however, He sends it through a friend, a kind word, or someone's simply showing up. This may seem small, but that's often how His care comes to us.

I've experienced that in my own life. I'm especially thankful for the GES community. Being part of a group in which I can learn, serve, and also be supported has meant more than I can say. And I'm deeply grateful for my husband, Óscar. His love and steady presence have carried me through more hard days than I can count. His patience has been a reflection of God's faithfulness in my life.

At the same time, I know that not everyone has that kind of support. In some church circles, there's an unspoken message that if you're sick or going through a hard time, maybe your faith isn't strong enough, or perhaps you've done something wrong. That mindset makes it harder for people to be honest about their struggles. They end up hiding their pain, putting on a smile, and acting as if everything's fine. But that's not what Jesus ever asked of us.



In the midst of all this that I've come to know God in a deeper, more personal way than I ever thought I would.

It's not a lack of faith to admit that we're hurting. In fact, vulnerability can open the door for others to share their burdens, too. Paul reminds us:

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it... (1 Cor 12:26).

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

So, back to the title's question: Is suffering always a bad thing?

For those who don't know the Lord, suffering can feel unbearable. There's no higher purpose, no comfort beyond the present moment, no hope beyond what's visible. Pain feels final. And that's what breaks my heart the most.

I sometimes wonder how people endure deep loss or chronic pain without the kind of hope God gives. Without it, suffering can feel hollow, pointless, and even cruel.

But for the believer, suffering is never wasted. God uses it to refine our faith, shape our character, and remind us that this world isn't our home. Like the blind man in John 9, we may not understand the "why," but we know the "Who." Our struggles can become a stage upon which God's mercy and strength are revealed.

But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (Jas 1:4).

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom 8:18).


I don't know what tomorrow will look like. I feel stronger on some days than on others. But trust-

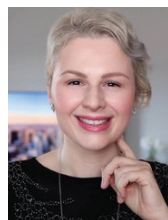
ing God doesn't mean expecting Him to make everything better overnight. It means walking with Him through the uncertainty, even when I can't see what's ahead.

What keeps me going is the promise that this won't last forever. One day, the pain will end, and I'll walk without limitations, without weariness. One day, I'll be whole (2 Cor 5:1-8).

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes... (Rev 21:4).

Blessed is the man who endures temptation ... he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him (Jas 1:12).

If you're walking through something hard right now, I just want you to know—you're not alone. I'm still there, too. But I've come to see how gently and faithfully God meets us there. Sometimes it's a verse, a kind word, or simply enough strength to make it through the day. If all you can do is whisper a prayer or take the smallest step forward, that's okay. His grace is enough, even when we don't feel that we are enough. 



Georgiana is a content creator and podcaster who specializes in teaching English as a second language. She translates GES materials into Romanian. Based in Spain, she and her husband, Óscar Pellús—the Spanish-language translator for GES—enjoy helping make GES content accessible to an international audience.



What Must I

BELIEVE

In Order To Be
SAVED?

By Micaela Manley

The moment we take Him at His word, we have everlasting life that can never be lost.

INTRODUCTION

What must I believe in order to be saved? While this question seems innocently simple, it has caused much confusion throughout our churches. I first experienced this confusion and the immense mental anguish that accompanies it when I was new to Christianity and had just left New Age. In visiting numerous churches as I sought to understand the truth, I noticed that every church preached a different message. I easily identified the works-based messages as false because I knew that we are saved by grace through faith. However, I found myself confronted with a question concerning what constitutes *faith*. I went to multiple churches that claimed to be Free Grace, yet when I asked each the same question—“What must I believe to be saved?”—I consistently received different answers. As one can imagine, this lack of clarity regarding the saving message was extremely disturbing, leading to many mental health struggles and reminding me of my time in New Age, where doctrine is deliberately abstract. However, by His grace, the Lord ultimately used those struggles to fuel my search for the objective truth. I came up against multiple points of confusion, but eventually the mental fog began to lift, and the saving message was brought into focus.

“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33a).

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN FLEXIBLE AND FOCUSED FREE GRACE

The first point of confusion I experienced was the distinction between Flexible and Focused Free Grace. Being new to Free Grace, I had never heard these terms, nor did I initially realize there was a distinction. I figured that everyone who claimed to be Free Grace was on the same page. However,

as I listened to more sermons, it became clear that this was not the case. A line was drawn in the sand, and the difference was significant. In the simplest of terms, this difference comes down to what truth about Jesus must be believed in order to be saved. While the Flexible Free Grace camp is divided between two factions, Focused Free Grace remains unified and consistent in its answer.

The first faction within Flexible Free Grace believes that there are multiple saving messages and that any truth believed about Jesus is sufficient to save. The second faction believes there to be a single saving message, the content of which is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection). While Focused Free Grace agrees that there is only one saving message, it differs with Flexible Free Grace regarding the content of that message.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matt 7:13-14).

THE ERROR OF FLEXIBLE FREE GRACE

One of the biggest errors within Flexible Free Grace is the lack of clarity regarding what constitutes saving faith. It is the most important information a person can know, but if you ask ten different people, you may get ten different answers. I can recall numerous nights spent in agony because of the mental pain I was in. I had never endured such intense mental pain prior to being exposed to false teachings and now found myself experiencing the repercussions of uncertainty and confusion. My head pounded with so many differing responses that it felt as if I could

no longer think clearly, and I was left hopeless and in tears.

While some said that you need to believe in the death, burial and resurrection, others would say that believing in any aspect of Jesus's identity is sufficient to save. Some examples of these aspects would include knowing He is God, knowing He is sinless, knowing He is the Lamb of God, etc. The combination of facts I was told to believe seemed endless. Without definitive truth, people's well-meaning attempts to help and assure me led instead to instability and anguish.

KNOWING THE FOCUS OF OUR FAITH

It's important to know that the Lord wants people to be saved and would not hide the answer to this question. Therefore, when identifying the content of saving faith, we must always go back to the Scriptures. We see that multiple passages verify Jesus as the focus of our faith.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

The Lord makes it clear that we are to believe in Him in order to be saved. Specifically, we are to believe in Him for what He promises, which is everlasting life. The Lord Jesus never asked unbelievers to believe in His death, burial, and resurrection. Nor did He ask them to believe a list

of facts about Him or themselves. He simply asked them to believe Him, to take Him at His word.

The moment we take Him at His word, we have everlasting life that can never be lost.

WHY IT MATTERS

The result of not knowing what one must believe in order to be saved is detrimental, not only to one's assurance, but to one's mental health as well. Assurance and a sound mind go hand

in hand. Without one, the other is susceptible to suffering. For example, traditional OCD therapy teaches that one can't have assurance, but the Word of God teaches that we can. It is not the Lord's desire for His children to be unsure of whether they are His forever. He wants us to know without a doubt that we are, and that our eternal destiny is secure in Him. Focused Free Grace has given me the tools and resources

necessary to combat any doubts when they come up. It has taken time, but my mind continues to be renewed day by day as I replace the lies I had been fed with the truth of God's Word. Knowing the Scriptures is essential to having a steadfast mindset when confronted with confusing messages. It allows mental clarity and, most importantly, keeps the offer of eternal life in focus. ■

In visiting numerous churches as I sought to understand the truth, I noticed that every church preached a different message.



Micaela works part-time for GES for the seminary and other projects. She is currently taking GES seminary classes herself while finishing her undergraduate in Communication Sciences and Disorders. Lord willing, she plans to use her degree to have a tent-making job in speech-language pathology that will allow her to do something she is passionate about while also keeping ministry as her life's focus.

Lessons From An Old Testament Overcomer: **DANIEL**

By Dix Winston

INTRODUCTION

Some believers fight; others falter. Some defy and some comply. Daniel was a fighter and a defier.

He was a young teen when taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 586 BC. He lived the rest of his life in Babylon, never to return to Israel in this life. He died in Babylon, but he remained faithful to the end. Daniel was an overcomer.

The doctrine of rewards that Daniel, an Old Testament overcomer, believed is supported throughout the New Testament, as well.

Daniel demonstrates four important truths essential to overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil. The first truth is that God is a God who reveals.

THE GOD WHO REVEALS

Upon arriving in Babylon, Daniel and his companions were chosen for service in the royal court. This required them to learn the language and literature of Babylon, receive new Babylonian names, and eat from the king's table. This would "Babylonianize" these Jewish exiles.

No doubt the king's food had five Michelin stars, but Daniel and his close companions would not eat that fine food for two reasons. First, to do so would defile them, rendering them ceremonially unclean (Lev 11:1-47; 17:10-16). Second, this food had most likely been offered to idols, making it additionally defiling. Language, literature, or labels would not defile, but the food would.

There was not a minute of indecision, discussion, or hesitation. They would not eat from the king's table. Daniel proposed a creative alternative (Dan 1:12-13).

When God said, "Don't eat!" Adam and Eve ate. Daniel and his friends did not.

Ironically, it was because the nation of Israel had disregarded God's revealed will that they were exiled to Babylon. For 490 years Israel had not observed the sabbatical year, thereby stealing seventy sabbatical years from God. God reclaimed what was due Him, exiling His people to Babylon for seventy years (2 Chron 36:15-21; Jer 25:8-12). At last, the land enjoyed its Sabbaths!

An
overcomer
is victorious
over the
world, the
flesh, and
the devil.



An overcomer—one who is victorious over the world, the flesh, and the devil—obeys God and His revelation. But in order to obey, you must deal with spiritual opposition. Unless you know there is a God who rules, you will crumble.

THE GOD WHO RULES

In Chapter 2 of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that is indecipherable to all his courtly advisors. Daniel tells him, “...there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days” (Dan 2:28, NASB).ⁱ

Daniel deciphers the dream, which reveals the coming Gentile kingdoms of the world beginning with Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, then Rome. These will all come to an end, because “...the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people, but it will endure forever” (Dan 2:44). This final kingdom is the coming Messianic Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will last for 1000 years on earth, and then on into the eternal state (Rev 20:1-7).

Jesus called Satan the “ruler of this world,” (John 12:31). But he rules only within God’s preordained parameters. In Dan 4:17 God is called “the

Some believers fight; others falter. Some defy and some comply.

Most High [who] rules in the kingdom of men.” King David, the greatest king of Israel, wrote that God “rules over the nations” (Ps 22:28).

Overcomers—no matter how out-of-control life and the world may be—know that there is a God who rules.

If you live by the Word of God and are rock solid sure that the Revealer is also the Ruler, there will be times when you need to be rescued. But overcomers do not worry, because they know that their God is a God who rescues.

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

In Daniel, Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar imposed a loyalty test on his government officials. A statue was constructed in the image of the king. The entire company of the king’s government officials—including Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego—were assembled. When a trumpet sounded, all were commanded to bow down and worship.

When God said,
“Don’t eat!” Adam
and Eve ate. Daniel
and his friends
did not.

Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego knew God’s revelation about graven images and the prohibition against worshipping other gods (Exod 20:1-4). This was not something they could do. When the trumpets stopped blowing, only three Jewish men were left standing. (Scripture does not tell us whether Daniel was present at this

test.) The king decreed the death penalty for anyone not bowing.

The king gave the Jewish men one last opportunity to bend the knee. They once again declined with these words: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan 3:16-18).

While they knew that God would rescue them, they did not know how He would do it. But knowing that there is a God who reveals and reigns told them that He is also a God who rescues. They did not doubt the power of God—He is the God who reveals and rules—but they were unsure of God’s purposes.

They were bound and thrown into the furnace. And God delivered them through the fire. In fact, He sent His Son to be with them in the fire (Dan 3:25).

This had a profound effect upon the king. Originally, he had taunted them with the words: “What god is able to deliver you from my hands?” (Dan 3:15). The king found out that it was the God who rescues!

Overcomers never doubt that there is a God who rescues. No matter what trial or trouble comes upon us, God is the God who rescues.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it (1 Cor 10:13).

Dwight Hunt insightfully says of this verse,

...the faithful God would not allow them to be tempted (or “tested”) beyond what He had prepared them to experience, but with the temptation He will also make the way of escape that [they] may be able to bear it. The ability to endure is given with the temptation, not apart from it. The word escape (*ekbasis*) pictures an army trapped in the mountains, which then escape through a pass. God faithfully provides the way of escape—the pass through the mountains.ⁱⁱ

Daniel demonstrates
four important truths
essential to overcoming
the world, the
flesh and the devil.

Finally—and this is the cherry on top—the God who reveals, rules, and rescues, also rewards.

THE GOD WHO REWARDS


In Daniel 12, as Daniel was nearing the end of his earthly sojourn, God revealed a fourth and final lesson: God is a God who rewards. Both resurrection and rewards are promised in Daniel 12:2, 13. In the final verse, God says, “But as for you [Daniel], go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age.” Commenting on this verse J. Paul Tanner says,

His resurrection will not simply be an awakening from the grave, but much more to receive his “allotted portion.” His “allotted portion”... is a word meaning a “lot” that is cast for determining a decision, from which it has the derived meaning of that which is obtained by

a lot cast. The same word was used for the land inheritance that the tribes received upon entering the promised land (e.g., Josh 15:1). Hence, the word is used here for the inheritance that is in store for Daniel in the resurrection as his reward for a life of faithful service. This is what he will have to enjoy forever and ever in Messiah's kingdom. Such reward in the resurrection sets the stage and anticipates the doctrine of rewards that is developed more fully in the New Testament. Believers today can also hope to receive a future reward and inheritance, provided, that is, that they endure in a life of faithfulness with the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Heb 10:35-36). For this, we have no greater model than Daniel. Amen.ⁱⁱⁱ

The doctrine of rewards that Daniel, an Old Testament overcomer, believed is supported throughout the New Testament, as well.^{iv} The doctrine of rewards goes hand-in-hand with the teachings of Focused Free Grace.

Overcomers remember and live by four precepts:

- God is a God who reveals.
- God is a God who rules.
- God is a God who rescues.
- God is a God who rewards. 



Dix and his wife, Cynthia live in Colorado and have been married for nearly five decades. Dix and Bob Wilkin have been friends since their seminary days, having graduated from DTS in 1982.

ⁱ All Scripture quotations are either from the NASB or are the author's own translation.

ⁱⁱ Dwight Hunt, “1 Corinthians” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. by Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2019), p. 365.

ⁱⁱⁱ J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2020), p. 769.

^{iv} Bob Wilkin, *The Road to Rewards: Living Today in Light of Tomorrow* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2003).

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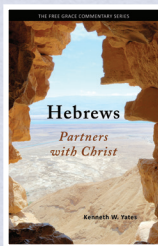


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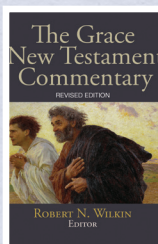


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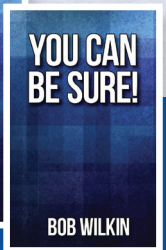
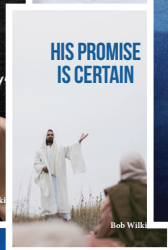
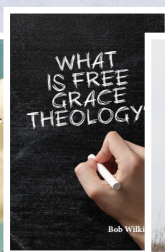
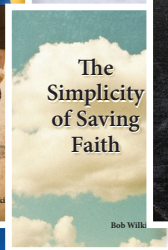
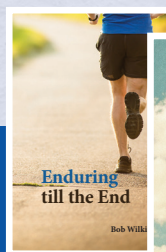


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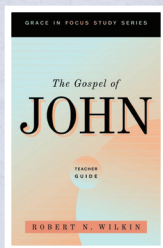
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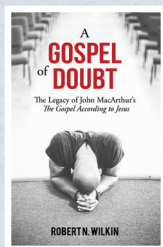


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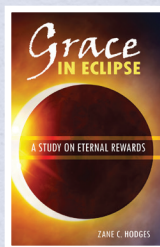


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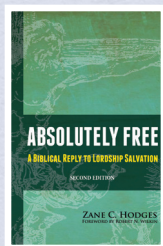


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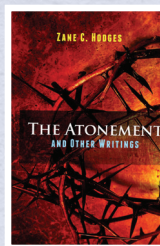


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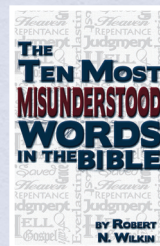


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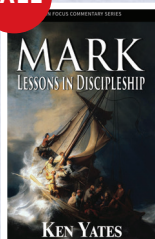
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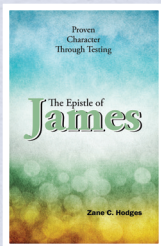
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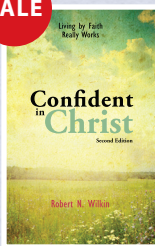


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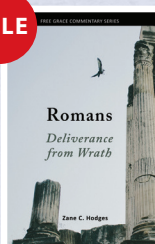


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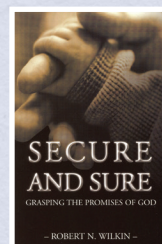
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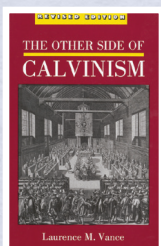
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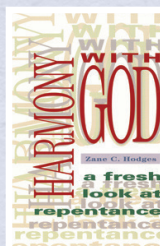
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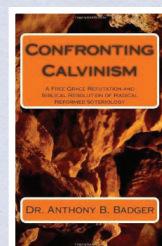
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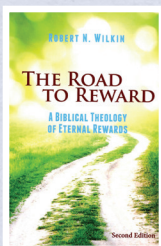
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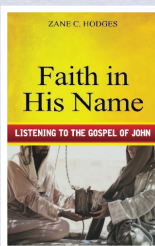
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Kathryn and the Ritchie family at Worldwide Healing Church in Kampala with Pastor Wisdom and his family



Kathryn speaking on eternal security and the gospel of John at a conference at Christ Reign Ministries International in Kampala



The Ritchies and Kathryn with Pastor Steven and his family in Kakiri



Jennifer, Carissa, and Kaela Ritchie with VBS kids at Christ Reigns Church in Kakiri

Brian Ritchie with Umar (his translator) explaining the Living Water Gospel of John booklets at Christ Reigns Church in Kakiri



Will Christ Find All Believers Spotless and Blameless? (2 Peter 3:14-18)

By Bob Wilkin

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul... which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Peter's second letter concerns the prophetic word and remaining true to it. In this letter, he reminds the readers that Jesus is coming again soon and will reward those who persevere in faith and good works.

MOST COMMENTATORS UNDERSTAND PETER TO BE WARNING ABOUT THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

J. N. D. Kelly says that “to be found by the Lord when He comes...is a clear reference to the judgment” (p. 370). He means the Great White Throne Judgment. Kelly thinks all will be judged there.

Davids agrees:

The point our author is making is that purity in the eyes of the Lord ...is something to make every effort to gain. It

alone has lasting value. It is the lack of this purity that marks the lives of the teachers our author opposes. And this lack of purity will condemn them to destruction since purity is the natural result of submission to Jesus as Lord (*2 Peter and Jude*, p. 295).

Schreiner is even clearer: “Hence, there is little doubt that believers need to be “spotless and blameless” to be saved” (*1, 2 Peter, Jude*, p. 393).

PETER WAS TALKING ABOUT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Peter was writing to believers, not unbelievers. He calls them *beloved* twice in this closing passage (vv 14, 17) and twice earlier in chapter 3 (vv 1, 8). In the opening verse of 2 Peter, he writes:

Notice that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Christian life centers on Christ. We grow by getting to know Him better.

“To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Believers will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment (John 5:24). Peter is talking about *the judgment of believers*, which occurs at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:9-11), a thousand years before the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

When Jesus returns, will He find us *spotless and blameless* (lit. “unblemished”) or spotted and blemished? The Apostle John said that if we (“little children”) abide in Him we will have *confidence* before Him when He comes, but if we do not abide, we will shrink back in shame before Him (1 John 2:28). The Lord also spoke of these two possible outcomes occurring at the Bema (e.g., Matt 24:45-51; Luke 8:11-15; 19:16-26).

In his commentary on 2 Peter in *1-2 Peter and Jude*, Zane Hodges explain Peter’s words in this way:

The words *spotless and blameless* do not indicate sinlessness but rather lives lived free of the general depravity and corruptness all around them, especially of the sort encouraged by the licentiousness of the false teachers (p. 170).

Other than Hodges, the only commentator I could find who seemed to understand this as the Bema was Clive Anderson, and even his statement is not crystal clear: “The process of being made holy, called sanctification, is a divine act—it is something God does in us by his Spirit” (2 Peter, p. 105).

THE DELAY OF THE RAPTURE REMINDS US OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR US

Peter says the readers should “consider that the longsuffering of our Lord *is salvation*.” Longsuffering about what? Salvation from what?

Hodges notes: “Peter once again warns them not to be discouraged by the delay of the Second Advent (a delay of which the scoffers would

make much: 3:3-4)” (p. 170). The Lord has been longsuffering toward sinful humanity for nearly two millennia. He has not yet sent the cataclysmic judgments of the Tribulation. He delays the Tribulation as long as there is sufficient repentance on earth (2 Pet 3:9). Hodges wrote concerning 2 Pet 3:9: “What is therefore implicit in the text is that a worldwide repentance could postpone the Day of the Lord for as long as such a repentant attitude prevailed” (p. 153).

Believers will not be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Noah’s flood was delayed for 120 years—until the sins of the world were filled to the brim. Sodom would not have been destroyed had there been ten righteous people in it. Nineveh escaped destruction because it repented under Jonah’s preaching.

Peter was not speaking of salvation from hell here, though most commentators suggest he is.

In his commentary, Hodges interprets *deliverance* (*sōtēria*) here as deliverance *from the Tribulation via the Rapture*. When the Lord comes, we will be delivered from the Tribulation wrath as He catches us up into the air to meet Him (1 Thess 4:16-17). Note that Peter said that Paul spoke of that very deliverance in his epistles (v 16). Surely Peter had 1 Thess 4:13–5:11 in mind.

Believers will be delivered from this evil age and its false teachers. If we keep looking to the Lord Jesus, we will be found spotless and blameless.

SCRIPTURE REQUIRES SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT TO BE UNDERSTOOD

With a very human touch, Peter says that things in Paul’s letters are *hard to understand*. Of course, Peter carefully studied Paul’s letters and came to understand them. But others did not understand Paul’s writings. They twisted Paul’s words “to their

own destruction, as they do the rest of the Scriptures.” Peter called Paul’s writings Scripture in around AD 66!

BEWARE LEST YOU FALL

“Beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pet 3:17). The readers were currently steadfast.

Note the contrast between the steadiness of the readers and the instability of false teachers (2 Pet 3:16).

Because there are people who twist the Scriptures (v 16)—wicked men who teach error (v 17)—we must beware lest we fall!

We all remember people who used to be regulars at our church and walked with the Lord, but who have since ceased to walk in fellowship with Him.

It can happen to any of us. We are not safe from the danger of falling. We all need regular fellowship centered around God’s Word in order to remain steadfast (Heb 10:23-25).

The way we keep from falling, the way we remain steadfast, is by continuing to grow in the grace and knowledge of God (2 Pet 3:18).

Compare Jude 24. God can keep us from falling.

If you are growing, you will not fall. If you stop growing, you will. If you continue to hear and apply God’s Word as it is taught, you will grow more and more.

Zane Hodges makes a super observation about the need to maintain a proper understanding of the grace of God in both our justification and our sanctification:

In the modern evangelical church, when a born-again believer is ensnared by doctrines that mix grace and works, growth in *the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* and of His word comes largely to a halt. This is not

surprising since our fundamental relationship to God is based on His saving grace to us in Jesus Christ. When someone is confused about that, his confusion throws a veil over Scripture as a whole. Progress necessarily stops (*1-2 Peter & Jude*, p. 173, italics his).

If we keep
looking to the
Lord Jesus, we
will be found
spotless and
blameless.

Notice that we are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The Christian life centers on Christ. We grow by getting to know Him better.

He is the One who deserves glory “both now and forever.” He is glorious. And we should glorify Him with our lives.

Michael Green points out that “It is fitting that the glory of Christ should close this epistle which has had so much to say about...the ascended Lord” (p. 152).

We do not live in a world that promotes a proper view of the Lord Jesus Christ and His teachings. Even teachers who call themselves *Christians* often twist and distort the clear meaning of God’s Word.

We must be on guard lest we fall away from the Lord. We need to keep on growing.

The Lord Jesus has promised that He will come again soon. And He keeps all His promises.

Live each day as though the Lord might return today. Live in light of the Lord’s soon return and your judgment at the Bema.

We want to be found by Him without spot and blemish. We want to hear our Lord and Savior say, “Well done, good servant.” ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and Sharon live in Highland Village, TX. He has racewalked twelve marathons.

Spreading the Free Grace Message in Mexico

By John & Alysse Stravopoulos

We are Free Grace missionaries who share the grace message in Chihuahua, Mexico, and Latin America.

I (John) am a South African who grew up in a Christian home. When I was three years old, I nearly drowned in a swimming pool. That experience caused me to question what happens when someone dies. My mother explained that if I believed in Jesus for everlasting life, I would have it! I believed that promise, but as I grew up and my family attended different churches, I lost my assurance of salvation.

From a young age, I wanted to be a missionary. I attended New Tribes Bible Institute (now Ethnos360 Bible Institute) in Michigan. It was there that I was introduced to Free Grace theology. Through studying the Word and reading commentaries by Zane Hodges (which were used as some of the class textbooks), I became convinced that everlasting life is a gift that can never be lost.

We discovered that our Free Grace views were not welcome.

I (Alysse) am Canadian, and I also grew up in a Christian home. At a young age, my mother shared with me that Jesus died on the cross in my place and that only He offered me everlasting life. I believed in Jesus for everlasting life when I was about six years old.

Though I grew up going to church, I heard conflicting messages when it came to what one needs to do to have eternal life, and I did not know



how the Bible fit together as one book. I lost my assurance of salvation and as a teenager was constantly afraid of going to hell. I thought I needed to be a “good person” to gain God’s approval. I attended New Tribes Bible Institute, and through the classes came to understand that everlasting life is a gift that cannot be lost or earned. I met John at New Tribes Bible Institute in 2007, and we married in 2012.

We first served in Mozambique with the goal of doing church planting and Bible translation. Unfortunately, we did not have coworkers, and the living conditions were very difficult. We ended up leaving the ministry there and moving to South Africa, where we helped to register a non-profit organization and also taught at Word of Life Bible Institute in Johannesburg. We were able to teach the Free Grace message and saw some of the students come to understand the difference between salvation and discipleship. We wanted to continue in a full-time teaching role and had heard of a Bible school in Chihuahua, Mexico, that needed teachers. We moved to Mexico in January 2021 and began learning Spanish.

After a few months, we discovered that our Free Grace views were not welcome, and we were not permitted to teach at the Bible school.

In each place we have served, we have struggled to find like-minded believers. Lordship Salvation, Calvinism and “the prosperity gospel” are the dominant theologies in many places we have lived. Thankfully, the Lord has provided pockets of Free Grace brothers and sisters, whether online or in person, to encourage us.

At the end of last year, we became independent missionaries with the desire to teach God’s Word and to use the Gospel of John to show people that everlasting life is a gift that Jesus offers to all who believe Him for it.

Our current full-time ministry focuses on:

Evangelism: We intentionally spend time with non-believers with the purpose of sharing that everlasting life is a free gift that Jesus offers to those who believe His promise. We also engage with “churched” people who have an unclear understanding of how one receives everlasting life.

Discipleship: We invite believers to study through the Bible (whether in person or online), and we help them grow in their understanding of God’s Word. We completed our first online class on the eight signs in the Gospel of John with two couples from Argentina and three people from Chihuahua. In the coming months we will be teaching the following classes:


- The Epistles of John
- Missions (4-week workshop at a local church)
- Hermeneutics

Writing and Translating Bible Study Materials: We write and create Bible studies for adults and children (currently in English and Spanish) that can be used and shared for free. It is our goal that everyone has easy access to truth.

We have had positive responses from our on-line teaching. One attendee recently said, “I have never had such clear Bible teaching. The lessons are simple but not dumbed down. It is very easy to understand. I am so thankful we found you!” Another said, “The recordings of these studies would be a great resource for home Bible studies. Many people do not have time to prepare studies. They could play the recording, and you could have discussion questions to go with the lesson.”

The last class we led ended with a very interesting discussion. Our Catholic friend had been coming on and off. In the last lesson, John really emphasized that we can do nothing to gain everlasting life; it is a gift. She strongly disagreed saying, “We need to work hard for everything in life: a car, a vacation, a house. *How much more we need to work to get to heaven.*” It was very sad. Everyone gave their input and directed her to Scriptures like Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3. In the end, she said she needed to study it out, but she could not see how it could be so easy. It is sad that she feels she can—and indeed, needs to—work to gain everlasting life.

Catholicism is the main religion in Mexico. And among Evangelical churches, Lordship Salvation and Calvinism are strong. We have not found any Free Grace churches in our city. The attendees from Argentina say the same thing. They enjoy reading the GES articles in Spanish and have left their church because it did not hold to Free Grace theology. They found us through our Facebook page.

A great need remains for people in Latin America to hear Free Grace teaching and to have access to Free Grace materials! 



John & Alysse are Free Grace missionaries who serve the Lord in Chihuahua, Mexico.

I lost
my assurance
of salvation and
as a teenager
was constantly
afraid of going
to hell.

Should We Teach **ETERNAL SECURITY** If It Is Divisive?

By Bob Wilkin

Most people recognize that religion and politics are divisive issues. Some families make it a rule not to discuss religion or politics at their family gatherings.

Many Christians recognize that doctrine divides. For this reason, some major ministries do not allow certain doctrines to be discussed in their Bible studies. Doctrines that are off limits might include tongues, prophecy, and the sign gifts. But did you know that some groups ban the discussion of eternal security? It, too, is divisive.

There are pros and cons to teaching on eternal security in your church or Bible study. Let's consider both, starting with the cons.

The cons are:

1. Eternal security is divisive.
2. Some visitors will not come back if we teach on it.
3. If visitors leave, they won't have a chance to hear our good teaching.
4. The church finances will suffer.
5. Attendance will suffer.
6. Unbelievers will be turned off and won't keep coming.

The pros are:

1. A person cannot be born again until he believes in Jesus for everlasting life that

can never be lost (John 3:16; 11:25-27; 20:31).

2. Believers cannot grow properly unless they remain sure that they are eternally secure (1 John 5:9-13).
3. God commands us to teach the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27).
4. Sometimes visitors who hear about eternal security will be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11 and will search the Scriptures to see whether this is true. Some will come to faith as a result.
5. If the finances and attendance of the church suffer as a result, then that is as it should be. If we hide the vital truths of Scripture in order to increase attendance and finances, we lose our reason for existing.

The apostles were arrested and put in prison for preaching the message of life in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:17-18). The message of everlasting life was (and is) divisive.

Then an angel came and "opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this life' (Acts 5:19-20, NASB95). The apostles did as they were told and started teaching at daybreak.

The Jewish authorities were furious.

The high priest, the most revered priest, said, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” (Acts 5:28, NASB95).

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What the angel called “the whole message of this life,” the high priest called “teaching in this name.” When the apostles preached about Jesus, they preached the message of everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

Peter and the other apostles knew that the message of life was divisive. But they did not shrink back. This is how they responded to the high priest: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The Jewish leadership was so angry that they “intended to kill them” (Acts 5:33, NASB95). Only the intervention of a famous teacher, Gamaliel, deterred them.

The authorities accepted Gamaliel’s counsel and did not kill them. Instead, the authorities beat them and “commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go” (Acts 5:40).

What was the apostles’ attitude after being beaten for doing what God told them to do?

They rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). And that was not the end of their preaching the prom-

ise of life: “...daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Let’s say you’re part of a church of 500 that has a senior pastor and two assistant pastors. The senior pastor leaves, so the church calls a new pastor to take his place. This pastor boldly proclaims the promise of eternal security, and half the church members express their displeasure. A meeting is held, and it becomes clear that a church split is brewing. The elders back the pastor. They believe in eternal security. It is in the church’s doctrinal statement. The previous pastor rarely taught it, and when he did, he presented eternal security as an interesting but non-essential doctrine. The people who disagreed were undisturbed (and unconvinced) and remained in the church.

The hypothetical result is that half the church leaves. Church finances suffer greatly. All three pastors have to take pay cuts.

What would your attitude be if you were part of the half that stayed? Would you be upset that the leadership stood up for the clear teaching of eternal security? Or would you rejoice that you were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name?

For me, this is not a hypothetical issue. It happened to me and to GES.

At our 2006 annual conference, Bob Bryant and Zane Hodges gave messages in which they said that a person is not born again until he believes

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in Jesus for everlasting life, defined as “salvation that can never be lost.” It split the conference. Half the conferees voiced strong disagreement. There were 360 in attendance that year. The next year, we had 160 at our annual conference.

In my opinion, that has been the single most important event in the history of GES. It was instrumental in us moving forward with a unified vision and message.

I’m not suggesting that our tone is unimportant. If our tone is mean and nasty, then our tone, not our message, will drive people away.

But if our tone is loving and caring and our message still rubs some the wrong way, then so be it. Those who are open will receive the message.

The message of eternal security is not some unimportant doctrine. It is not a secondary issue. It is a primary issue.

To keep grace in focus, you must remain certain that you are saved once and for all simply by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from all works, including future works. ■



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The Danger of APPLAUSE

By Ken Yates


The Scriptures tell us that the world will always oppose the truth.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most infamous days in American history was November 22, 1963. President John F. Kennedy had made a two-day, five-city tour of Texas—which he had won by a narrow margin in the 1960 election—with the goal of solidifying party support and winning new voters. As the Texas tour was nearing its end, President and Mrs. Kennedy, along with Texas Governor and Mrs. John Connally, were riding through the streets of Dallas in an open-top limousine. Videos of that day show a huge, enthusiastic crowd lining the street.

The people were cheering the young, charismatic president.

As they headed toward Dealey Plaza en route to Stemmons Freeway, Mrs. Connally turned to the president and said, “Mr. President, you can’t say Dallas doesn’t love you.” Seconds later, as they entered the plaza, a sniper firing from the sixth floor of a nearby building ended the life of John Kennedy. Governor Connally was also seriously injured.



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Mrs. Connally's view of the situation that day was erroneous. The crowd's applause had fooled her.

THE CROWDS AROUND JESUS

In Luke 9, Jesus is surrounded by crowds. The people loved being around Him. They had all heard of His supernatural power. In Luke 9:10-17, the Lord miraculously fed a multitude with just a few fish and pieces of bread. If we count the women and children, the crowd might have numbered around twenty thousand. It wouldn't be surprising if those

present applauded what they had the privilege of seeing.

A little later, the Lord encountered another crowd. Accompanied by three of His disciples, He came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and found a crowd awaiting Him. We are not told how many were in the crowd, but Luke says it was a "great multitude" (Luke 9:37). Those in the crowd had heard of the things Jesus had done. Almost certainly, some in the crowd were part of the multitude that had received the bread and fish. They were eager to see what Jesus would do this time. Excitement filled the air. I'm sure many applauded when they saw Him.

He didn't disappoint them. A father brought his son—a young boy cruelly tormented by a demon—to Jesus. Dramatically, the Lord healed the boy. Luke explains how thrilled the crowd was at such a display of power. They were "amazed at the majesty of God" (Luke 9:43).

How did the disciples react to these crowds? Peter had been with the Lord when He fed the twenty thousand. He was with Him as He descended the mountain and met the waiting multitude. As one of the Lord's disciples, Peter must have been pleased to see the crowds. As a citizen of Israel, Peter would have approved of his fellow countrymen coming together to see Christ. Peter knew that Jesus was the promised King. He saw the large crowds as an indication that the nation agreed with him. You can almost hear him say, "Lord, You can't say Israel doesn't love You!"

Like Mrs. Connally, Peter was mistaken. The applause had fooled him.

THE LORD WASN'T FOOLED

After Mrs. Connally told President Kennedy that he couldn't deny Dallas's love for him, he said, "You certainly can't." These were his last recorded words. Like Mrs. Connally, Kennedy was fooled by the praise of the crowds.

But our Lord wasn't. He knew what the nation would do to Him. Following His interaction with the applauding crowd that ate the bread and fish, He told His disciples that He would suffer at the hands of the nation's leaders, who would put Him

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to death (Luke 9:21). Later, after meeting the adoring crowd at the base of the mountain, He reminded the disciples of what He had told them. The nation would betray Him (Luke 9:44). It would not accept Him as its King. The people would kill Him.

Luke tells us that Peter and the other disciples reacted the way Mrs. Connally did when she heard the applause in Dallas that November day. The disciples didn't see the reality. Luke records that even after the Lord told the disciples that the nation would kill Him, they did not understand (Luke 9:45).

We should not make the same mistake.

DON'T BE FOOLED

Perhaps encouraged by the generally positive reception he had received as he toured Texas, Kennedy let his guard down. Despite the fact that Dallas was home to a notable faction of extreme right-wingers whom many considered threats to Kennedy, he ordered the Secret Service to conduct the motorcade with an open-top limousine. That decision, of course, made Lee Harvey Oswald's fatal shot possible. Ironically, Oswald was not a right-winger, but a passionate communist who at one point had defected to the Soviet Union. It seems that in the last moment of his life, President Kennedy, taken in by Mrs. Connally's remark, had forgotten that he could have many types of enemies concealed in the crowd.

The same was true of the crowds that surrounded Christ. Some believed in Him. But others opposed Him. Many were looking for opportunities to accuse Him of a crime. Some even wanted to kill Him.


We need to remember that when we encounter crowds. The world's applause conceals danger. The Lord warned His disciples about this when He said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you..." (Luke 6:26).

James also warns against desiring the world's approval. He asks his readers, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas 4:4). In simple terms, James is telling us to watch out when the world applauds us. Things are not as they appear.

APPLICATION

When we gain the approval of others, it makes us feel good. We can actively seek that approval and measure our success by the crowds we attract. When we do, we assume that large ministries are more pleasing to the Lord than small ones.

But the Scriptures tell us that the world will always oppose the truth. In Gal 1:10, Paul explains that he does not seek to please men. If we accurately teach what the Bible says, we will have enemies. Many will think we are jerks, heretics, or both. GES, for example, teaches that eternal life is given as a free gift when one believes in Jesus alone for it, and that it can never be lost. We also teach that in the kingdom of God there will be differences among believers. Some will be greater than others. Many people, both in and out of churches, vehemently oppose such teachings. Paul, James, and the Lord said it would be that way.

It is easy to fall in love with adoring crowds. Disciples of the Lord should not seek such approbation and acclaim. In fact, if a bunch of applauding people surround us, we can be sure there is danger around the next corner. 



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A Silent Woman

By Kathryn Wright

INTRODUCTION

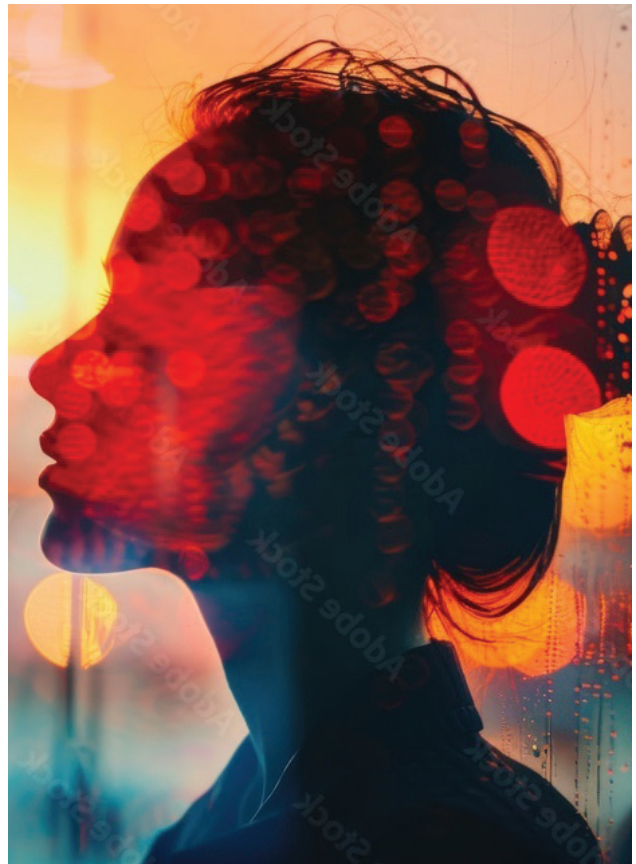
In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judg 21:25).

The book of Judges records the events that took place after the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land. Sadly, what began with godly leadership and possession of the land under Joshua and Caleb ended with immorality and civil war. Through the book's narratives, the author of Judges portrays the nation's tragic descent into spiritual degradation.

It is striking that women are the lens through which this decay is revealed. Women such as Deborah, Jael, and Delilah serve as an indictment of the men of Israel. In addition, three daughters illustrate the gradual deterioration of the nation's spiritual condition.

THE WISE FATHER: CALEB AND ACHSAH (JUDGES 1:12-15)

At the beginning of Judges, we see examples of strength and bravery. Caleb, the faithful spy from the days of Moses and Joshua (Num 14:24), offers his daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who will take up the challenge of conquering Kiriath Sepher (Judg 1:12). Othniel, a godly warrior who will later become Israel's first judge, rises to the occasion (Judg 3:9-11).



Stone comments:

It might seem to us at first that Caleb is not treating his daughter very well when he offers her as the prize for bravery, but we need to recognize that Caleb's challenge to the soldiers would **ensure that his daughter married a strong and brave man** who would more than likely be the leader of the family and provide for her. We can also conclude that if this warrior took the city, it would be because he had faith in God. That was the only way the Israelites ever won a battle. So, the chances were also good that **Caleb would be providing a man of God for his daughter**. So, I conclude from this section that Caleb is going to find a good husband for his daughter (Stone, "The Role of Women in the Book of Judges," *Bible.org*, <https://bible.org/article/role-women-book-judges>. Accessed 5 June 2025. Emphasis added).

When men fail to lead, women are not merely dishonored—they are silenced.

Caleb's choice reflected discernment and tender care for his daughter. A man had to be proven worthy of marrying her, so Caleb looked for the qualities of courage and faith. He found them in Othniel. What follows is a beautiful exchange between a loving father and his daughter:

Now it happened, when she came to him, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from *her donkey*, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" So she said to him, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs (Judg 1:14-15, emphasis added).

Achsah was a bold and clever bride. While the new couple had been given land, it came without springs. This would have made life difficult in an agricultural society. Therefore, Achsah boldly approached her father and asked for more than land. She asked for springs of water. Achsah was emboldened, undoubtedly because she trusted in her father's care for her. In response, she was not ignored, but listened to. In fact, Caleb didn't just listen to her; he blessed the couple. He gave Achsah what she needed in order to flourish and even went beyond what she asked by providing both the upper and lower springs.

This is what godly leadership produces: strong women, courageous husbands, provision, and peace. Judges later records that Israel enjoyed forty years of rest under Othniel's leadership (3:9-11). Achsah's inheritance secured abundant life for her, her husband, and any future children.

Three elements make this account notable:

1. Achsah is named.
2. She dismounts from her donkey.

3. She speaks, and her wise request is heard and honored.

Near the end of Judges, another narrative will feature a woman on a donkey. But this time the scenario will be tragically different.

THE WEAK FATHER: JEPHTHAH AND HIS DAUGHTER (JUDGES 11:29-40)

The next father-daughter duo in the Book of Judges is found in 11:29-40, the account of Jephthah. He was a mighty warrior and is listed among the faithful in Hebrews 11. He was a man chosen to lead Israel into battle. But when given leadership, he didn't trust in God's promise; instead, he bargained:

"If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me... shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering" (Judg 11:30-31).

Rather than entering into battle with faith, Jephthah leads with superstition. When he returns home in victory, his only daughter comes out dancing. His rash vow becomes her ruin. It's unlikely that her father killed her. Instead, the text and Hebrew wording lean toward his consigning his daughter to lifelong virginity. In the culture in which they lived, her life was as good as destroyed because she would never marry, bear children, or inherit land. She became a living sacrifice to her father's foolishness.

She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel... (Judg 11:39).

The tragedy isn't just what happened to her, but what didn't happen *through* her. She left a legacy of emptiness and silence. She became a symbol of loss, not life. Whereas Achsah inherited springs, Jephthah's daughter inherited isolation.

THE WICKED FATHER: THE CONCUBINE'S DEGRADATION (JUDGES 19:1-30)

The final father-daughter duo in Judges is found in chapter 19. Like Caleb, this unnamed father has a daughter. But unlike Caleb, this father shows no discernment and fails to protect his daughter. Instead, his daughter is reduced to being a Levite's concubine. As one of Israel's spiritual leaders, this Levite should have been above reproach in his treatment of this woman. Instead, he neither elevates nor cares for her. She flees him, and the text hints at why: She would rather prostitute herself than live under his roof.

Something is deeply wrong. She eventually returns to her father's house—but even there, she finds no true refuge. When the Levite comes to retrieve her, her father lavishes hospitality on him. The father raises no concern, asks no questions, and finally sends his daughter back with the Levite. She is not protected by her father, but treated as a piece of property.

The Levite, far from being a righteous counterpart to Othniel, leads her straight into ruin. On their journey home, they spend the night in a house in Gibeah. A mob surrounds the house, demanding that the Levite come out so they can violate him. To protect himself, the Levite instead gives them his concubine:

So the man took his concubine and brought her out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning (Judg 19:25).

The next morning, the Levite arises from his bed to find the concubine lying at the door, her hands on the threshold, indicating a last desperate attempt to find refuge from the ravages of the night before (19:27). The Levite's response is nothing short of astonishing:

And he said to her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place (Judg 19:28, emphasis added).

The Levite shows no remorse upon finding his concubine lying dead at the doorway. He proceeds to dismember her body, dividing it into twelve pieces which he sends throughout Israel to the twelve tribes. He does this, not out of grief, but as a political ploy. His brutal act sparks civil war. As a result, countless more women suffer (Judges 20–21). When fathers fail and spiritual leaders become predators, daughters are no longer honored or heard—they become collateral damage.

Unlike Achsah, the concubine is never named. She never speaks. Her body is placed on a donkey, not as a bride, but as a gruesome warning. At the beginning of Judges, a woman descends from her donkey to claim a blessing. At the end of Judges, a woman is lifted onto a donkey in death.

CONCLUSION

Through these three daughters, the nation's spiritual condition is revealed. When the nation was spiritually healthy, Achsah was cherished, protected, and given the means to flourish. When spiritually weak, Jephthah's daughter was cursed, isolated, and cut off from an abundant life or legacy. When the nation was in spiritual darkness, the concubine—nameless, neglected, and brutalized—graphically personified the nation's moral collapse and lack of godly leadership.

The book of Judges begins with a strong father, a bold daughter, and a faithful son-in-law. It ends with mutilation, civil war, and women sacrificed for men's protection and pride. Many want to close their eyes to the final account and gloss over the goriness. But the horrors of the passage are meant to be understood in context. If the true context is ignored, we will fail to understand the message so vividly demonstrated in the book of Judges: Sin is always ugly, and its wages are death (Rom 6:23). And when men fail to lead, women are not merely dishonored—they are silenced.



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A large crowd of people is silhouetted against a vibrant, colorful background of stage lights. The lights transition from a bright yellow on the left, through a deep purple in the center, to a bright blue on the right. The crowd is dense, and the overall atmosphere is one of a large-scale event or concert.

THAT YOU MAY KNOW YOU
HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE

KEEP GRACE IN FOCUS