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GRACE IN FOCUS



NICE PEOPLE CAN STILL BE DEAD PEOPLE



GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY 40th ANNIVERSARY







ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Eat 'Em Up, Obadiah!

Doesn't God Save Everyone the Same Way?

Mary, Did You Know?

In This Issue

4 **"Can You Help Us?"**
Ken Yates
Many men have promised to save those under them, to keep them from harm. But men can fail or lie. We know we can rest assured in Christ's promise. He will return for us.

7 **Mary, Did You Know?**
Kathryn Wright
Mary was blessed with an incredible responsibility. She should be remembered and respected for her faithfulness, but it can go too far. Many Christian traditions go beyond what the Bible actually says. God should be the only object of our worship.

10 **Doesn't God Save Everyone the Same Way?**
Ralph Grant
Salvation has always come by faith in the Messiah, whatever the time or place or tradition. How can we explain this to those who see different saving messages in the Bible?

12 **Eat 'Em Up, Obadiah!**
Bob Wilkin
Obadiah describes a judgment that was coming for the nation of Edom. God promised to curse those who curse Israel. This short book shows how He keeps His promises.

16 **Disqualified from What? *Adokimos* in 1 Corinthians 9:27**
Petr Tyll
Was Paul the apostle worried about losing his salvation? If Paul could become disqualified from everlasting life, then what would that mean for us?

20 **2026 Year End Contributions CALL-TO-ACTION**
As you prayerfully evaluate your year-end charitable giving, we invite you to partner with us in proclaiming clear Free Grace teaching.

22 **2027 Annual Conference Promo**
This year's conference theme, Free Grace Issues in the Prophets, coincides with the official release of The Grace Old Testament Commentary, Volume 2: The Nevi'im.

24 **Nice People Can Still Be Dead People**
Ruth Vidrine
Many Christians never question what they have been taught in church. This can lead fellow church members to have different views on Scripture without realizing it. What happens when their views on salvation differ?

33 **Distinct Destinies for Servants & Citizens in the Parable of the Minas**
Greg Muller
The parable of the minas describes two groups of people. Many theologians blur the line between these groups by considering the third servant as one of the unbelieving citizens. This undermines the meaning of the parable and distorts the lesson for believers. There are many views on if and when that rule will take place.

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36 What Kind of Millennialist Are You?

Laurence M. Vance

The Bible clearly teaches that Christ will rule on this Earth for 1000 years before creating the New Earth. There are many views on if and when that rule will take place.

39 Keep Christ in Christmas All Year Long

Bob Wilkin

Christmas is a wonderful time to remember God's greatest gift to the world. But Christ should be the center of our attention no matter the season. Whenever we read God's Word, Christ should be our focus.

42 Virtue in a Woman

Marcia Hornok

The Bible is full of examples of men acting virtuously, but what about women? The personification of wisdom in Proverbs 31 teaches how women and men can be virtuous in God's eyes.

46 Cowardly Heroes

Ken Yates

It is easy to find accounts of great bravery in the Bible. But those same brave heroes acted cowardly. We should not despair if we sometimes fail to act bravely for the Lord.



Letter from the Editor



We don't know when Jesus was born. Many speculate He was born in March or April since the shepherds were in the fields with their flocks. December 25, or January 7 for the Orthodox, is a man-made date.

Overcomers should focus every day on Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, and soon return (1 Cor 15:1-57). Paul said that to live is Christ (Phil 1:21).

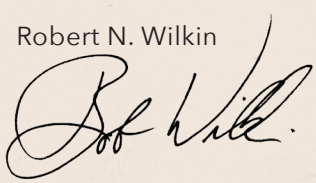
Our magazine is designed to fulfill both purposes of GES: to make the promise of everlasting life clear (to unbelievers and to believers who share their faith) and to present the promise of eternal rewards to believers who persevere in faith and good works.

This issue completes the six issues that focus on our 40th anniversary. The front and back covers of each issue stressed that fact. I'd like to say I was ten years old when I started GES. But the truth is, I was thirty-four. How time flies. I am thankful to be joined in this endeavor by many others, including Ken Yates, Kathryn Wright, Dan Strathman, Sam Marr, Dave Wyant, Tony Badger, Dix Winston, Geoff Stevens, Jeff Spencer, and many more. When the time comes for me to cut back or retire, many gifted, committed, spiritually minded believers are prepared to keep the torch burning until the rapture.

Many of you give financially to help this ministry. We call you *Partners in Grace*. Thank you for your fellowship in all that we do. Humanly speaking, we could not do this without your partnership.

Keep grace in focus.

Robert N. Wilkin



"Can You Help Us?"

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

The last American forces left South Vietnam on April 30, 1975. I am old enough to remember the scenes on TV. One of the most famous photos is of a helicopter perched precariously on the very small roof of a building in Saigon. A long line of people, obviously Vietnamese, were climbing a ladder to get on the aircraft, which looked like it could hold only about eight people. Clearly, there was not enough room for everyone.

The people in the photo had supported the US presence in Vietnam over the course of approximately fifteen years. Now the Vietcong were entering their city, and our allies on the ground knew that if they did not leave, they would be tortured, placed in concentration or "reeducation" camps, or even killed. Those trying to board that helicopter were considered traitors by the invaders from the north. Our friends in the south had assisted the US in bombing and killing the friends and families of the enemy soldiers, who now had vengeance on their minds.

This was not America's finest hour. The US ambassador to South Vietnam, Graham Martin, had waited too long to get our friends out of the country. Those friends had relied on the US to take care of them. We let thousands of people down. Graham left the country, abandoning those climbing the ladder—as well as countless others—to their fate. The withdrawal was a disaster.

I can only imagine the terror they felt as Vietcong tanks entered Saigon.

WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?

Journalists from other countries remained in Saigon to record what would happen. On May 2, one climbed to a rooftop, where he found a group of Vietnamese who had been US allies. He asked a woman with a child, "Why are you still here?"

The woman said she was waiting for a helicopter to return and take her and her child to safety. The journalist assured her that America was gone and would not be coming back. I think the woman was in denial, for she very calmly asked the journalist: "Can you help us?"

If we did not know the context, her question would have given us the wrong impression. Her tone suggested she was asking a neighbor for a lift because her car battery had died.

PUT TO SHAME

That woman, and many like her, had put their hope in the wrong source. She had been told that if she worked with the US to defeat the communists in the north, America would take care of her. She and her family would be safe. Perhaps she had been told, even during the final days, that the US helicopters would return and take her to her new home in America. Surely the US ambassador would never leave her to face the enemy alone.

Eventually, she would realize that she had been duped. She feared for her own life and the life of her child. I'm sure she felt stupid, resentful, disappointed, and ashamed. I have no idea what happened to her when she climbed down from that roof or was dragged down from it by a Vietcong soldier. I prefer not to think about it.

WE ARE AT WAR

The New Testament repeatedly says that Christians are engaged in a battle. Satan and his forces are constantly at work, trying to impede the work of the Church (Mark 4:15; 2 Cor 2:11; 4:4; Eph 6:11-13; 1 Pet 5:8).

The Lord Himself entered into the battle. Satan severely tested Him in hopes of persuading Him to abort His mission (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). Satan's demonic soldiers opposed the Lord's ministry on many occasions. The Lord cast them out, showing His power over the enemy. In His earthly life, He demonstrated that we are fighting a war.

For fifteen years, the U.S. government and the ambassador in Saigon had told the South Vietnamese that we were in the war together. The US was the strongest nation on earth, and they had nothing to fear. America would never let them down. America would take care of them. America would keep its promises.

The Lord has promised the same thing to us—His allies, if you will. He is greater than our enemy (1 John 4:4). He will never leave us alone (John 14:18; Heb 13:5). Even though He ascended to the Father, He lives within His people through the Holy Spirit.

Our South Vietnamese friends thought, even when the tide of the war turned against them, that they had a home in America if the communists became too strong. The lady on the rooftop had believed in the promises of Graham Martin.

Jesus has made a promise to us. He will not leave us stranded, but will personally return: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also" (John 14:3). He will not abandon one single person who has believed in His promise.

ISRAEL'S FUTURE WAR

In Romans 9–11, Paul speaks of a future time when Israel will be surrounded by her enemies, led by Satan and his henchman, the Man of Sin. The nation will be threatened with annihilation. In that day, the whole nation will be made up of believers in Jesus Christ.

Revelation 6–19 paints a dark picture of those days. The Jewish nation will have believed Christ's promise to take care of them. He said He would defeat their enemies. Christ's prophets had said it. In its darkest hour, the nation will call upon Him. He will respond and fulfill His promises (Rom 10:13).

But unlike the lady on that rooftop in Saigon, they will not ask if someone else can help them. The Lord Himself will deliver them from their enemies (Rom 11:26).

Those left behind in Saigon were put to shame. They had placed their confidence in the wrong source. But that is not the way it will be for Israel in the last days. As Paul says in his discussion about Israel: "Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame" (Rom 10:11). He will not abandon His people.

CONCLUSION

We do not know what happened to all of our allies who were left behind in South Vietnam. But we do know that their enemies mocked them. Even the journalist who questioned the woman on the rooftop thought she was a fool. Nobody was coming to help, and nobody did.

In some ways, it is the same for believers today. We believe the Lord will keep His promise. He will not let us down. His enemies will be defeated. He will come for us. He will not leave us stranded on some rooftop. That is true for the Church and for Israel in the future.

For now, the world mocks us. While the woman waited on that rooftop for two days, the world says we are even bigger fools because we have been waiting for 2,000 years (2 Pet 3:4)! But they have forgotten who made those promises to us.

Jesus Christ is not Graham Martin. Nobody who has believed in Him and nobody who is waiting for Him will be put to shame.



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.



Mary, Did You Know?

By Kathryn Wright

Every year at this time, believers around the world turn to the Biblical accounts of the Lord's birth. As we consider these familiar accounts, many will turn their gaze to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

While there is much to learn from Mary, we should avoid a common pitfall that is especially prevalent at Christmas: overemphasizing and even glorifying Mary. For example, the Roman Catholic Church venerates Mary, claiming that she is without sin and is an intercessor between man and God. Over the last few years, there has been a pendulum swing toward Catholicism, especially among Gen Z. Many are converting to Catholicism, including former Evangelicals. This raises the question: Why?

One contributing factor is Catholicism's love and adoration of Mary. While Evangelical doctrine doesn't venerate Mary or hold to other heresies regarding her, there is arguably a soft elevation of her among Evangelicals. She is often treated as being near-omniscient. Therefore, when confronted with the Catholic heresies, Evangelicals are often ill-equipped to defend their official position.

However, the Christmas narrative in Luke 2 helps us to see Mary from a more accurate perspective. In this chapter, we encounter Mary three times. These encounters paint her in a different light than we might traditionally envision. This article will examine these passages as we seek to arrive at a Biblical view of Mary of Nazareth.

THE GIRL WHO PONDERED

The first encounter is recorded in Luke 2:8-18. Angels appear to a group of shepherds, who in turn go to see the Baby. The shepherds then go out proclaiming everything they have heard and seen. As the shepherds go out to proclaim the news, Luke writes:

> Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart (v 19).

The word *pondered* here means "considered something" or "gave careful thought to it." The NET Study Bible says this about the word:

> The term *sumballousa* suggests more than remembering. She is trying to ***put things together*** here [emphasis added].

Like someone working on a puzzle, Mary is depicted as trying to put all the pieces together. Mary didn't fully understand what she had seen and heard from the shepherds. However, she meditated on what they had said and tried to understand its significance. Mary didn't fully comprehend what she was shown, but like any faithful student of God's Word, she studied it and pondered its meaning (Ps 119:15, 25-27; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 1:10-12).

THE GIRL WHO MARVELED

In the second encounter with Mary, Luke's narrative jumps to the temple. As required by the Mosaic Law, Mary and Joseph are offering two doves as a sacrifice following the birth of their Son, the Lord Jesus. In the temple, they meet a man named Simeon. He makes some amazing statements about the Baby, speaking of a future time when all people, including Gentiles, will worship God (Luke 2:31-32). Luke records the couple's response:

> And Joseph and His mother ***marveled*** at those things which were spoken of Him (v. 33) [emphasis added].

Once again, Luke does not portray a tranquil Mary who hears Simeon's predictions with perfect understanding. She and Joseph are shocked by this new information. Certainly, Mary would have known that the nation of Israel would be delivered by the Messiah (Luke 1:54-55). But the idea that Gentiles would also receive light and revelation was unexpected. One could argue that she should have known (Gen 12:2-3), but she did not. Constable writes:

> Mary and Joseph understood that Jesus was the Messiah. However, they had evidently not connected some of the Old Testament revelation about the Messiah to which Simeon referred with Jesus' ministry. Perhaps they understood Messiah to be ***mainly a political leader, as was the view of most of their contemporaries***. God used a stranger to inform them of their Son's significance for the Gentiles (Tom Constable, Bible.org).

In short, Mary didn't understand everything regarding the Child to whom she had given birth. She had previously spoken of the deliverance of Israel. As Constable notes, this was likely because the Jews believed the Messiah to be a political figure and a warrior. At this time they did not understand all His attributes, that He was God in the flesh, or what He would accomplish on the cross. In the encounter with Simeon in the temple, Mary was unaware of the blessings the Lord would bring to the Gentile nations, as well as of the coming church age. The example here is one of ongoing growth as she is given new information.

THE GIRL WHO DID NOT UNDERSTAND

The third encounter with Mary takes place a few years later. Following His family's journey to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, Jesus—still a child—had stayed behind to teach in the temple. When His parents realized that He wasn't in the group traveling back to Nazareth, they returned to Jerusalem and, after some searching, finally located Him (Luke 2:41-46). In verses 48-50, Luke tells us what happened when Mary found Jesus:

> So when they saw Him, they were ***amazed***; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You ***anxiously***." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they ***did not understand*** the statement which He spoke to them. [emphasis added]

Luke again provides an interesting description of Mary. She is amazed and anxious and is oblivious to Jesus' ministry at the temple. Despite all that had happened at His birth, she still did not understand what Jesus was telling her now about His ministry. Looking at these accounts, we can learn many things about Mary. She was obviously a believer. She understood that a Messiah who

gives eternal life was coming. She also knew that Jesus was this promised One who would redeem the nation of Israel.

However, there were also many limitations in her understanding. She didn't understand the significance of the events surrounding the Lord's birth. At this time, she didn't understand the impact He would have on the Gentiles, His ministry at the temple, His coming work on the cross, or His divinity. There were a lot of theological gaps in Mary's understanding of Jesus and His earthly ministry.

Yet, the Lord used her.

Mary was an imperfect person, with imperfect knowledge. Despite all this, she is a wonderful picture of a profound Scriptural truth: **God does great things with humble people**.

Roman Catholics do Mary a disservice by elevating her to the position of intercessor. But Evangelicals also do Mary a disservice by making her into a 21st-century Bible scholar. She didn't have all her theological ducks in a row. She didn't understand everything she saw, or even experienced. What a comfort it is to know that, despite her deficiencies, God still used a poor teenager from Galilee to be the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Despite her imperfect knowledge, she was still able to glorify the One who knows everything.

He can do great things with us as well.

THE GIRL WHO PRAYED

The last time Mary is mentioned in Scripture is after Jesus ascends.

> These all continued with one accord in prayer... with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers (Acts 1:14).

Unlike the Catholic portrayal of Mary as transcending the status of ordinary people, our last glimpse of her is as one believer praying among many. The New Testament never portrays her as having either a special mediatorial role or any unique authority over the Church. Instead, she is presented as a faithful disciple of her risen Son.

Throughout church history, many have elevated Mary beyond what Scripture says. Some have claimed she was sinless. Others have suggested that she possessed extraordinary knowledge of Jesus' life and mission from the very beginning. Even among Evangelicals, songs and sermons sometimes paint Mary as if she fully understood everything that was about to unfold.

Yet the Biblical portrait is both simpler and more beautiful.

The New Testament never presents Mary as all-knowing. It never portrays her as an intercessor between believers and Christ. It never calls believers to pray to her or to seek her favor. Instead, it presents her as a humble servant of God, a believer who trusted His promises and continued to learn throughout her life.

Perhaps the greatest miracle surrounding Mary is that while she was not a flawless, untouchable saint, God chose to accomplish one of the most significant moments in redemptive history through an ordinary, young Jewish girl who needed a Savior just as much as everyone else. That truth should encourage every believer. The Christmas story is not ultimately about the greatness of Mary. It is about the greatness of Mary's God.

The same Lord who chose a humble teenage girl from Nazareth still delights in using ordinary believers today. He is not looking for people with perfect understanding, spotless records, or extraordinary abilities. He is looking for hearts that are willing to believe His promises and say, as Mary once did, "Let it be to me according to Your word."

That is a miracle of grace worth celebrating every Christmas.



Kathryn Wright and her husband, Dewey, live in Columbia, SC. She is the GES missions coordinator, women's conference speaker, writer, and Zoom teacher.

Doesn't God Save Everyone the Same Way?

By Ralph Grant[1]

**This article first appeared in the January-February 1998 issue of Grace in Focus. It has been slightly edited.*

Over twenty-five years ago, I trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. It was like nothing I had ever experienced in my life. Overwhelmed by God's love, I found a joy and peace that was indescribable. With perfect confidence in Christ, I knew without a doubt that He had paid the total price for my sins on the cross. My first desire was to tell my relatives and friends about the loving Christ who had counted my faith in Him for righteousness (Rom 4:5) and had given me salvation as a gift (Eph 2:8).

This was something that I just couldn't keep to myself. I had to tell somebody! If my loved ones only knew, there would be no way that they could pass up a gift like this. A month after trusting Christ as my Savior, my family and I took a month's vacation to our hometown to tell our families and friends about the Lord Jesus and what He had done for me. As a "babe in Christ," I was not prepared for some of their responses.

Somewhat naïvely, I had assumed that all professing Christians believe the same gospel. I didn't know that there were church members whose sole calling was to "witness" to new converts like me in order to get us on the "right" road to heaven. Oddly enough, not one of them, in all the years I had known them, had ever said anything to me about the Lord Jesus, or about my lost condition. However, the moment I confessed to them that I was saved, it became their duty to show me that I was still lost and on my way to a "devil's hell."

A CONFUSING CONVERSATION

"Ralph, don't you know that you've been listening to the commandments of men rather than the command of Christ?" one relative asked me. "You have to believe ***and be baptized*** in order to receive Biblical salvation. Water baptism is ***essential*** to salvation. Here, look at what God's Word says: 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned' (Mark 16:16), 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38), and 'Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord'" (Acts 22:16).

"I see that," I said, "but doesn't God save everyone the same way? If God saved one person

without water baptism, then water baptism isn't essential to salvation, right?"

"Hold on, Ralph, I know where you're headed—the thief on the cross, right?"

"No, not really. I was thinking about the Old Testament saints. How were *they* saved?"

"That's easy, Ralph. They were saved under the Old Covenant. They were obedient to the Law of Moses and the sacrificial system."

"Since you mentioned the thief on the cross, how was he saved? He didn't keep the Law of Moses or the sacrificial system."

"He was a *special case*. Jesus saved him personally. You don't have a problem with the Lord saving someone under special circumstances, do you? Anyway, this happened between the Old Testament and the New Testament. *We* are living under the New Covenant today."

"Well, tell me about the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. How were *they* saved?"

"Ralph, they weren't really saved until they were water baptized. Even though they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they were still unsaved."

What I came away with were these confusing conclusions: God has employed different ways to save people throughout history; the thief on the cross existed during some special dispensation between Law and Grace; and a person can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and yet be unsaved.

It took years for the Holy Spirit to unravel the "wisdom" imparted to me that day. But thankfully, through careful personal study of His Word, God has done just that.

SALVATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE SAME FOR EVERYONE

No one has ever been saved by animal sacrifices (Heb 10:4), or by keeping the Mosaic Law (Luke 18:9-14; Acts 15:5-10). We needed a perfect Savior. So God sent His only Son to die as our substitute (2 Cor 5:21). Putting on human flesh, God became a Man and died for man's sin.

People before Calvary were saved by believing in the Messiah who was to come (Gen 15:6; John 5:46; 8:56; Rom 4:1-8). People after Calvary are saved by believing in the Messiah who has already come. Abraham, David, John the Baptist, the thief on the cross, and Cornelius and his household were all saved by grace through faith in Christ, plus nothing.

Since that's the case, then water baptism cannot be a condition of our salvation. Although water baptism is something every believer should submit to out of obedience to God, neither it, nor any other righteous act, will ever save the sinner (Titus 3:5). It is belief in the gospel that saves the lost sinner (Rom 1:16). When we trust in Christ as Savior, God gives us eternal life (John 5:24; 6:47).

And finally, Jesus said that when a person believed on Him, not only would that person receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life (John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 8:24), but that the Holy Spirit would be *with* and *in* him forever (John 14:16-17). All Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and no unbelievers are indwelt by Him. The Bible does not teach an in-between state.

All who have been saved or will be saved, up to the end of time, receive that salvation the same way. How wonderful it is to understand this great truth and to rest in God's promise of eternal life by simple faith in His Son!

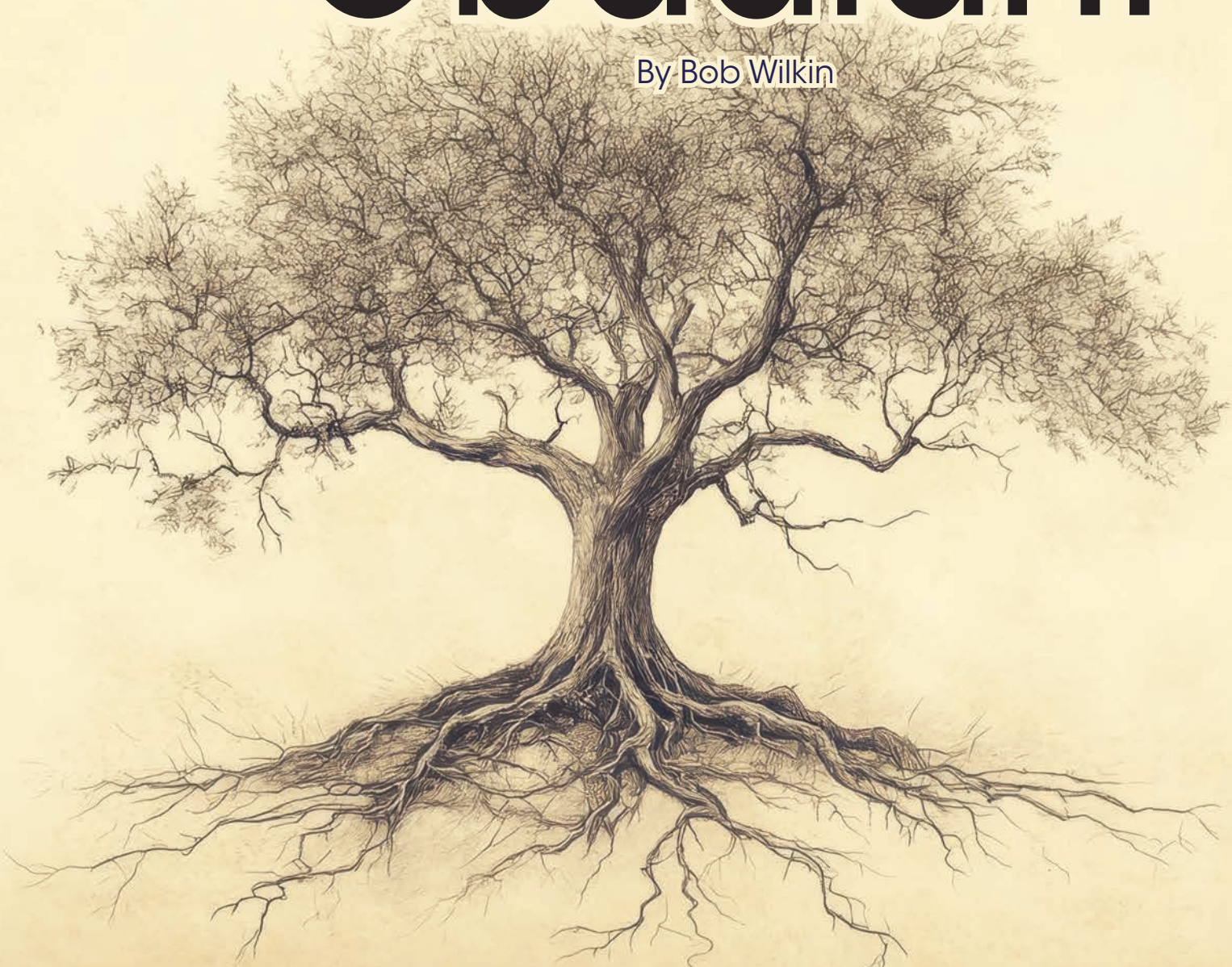


Ralph Grant (July 1940 to November 2019) served two terms on the GES board, from circa 1998 to 2002 and from 2006 to 2008. Ralph spent twenty years in the Army and then another twenty working for the City of Dallas in the Signal Department. He also worked for several years at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. He and his wife Eva then returned to Houston, where they were from.

[1] Ralph Grant was one of the early board members of GES. He went to be with the Lord in 2019. His beloved wife, Eva, followed him in 2022.

Eat 'Em Up, Obadiah!

By Bob Wilkin



I wrote the commentary on Obadiah for Volume 2 of our *Grace Old Testament Commentary*, due to be available in May 2027. Volume 2 covers the Neviim—the prophets—in the Tanakh, the Hebrew Old Testament.

I remember the big idea of Obadiah by means of the four words in this title. "Eat 'Em" is short for *Edom*. Obadiah is about God's coming judgment of Edom, Israel's brother, but also her foe.

Obadiah is the shortest of the twelve Minor Prophets (i.e., prophetic books that are shorter in length). It is also the shortest book in the OT, at just twenty-one verses.

It is not quoted in the NT , though it is alluded to in several places (Rom 9:12-13; Rev 11:15; 18:7-8).

Obadiah is about two nations that arose from two brothers: Israel (Jacob) and Edom (Esau). It presents prophecies about the coming destruction of Edom. That destruction occurred in 553 BC.

Many nations opposed Israel, but none is mentioned in the OT more than Edom (110 times). Many of the prophetic books mention this brother nation. It is mentioned four times in Isaiah, eight times in Jeremiah, seven times in Ezekiel, five times in Amos, and once each in Daniel and Malachi. Obadiah mentions Edom twice (vv 1, 8).

The book predicts judgment on Edom for its many sins against Israel. It ends by telling of the coming day when Israel is restored to a position of glory and honor.

The Southern Kingdom was carried away to Babylon between 605 and 586 BC. If Obadiah wrote after the Babylonian exile, he wrote to either the small remnant that was allowed to remain in Judah (cf. 2 Kgs 25:12; Jer 39:10; 40:6) or to the exiles in Babylon.

Verse 1 introduces the book by declaring that God has sent a messenger to stir up the nations to go to war against Edom. Edom would fall because there were not enough righteous people to spare it from destruction (cf. Gen 18:23-33).

Verses 2-9 tell of the coming destruction of Edom, a proud nation that would soon be humbled. The Edomites had stored up earthly treasures, which would soon be taken away (cf. Matt 6:19-21).

Verses 10-14 indicate that Edom would be cut off forever because of its attitudes (vv 10-12) and actions (vv 13-14) toward its brother Israel. The Edomites rejoiced in Israel's deportation and captivity.

Edom even entered Jerusalem and looted it (v 13). Worse, it killed and captured Jews who were escaping, turning the captives over to the attackers.

Verses 15-17 tell of **the day of the Lord**:

> "For **the day of the LORD** upon all the nations is near;
> As you have done, it shall be done to you;
> Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.
> For as you drank on My holy mountain,
> So shall all the nations drink continually;
> Yes, they shall drink, and swallow,
> And they shall be as though they had never been.
> But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
> And there shall be holiness;
> The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions."

The expression "the day of the Lord" occurs seventeen times in the OT and twice in the NT. It is found eleven times in the Minor Prophets. It always refers to a time of judgment, followed by a time of blessing upon Israel. Did you know that the day of the Lord has occurred previously? It occurred several times before the church age. Remember that the expression refers to judgment on Israel and the nations, followed by blessings upon Israel. That has happened before, and that will happen again.

The day of the Lord will also occur after the church age. The day of the Lord that is yet future refers to the time that begins with the Rapture and ends with the destruction of the heavens and the earth after the Millennium (cf. 1 Thess 5:1-11; 2 Pet 3:10-12). It includes the Tribulation judgments and the judgments that put down the rebellion at the end of the Millennium.

At the end of the Tribulation, Jerusalem (Mount Zion) and all of Israel will be saved from Gentile oppression (Rom 10:13; 11:26). Verses 18-20 describe a coming day, the Millennium, in which Israel will possess the mountains of Esau, the Philistine plain, Samaria, and Ammon.

All the nations will one day reap what they sowed. They poured out their wrath on Israel. Soon, it will be their turn to drink of the cup of



God's wrath. The concept of drinking the cup of God's wrath is found in Ps 75:8 and in Rev 14:10 and 16:19. The Lord Jesus Himself willingly drank that cup for us (Matt 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 12:27; 18:11).

The final verse of the book (v 21) reads:

> Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion
> To judge the mountains of Esau,
> And the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

The concept of ruling with Messiah as an eternal reward (e.g., Luke 19:16-26; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26) is found in that final verse. The people called "the saviors," plural, are those who will act as rulers under the Messiah. They will rule both during the Millennium and on the new earth after the Millennium.

Though short, Obadiah is a book worthy of your attention. You might want to study it in your Sunday School class or home Bible study. Every one of us should be a student of all of God's revelation to us: the Torah, the Prophets, the writings (the Ketuvim), the Gospels, Acts, the epistles, and Revelation. It is all inspired and profitable (2 Tim 3:16-17).



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

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Bob, Dan, David, Sam after Bob & David recorded last radio in old office



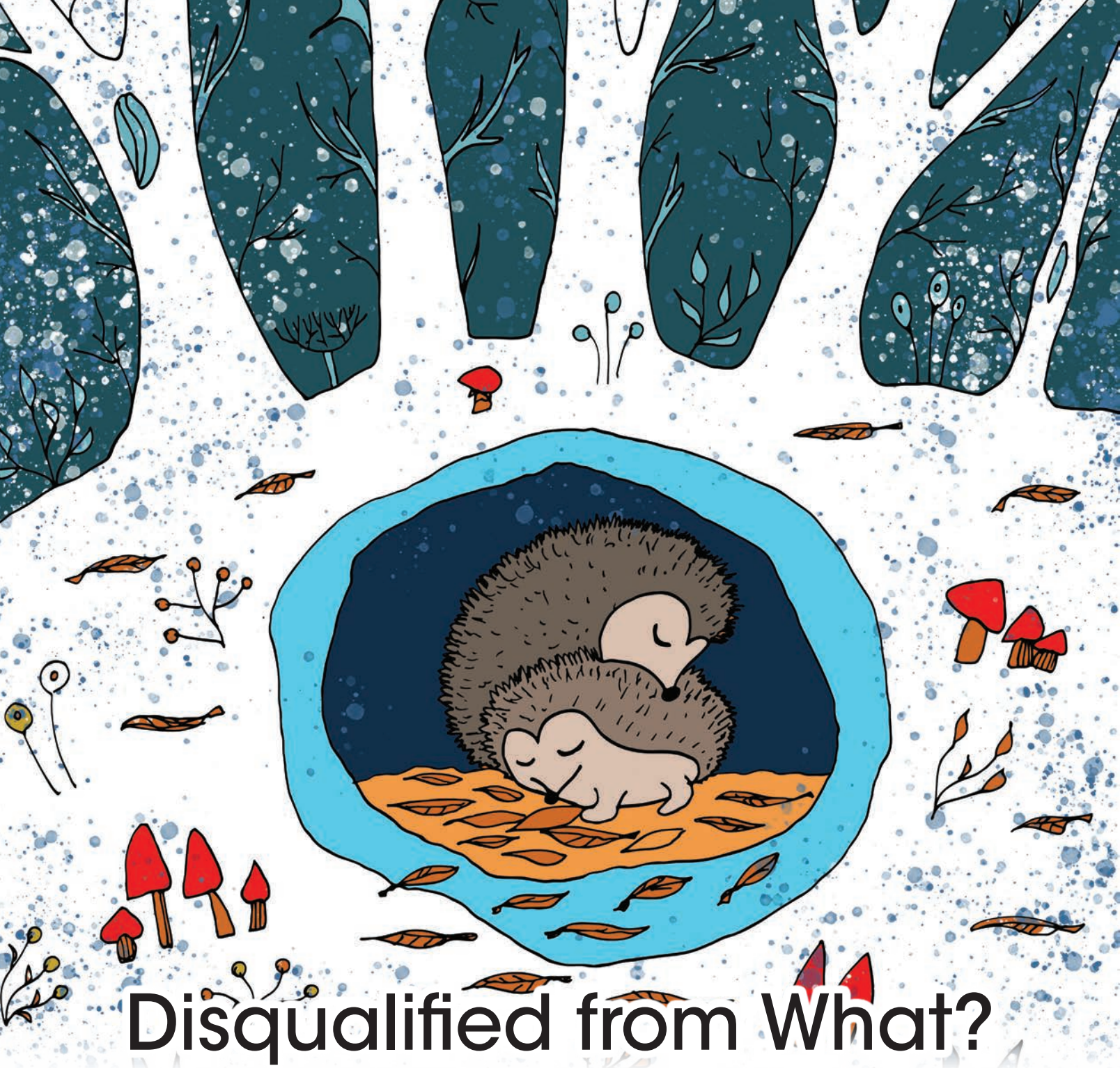
Dan moving boxes



Ken with basketball buddies Johnny and Dirk (not Nowitzki)



Bob, Pastor Leon Adkins, & Jim Duncan @ Berean Memorial



Disqualified from What?

Adokimos

in 1 Corinthians 9:27

By Petr Tyll



First Corinthians 9:27 leads to our asking the question: "Disqualified from what?" Chrysostom read Paul's fear of becoming *adokimos* as a warning about eschatological salvation, writing that "…if Paul, who had taught so many, was afraid of being rejected at the end, what can we say? Mere belief is not enough; we must behave in a way which is blameless if we hope to inherit salvation."[1] This interpretation has found modern advocates across the theological spectrum. I. Howard Marshall, writing from an Arminian perspective, argued that the passage reflects a genuine possibility of apostasy for a true believer and that salvation, once possessed, can be lost.[2] Thomas Schreiner, a committed Calvinist, reads the word the same way lexically, though for different theological reasons. Where Marshall sees a genuine possibility of losing salvation, Schreiner understands the warning as the means by which God preserves the elect and those who fall away, proving thereby that they were never truly regenerate.[3] That two scholars standing at opposite ends of the perseverance debate read *adokimos* as referring to eternal standing, while arriving at mutually incompatible conclusions about what that means, is itself worth pausing over. It suggests that the salvation-loss reading may be driven less by the text than by prior soteriological commitments, whether it be Arminian anxiety about the possibility of falling away or Calvinist insistence that warning passages must carry eschatological weight if they are to function as genuine motivators.



Yet the salvation-loss reading assumes rather than demonstrates that *adokimos* here refers to eternal standing. Chrysostom does not argue the point from the word itself but imports his broader moral-theological framework into the text. The question, therefore, that the lexical and contextual evidence must answer is: "Disqualified from *what*?" Commentators such as Leon Morris have answered that disqualification would result in loss of crown, but not salvation.[4] This paper argues that the reward interpretation is correct, and that it can be defended on both contextual and lexical grounds.



The words *dokimos* and *adokimos* come from the verb *dokimázō* meaning "to test" or "to approve after testing." The noun *dokimos* describes someone or something that has passed the test and stands approved as genuine. *Adokimos* is its opposite and describes something or someone that has failed the test or is not according to standard and therefore disapproved, disqualified.

In the original usage, the word was associated with metallurgy, describing metal proven genuine by fire. A coin was *dokimos* if it was authentic, and an athlete was *dokimos* if he met the competition requirements. The idea is always about being tested against a real standard and either passing or not.[5]



In 1 Cor 9:27, Paul fears becoming *adokimos*, not with respect to his eternal salvation, but with respect to his ministry usefulness

Koine Keeper:

The word *pneumatikos* comes from *pneuma* (*S/spirit*). Paul used it four times in 1 Cor 2:13-3:1. It refers to *one who is spiritual*, one who has "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16; cf. Rom 8:6, "spiritually minded"). The spiritual believer is contrasted with the carnal believer (*sarkikos*), one who is carnally minded (1 Cor 3:3-4; cf. Rom 8:6). Carnal believers are "babes in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1). All newborn believers are carnal believers. But it is sadly possible for one who has been a believer for decades to still be a baby Christian in their mindset and actions (1 Cor 3:1-4).

and apostolic credibility. The boxing metaphor makes this clear. A boxer who fails to meet the weight limit but shows up at the contest is still a boxer, though diqualified. Paul is not expressing doubt about his heavenly citizenship. He is expressing his concern about being found unworthy of the prize, of the "Well done," from his Savior at the Bema.

Something similar is happening in 2 Corinthians 13. The Corinthians had been questioning Paul's apostolic authority, so he turned the tables: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified [*adokimoi*]" (v 5). The point is not that they should doubt their eternal salvation. Paul is asking whether they are actually operating within the sphere of faith (living from it as their practical source). His conceptual parallels elsewhere explain his thinking: walking by the Spirit vs. walking by the flesh in Galatians 5, or *pneumatikos* vs. *sarkikos* in 1 Corinthians 3. Examining their actual behavior, the Corinthians were still *sarkikos*, "living from the flesh." That is the kind of *adokimos* condition Paul has in mind.

Romans 1:28 uses the word for a mind that no longer functions as God designed it. Hebrews 6:8 applies it to unfruitful land. The core idea is the same.

What holds this all together is that *dokimos* describes something or someone functioning as designed or as intended. *Adokimos* is the failure to so function, whether it be a mind, a field, an apostle, a church, or a believer. The Christian life is meant to be lived by the Spirit—by faith through grace. The issue of *dokimos* and *adokimos* is therefore not being saved or not being saved but functioning or not functioning in the grace, by faith and by the Spirit. Such a way of living is rewarded not only in this life by the peaceable fruit of righteousness, but in the future by the Lord at His Bema.

ENGAGING THE OPPOSING VIEW

Thomas Schreiner argues that the ministry-reward reading of *adokimos* "strays from the context since Paul warns his readers about matters relating to salvation in 10:1-22," and that the word consistently denotes those "disqualified in some way from genuine faith."[6] The contextual argument, however, actually works in the opposite direction. The Israelites invoked by Paul in chapter 10 all passed through the Red Sea, which is Paul's own typological language for the event that constituted them as God's redeemed people. As Randall Gleason demonstrates in his study of the Old Testament background of Hebrews 3–4, the Israelites of the Exodus generation were a genuinely redeemed people, and despite their subsequent failure, their redemption from Egypt was never forfeited. God continued to care for them in the wilderness for forty years.[7] Their failure in the wilderness was therefore not a failure of saving faith. They neither lost their standing as the redeemed nor proved they were never redeemed. What they forfeited was entry into the promised land by resting in faith toward God. That meant the experiential enjoyment of what God had already secured for them and for which He could be trusted in the future. The Jordan crossing, not the Red Sea, is the picture of the victorious, Spirit-empowered life of faith in God's promises. This is precisely the post-salvation, approved-servant issue Paul has in mind in 9:27.

As Robert Gromacki observes in his exposition of this passage, the athletic analogy

makes the distinction explicit: "An Olympic athlete who won a race did not lose his Greek citizenship if he was subsequently disqualified; however, he did lose the honor and forfeited his wreath crown."[8] To compete in the Isthmian Games, an athlete had to possess Greek citizenship. The citizenship was the prerequisite for entry, not the prize at stake. In the same way, eternal life is the prerequisite of the race Paul describes, not its uncertain outcome. The prize Paul runs for is the Savior's commendation at the Bema.

Schreiner's second line of argument is lexical: that *adokimos* across its NT usage consistently refers to exclusion from genuine faith and thus salvation.[9] But a survey of all eight occurrences of the word in the NT does not bear this out. Bob Wilkin, surveying the full NT evidence, concludes that "with one possible exception (Titus 1:16), every use of *dokimos* and *adokimos* in the NT is in a context dealing not with everlasting life, but with eternal rewards or temporal judgment."[10] This is precisely what the evidence shows. Romans 1:28 applies *adokimos* to a *nous* ("mind") that suppresses truth and no longer functions as God designed it, and the context is temporal wrath (1:18-32), not the verdict of eternal condemnation. Hebrews 6:8 applies it to unfruitful land. In 2 Tim 3:8, the word appears with the qualifying genitive *peri tēn pistin*, "disqualified with respect to the faith," indicating a domain of failure, not a synonym for *reprobation*. Titus 1:16 similarly governs the word with *pros pan ergon agathon*, "unfit for every good work," a functional disqualification, not a statement about eternal destiny.

The most decisive passage is 2 Cor 13:7, where Paul expresses willingness to appear *adokimos* himself for the sake of the Corinthians' progress. If *adokimos* meant "eternally condemned" or "proven to be an unbeliever," Paul's statement would be incoherent because he could not be seriously contemplating appearing unsaved for the Corinthians' benefit. Not a single NT occurrence uses *adokimos* as a direct reference to eternal condemnation or as a technical term for the unjustified. Schreiner's lexical argument is dismantled by the very texts he cites. A word's semantic range cannot be made to carry a meaning that none of its actual occurrences sustain.



Petr Tyll is the pastor of Církev Milosti in Prague, a position he has held since 2005. He is currently completing an MDiv at Grace Evangelical Theological Seminary. He lives with his wife Jarmila and their three children in the Czech Republic.

[1] Gerald Bray, ed., *1–2 Corinthians*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 7 (New York: Routledge, 1999), 89.

[2] I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 122.

[3] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 7 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 195.

[4] Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 140.

[5] Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 12

[6] Schreiner, 196.

[7] Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 627 (July 2000): 281-303.

[8] Robert G. Gromacki, *Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of I Corinthians* (The Woodlands:Kress Christian Publications, 2002), 114.

[9] Schreiner, 196.

[10] Bob Wilkin, "Testing Yourself Regarding God's Approval and Disapproval (2 Corinthians 13:5-7)," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 33, no. 64 (Spring 2020): 21-39, available at faithalone.org.

2026 Year End Contributions

CALL-TO-ACTION

As this year draws to a close, we reflect on the incredible scope of outreach God has allowed us to accomplish together. From publications to digital media, from conferences to our seminary, our mission remains clear: proclaiming the clear promise of life and equipping believers with sound, Free Grace teaching.

Every project we launch, every page we publish, every class taught, and every episode we record is made possible by the faithful generosity of partners like you. Yet, sustaining and expanding this reach requires ongoing, dedicated financial support.

What many may not realize is that our ministry receives no institutional grants and relies on very few large gifts. Instead, our operations are funded almost entirely by faithful, smaller individual donations from everyday readers and listeners like you.

When you give to our year-end campaign, your support directly funds tangible, day-to-day operations. Your contributions cover our vital outreach initiatives—including regional conferences, live events, and teaching or speaking engagements—as well as the production of our weekly YouTube videos and podcasts. Donations also meet the development and maintenance costs of our website, a digital hub serving tens of thousands of visitors each month with clear biblical resources. Furthermore, your gifts help sustain our full-scope, online theological seminary, this magazine, our semi-annual scholarly journal, and major publishing initiatives—including the upcoming Volume 2 of the Old Testament commentary and other Free Grace books.

Every gift—no matter the size—makes a direct impact on these ongoing initiatives. As you prayerfully evaluate your year-end charitable giving, we invite you to partner with us in proclaiming clear Free Grace teaching. Your tax-deductible contribution will ensure these vital platforms continue to thrive in the year ahead. Please visit www.faithalone.org to make your donation today.

GES GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY





Grace in Focus Going Deeper!

Last July, our podcast ministry, *Grace in Focus*, made an exciting transition. We moved the program off the radio and fully onto digital platforms, allowing us to reach listeners in new ways while keeping the format you know and love: short, practical 10–15 minute Q&A episodes tackling your questions from Scripture. But starting in January, we're taking another big step. *Grace in Focus* is becoming a long-form podcast, and we couldn't be more excited about what that means for our followers!

So, what will this new format look like? More content. More conversation. More time in the Word. We'll still be answering your questions in our familiar 15-minute Q&A segments, but now we'll also have room for longer discussions with Bob, Ken, and special guests. Without the clock constantly running, we can slow down, dig deeper, explore difficult questions, and follow an idea all the way to its biblical conclusion. We'll also introduce segments that examine alternative interpretations and the arguments behind them, giving you an opportunity to hear not just *what* we believe, but *why* we believe it. And, of course, our mailbag segments will continue bringing your questions into the conversation.

Our first series in this new chapter is called "Why Distinctions Matter." G. K. Chesterton once wrote, "Art, like morality, consists of drawing the line somewhere." Whether or not you agree with Chesterton on everything, there's something important in that observation: meaningful distinctions require us to draw lines. But where should those lines be drawn? And how do we know when a distinction is biblical—and when we've simply become nitpicky? In this opening series, we'll tackle some of the distinctions that matter deeply to our understanding of Scripture, including the assurance of salvation, repentance, the content of saving faith, and Israel. We'll ask why these distinctions matter, examine competing viewpoints, and work through the biblical arguments together.

At GES, our mission is to educate and equip believers by teaching the Word of God. We believe part of learning Scripture is learning *how to learn Scripture*—how to ask questions, examine arguments, follow the text, and arrive at sound conclusions. This new format gives us more room to do exactly that.

We're going deeper. We're asking harder questions. And we're doing more for you. Welcome to the next chapter of *Grace in Focus*.

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GES GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

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2027 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Free Grace Issues in the Prophets

Looking Into the Past to See the Future

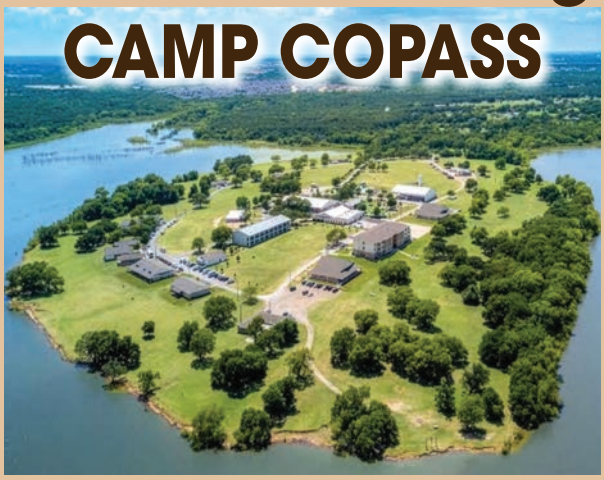
Mark your calendars for our upcoming Annual Conference, hosted at Camp Copass! Scheduled for **May 24–27, 2027** (with check-in on Sunday, May 23), the conference takes place during the final week of May—the week immediately following the end of the Texas school year. To make this an enriching experience for the whole family, we are pleased to offer a dedicated Vacation Bible School (VBS) program for children ages 4–11.

2027's conference theme, *Free Grace Issues in the Prophets*, coincides with the official release of *The Grace Old Testament Commentary, Volume 2: The Nevi'im*.

Together, we will examine critical Old Testament passages and tackle tough interpretive questions through a Free Grace lens. Sessions will address key theological topics such as:

- Misunderstood "problem passages" and covenant promises (such as Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 40–48).
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- How the New Testament uses and fulfills OT prophecy (e.g., Matt 2:15, Acts 15) without improperly imposing NT church truth onto the OT.
- Practical Free Grace principles and church-age application derived from prophetic Scripture.

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WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?

"TRENDS VS. TEXT" REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN KAMIAH, IDAHO



Idaho Regional Group picture



Jeff, Kathryn, Ken, and Geoff hiking



Sharing a meal at the Idaho Regional



Tubing together at the Idaho Regional



NICE PEOPLE CAN STILL BE DEAD PEOPLE

By Ruth Vidrine

Over several years, I had many interesting conversations with my friend. We had been in a Bible study together for almost three years and had walked through difficult life challenges together, including the death of my father, the separation of my marriage for a time, and her unwell mother moving in with her family. Life is hard. We shared prayers, verses, and tears together.

But one lunch together became eye-opening for both of us. While eating and discussing the infiltration of mysticism into the church today (another topic for another day!), the issue of how one becomes born again came up. How had we been friends so long and not seen the chasm of differences between us? It became apparent that she believed repentance and commitment are required for one to be born again, though phrased as the idea that, while they do not save a person,

they will surely be the result if one truly is born again.

Thus began our discussions, which went on for quite a few months, over what one must do to be born again.

HOW CAN YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU BELIEVE AND YET LIVE SUCH A GODLY LIFE?

During one of our last conversations, she stopped, looked at me, and said, **"How can you believe what you believe and yet live such a godly life?"** She was stumped that I could believe in the certainty of having eternal life, no matter what I did or did not do in the future, and yet not live like a heathen. It seemed clear to her from observing my lifestyle that I was born again, although my beliefs were all wrong.

At the time, her question stumped me. Why would she ask me this? Why would I not live a godly life? My Savior has given me eternal life! I told her that I had wondered the same thing regarding her. How could she and I have such drastically different beliefs on how to be born again, yet our lives look so similar? We were both faithful wives, good mothers, faithful weekly Bible study members, and nice people.

She assured me that she believed I was her sister in Christ (to which I responded that I was secure whether she believed it or not). However, she accused me of teaching heresy and being deceived by the enemy in my theology. Perhaps she thinks that no one can live a moral, good life unless they are born again. And the irony is that the passage that includes Matt 7:16—"...you will know them by their fruits"—was misused in our Bible study. This passage uses *fruit* as a metaphor to represent what the person (a.k.a. *false prophet*) teaches. Matthew 7 says to listen to what is said, not to focus on how one appears outwardly, for he may be a *wolf in sheep's clothing*. Ironically, she did not follow this advice.

If I could go back, I would have given a more thorough answer.

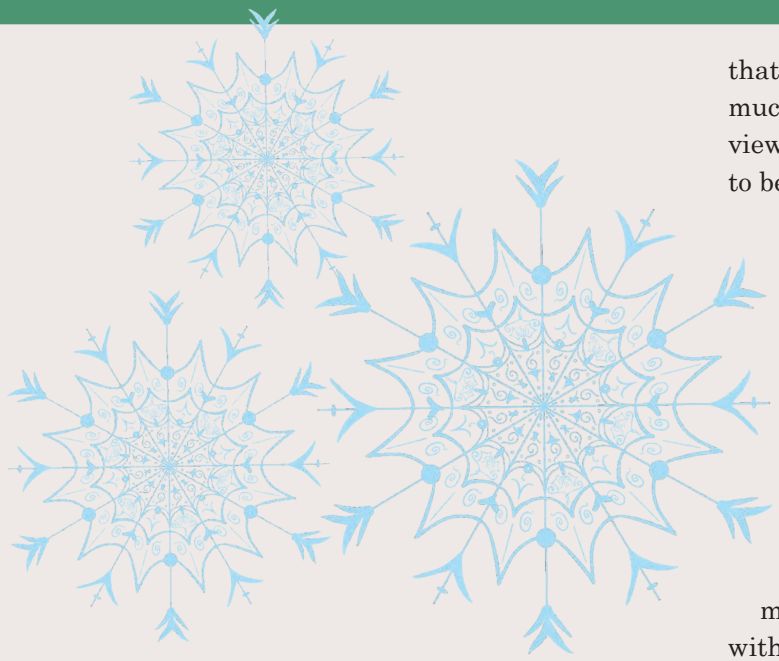


WHAT I SHOULD HAVE SAID

Here is what I would like to say to her:

1. When I realize the grandness of His glorious gift of eternal life, I want to live a life pleasing to Him.
2. The more I understand the importance of eternal rewards, the more I desire to live faithfully. (My friend thinks that heaven is a reward that all the elect get.)
3. Why would I want to live a destructive life and die prematurely?
4. Why would I want to ruin the life that my Creator has given me?
5. Life is hard. The Christian life is a battle! Knowing that I may not persevere, I want to run the race well.
6. I do not want to be a believer who is ashamed at His coming (1 John 2:28)!

Instead, I told her that at age eight or nine, I wanted to go to heaven. I learned that only Jesus



could do that for me. I trusted Him to get me there and keep me with Him forever. I was not a drug addict. I was not sleeping around. I didn't really use bad language. There were no egregious, looming sins from which to turn. I was a pretty good child, and my life did not noticeably change. My conversion was beautiful, for I was dead, and He gave me Life, but it was not particularly evident to others.

Now, I had always wrestled with my conversion story since it was not very dramatic. And at that moment, after sharing this with her, I got it. It all clicked. I loved my testimony. It was beautiful and simple! It was a child's receiving from the Creator a gift that could never be lost. I received eternal life and would go to be with Him when I died.

I shared with her that, having become a hormonal teenager soon after receiving eternal life, I sinned more following my conversion than before it. She did not know what to say. But I was joyful, because it all made sense to me. After wrestling with my eternal security during my teen years, I could look back at my lifestyle then and clearly see its foolishness. My testimony was a testimony to His kindness (Eph 2:7).

CONVERSATION WITH OUR CALVINIST PASTOR

I then had a conversation with our mutual pastor. I shared my testimony with him. He told me that people who claim they really were not sinning much before their conversion have a self-righteous view of themselves. Basically, it just wasn't possible to become a believer without a radical change. But under his theology, it almost seems that the worse off a person is morally before becoming a believer, the better, for more "proof" is then evident to others and to oneself that the conversion "took."

I disagreed. We left that church.

OUR COLLEGE DAUGHTER'S NICE ATHEIST FRIENDS

A few years before this discussion with my friend, I had an interesting conversation with one of our daughters, who had just returned home from her first semester in college. She shared that she had been shocked that some of the nicest people she met there were atheists. This conversation stuck with me. She said most of them were even nicer than the people she knew at church. How does this make sense? These new friends of hers were unbelievers, wanting nothing to do with Christianity. Shouldn't they be evil and seething with foulness? No, they became some of my daughter's good friends. She realized that they needed Jesus, too, whether they were "nice" or not.

All this has made me wonder whether our big churches today aren't made up of similar personalities—people who would be "nice" whether they went to church or not. Are our big churches primarily made up of rule-followers? I have often thought about how we assume that someone is a believer based on this image we have created: the right clothes, the right hair, and a friendly personality. People like that fit in with the big churches, at least here in Texas. Do many have false hope about their eternal destiny because they fit in and are "nice"? I wonder whether the depressed or anxious person, or one who struggles to dress nicely feels displaced in our churches today. Do they feel welcome? Do they question their eternal security because they are looking at this niceness gauge?

Maybe I would act the way I do because of my upbringing as a recovering middle-child people-pleaser. I typically find it easy to fit in most places. I have always been basically a rule-follower. I

wonder if I would behave similarly whether I were a believer or not.

Would my daughter's atheist friends behave much differently if they became believers? They are already nice! Their outward behavior would probably not look much different, at least to a casual friend.

MY FRIEND RECOMMENDED AN ARTICLE ON ASSURANCE AND WORKS

In an article my Calvinist friend recommended, Dr. John Piper states that if one is unsure of his salvation, he should ask his friends for their opinion. In episode 1572 at desiringgod.org, he says:

> Well, might I be deceived [about being a real Christian]? No, in fellowship with other people, encouraging us with the promises of God, giving us the warning of God, and keeping their eyes on our life and faith, that's the prescribed way by which we avoid being self-deceived [about whether or not we are Christians].

Looking at one's "fruits" for eternal security is a dangerous business, and so is asking friends for their opinions about one's eternal destiny. If I cannot tell that I am born again, why would I trust another fallen human to decide whether I was heading for the lake of fire based on the way they view my life? They do not know what is inside my heart, nor will they be the Judge in the afterlife. If I can look polished on Sunday morning, no one will question my eternal security. So many in our churches are looking at the wrong things to determine one's eternal destiny. And sadly, in my experience, when the truth of the free gift of eternal life by faith alone in Jesus is presented, it is called "heresy"! It does not make man feel good to hear that his soteriology does not match what Jesus said in the Gospel of John—and so the Free Grace message is dismissed.

PEOPLE SOMETIMES PLAY CHURCH GAMES

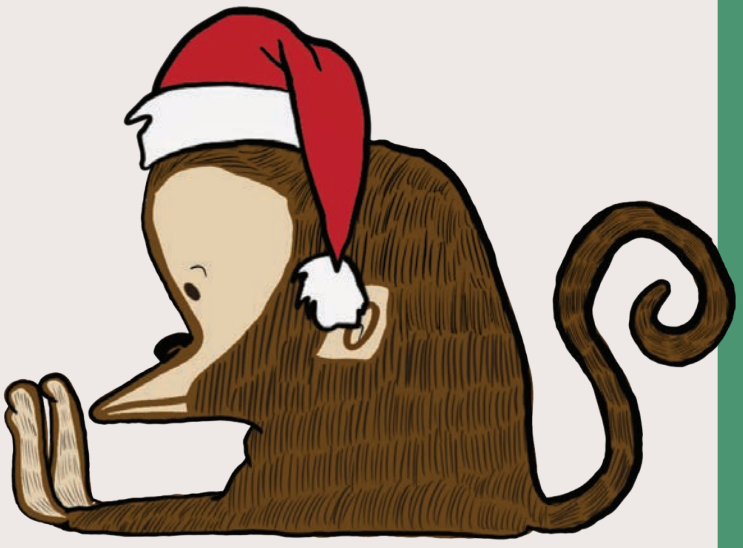
So why does my friend live a godly life, given what she believes? For her and other Calvinists, performance is necessary in order to feel confident of being "truly" born again. But there can be no certainty of eternal life when she is looking to her works for proof.

I also wonder if she would be "good," whether born again or not. People can play the church game, blend in, and feel a false sense of security because they are looking at their "niceness," not at the promise of eternal life given to all who believe in Him (John 11:25-26). She looks at people's lifestyles, not at what they believe, for proof of eternal life.

Ephesians 2:7 says, "...so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." I now love my easy-believism testimony. Eternal life is a gift given to all who believe in Him for it. Nice people can still be dead people! It is all about what He has done and what He promises the believer. It's not about what we do or what we promise.

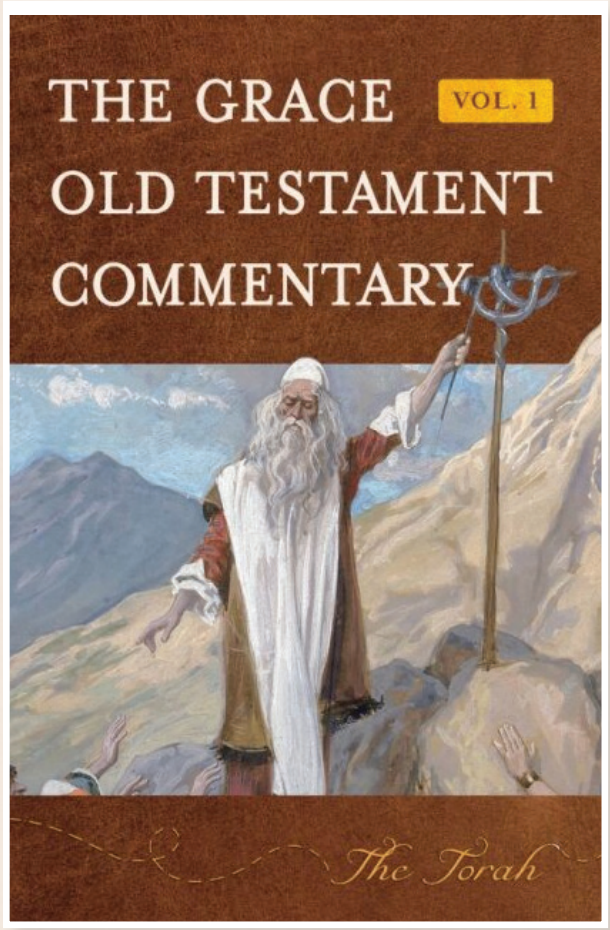


Ruth Vidrine and her husband, Ryan, live in Grapevine, TX, and they are the parents of 3 grown daughters. Ruth has her B.A. in Elem. Ed and is a retired homeschool mom. She is so grateful for the clear free-grace message of everlasting life.



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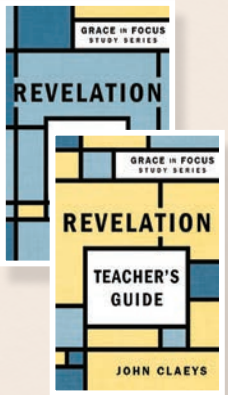


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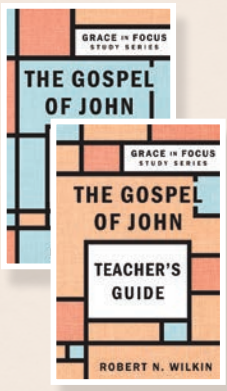


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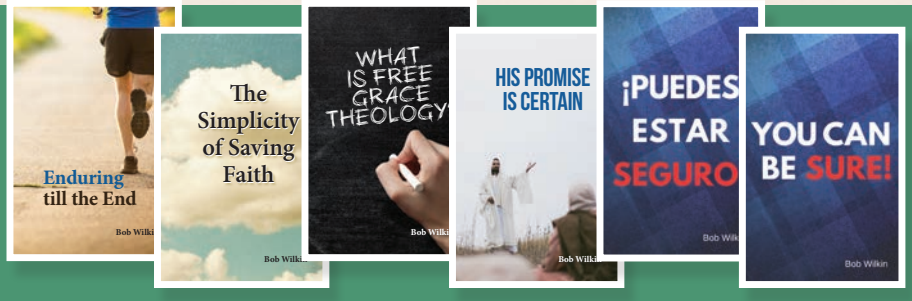


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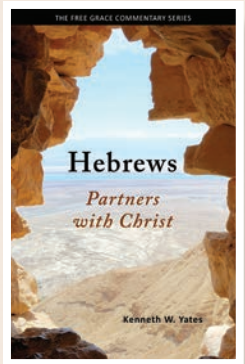
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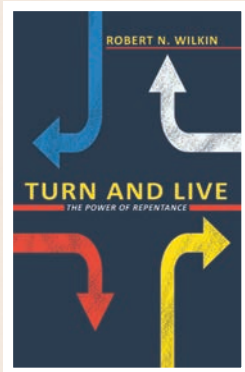


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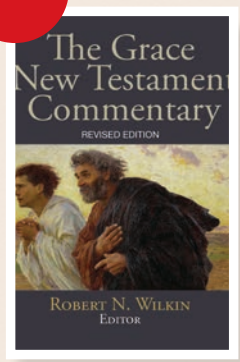
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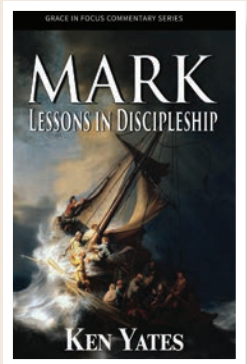


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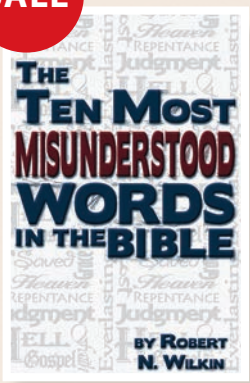
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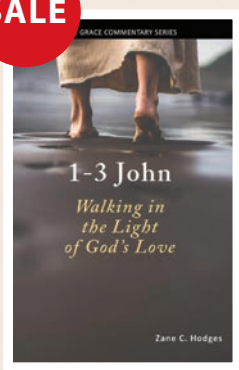
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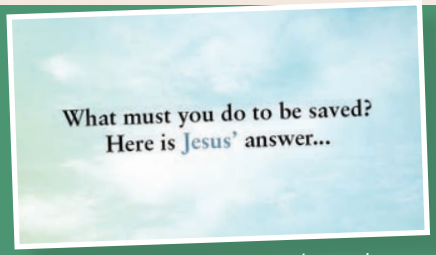


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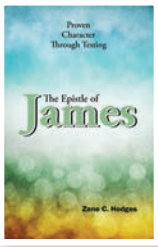
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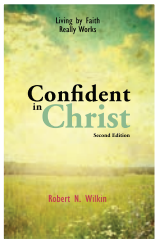


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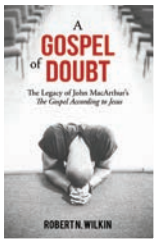


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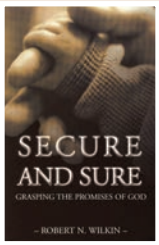


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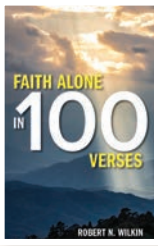


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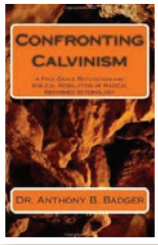


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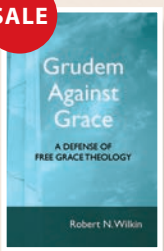
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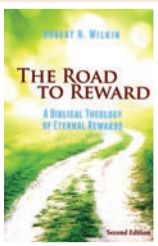


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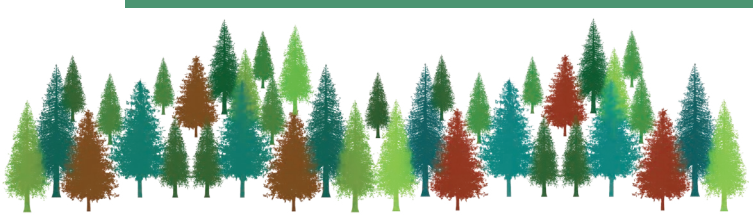
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Distinct Destinies for Servants and Citizens in the Parable of the Minas

By Greg Muller

17 "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'…"

19 "Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.'…"

22 "And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow.'"

At this point in His ministry, Jesus came through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, where He would be crucified. The people and His disciples expected the kingdom of God "would appear immediately" (v 11). To correct this misunderstanding of the timing and to explain what He expects of His followers during His absence, Jesus told the Parable of the Minas. This parable makes a distinction between two groups: the nobleman's own servants, who are entrusted with resources, and the citizens (enemies), who

Koine Keeper:

A mina equaled 100 silver coins called drachmas or denarii (BDAG, p. 654). One drachma could buy a sheep (BDAG, p. 261). It was a day's wage. A mina was thus worth around a hundred days' wages, or $20,000 in today's dollars. By comparison, a talent (cf. Matt 25:14-30) was worth about 6,000 days' wages, or about $1.2 million in today's dollars. A mina was a huge amount of seed money the master entrusted to his servants.[1]

hate him and reject his rule. Understanding the difference between these two groups is the key to understanding the passage's meaning regarding rewards.

BELIEVERS AND THE JUDGMENT OF WORKS

The first group in the Parable of the Minas is the servants (v 13), believers in Jesus Christ awaiting His return. In the parable, the nobleman calls ten of his servants and distributes one mina to each, commanding them to do business until he returns. Unlike the Parable of the Talents, in which amounts vary according to ability, the equal distribution of minas suggests that all believers are given an equal opportunity to serve the Lord during their lives. This *mina* stands for the "equal opportunity of life"[2] entrusted to every Christian to use for God's glory. All believers have the same twenty-four hours in a day and the same Holy Spirit dwelling within us. We can serve our Lord, which gives purpose to our lives and meaning to how we live.

Upon the master's return, the servants are summoned for an accounting. This event parallels the Judgment Seat of Christ, which occurs after the Rapture but before the establishment of the millennial kingdom. The first servant reports a tenfold increase and is rewarded with authority over ten cities. The second reports a fivefold increase and receives five cities. These rewards—positions of rulership in the coming kingdom—are proportional to each servant's faithfulness.[3] The third servant presents a case often misunderstood. He returns the mina without increase, having hidden it in a handkerchief. Martin in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says he did this because:

> The implication was that the servant did not really expect the king to come back…so he did not bother with the king's business. Matthew related that the third servant was thrown out of the kingdom (Matt. 25:30). This indicates that this servant really belonged to the group of people who did not want the king to reign over them (Luke 19:14).[4]

This perspective doesn't hold up logically. If the servant had thought the master wasn't returning, he would have used the mina for his own benefit. Furthermore, the BKC interpretation conflates this parable with the Parable of the Talents and incorrectly understands the outer darkness in the Talents as kingdom exclusion. These parables are distinct and carry different meanings. In his commentary on Luke, David Garland points out that "Superimposing the interpretation of the Matthean parable and this saying on Luke's parable prevents one from understanding its meaning in Luke's context." [5]

This third servant is a believer who has failed in his stewardship. Lanier correctly identifies this servant as such, as he notes that within this parable there is a "servant/stewardship plotline" as well as a "kingship/subjects plotline."[6] This is why the subjects are addressed after the servants. This third servant is still identified as a servant and is judged alongside the faithful ones, distinct from the enemies mentioned later.[7] His failure stems from a "wrong view of the Lord."[8] He perceived the master as an "austere man" and was paralyzed, rather than motivated, by reverence. While this servant loses his reward—the mina is taken from him, and he receives no authority—he is not slain or cast out. He suffers the loss of position in the kingdom, but his presence in the kingdom is assumed, differentiating his judgment from the second group's. Lanier also concludes that "When Jesus eventually returns to consummate his kingly reign, he will examine their works (1 Cor 3:13) and provide rewards for their

stewardship." The text does not indicate that only the first two of these three will be in the kingdom; all three will be in the kingdom. (Note that verse 27 begins with an adversative, "*but* (*plēn*) bring here those enemies of mine…")

THE CITIZENS: ANOTHER JUDGMENT

As noted above, the second group in the parable consists of the citizens who hated the nobleman (v 14). These citizens are referred to by the Greek word *politai*, which can mean "an inhabitant of a city." This is a city that will fall under the kingdom's jurisdiction. Its citizens sent a delegation after the nobleman to declare, "We do not want this man to reign over us," thereby characterizing themselves as political enemies. Historically, this may reflect the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by the Jewish nation, but theologically, it stands for all who reject Jesus as the Christ.[9] They did not believe that He was the Messiah, King of Israel. This is like the modern worldview that accepts Jesus as a historical figure or good teacher but rejects His claim to give everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

When the master who has received the kingdom returns, He "slays" those who rejected Him. The judgment of the enemies is entirely separate from that of the servants. It occurs at the very end of the parable (v 27), chronologically distinct from the evaluation of the servants.[10] The master commands, "But bring here those enemies of mine…and slay them in my presence." Unlike the unfaithful servant who loses reward, the enemies lose their lives. This slaying signifies the second death in the lake of fire. This most likely corresponds to the Great White Throne Judgment, which occurs after the Millennial Kingdom and separates it from the earlier judgment of the Church.

In the end, this Parable of the Minas shows that faith plus works is not required for entrance into eternal life. The parable also shows that there are eternal rewards for diligence in service and for faithfulness. The primary issue is going to be faithfulness, and that should cause every believer to ask himself: *Am I serving the Lord faithfully?* Not faithfully compared to another believer but faithfully compared to what the Lord has called me to do. The degree of faithfulness will result in distinctions in the kingdom. None of us will be perfect, but every one of us can contribute to the work of Christ on earth and share the message of eternal life.



Greg Muller lives in Houston with his wife and four children. He is currently pursuing his PhD in Bible Exposition at Liberty University. Additionally, he serves as the Chief Engineer for an aerospace company, where he manages spacesuit and life support system design.

[1] Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). In *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament* and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 261). University of Chicago Press.

[2] Kirk Muller, *The Judgment Seat of Christ*, Luke 19:11-27 (sermon, June 29, 2003).

[3] Robert N. Wilkin, "Two Judgments and Four Types of People (Luke 19:11-27)," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 25, no. 48 (2012): 10.

[4] John Martin, "Luke" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 253.

[5] David E. Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2011), 19:25–26.

[6] Gregory R. Lanier, *Luke: The Christian Standard Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2025), 19:26-27.

[7] Wilkin, "Two Judgments and Four Types of People," 12.

[8] Ken Yates, "A Wrong View of the Lord - Luke 19:21," *Grace Evangelical Society*, August 31, 2017, https://faithalone.org/blog/a-wrong-view-of-the-lord/.

[9] Wilkin, "Two Judgments and Four Types of People," 16.

[10] Ibid., 9.





What Kind of Millennialist Are You?

By Laurence M. Vance

While the term millennium, which simply means "a thousand years," does not appear in the Bible, numerous passages teach the concept of a future literal thousand-year kingdom of righteousness and peace. For example, Rev 20:2-7 mentions this thousand-year period six times, saying that during that period, the devil will be bound while a group of people reigns with Christ. Those who connect such passages to a literal, bodily return of Christ fall into three broad groups.

AMILLENNIALISM

Amillennialism sees no future earthly reign of Christ following His return. Revelation 20 simply recapitulates events in church history. However, amillennialists do believe in a Millennium, seeing it as the period between the First and Second Advents. Satan was bound at Christ's first advent. The reign of Christ is taking place now, either in the hearts of the saved who make up the Church, or in heaven, where Christ reigns over the departed saints. Christ's return is followed by a general resurrection and judgment of all the dead, saved and lost.[1]

POSTMILLENNIALISM

Postmillennialism, a relatively recent view, teaches that Christ will return *after* the Millennium.

This view does not see the Millennium as a thousand-year period but as an indefinite period just before the Second Advent. During this period, society is transformed by the triumph of the Gospel. All humanity will not convert to Christianity, nor will all evil be eliminated from the world, but societies and governments will be largely Christianized. As with amillennialism, Christ's return is followed by a general resurrection and judgment of all the dead. Postmillennialism was the dominant Protestant view during the nineteenth century. After the bloodbath of World War I—and with the meteoric rise of premillennialism—postmillennialism suffered a sharp decline.[2]

PREMILLENNIALISM

Most Free Grace believers are probably premillennialists. Premillennialism teaches that Christ will return *before* the Millennium, then inaugurate a literal thousand-year period of righteousness and peace during which He will rule and reign. Both resurrections in Revelation 20 are seen as literal. Satan will be bound, and resurrected saints will reign with Christ on earth. Afterwards, Satan is loosed to deceive the nations. He is then cast into the lake of fire. The Great White Throne Judgment follows, after which a new heaven, a new earth, and the new Jerusalem are established. Premillennialists maintain that their view is logical because Christ's return in Revelation 19 is followed by the Millennium in Revelation 20. Before the rise of the allegorical hermeneutic of Origen (AD 185–254) and Augustine (AD 354–430), the early church taught premillennialism. Between the Reformation and the twentieth century, many prominent theologians, commentators, and preachers were premillennialists. Charles Ryrie rightly concluded: "The assertion that premillennialism is a new thing is not at all warranted in the light of the historical evidence."[3] Premillennialists dominate the list of the twentieth- and twenty-first century's most influential Bible preachers, teachers, and writers.[4]

TYPES OF PREMILLENNIALISM

There are four types of premillennialists: thematic, historicist, dispensational, and historic.

Thematic premillennialism does not teach a literal thousand-year Millennium. A chief advocate is David Mathewson, associate professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary and author of numerous books and articles on Revelation and New Testament Greek. He cites scholars Richard Bauckham, Craig Koester, and Gordon Fee, as "recent proponents of one form or another of this view."[5] Mathewson views the numbers in Revelation as symbolic. Therefore, "the reference to one thousand years does not need to, and probably is not intended to, describe an actual period of one thousand years duration."[6] Revelation 20:1-10 recapitulates Rev 19:11-21. Thematic premillennialism "is primarily interested in the role that the Millennium plays in Revelation itself, rather than seeing it as the place where Old Testament promises of an earthly kingdom with restored Israel and redeemed nations living in a time of unparalleled peace and prosperity converge and will be fulfilled."[7] The main function of the Millennium is "to symbolize important theological meanings such as judgment, vindication, and victory over Satan and death."[8] The Millennium "functions as the vindication of the suffering people of God, particularly the reward for the martyrs who die for the testimony of Jesus."[9]

Historicist premillennialism interprets as literal the return of Christ, the first resurrection, the establishment of the Millennium, the binding and judgment of Satan, and the final judgment of the unsaved dead in Revelation 20. However, as with the amillennial Reformers, earlier events in Revelation are viewed as a prophetic survey of church history. Certain numbers in Daniel and Revelation are said to refer to years in church history, and specific historical events are aligned with events in Revelation. Historicist premillennialism, mainly a pre-twentieth-century view, is held today mainly by Seventh-day Adventists. They see the Millennium as the thousand-year period after Christ's return during which the saved reign with Christ in heaven, the unsaved are slain, and Satan and his angels occupy the earth. Other premillennialists dabble in the historicist version by interpreting the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2–3 as representing periods of church history.[10]

Dispensational premillennialism interprets chronologically and literally Christ's return and subsequent events in Revelation 20. While Christ and those raised in the First Resurrection reign on earth for a literal thousand years, Satan is consigned to the bottomless pit. Afterward, Satan is released to deceive the nations, only to be cast into the lake of fire with those judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. Two distinctives of dispensational premillennialism are (1) strictly differentiating between Israel and the Church and (2) seeing the Second Coming as being in two phases: Christ coming for His saints at the Rapture, then with His saints at the revelation.

Historic premillennialism, like the dispensational variety, interprets Christ's return and subsequent events in Revelation 20 chronologically and literally. However, historic premillennialism downplays the idea of the Millennium's fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Other distinctives include placing the Rapture of the Church after the Tribulation, rejecting a two-phased Second Coming, believing that believers are caught up to meet the Lord in order to accompany Him as He descends to earth, and seeing the Church as spiritual Israel.

The term *historic premillennialism* is based on the view that the early church fathers' premillennialism did not present a well-developed, explicit view of two phases of Christ's second coming or of a strict distinction between Israel and the Church. It is therefore claimed that dispensational premillennialism is a recent development in church history. Historic premillennialist Sung Wook Chung writes: "It is certainly not an overstatement to conclude that most evangelical theologians today hold to the historic premillennial view."[11]

CONCLUSION

What kind of millennialist are you? Does it matter? I believe it does. Only dispensational premillennialism takes Scripture at face value and carefully observes the distinction between Israel and the Church.



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[1] Amillennialism has been the most prevalent view throughout church history. It is the position of Augustine, the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformers, liberal and mainline theologians and denominations, Reformed theologians like Louis Berkhof (1873–1957) and Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988), and Presbyterian theologians like Benjamin Warfield (1851–1921) and Oswald T. Allis (1880–1973).

[2] It was first popularized by the English Unitarian Daniel Whitby (1638–1726). Its most famous American proponent was probably Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). It is the position of Presbyterian theologians like Charles Hodge (1797–1878) and Loraine Boettner (1901–1990), and Baptist theologians like Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921) and B. H. Carroll (1843–1914). There has been a resurgence of postmillennialism since the 1970s due to the influence of R. J. Rushdoony (1916–2001) and other advocates of Christian Reconstructionism, dominion theology, and theonomy. Most recently, noted apologist James White has embraced postmillennialism.

[3] Charles C. Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953), 33.

[4] Most notably C. I. Scofield (1843–1921), Clarence Larkin (1850–1924), Arno C. Gaebelein (1861–1945), Harry Ironside (1876–1951), J. Frank Norris (1877–1952), Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952), Alva McClain (1888–1968), Charles Feinberg (1909–1995), John Walvoord (1910–2002), J. Dwight Pentecost (1915–2014), Charles Ryrie (1925–2016), Norman Geisler (1932–2019), and John MacArthur (1939–2025).

[5] Sung Wook Chung and David Mathewson, eds., *Models of Premillennialism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 71.

[6] Ibid., 72.

[7] Ibid., 85.

[8] Ibid., 70-71.

[9] Ibid., 74-75.

[10] Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*, rev. and updated ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 91-93.

[11] Chung and Mathewson, 1. He claims George Ladd (1911–1982), Robert Gundry, D.A. Carson, Douglas Moo, Craig Blomberg, Robert Mounce, Grant Osborne (1942–2018), Craig Keener, Ben Witherington, Millard Erickson, and Wayne Grudem.



Keep Christ in Christmas All Year Long

By Bob Wilkin

Protestants and Catholics celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25th. Most Orthodox celebrate His birth on January 7th. He was probably born in April. But the date is not crucial. The key is that Christmas is about Christ, not decorated trees, lights on our houses, and giving gifts to each other.

Pastor Rich Olsen of Upland Bible Church in Las Vegas likes to say, "Merry Christmas," every time he sees his grandkids. All year round. He wants them to keep Christ at the center of their thoughts.

In Romans 7, Paul wrote about a time early in his Christian life when he "died" (v 9). When he took his eyes off Christ and turned them to the Law, he ceased living victoriously. Legalism does not produce spiritual victory. Focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ does.

Koine Keeper:

The name *Immanuel* is a Hebrew word transliterated into Greek. "El" means *God*. "Im" means *with* and "nu" means *us*. Hence, *Imma-nu-El* means *with us God* or *God is with us*. Immanuel appears only here in the NT and twice in the OT: Isa 7:14, regarding the virgin birth, and Isa 8:8. The Spanish name Manuel is a shortened form of Immanuel.

Many churches fail to keep Christ at the center of Christianity. Many churches preach on hot topics such as parenting, being a good spouse, handling your finances, and so forth. Whole sermons can be given with little or no mention of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even if a church is doing a series on an OT book, Christ should still be the focus. The preacher needs to show how what is being said applies to Christ. Pastor Philippe Sterling of Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Corinth, TX, has written and spoken on the Messianic Thread in the OT.

The birth of Christ is famously found in Micah 5:2:

> "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
>
> Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
>
> Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
>
> The One to be Ruler in Israel,
>
> Whose goings forth are from of old,
>
> From everlasting."

When the wise men came to Herod in Jerusalem to ask where the King of Israel had been born, Herod, in turn "…gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people [and] inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet…'" (Matt 2:4-5). Then they quoted what we know as Micah 5:2.

Isaiah 7:14 foretold the fact that the Christ would be born of a virgin: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." That is quoted in Matt 1:22-23. *Immanuel* means "God with us."

Handel's "Messiah" made famous the glorious words of Isa 9:6-7:

> For unto us a Child is born,
>
> Unto us a Son is given;
>
> And the government will be upon His shoulder.
>
> And His name will be called
>
> Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
>
> Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
>
> Of the increase of His government and peace
>
> There will be no end,
>
> Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
>
> To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
>
> From that time forward, even forever.
>
> The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Matthew gives Jesus' genealogy through Joseph, and Luke gives His genealogy through Mary.

In Gal 4:4, Paul said that "…when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law…" There are three reasons for the first century's being the fullness of time:

> 1) Greek was the common language of the entire Roman Empire,
>
> 2) the Roman roads were great for transportation, and
>
> 3) the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome, lasted for 200 years, from 27 BC to AD 180.

Romans 1:3 and Rev 12:1-5 also speak of Christ's birth. Paul said that "Jesus Christ our Lord … was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3).

While some understand Rev 12:1-5 to refer to the birth of Christ, Walvoord is certainly correct when he comments,

> The woman was said to be pregnant and about to give birth (12:2). While in some sense this may be fulfilled in the birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary, the context seems to refer to the emerging nation of Israel in its suffering prior to the second coming of Christ. This is further supported by the verses which follow ("Revelation" in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 958).

Of course, both the OT and NT exalt Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead without mentioning His birth. But His death, burial, and resurrection followed His birth. Without His birth, there could have been no atonement on the cross.

When you gather as a family on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, make sure to announce the birth of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And remember that His birth not only anticipated His substitutionary death, but also His glorious resurrection from the dead on the third day, His ascension to the third heaven, and His soon return to establish His righteous and just kingdom on earth.

May we all remember Christ every day.



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

Virtue in a Woman



How do we typically describe the Proverbs 31 woman? "Excellent, capable, noble, industrious, productive, busy." While those qualities seem to derive from the passage, what about a low-energy woman? What about those with disabilities that limit them? When age or illness reduces a woman's stamina and skills, is she a post-virtuous woman? Is Proverbs 31 only for the healthy and hardy?

No. I believe the passage applies to all Christian women who fear the Lord, because virtue is a mindset, not a list of achievements. Let me explain.

The Hebrew root word *hayil* is a masculine noun found 243 times in the Old Testament to describe someone of "great value." Only four times does it refer to women. Often translated as "valiant," it can mean a force, wealth, strength, military power, and more. It usually describes armies or mighty men. This has caused some writers to claim that virtuous women are strong and warrior-like. Others use the adjectives *valiant, heroic, fearless,* or *bold*.

Doesn't this play into our culture's view of feminism—the view that women should be encouraged to match or exceed what we expect of males? Modern social narrative wants us to believe that historically, women have been marginalized and oppressed by men. But I ask: Should the masculine connotations of the word *virtue* also define women?

If I say, "My son Ben is an excellent **homebuilder**. He owns his own construction business," you can guess my meaning. But if I say, "My daughter Leah is an excellent **homebuilder**," you get a different picture: Leah supports her husband, nurtures their four young children, and manages their home well. Same word—different understandings, based largely on gender. To examine whether female *virtue* should parallel

male *virtue*, let's look at the four times the word is used of women.

WOMAN AS VIRTUOUS

Proverbs 12:4 says, "A *virtuous* woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones" (KJV). I wonder: Does a strong, valiant, warrior-wife make her husband feel crowned like a king?

Proverbs 31 uses the word twice. Verse 10 encourages men to seek a *virtuous* woman, because she is worth it. Is she rare? Not if we look at verse 29: "Many daughters have done *virtuously*…" If *many* women are virtuous, then how many Old Testament women are referred to as *virtuous*? Exactly one. Only Ruth. Boaz said to Ruth, "And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a *virtuous* woman." Ruth 3:11 is the fourth and final reference to female virtue.

Why was Ruth considered virtuous? Boaz answered that in Ruth 2:11-12: "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." Ruth left her people and homeland, choosing to stay with Naomi, because she was trusting in Naomi's God, Yahweh. Her mindset was to serve her mother-in-law in a perhaps uncomfortable environment while depending on God. That was why all the people of the town knew she was virtuous.

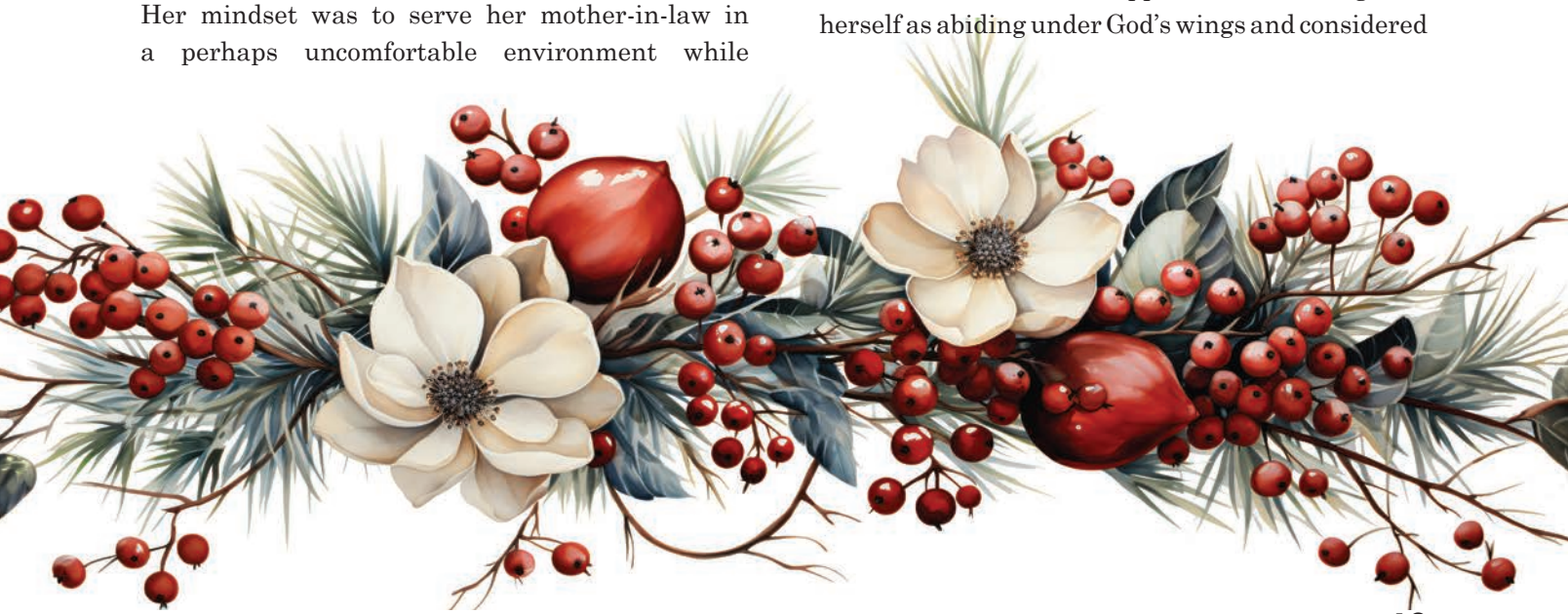
SERVING OTHERS IN THE FEAR OF GOD

The *virtue* of Prov 31 could be defined as "fearing God while meeting needs."[1] Consider the people whom the Prov 31 woman helped: "her husband" (v. 11, 28); "her household" (v. 15, 21, 27); and "the poor [and] needy" (v. 20). How did she help them? Primarily with food (v. 14-16), and clothing (v. 13, 19, 21, 22). Her expertise was garment making, even into her senior[2] years (v. 24). She used what she was good at to benefit others.

Verse 30 highlights her *modus operandi*—a mindset of fearing the Lord. "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (NKJV). The next verse contains the only command in the passage. Observers are told to give her the fruit of her hands—her own works—which will bring her praise.

In Prov 31, Hebrew words for *hands/palms* occur seven times—a number of completion. Unfortunately, several modern translations replace the phrase "fruit of her palms" in verse 16 with the word *earnings* or *profits*. However, women in Bible times did not buy or own land.[3] She considered how best to use a field, not whether to buy it. Deciding that it would make a good vineyard, she planted it with her own hands.

Ruth took the same approach. She thought of herself as abiding under God's wings and considered



how best to take care of Naomi and herself. Seeing the barley harvest in progress, she decided that the fruit of her hands would be gleaning barley.

WHY ONLY RUTH?

Many Bible women did likewise. They used their skills to take care of others. Why were they not called virtuous? Because it went without saying. It was understood that all Hebrew women who feared God were virtuous. Hence, Prov 31:29 states, "**Many** daughters have done virtuously." Ruth, however, was not a daughter in the Hebrew sense. She was Moabite. Not only that, but when Boaz called her *virtuous*, she was not a wife or a mother, or even a virgin. (Does that shatter how you pictured the Prov 31 woman?)

The significant thing is that both Naomi and Boaz called Ruth a *daughter* (Ruth 2:2, 2:8, 3:1, 10-11, and others). They elevated her to the status of "daughter in Israel." She was now one of the "many daughters" who had done virtuously.

WHAT ABOUT US?

The same can be true of Christian women today. If we "daughters of God" fear Him while meeting the needs of our husbands (if we have one), our households (people for whom we are responsible), and the disadvantaged, we are virtuous. Virtue is not primarily **what** we do, but **why** we do it. Do we think of God while loading the dishwasher? Are we honoring Him while working for our employers? Do we serve needy people because we love the Lord? That is the virtuous mindset.

Ken Yates wrote about "The Imaginary Proverbs Woman" in the July/August 2025 issue of *Grace in Focus*. He made the valid point that no woman can replicate the qualities listed in Prov 31, concluding that the chapter symbolizes wisdom as a woman. With that in mind, all women (and men) can follow her example, because wisdom derives from fearing the Lord (Prov 9:10, 15:33). He also said that walking in wisdom is "a mindset that any believer can have."

Consider what Rom 8:5-6 says about mindset: "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (NIV).

The woman whose mindset is spiritual is a wise and godly Proverbs 31 woman, no matter her energy level or age, whether married or single, employed or not, with or without children. The poem ends by saying that a woman who fears the Lord shall be praised for her works—the fruit of her hands. Fearing the Lord results in fruit that counts for eternity. Your "fruit" may be running a company, posting helpful YouTube videos, homeschooling your children, or, like Ruth, being the caregiver of a loved one. As long as your mindset is to please God in whatever you do,[4] you are virtuous.

So even when our physical strength is dried up, our platform is gone, our influence on others is in the past, we can still live in fellowship with Christ, praying, smiling, saying thank you, giving hugs—because we love the Lord. That is virtue in a woman. GIF



Marcia Hornok is Ken's grateful wife, serving with him in Utah where he pastored for 39 years and they raised six children. Now they enjoy 13 grandkids. Her latest work is a guilt-free Bible study of Proverbs 31.

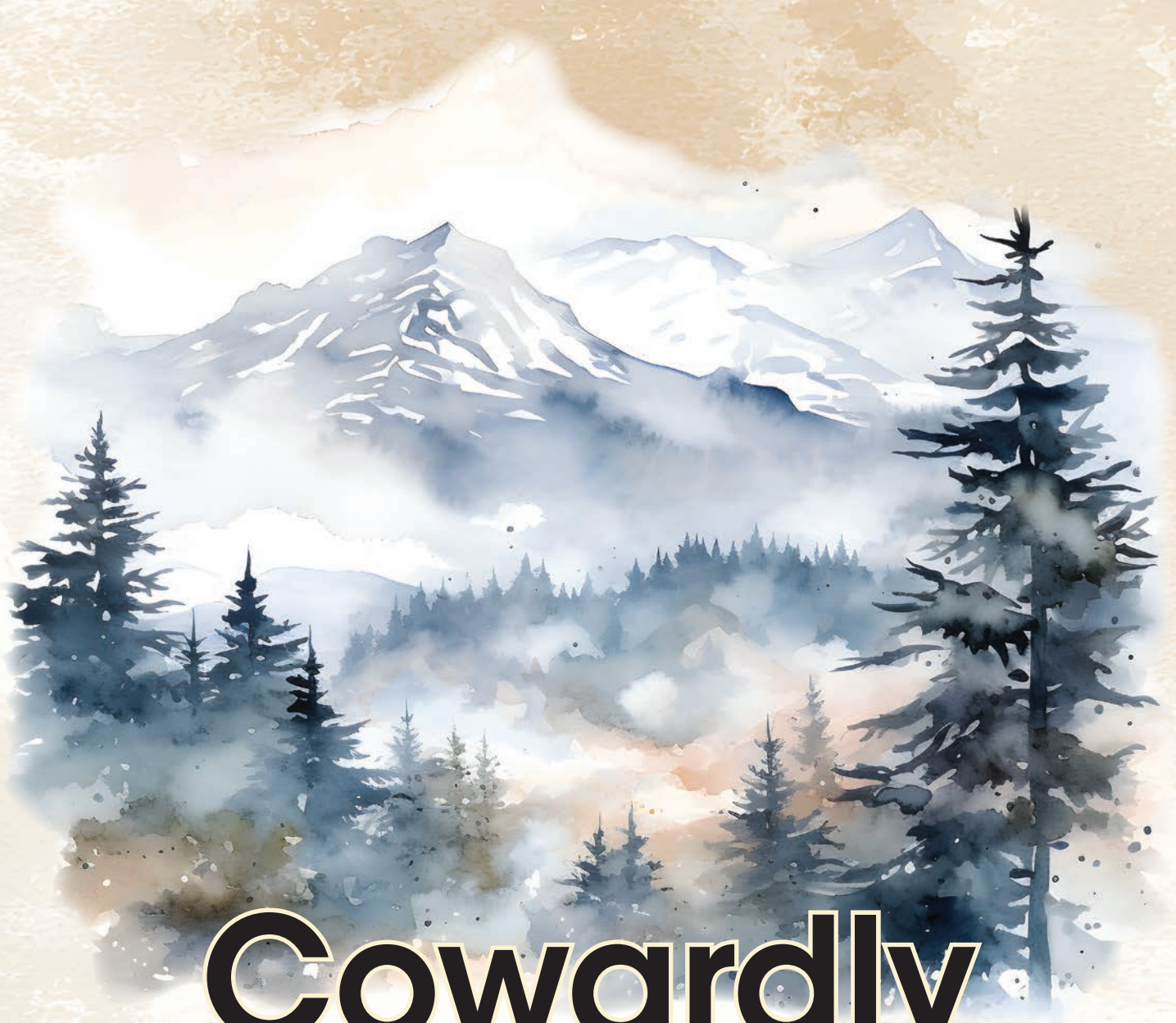
[1] Note that Prov 31:29 says "many daughters **have done** virtuously" (KJV). The virtuous mindset means fearing God while doing what needs to be done.

[2] This is based on the observation that Prov 31:10-31 outlines nicely into three verses of introduction; five verses for the early years; five verses for the middle years, five verses for the later years, and four verses of conclusion. See my 110-page Bible study, "Proverbs 31: Virtue Not Exhaustion,"(2025, available on Amazon).

[3] The Hebrew word *laqah* in verse 16 occurs 965 times in the OT and actually means "to take, get, lay hold of, receive." She took over a field after considering how best to use it. The word is translated as "buys" only a handful of times. When Boaz *bought* a field in Ruth 4:5, the Hebrew word is *qana*, which does mean "to buy."

[4] Note Col 3:17 and 23-24.





Cowardly Heroes

By Ken Yates

INTRODUCTION

We all love stories of heroes. I spent many years in the military and heard many such tales. I even had the privilege of meeting many of these men. It was an honor.

The Bible also contains stories of heroes. These are some of our favorite passages. We cheer on these heroes.

But in other situations, these brave people do not always act bravely. Our Biblical heroes can be cowards. In one sense, we may feel disappointed and that they have let us down. But these cowardly heroes teach us some very important lessons.

HEROIC EXAMPLES

It is easy to find accounts of great bravery in the Bible. I will discuss three.

The Lord was arrested in Gethsemane by a large group that had swords and clubs. These men, who came by night to arrest the Lord, represented the power of the government.

Peter confronted the mob by himself. He drew his sword and attacked the leader, cutting off his ear. Even though the Lord rebuked Peter's actions, we have to admit that it took a great deal of bravery. He thought he was defending the Lord and was willing to risk his life to do so (Matt 26:50-52). That took great courage, even if it wasn't the wisest decision.

The prophet Elijah also performed a great act of bravery. He, too, stood alone. In his case, he opposed hundreds of false prophets. Those in political power supported these prophets. The only thing that would save Elijah's life was a miracle by God. He stared death in the eyes and mocked those who threatened him. God performed the miracle, and Elijah left the mountain a victorious hero of the faith (1 Kgs 18:20-40).

As a youth, David confronted a whole army, armed with only a slingshot. He agreed to face their fiercest warrior, Goliath, in a fight to the death. We are told that Goliath was a Philistine from Gath (1 Sam 17:23). He was about four feet taller than David and probably outweighed him by over a hundred pounds. But David killed him (1 Sam 17:50).

I saw the movie *Troy*, in which Brad Pitt plays Achilles and faces a giant named Boagrius. Achilles slays Boagrius with a sword. David's confrontation with Goliath would have been similar, but even more frightening.

I would not have done what David did. Nor would I have stood up to the mob as Peter did. I certainly would not have fought with hundreds of prophets at the risk of my life as Elijah did. All three can be classified as brave heroes.

But these men were not always so brave.

COWARDLY EXAMPLES

We can read the exploits of these three men and wish we were as brave as they were. But then we can read about other incidents in their lives and wonder how these same men could be so cowardly.

Just a few hours after defending the Lord in the face of a powerful mob, Peter finds himself in a courtyard. A young girl asks him if he knows the Lord. He denies such knowledge. A little while later, the same girl insists that Peter is lying, and once again Peter denies knowing the Lord. The girl's accusations draw the attention of another mob—one that would seem less threatening than in the Garden. When this mob confronts him, Peter states emphatically that he has nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth. This friend of the Lord who had stood alone against an armed arrest party wilted when confronted by a servant girl.

Elijah did not fare much better than Peter. After his great victory on Mount Carmel, Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him because of what he had done to her prophets. Shockingly, Scripture says that Elijah "ran for his life." He was so afraid that he said he wanted to die (1 Kgs 19:3-4). Elijah hid in a cave because an angry woman was seeking to take his life (1 Kgs 19:10).

David also had his cowardly moments. Even before David killed Goliath, God had promised that he would become king (1 Sam 16:13). After slaying the giant, one would expect that David would fear no one. We are told that he had to flee from the wrath of Saul, the king, but that should have been no problem for a man who was destined to become king and who had been able to kill his most powerful foe. As he fled, he was given Goliath's sword (1 Sam 21:9). This reminds the reader of David's great courage.

David arrived in Philistia, where he encountered the king of Gath. This reference to Gath reminds us of what David had done to Goliath, who was from that city. In the enemy territory of Gath, being in possession of Goliath's sword would certainly have revealed David's bravery.

But we are told that David "was very much afraid." He pretended to be insane. He scratched doors with his fingernails. He slobbered on himself, letting his saliva drip through his beard (1 Sam 21:12-13). He pretended to have lost his mind because he did not want the Philistines to see him as a threat.

Based on earlier episodes in these three men's lives, readers of the Bible would understandably have placed them on pedestals. Most will admit that they would not have done what these men did. But when we read about their fearful actions in much less threatening situations, we probably feel we can relate to them. That is the way we would have acted. Like us, they were men with feet of clay.

What can we learn from their examples of bravery and cowardice?

HOW ABOUT US?

Peter, David, and Elijah all served the Lord. Sometimes they did commendable things; sometimes they did pathetic things. It is hard to read of Peter's running from a teenage girl, Elijah's hiding in a cave, or David's purposely drooling on himself. All three showed a lack of faith in God's Word.

But they were servants, nonetheless. They had faithfully served Him before. Walking with the Lord is a process. Anybody who desires to serve the Lord will have bright spots and not-so-bright spots.

The same is true for believers today. Everyone who believes in Jesus for eternal life has it and can never lose it. But believers have the privilege of following the Lord in discipleship. If we decide to follow Him, we will experience what Peter, David, and Elijah did.

Sometimes we will face situations and come through like heroes. We will believe what God has said and act accordingly. At other times, we will look like sad, drooling cowards running from teenagers.

We should take comfort from these men. All three will be great in the Lord's kingdom. Peter will sit on a throne judging Israel. David will be a prince in that kingdom. Elijah will return before the Second Coming. He even avoided physical death: He got a free ride into the heavens on a glorious chariot. The Lord was pleased with all three.

If we decide to be disciples, we will make mistakes. We will look bad on occasion. But we can take comfort in the fact that the heroes of the past did, too.



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.



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