



Facing the Future

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,
and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction,
while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

- Yeats

Introduction

The key words in the title give us the subject matter. There is a fact which we all must FACE; and that is this: the FUTURE is coming. Whether the prognosis is good or bad – whether we want it to come or not – the FUTURE is coming – we must FACE IT. What does the future hold? The future is a very important issue for us human beings. If it weren't, people would not exert so much time and money in diverse efforts trying to plan and prepare for the future - albeit the concern of most people has to do with the physical and financial aspects, rather than the spiritual aspects of their future. What people spend their money on and invest their money in is the most accurate indicator of their hearts – Jesus said so.¹ The vast difference between what people are willing to spend on their physical health and what they are willing to spend on their spiritual health really says it all. One of the points I hope to make in this message is to show that there is a spiritual realm which governs the physical realm; therefore, what is going on in that spiritual realm will determine the physical and financial aspects of our future as well.

¹ Luke 12:34

Understanding the World in which We Live

What this message has to say will be more scriptural than speculative and more sensible than sensational. It will be pretty much limited to what the Bible has to say, rather than what the media has to say. In that regard though, I will offer this: In order to properly understand the future - that is, to have a Biblical perspective on the future – we must see a global context from a spiritual perspective.

In his Thessalonian epistle the apostle Paul wrote that there will be those who perish **“because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”**² **If we analyze what we see and hear merely on a social-political-economic level we will not understand the truth; but instead, believe “the lie”.** The apostle Paul explained why this is so: In his Ephesian epistle he refers to “the schemes of the devil” – not the schemes of national governments or political parties – but the “schemes of the devil”, “the god of this world”³. National governments and political parties may have their agendas and schemes, but what lies behind that is spiritual. Paul explains: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the **spiritual forces** of wickedness in the heavenly places.”⁴

The following quote communicates what we must understand about the world in which we live: “(It is) An ordered world system governed from

² 2 Thessalonians 2:10b-12 *New King James Version*. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

³ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁴ Ephesians 6:11b-12

behind the scenes by Satan. This system encompasses politics, education, literature, science, art, law, commerce, music -- anything involved in the progress of mankind.... No matter how good the initial intentions, all organizations created by mankind eventually turn away from Godly power to worldliness. When the influence of Divine Life is removed, organizations gravitate towards materialism, humanism, worldliness, and Satan.”⁵

Christians or people who favor Judeo-Christian morality may be elected to serve in political offices and government; but there is no such thing as a Christian nation, or a Christian political party. Collectively speaking, the rulers and politicians of all the nations of the world lie in the power of the Evil One. If we do not believe that truth, we believe “the lie”. If we do not believe this statement, we do not believe what the Scripture states: **“that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”**⁶ The Greek scholar, Henry Alford, translated this phrase as: “the whole world lies in the hand of the Evil”. The God’s Word Translation says, “the whole world is under the control of the Evil One”. In the Almeida Translation, the Portuguese words translate: “the whole world is under the trance of the Evil One” – in other words, “like one who is sleepwalking”.⁷ Again, **if we analyze what we see and hear merely on a social-political-economic level, we will not understand the truth, but will believe “the lie”.**

Psalm 2 gives a remarkably clear picture of what has been happening, what is happening, and what will continue to happen in the future:

Verse 1: “Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing?”

- What is happening is not a conspiracy theory. What is happening is a conspiracy.

⁵ This quote is from a book summary (not an excerpt) of “*Love Not the World*” by Watchman Nee offered by a Davin Dahlgren. This book, as with his many other books, is actually published from the notes taken by his students during Watchman Nee’s talks (1920-1972).

⁶ 1 John 5:19

⁷ Weber Chagas, a Brazilian pastor friend of mine in Rio de Janeiro, shared this with me.

Verses 2 & 3: **“The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!’”**⁸

- In saying this, “the kings of the earth” are agreeing with those in Christ’s parable who said: “We do not want this man to reign over us.”⁹ They discredit, reject and refuse to submit to the law of God which makes “a distinction between the holy and the profane”.¹⁰ The agendas of the Antichrist – “the schemes of the devil”¹¹ – are to discredit the Word and Law of God and keep humanity under the delusion that we are “like God” and, independently of God, can decide for ourselves what is good and evil.¹²

Both God and His Adversary, Satan, have their opposing purposes for this world. God is going to win. Agendas are coming to pass - both for the kingdom of heaven and for the kingdoms of this world. The kingdoms of this world will be shaken. The kingdom of heaven cannot be shaken. The world system is now being intentionally unraveled so that it can be refashioned by the Antichrist with the help of his Prophet and Beast system. They will present a “new world order” – a solution for the woes of the world – a “solution” which is Satanic in origin and will have a supernatural/superhuman quality.¹³ The world system will implement this “solution” in exchange for control over humanity, calling for an allegiance and worship to government¹⁴ - an allegiance and worship due to God alone. I speak in future tense, but in reality, this process has been on-going for a

⁸ Psalm 2:1-3

⁹ Luke 19:14

¹⁰ Leviticus 10:9

¹¹ Ephesians 6:11

¹² Genesis 3:5, 22

¹³ Neo-paganism

¹⁴ First Century Emperor worship revived

long time. In the first century, the apostles referred to “the mystery of iniquity which is **already** at work in the world.”¹⁵ But in the final act of this scenario, Christ will come, put an end to it, and establish His eternal kingdom.

To analyze what we see and hear on just a local, regional, or national level is to not understand the reality of things. Behind everything we are seeing and everything we will see in the future, are spiritual forces at work in **a global context**. Therefore, in order to see reality, one must see a global context from a spiritual perspective.¹⁶

¹⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2:7. (Also: 1 John 4:1)

¹⁶ What is being presented here is a Biblical worldview of history. One author has described the story as “The Great Controversy... The Conflict of the Ages”. (*The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan – The Conflict of the ages in the Christian Dispensation*, Ellen G. White, 1911.)

Tribulation

But, if we were to give a one-word answer to the question, “What does the future hold?”, that one word would be “**TRIBULATION**”. Jesus told us this 2000 years ago.

In Matthew 24 Jesus said the indications of the end of the age¹⁷ would be deception¹⁸, lawlessness¹⁹ and tribulations²⁰. “Deception” and “Lawlessness” are topics for other messages.²¹ The focus of this message is “Tribulation”. The tribulations Jesus specifies just in Matthew 24 are wars, international unrest, famines, earthquakes, persecutions, and betrayals of the followers of Christ. In the parallel passage in Luke’s gospel, plagues, terrors, and great signs from heaven are also listed.²² Also in Luke’s gospel, a statement by Jesus is recorded in which He tells us that “these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately”.²³ This tells us that these tribulations “are characteristic of the entire present age, not just signs of the end of the age”.²⁴

And in John’s gospel, Jesus **summarizes** what life in the world will be like for His followers²⁵ by saying: **“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world.”**²⁶ Jesus spoke these words to His

¹⁷ Matthew 24:3

¹⁸ Matthew 24:4-5

¹⁹ Matthew 24:12

²⁰ Matthew 24:6-14

²¹ I have written on “Deception” in my eBook “The Spirit of the World”. A complimentary .pdf copy can be obtained by emailing AtChristsTable@gmail.com

²² Luke 21:7-12

²³ Luke 21:9

²⁴ Notes from the *NASB Study Bible* (Zondervan)

²⁵ John 15:18; 16:1-4, 32-33

²⁶ John 16:33 *New American Standard Bible*.

disciples in Jerusalem, after the Last Supper, just before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. He wanted to prepare His disciples for what was about to take place with Himself, as well as prepare them for what would take place with themselves in the future. The Greek word translated **“tribulation”** is *thlipsis*, which can also be translated as: *pressure, affliction, anguish, distress, trouble*. Here, Jesus is not only referring to “the great tribulation”,²⁷ which is understood to be either a 7 or 3 ½ year period near the end of the age, but He was particularly referring to the normal, on-going condition of the world throughout human history.

There are some very significant Old Testament references to tribulation of which Paul said: “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”²⁸ These are prophetic Scriptures which have past, present and future fulfillments.

Isaiah prophesied: **“One keeps calling to me from Seir, “Watchman, how far gone is the night? Watchman, how far gone is the night?” The watchman says, ‘Morning comes but also night. If you would inquire, inquire; come back again.’”**²⁹ The “night” refers to the Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities of Israel³⁰ (773 & 623 B.C.) Since that time, God’s people have been living in captivity within the world system.³¹

But Isaiah also prophesied: **“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.”**³² This is a picture of light shining in the midst of the darkness.

²⁷ Matthew 24:21 & 29, Mark 13: 19 & 24, Revelation 7:14

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:11

²⁹ Isaiah 21:11b-12

³⁰ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary

³¹ Specifically, not having a land governed by a theocracy.

³² Isaiah 60:1-2

I believe these prophetic pictures coincide with what Jesus said things would look like just prior to His coming. As we read in Matthew 24, Jesus related to His disciples a list of tribulations that would be covering the earth just prior to His Coming³³, and at the end of the list He said: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.”³⁴ So we see “great darkness covering the earth” with various tribulations, and right in the midst of this darkness the Lord will have the light of “the gospel of His kingdom being preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” – a picture of light shining in the darkness.

The apostle Luke quoted the apostles Paul and Barnabas as saying that there would be “**many tribulations**” before we enter the kingdom of God.³⁵ The apostle Paul bore witness to Jesus’ warnings of a future filled with **tribulation when he wrote to Timothy: “But realize this, that in the last days³⁶ difficult times will come.”³⁷** The Greek word translated “difficult” is *chalepos*, which can also be translated *perilous, grievous, stressful* – in other words, “hard times”.

³³ Matthew 24:3-13

³⁴ Matthew 24:14

³⁵ Acts 14:22

³⁶ Namely, the days of the New Covenant initiated by the first coming of the Messiah and ending with the second coming of Christ.

³⁷ 2 Timothy 3:1

God's Purpose in Tribulation

Let's look again at what Jesus said: **"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world."**³⁸ Besides telling us that the prospect of our future is **tribulation**, Jesus is also communicating His promise to His disciples for the future: **peace in tribulation** if we have **courage in overcoming**.

Jesus said: **"In the world you have tribulation..."** We may ask: "Why? Why tribulation?" What is it about this **world** that causes **tribulation**? The simple, bottom-line answer is **SIN**.¹ Because of humanity's fall into sin, God has cursed this world.³⁹ Although "God so loved the world..."⁴⁰, there is also a "dark side"⁴¹ to this world so that the Scriptures exhort us: "Do not love the world."⁴² Why? What is wrong with the world? What we need to understand is that this world "lies under the power of" a different god⁴³, who is an adversary to both God and humanity.⁴⁴ **It is Satan and sin, not God, that causes tribulation in the world.**⁴⁵

But, **God has a purpose for His people in tribulation**. The apostle Paul writes: "Let us also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven

³⁸ John 16:33

³⁹ Romans 8:20-23, Ecclesiastes 11:2, 8

⁴⁰ John 3:16

⁴¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:7

⁴² 1John 2:15-17

⁴³ 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19

⁴⁴ Daniel 7:25, John 6:28-29, 10:10, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Peter 5:8.

⁴⁵ For a more detailed discussion of "the World", see my eBook "The Spirit of the World". A complementary .pdf copy of this can be obtained by emailing AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com

character, hope."⁴⁶ God's purpose in tribulation is **to produce in His people the proven character** that comes with perseverance and hope – **the character of Christ.**

God has a **"good purpose"** for His people in tribulation; and that **"good purpose"** is revealed by the apostle Paul in his Roman epistle: **"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...."**⁴⁷ The **"good purpose"** of God is to conform us to the image of Jesus – the character of Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us how God uses tribulation to achieve this **"good purpose"**: **"And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.'**⁴⁸ This expression, **"Yet once more,"** denotes **the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.** Therefore, since we receive **a kingdom which cannot be shaken,** let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe...."⁴⁹

What the writer to the Hebrews tells us about God's kingdom is that it **"cannot be shaken"**. This is what Jesus told us regarding His kingdom: **"Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the nations eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."**⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Romans 5:3-4

⁴⁷ Romans 8:28-29

⁴⁸ Haggai 2:6

⁴⁹ Hebrews 12:26-28

⁵⁰ Matthew 6:31-33

The apostle Paul defined the kingdom of God in these terms: **“The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”**⁵¹ But, we all have a natural tendency to focus on the “created things” like “what we will eat, what we will drink, and what we will wear”.⁵² So, **through tribulation**, God **shakes** and **removes** these things **to refocus our hearts and lives**⁵³ onto the things that are **eternal** – the things of His unshakeable kingdom - **“righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”**.⁵⁴

Let’s look again at what Paul said about tribulation and character: “Let us also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, **proven character**; and proven character, hope.”⁵⁵

The Greek word, *dokime*, is translated “proven character” in the *New American Standard Bible* and is translated “experience” in the King James Version. W.E. Vine says it means “the effect of proving, approval”.⁵⁶ This is referring to character which has been tested by experience and approved.⁵⁷ Persevering in tribulation brings about proven experience. Persevering in tribulation brings about the actual experience of Christ and having the doctrines of Christ become experiential in our lives. Christ proves His reality to us; and our characters are approved by God. It’s the difference between a professing faith and a living faith. Without this we are likely to be “holding to a form of godliness but denying its power”.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Romans 14:17

⁵² Matthew 6:31

⁵³ I would like to suggest that God even uses the chaos created by the “schemes of the Devil” to accomplish His work of shaking, removing, and refocusing.

⁵⁴ Romans 14:17

⁵⁵ Romans 5:3-4

⁵⁶ Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

⁵⁷ A good example of this “the effect of proving, approval” is the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac. Genesis 22:1-14

⁵⁸ 2 Timothy 3:5

The Church in Western Nations

We may ask: “Is persevering in tribulation really necessary to form the character of Christ?” We can start to answer that question with the verses from Hebrews which say that “the Author of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings” and “although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered”.⁵⁹ Jesus had to, but we don’t need to? We are exhorted to **“fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”** This was Jesus’ path to glory. Do we really think we can get there a different way?

The fact is: without tribulation, our natural tendency is to “sow to our own flesh, and from the flesh reap corruption”.⁶⁰ Paul warned us: **“Do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh.”**⁶¹ Let’s reflect on that a bit: In the context of his Galatian epistle, Paul is referring to our freedom in Christ – freedom from the Law. But Paul’s phrase regarding “freedom as an opportunity for the flesh” can be understood in terms of “freedom of lifestyle”; and I am going to speak in terms of the lifestyle of the Church in Western nations. There are aspects of our lifestyle that are there because of the freedom we enjoy, and in turn, these very same things also create more freedom in our lifestyle. I’m referring to things like education, career, regular income, “discretionary” income, home and property, a multitude of possessions, the availability of social services, financial savings, and

⁵⁹ Hebrews 2:10; 5:8

⁶⁰ Galatians 6:8

⁶¹ Galatians 5:13

investments, et al. – all these things give us a freedom of lifestyle that goes way beyond daily survival – namely: “Give us this day our daily bread.”⁶²

The fact is: The freedom we enjoy affords many, many “opportunities for our flesh”. There are some that are more noble, like creative pursuits, which are wonderful when done as acts of worship for the glory of God rather than a means of self-aggrandizement. But for the most part, these “opportunities for our flesh” result in a plethora of “**diversions**” – **unessential entertainments**. Let’s compare our normal everyday lives with Paul’s idea of the normal Christian life: **“Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”**⁶³

The word “dissipation” in the *New American Standard Bible* is translated “excess” in the *King James Version*. The Greek word is *asortia*, which means prodigality, wasteful – that is, a waste of time, a frivolous diversion. The fundamental sickness of the Church in Western nations is that our freedom affords almost unlimited opportunities for frivolous diversions to sow to our flesh, which, at best, have little to no spiritual value, and at worse, reap spiritual corruption. The result is a loss of spiritual passion for our “First Love”⁶⁴ – our hearts are divided, fragmented by our many “loves”. Jesus, Himself, warned us that these “time-wasting, frivolous diversions” would be a stumbling block to us in the last days: He said: **“Be on guard, so that**

⁶² Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3

⁶³ Ephesians 5:15-21. Paul gives a similar view of the normal Christian life in Romans 12:9-21.

⁶⁴ Revelation 2:4

your hearts will not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap, for it will come all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.”⁶⁵

The Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well had five husbands. This woman symbolizes the church that still needs an authentic revelation of Christ.⁶⁶ The Bride that Jesus plans to present to Himself is a Church that is dedicated and devoted to **Him**⁶⁷ - a Bride whose heart is not fragmented and led astray by multiple loves but has single devotion to Christ.⁶⁸

I've had the privilege of ministering in hundreds of churches in the Global South.⁶⁹ Being in the midst of these churches, one cannot help but ask oneself: “What’s the difference? How does one describe the difference between the quality of spirituality and lifestyle between these churches and churches in the Western world?” The best way I can describe it is with the word “**PASSION**”. Of all the many spiritual blessings the Church in Western nations has been given and may have to offer, it lacks the passion of the Church of the Global South.⁷⁰

Passion is at the heart of the matter; and the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. But the proverb tells us to “Keep your heart with all diligence for from it spring the issues of life.”⁷¹ **This fragmented heart syndrome manifests itself definitively in our life and character.** In his second letter to Timothy, his last epistle, Paul describes the pervading lifestyle and character traits that will be the spiritual environment of the last

⁶⁵ Luke 21:34-35

⁶⁶ John 4

⁶⁷ Ephesians 5:27

⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:2-3

⁶⁹ Viz. Africa and Latin America. For further reading in this regard, I highly recommend *The Next Christendom* and *The New Faces of Christianity* by Philip Jenkins.

⁷⁰ For further reading on the general topic of our culture’s obsession with entertainments: *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* by Neil Postman & *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion & Wonder* by Richard Winter

⁷¹ Proverbs 4:23 *The New King James Version*

days: **“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these. ⁶ For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”⁷²**

“Difficult times” – the Greek word is *chalepos*, which literally means **“reducing strength”⁷³** – times that are difficult and stressful. Tribulation causes what we might call “The Toothpaste Tube Effect”: when squeezed, what’s inside comes out. Unfortunately, what so often comes out are all the character traits on this list – each one calls for sermon itself. Of particular interest to me are “lovers of self”⁷⁴ – the quintessential flaw from the Fall; and “disobedient to parents”⁷⁵ – a trait which might seem not noteworthy enough to appear on this list, but that is only because we don’t fully realize how the Fall has fundamentally affected parent – child relationships. But the trait I want to comment on in this message is **“without self-control”⁷⁶**:

The Greek word which is translated “without self-control” is *akrasia*. It literally means **“incontinent, powerless, lacking strength”⁷⁷**. The medical condition of “incontinence” is an unpleasant but vivid analogy of this spiritual condition. All of our freedom with the accompanying diversions not only depletes our passion for Christ, but, in spite of all of our spiritual

⁷² 2 Timothy 3:1-7

⁷³ Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

⁷⁴ Verse 2

⁷⁵ Verse 2

⁷⁶ Verse 3

⁷⁷ Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

resources, makes us **spiritually weak – carnal Christians**. Our brothers and sisters in the Global South are impressed by our spiritual resources but shocked by our weakness of Christian character. I would like to make my point by briefly relating two stories that come to mind from our years on the mission field in South Africa:

When we lived in a small town near Cape Town, I hired a company to do some work. The workmen did not show up on the designated day. I always took that as a personal affront which offends my pride because I feel the tradesman thinks someone else is more important than me. I made an angry phone call to their office. Not satisfied with this, I felt I needed to make a personal visit to the company's office where I made an angry scene. Still not satisfied, that evening I made a visit to the business owner's home, disrupting his family's dinner time. I'm ashamed to say that I did all of this because I thought I was superior to this man. I discovered that the man was a Christian. He humbly apologized and explained to me that his crew was obligated to finish a job they had started in another town which took longer than expected, and so, they had to delay my work by one day. Then he told me that he had been aware that I was "the American missionary" living in their town. But when he had heard of my ranting and raving, he wondered to himself: "Can it be possible that this is a man of God?" I sat there in his living room and cried as I asked his forgiveness.

Previous to this, we lived in a rural area outside of Johannesburg. A number of times we had ministered in a Bible college in nearby Pretoria. One of the students, named Botamase Senyabe, connected with us and would spend weekends in our home. When he graduated, he returned to his hometown, Serowe Botswana, to plant a church. He asked me to come up and minister in his area. I decided to go up for 10 days. Because he was also Tswana and spoke the language, I decided to take along a young African man who lived on an adjacent farm next to where we lived. I unfortunately cannot remember his name; but he probably earned his keep

by working for the landowner. Our trip to Botswana was complicated by the fact that I blew a rod in my VW just as we crossed the border into Botswana. The whole 10 days I was in Botswana, I was not able to find parts or a mechanic. What was normally an 8-hour trip from Serowe back to Johannesburg took twice as long as I had to travel the distance in second gear. The entire 10 days we were in Serowe, we had eaten nothing but white bread, corn meal and black tea. (One day, when we had walked into town, I was able to buy a Coke.) Early in the morning, my VW crawled across the border back into South Africa. When we came to the first small town, I spied a bakery, and told my African friend I wanted to stop there. Now baking is not really something Afrikaners excel in. But at least I would find something that had sugar in it. When I returned to my vehicle, I asked my African friend if he wanted some of the sweets I had found. He answered: "No thanks. I try not to eat sweets." When I asked him why, he answered: "Eating food like that just makes you weak." I thought of Daniel's diet in Babylon. Comparatively speaking, life is "sweet" in the Western world. All of our freedom with the accompanying diversions not only depletes our passion for Christ, but, in spite of all of our spiritual resources, makes us spiritually weak – carnal Christians.

Tribulation - Perseverance - Proven Character

Here is a key: **We receive spiritual power from God during times of tribulation and this causes us to grow spiritually stronger.** In Colossians 1:11 Paul wrote this phrase: **“being strengthened with all power, according to the might of His glory, for the attaining of all perseverance (or endurance)⁷⁸ and patience.”** We may understand this in this way: During tribulation God strengthens us with what the apostle Paul calls “the perseverance (or endurance) of Christ”.⁷⁹

“Tribulation brings about perseverance (or endurance).”⁸⁰

Perseverance (or endurance) comes only through tribulation. That’s the nature of the case – it doesn’t come any other way. The Greek word is *hupomone*, which literally means “abiding under” – enduring hard times. In his epistle, the apostle James explains that it is “the testing of your faith (which) produces endurance (or perseverance).⁸¹ He encourages us to “let perseverance (or endurance) have its perfect results, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”⁸² And in this way our character is proven, our love for Christ is proven, and we receive “the crown of life”.⁸³ Paul reminds Timothy: **“If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”⁸⁴**

In facing the future, we must face tribulation. This is the process which God ordained for His Church; and He has not exempted the Church in Western nations. Do not say, “It can never happen here.”⁸⁵ In the opening lines of the Book of Revelation, the apostle John identified himself as “your

⁷⁸ Same Greek word, *hupomone*.

⁷⁹ 2 Thessalonians 3:5 (See also Revelation 3:10) Same Greek word, *hupomone*.

⁸⁰ Romans 5:3 (Also see Romans 12:12)

⁸¹ James 1:3

⁸² James 1:4

⁸³ James 1:12 (See also Luke 21:19; Romans 2:7 and 1 Peter 2:20.)

⁸⁴ 2 Timothy 2:12 Same Greek word in the verb form, *hupomeno*.

⁸⁵ Taken from the title of the book *Persecution: It Will Never Happen Here?* By Jan Pit, Open Doors (1981)

brother and fellow partaker in the **tribulation** and **kingdom** and **perseverance** which are in Jesus” – linking **perseverance** with both **tribulation** and **the kingdom**. It is in this way that “through many **tribulations** we must enter **the kingdom of God**.”⁸⁶ It is in this way that God will form a people – the Church - who will embrace the kingdom of heaven as the Man Jesus of Nazareth did, when He walked this earth. Like Jesus, we can have **courage in overcoming** and **peace in tribulation**. We can learn to have the kingdom’s “**righteousness, peace and joy**” in the midst of the **tribulation**.

⁸⁶ Acts 14:22

“You’re going have to serve somebody.
Yes, indeed,
you’re gonna have to serve somebody.
Well, it may be the devil
or it may be the Lord,
but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

Bob Dylan
“Gotta Serve Somebody”
from “Slow Train Coming” (1979)

Faith

Let’s look at Jesus’ words once again: **“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world.”**⁸⁷ How can we have peace in the midst of tribulation? How can we have courage in tribulation? How can we overcome in tribulation? The answers I have to offer you in this message are these: **“Facing the Future with Faith”** and **“Facing the Future with Wisdom”**. Let’s begin with “Faith”.

To truly understand why faith is essential in facing the future, we need to begin by understanding what is meant by “faith”. Its very definition contains elements that uncover the things which will come into play and the issues that will be at stake in the future. The Greek word translated “faith” most often in the New Testament is “pistis”.⁸⁸ To have “faith” means to believe in, trust in, depend upon, and lean upon something or someone. The issue for the future is the same as it always has been: To what or who

⁸⁷ John 16:33

⁸⁸ Strong’s # 4102

will we look, depend upon, and lean upon regarding the issues of our lives and the lives of our loved ones? What will be the foundation of our faith? What will our faith rest upon? The provision of Christ and His kingdom? Or the provision of the Antichrist and his kingdom?

The book of Hebrews has much to tell us about faith - faith in tribulation, and faith for the future. In Chapter 11, the writer defines “faith” as: **“Now faith is the assurance (or substance) of *things* hoped for (or *things* expected), the conviction (or evidence) of things not seen.² For by it the men of old gained approval (literally, *a good testimony*).³ By faith we understand that the worlds (literally, the ages) were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”⁸⁹** The essential thing we need to understand about faith is that it rests upon something that is NOT SEEN – something INVISIBLE. These verses tell us that Biblical faith rests on God. The invisible God of heaven Who has spoken is the only “assurance” and “evidence” for the things we “hope for” and “expect” in the future.

⁸⁹ Hebrews 11:1-3 (NASB) The words in parentheses are in the reference notes of the translators.

Kingdom Expectation

I suggest to you that our only other option is to depend and lean upon another invisible god – “the god of this world”⁹⁰. This god also speaks⁹¹ – that is, “lies”, for Jesus identified him as “a liar and the father of lies”⁹². Fundamental to all his lies – from the beginning of creation to the end of this age – is the idea that humans have a right to be “as God knowing (or designating) good and evil”⁹³. Biblical language scholar James Strong says that the Hebrew word *yada* “has a great variety of senses”.⁹⁴ While the word can mean to “know” in the sense of observation and recognition, Strong also gives the idea of “making known” by “instruction” and “designation” – that is, to “**decide**”, to “**designate**” good and evil.⁹⁵ Which application makes more logical and doctrinal sense regarding being “as God” – God “experiencing good and evil”? Or God “designating good and evil”? The fundamental lie of this invisible god who took on physical form in the Garden and will take on physical form again in the future is this: **The idea that human beings have the right to govern themselves independently of God – designating for themselves what is good and evil**. The reality that lies behind “the lie” is that there is no such thing as human beings governing themselves. This reality emerged immediately after Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden. It is clearly seen throughout all human history (if one is intellectually honest). And it will still be the case in the future: **Human beings have never governed themselves. They are governed by spiritual forces – either the God of heaven or “the god of this**

⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁹¹ viz. In the last days, through the false prophet.

⁹² John 8:44

⁹³ Genesis 3:5

⁹⁴ Strong's *Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*

⁹⁵ Strong's *Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*

world". "There is nothing new under the sun"⁹⁶ – these remain the only two options in the future: the kingdom of God or the kingdoms of this world under the power of Satan. There are only two options for the foundation of our faith. There are only two options to rest our faith upon. **We are either going to depend and lean upon the God of heaven or "the god of this world" – Christ or the Antichrist.**

"Now faith is the assurance (or substance) of *things hoped for* (or *things expected*), the conviction (or evidence) of *things not seen*." Therefore, it is imperative that we have **clarity about a world we do not yet see but are hoping for and expecting**. I believe the writer to the Hebrews helps us to have the proper **kingdom expectation**:

"26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.'⁹⁷ 27 This expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; 29 for our God is a consuming fire."⁹⁸

What the God of heaven tells us to hope for and expect in the future is **a spiritual and eternal kingdom** providing "righteousness, peace and joy"⁹⁹ which reside in the Holy Spirit"¹⁰⁰. What "the god of this world" has always promised but will never be able to deliver (because he is not the Creator), merely consists of the "created things" of this present world – a system

⁹⁶ Ecclesiastes 1:9

⁹⁷ Haggai 2:6

⁹⁸ Hebrews 12:26-29 (reference to Haggai 2:6)

⁹⁹ Romans 14:17

¹⁰⁰ Marvin Vincent says: "I see no objection with construing the words ("in the Holy Spirit") with all these terms." Godet: "It is this divine guest, who by His presence produces them in the church."

promising an illusion of human beings evolving, governing, providing for, and prospering themselves independently of God.

With regards to the God of heaven, the apostle Peter says: **“according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”**¹⁰¹ Whereas “the god of this world” has “a different gospel”¹⁰² which goes like this: “Our world is in danger of being destroyed. Trust me in this: This world doesn’t have to self destruct. I will re-order it with a system that will guarantee indefinite evolution, peace, and prosperity for all humanity. It consists of a universal religious system in which **everyone believes everything**, not tolerating any one religion as the only way. It is a system of government which will allow me to establish and maintain universal peace and harmony by removing all national boundaries which have been established¹⁰³ so that there will be only **one government for one world**. In exchange for this security, I must have **absolute control** and your **total allegiance**.”

The God of heaven offers a spiritual, eternal kingdom - “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”.¹⁰⁴ “The god of this world” offers a temporal, material kingdom - “the bread and lentil stew” for which Esau despised his birthright.¹⁰⁵ To which will we give our heart, allegiance, and life? As Bob Dylan said:

“You’re going have to serve somebody
....It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord,
but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ 2 Peter 3:13 (also v. 10 and Revelation 21:1)

¹⁰² 2 Corinthians 11:4

¹⁰³ By God – Acts 17:26

¹⁰⁴ Ephesians 1:3

¹⁰⁵ Genesis 25:30-34

¹⁰⁶ Bob Dylan, “Gotta Serve Somebody” from “Slow Train Coming” (1979)

Jesus pointed out that **we always serve our source**: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Where are our treasures and our hearts? Laid up in heaven¹⁰⁷? Or in the affairs of this life¹⁰⁸?

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 6:20-21

¹⁰⁸ 2 Timothy 2:4 (NKJV)

THE FAITH that Overcomes the World

In Luke 18:8 we find Jesus asking a question: “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”¹⁰⁹ He voiced that question at the end of a parable He had just told. Luke explains: “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to **lose heart**.”¹¹⁰ Why would there be a question about the Lord finding faith at the end of the age? Because people will lose heart. People will **lose faith** because they will “**lose heart**”. The Greek word there is *ekkakeo*, meaning to be “faint” or “weary”. Jesus said “Because lawlessness is increased, the love of most will grow cold”¹¹¹; and likewise, because of tribulation, most will “lose heart” – grow faint and weary. Indeed, the prophet Daniel prophesied that the Antichrist would “wear down the saints”¹¹². So, when the Lord returns, will He find faith on the earth? In the Greek, the question is literally “will He find THE FAITH on the earth”, that is, “THE FAITH which was once for all delivered to the saints”.¹¹³ I think it is important to consider that at the end of the age, people will still have options regarding what they will decide to put their faith in – or rest their faith upon. The fact is, throughout all human history, people have had the same options: We are always free to put our faith in or rest our faith upon God, or self, or other people, places, and things. The truly biblical faith is faith in God, which rests upon the Foundation of Jesus Christ. The “scheme of the Devil” – the agenda of the Antichrist - is to direct people’s faith toward his beast system, which rests upon himself. To encourage this, he is systematically wearing down the peoples of the world, with a particular emphasis on the saints.

¹⁰⁹ Luke 18:8

¹¹⁰ Luke 18:1

¹¹¹ Matthew 24:12

¹¹² Daniel 7:25

¹¹³ Jude 3

True biblical faith encompasses “life and death” issues. This is what the writer to the Hebrews had to say about some who “gained approval through their faith”: **“35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.”**¹¹⁴

This is the kind of faith Daniel had in Babylon, even in the lions’ den.¹¹⁵ This is the kind of faith that allowed his three Hebrew friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, to say: **“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”**¹¹⁶ In a life and death situation, or when a choice needs to be made that will determine our future – be it our continued survival, or merely maintaining a certain quality of life in the material realm, will we have the faith to remain faithful to the God of heaven rather than bow to the god of this world?

¹¹⁴ Hebrews 11:35-40

¹¹⁵ Daniel 6

¹¹⁶ Daniel 3:16-18

Do we have an authentic biblical faith? We need to know, because sooner or later, the foundation of our faith will be tested. Our spiritual lives can be likened to a house: There is a bedrock, a foundation laid upon the bedrock¹¹⁷, and a building upon the foundation.¹¹⁸ Jesus identified the bedrock as revelation of Him.¹¹⁹ Paul identified the Foundation as relationship with Christ.¹²⁰ That Foundation will be tested by “a flood”.¹²¹ And that which is being built upon that Foundation will be “tested by fire”.¹²² The “flood” and “fire” will be the implementation of “the new world order”; but all this will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

In the future, life on earth will look and feel like what Isaiah prophesied: **“A voice is calling, ‘Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴“Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; ⁵ then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh will see *it* together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’ ⁶ A voice says, ‘Call out.’ Then he answered, ‘What shall I call out?’ ‘All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”**¹²³ This is merely a statement of this passage. There is much here to be reflected upon. Suffice to say that there will be tumultuous changes taking place in the world, but all preparing the way for the coming of Christ.

¹¹⁷ Luke 6:48

¹¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:10 & 12

¹¹⁹ Matthew 16:15-18

¹²⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:11

¹²¹ Luke 6:48-49

¹²² 1 Corinthians 3:12-13

¹²³ Isaiah 40:3-8

We mentioned that the writer to the Hebrews warned us that God will shake everything that is shakable for **“the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain”**¹²⁴ in order to refocus our hearts and lives onto the eternal things of the unshakable kingdom – “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”.¹²⁵ Everything in our lives will be shaken, and all that will remain is that which is built upon the Foundation of Jesus Christ.¹²⁶

When He comes, Jesus will be looking for THE FAITH that has not been shaken or led astray by the Antichrist. **A faith that remains unshaken is THE FAITH that rests upon that which is unshakable.** The apostle Paul declared: **“The firm foundation of God stands,** having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His’.”¹²⁷ These are those who are “born of God”. Theirs is THE FAITH that “overcomes the world”¹²⁸. Theirs is THE FAITH “which was once for all delivered to the saints”.¹²⁹ Theirs is THE FAITH which Jesus will be looking for when He comes – THE FAITH that rests upon Him as it’s Foundation.

¹²⁴ Hebrews 12:27

¹²⁵ Again, I would like to suggest that God even uses the chaos created by the “schemes of the Devil” to accomplish His work of shaking, removing, and refocusing our hearts and lives.

¹²⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:14-15

¹²⁷ 2 Timothy 2:19. A reference to Numbers 16:5

¹²⁸ 1 John 5:4

¹²⁹ Jude 3

Rest

As I said earlier, the book of Hebrews has much to tell us about faith - faith in tribulation, and faith for the future. In the *New King James Version*, the heading of Hebrews 4 is: "The Promise of Rest". In the *New American Standard Version*, it reads, "The Believer's Rest". The *English Standard Version* says, "Rest for the People of God". We need to understand that **faith leads to "rest"**: **"Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest...."¹³⁰**

Another thing that we need to understand is that **"rest" is a place** – a spiritual place. While that may be difficult to comprehend, nevertheless, it is a place. Rest is not something we do. In this passage, the word "rest" is a noun, not a verb. It is not a ceasing of activity. Hebrews 4:11 tells us to "be diligent to enter into that rest". The Greek word, *spoudazo*, means "to make an earnest effort" – it doesn't mean a ceasing of activity, but rather, **making an earnest effort to enter into a particular spiritual place through faith**. I would like to suggest that "rest" is a place in the Spirit – like "righteousness, peace and joy – in the Holy Spirit"¹³¹, **"rest" is a place in the Spirit.**

The Holy Spirit used the word "rest" in the Old Testament to refer to the Promised Land.¹³² The Lord told Joshua: "The LORD your God gives you rest and will give you this land."¹³³ David said: "Trust in the LORD and do

¹³⁰ Hebrews 4:1-3a

¹³¹ Romans 14:17

¹³² Psalm 95:11; Numbers 14:23, 28-30; Deuteronomy 1:35.

¹³³ Joshua 1:13

good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.”¹³⁴ “Rest” is a land in which we dwell and cultivate faithfulness.

Under the New Covenant, we understand that we have been transferred into a **spiritual kingdom**.¹³⁵ Because it is spiritual, God’s “rest” can be entered into right here and now on earth.

¹³⁴ Psalm 37:3

¹³⁵ Colossians 1:13

The Secret Place of the Most High

Moses asked the Lord to see His glory. Something worth considering for the future is that the glory of the Lord which Moses experienced in his life all took place in the wilderness.¹³⁶ But when Moses made the request to see the Lord's glory, this was the Lord's response: **"Behold, there is a place with Me, and you shall stand *there on the rock*; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by."**¹³⁷ "Rest" is a place with God. "Rest" is a place in the cleft of the Rock which is Christ.¹³⁸

In the future, the glory of the Lord may be experienced as a whirlwind during times of tribulation; but when we are in the place of "rest", **the Lord will cover us with His hand.**

David knew this place of "rest". He called it various things: a "Hiding Place", a "Shelter", "The Secret Place of the Most High". Some verses from the Psalms of David:

From Psalm 27:

"For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock."¹³⁹

From Psalm 31:

"You hide (me) in the secret place of Your presence from the conspiracies of man; You keep (me) secretly in a shelter from the strife of tongues."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Cf. Revelation 12:14 This may be a picture of an Underground Church.

¹³⁷ Exodus 33:21-22

¹³⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:4

¹³⁹ Psalm 27:5

¹⁴⁰ Psalm 31:20

From Psalm 32:

“You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance.”¹⁴¹

Psalm 91¹⁴²

“He who dwells in The Secret Place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.” ³ Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. ⁴ He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. ⁵ You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. ⁸ Only with your eyes shall you look and see the reward of the wicked. ⁹ Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, ¹⁰ no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; ¹¹ for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. ¹² In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. ¹³ You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion, and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. ¹⁴ “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. ¹⁵ He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him My salvation.”

¹⁴¹ Psalm 32:7

¹⁴² *New King James Version*

“Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight,
for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth....

Indeed, if a man should live many years,
let him rejoice in them all,
and let him remember the days of darkness,
for they will be many.

Everything that is to come will be futility.”

Ecclesiastes 11:2 & 8

The Humility – Wisdom Connection

I'd like to quote a few verses from Paul's Ephesian letter which I find intriguing: "... so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places... Therefore, I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory."¹⁴³

Do you notice that “**TRIBULATION – WISDOM CONNECTION**” Paul referred to? While the “manifold wisdom of God” has a cosmic, “eternal purpose” as large as the mystery of Christ,¹⁴⁴ I believe that a facet of this “manifold wisdom” which God desires to “be made known through the church” is this: That through the power of the Spirit of Christ, He is able to form a people who will embrace the kingdom of heaven as the Man Jesus of Nazareth did when He walked this earth - mere human beings who have **peace in tribulation, courage in overcoming**, and “**righteousness, peace and joy**” in the midst of the **tribulation** in this world. God wants to make that known “to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” – those powerful angelic beings that

¹⁴³ Ephesians 3:10 & 13

¹⁴⁴ Ephesians 3:11, I Corinthians 1:30

rebelled against Him. In other words, God has a cosmic point to make. God's WISDOM makes the wisdom of the world and the god of this world look foolish.¹⁴⁵

But what is the Biblical meaning of "wisdom"? The first mention of the concept in the Scriptures appears in Exodus.¹⁴⁶ It is in reference to the skilled artisans whom God appointed to build the tabernacle. The Hebrew word is *hokmah*¹⁴⁷ which can be translated as "wisdom", "experience", or "skillfulness". Of this word, Biblical language scholar, W.E. Vine, says: "(It) signifies an important element of the Old Testament religious point of view. Religious experience was not a routine, a ritual, or faith experience. It was viewed as a mastery of **the art of living in accordance with God's expectations.... The ability to make the right choices at the opportune time.**" We can understand the Biblical concept of "wisdom" as the art of living skillfully, namely living according to the ways of God.

The Scriptures say many things about "**the ways of God**"; but here are three things to consider:

- The psalmist said: "**His way is perfect.**"¹⁴⁸
- Proverbs tells us that "**The way of the Lord is a strong defense to those who have integrity; but destruction or ruin to those who practice vanity.**"¹⁴⁹
- Hosea said: "**Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord**

¹⁴⁵ I Corinthians 1:19-20, 25, 27-28, 30, 2:6-8

¹⁴⁶ Exodus 28:3 and then also in 35:31

¹⁴⁷ Strong's # 2451

¹⁴⁸ Psalm 18:30

¹⁴⁹ Proverbs 10:29, a rendering based on *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary*

are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them."¹⁵⁰

As we discuss the Biblical concept of "wisdom", we are going to discover – maybe surprisingly – that one of the essential aspects of "wisdom" is **HUMILITY**. Our foundational scripture will be Proverbs 30:24 - "**Four things are small on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise.**" In a manner of speaking, for human beings: "SMALL" is "WISE". The apostle Paul admonishes us: "**For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment....**"¹⁵¹

In Matthew's gospel, there is a passage in which Jesus is speaking about a time of God's judgment coming upon cities. If you think about it, cities are places which represent humanity's creation of wealth and security independently of and in rebellion to God.¹⁵² It is in this context that Jesus makes the following appeal: "**Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart (KJV: *meek and lowly of heart*), and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**"¹⁵³ Through this, Jesus is inviting us "to be conformed to (His) image"¹⁵⁴, learning **gentleness** or **meekness** and **humility** or **lowliness**.

Earlier in Matthew's gospel, in what we call *The Beatitudes*, Jesus said: "Blessed are the **meek**, for they shall inherit the earth."¹⁵⁵ Do you see the "**MEEKNESS-WISDOM CONNECTION**"? This refers to inheriting the

¹⁵⁰ Hosea 14:9

¹⁵¹ Romans 12:3

¹⁵² This is the theme of French Reformed sociologist, Jacques Ellul, in his works, *The Technological Society* and *The Meaning of City*.

¹⁵³ Matthew 11:28-30

¹⁵⁴ Romans 8:29

¹⁵⁵ Matthew 5:5

kingdom of God – both in the age to come, but also “in this world where we have tribulation”.

In Psalm 37, David offers the same concept: **“Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there. But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.”**¹⁵⁶ Do you see the **“HUMILITY – WISDOM CONNECTION”**? In the *New Living Translation*, it says **“the lowly will possess the land”**. In the *New Century Version*, it says **“the people who are not proud will inherit the land”**. During a time of God’s judgment like we are experiencing on the earth today, it is the gentle, the meek, the lowly, the humble – “those people who are not proud” - who will find WISDOM. And in finding “wisdom”, one finds also all her blessings which are promised all throughout the Wisdom Books of the Bible.¹⁵⁷

In his epistle, the apostle James quotes from Proverbs: **“God gives grace to the humble.”**¹⁵⁸ I find what James has to say about **humility** to be extremely interesting: **“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’”**¹⁵⁹ In the context of this passage, James is writing about “the wisdom from above”.¹⁶⁰ And in this passage James is referring to two categories of people: **those whom God opposes, and those whom God graces or blesses.** Those whom **God opposes**, James describes as **“proud”**,

¹⁵⁶ Psalm 37:11

¹⁵⁷ Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

¹⁵⁸ Proverbs 3:34

¹⁵⁹ James 4:4-6 (Proverbs 3:34)

¹⁶⁰ James 3:13-18

“adulteress”, **“friends of the world”**. Their pursuit of the “pride of life”¹⁶¹ which the world offers them, causes them to become unfaithful to God and, instead, to become “friends of the world”. They become **proud** and hostile to God. God, in turn, **opposes** them. Then James describes **“the humble”**: These are those who are satisfied to simply be “friends of God” - being satisfied with God’s jealous love. And God, in turn, **gives them grace** – divine favor and blessings. So, **it is wise to be humble** – “God gives grace to the humble.”

We find the apostle Peter also quoting the same Proverb¹⁶² and admonishing us to “clothe ourselves with **humility**”.¹⁶³

The apostle Paul also instructs us on God’s dealings with humanity and the world – namely that **He is opposed to the proud and gives grace to the humble**: “The scripture says, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and set aside the understanding of the scholars.’ So then, where does that leave the wise? or the scholars? or the skillful debaters of this world? God has shown that this world's wisdom is foolishness!” For God in his wisdom made it impossible for people to know Him by means of their own wisdom. Instead, by means of the so-called “foolish” message we preach, God decided to save those who believe.”¹⁶⁴ So we see that “God is opposed to the proud”.

Paul continues: “For what seems to be God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and what seems to be God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Now remember what you were, my friends, when God called you. From the human point of view few of you were wise or powerful or of high social standing. God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and He chose what the

¹⁶¹ | John 2:16

¹⁶² | Proverbs 3:34

¹⁶³ | Peter 5:5

¹⁶⁴ | Corinthians 1:19-21 *Good News Translation*

world considers weak in order to shame the powerful. He chose what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. This means that no one can boast in God's presence."¹⁶⁵ Basically, Paul is saying: "God gives grace to the humble".

The apostle James warns us against "the pride of life"¹⁶⁶: "Now listen to me, you that say, 'Today or tomorrow we will travel to a certain city, where we will stay a year and go into business and make a lot of money.' You don't even know what your life tomorrow will be! You are like a puff of smoke, which appears for a moment and then disappears. What you should say is this: 'If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that.' But now you are proud, and you boast; all such boasting is wrong."¹⁶⁷

And the apostle Paul admonishes us to be humble and be willing to live humbly: "Do not be proud but accept humble duties. Do not think of yourselves as wise."¹⁶⁸ We can summarize with these words from Paul: "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."¹⁶⁹

So, do you see the "HUMILITY – WISDOM CONNECTION"? "The lowly will possess the land".¹⁷⁰ "The people who are not proud will inherit the land".¹⁷¹ During a time of God's judgment like we are experiencing on the earth today, it is the gentle, the meek, the lowly, the humble – "those people who are not proud" - who will find WISDOM and all her blessings.

¹⁶⁵ I Corinthians 1:25-29

¹⁶⁶ I John 2:16

¹⁶⁷ James 4:13-16 *Good News Translation*

¹⁶⁸ Romans 12:16 *Good News Translation*

¹⁶⁹ Philippians 2:5

¹⁷⁰ Psalm 37:11 *New Living Translation*

¹⁷¹ Psalm 37:11 *New Century Version*

Some Thoughts on Simplicity

This humble, lowly attitude, which Paul said Jesus modeled for us, will manifest in a humble, lowly lifestyle – namely, a lifestyle characterized by SIMPLICITY. A couple of verses from Proverbs explain to us why this is so. Proverbs 4:23 tells us to **“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.”** And Proverbs 23:7a says: **“For as he thinks within himself (that is, in his heart), so he is.”** This wisdom is telling us that **our outward life is determined by our inner life.** To apply it to our subject matter: **If we have pride in our hearts, our lifestyle will tend toward complexity; but if we have humility in our hearts, our lifestyle will tend toward simplicity.**

In his classic book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster writes: “The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle. Both the inward and the outward aspects of simplicity are essential. We deceive ourselves if we believe we can possess the inward reality without it having a profound effect on how we live. To attempt to arrange an outward lifestyle of simplicity without the inward reality leads to deadly legalism (externalism).”

The Blessing of Humility & Simplicity

In one of his letters, the apostle Paul admonishes Timothy: **“Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them.”**¹⁷²

It is **pride** that causes us to live beyond our means – or even to the max of our means. I remember back in the 80’s, I was living in the Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas area, and just barely making a living giving music lessons in a number of Christian schools and privately at my home. I had a young student whose father worked as an air-traffic controller at the DFW airport. I remember being quite impressed the day I drove the young guy home after one of his music lessons. His dad obviously made a very good living. They lived in a luxurious home in the suburbs with acreage, swimming pool, sport cars, etc., etc. The problem was that in 1982, the air-traffic controllers went on strike. After a number of months of negotiations for more money, President Reagan stepped into the situation by firing all the striking air-traffic controllers and replacing them with new people. This man was now unable to even keep up with the payments on his house and cars, etc. I remember thinking to myself: “Wow, here’s “little old me” essentially living on “minimum wage” earnings, but now I’m in a much better situation than this guy who had big-time earnings but is now drowning in big-time debt.” And, of course, we see many similar scenarios being repeated.

¹⁷² | Timothy 6:17-18 *New Living Translation*

I am not unaware that the greed of corporate America and puppet politicians has caused a situation of a high cost of living combined with a low income for the “lower class” (and what used to be the “middle class”). But what we need to be aware of is this: That situation is not going to change – not in America or anyplace else. That is an intentional aspect of the Antichrist agenda for devolving the present nationalistic system and evolving a “new world order” globally. The future holds more of the present. It is a given. It is “a fact of life”. We would do well to face it, believe it, understand it, and conduct ourselves wisely in it.

The Freedom of Simplicity¹⁷³

Following are quotes from Richard Foster regarding the freedom of simplicity:

- ❖ “Simplicity frees us from the tyranny of the self, the tyranny of things, and the tyranny of people.”
- ❖ “The self clamors for attention, self-recognition, applause.”
- ❖ “Out of fear..., we create an artificial world of ostentatious display, extravagant ornamentation, and pretentious style.”
- ❖ “What horrendous gymnastics we will put ourselves through just to ensure that others will have a good opinion of us.”

Before going any further, I think it would be good to repeat one statement I quoted earlier from Richard Foster: “To attempt to arrange an outward lifestyle of simplicity without the inward reality leads to deadly legalism (externalism).”¹⁷⁴ To this I will add: The ability to enjoy our physical life and the good things of life is evidence that one possesses the reality of the whole of the “abundant life” which Jesus gives.¹⁷⁵ As the apostle Paul said: “... **God has created (everything) to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude.**”¹⁷⁶

The fact of the matter is, **the evidence of carnality is fear and bondage, but the evidence of true spirituality is peace and freedom.**¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ The title of another book by Richard Foster.

¹⁷⁴ Paul addresses this externalism in his epistles: I Timothy 4:1-5, Romans 14:17.

¹⁷⁵ John 10:10

¹⁷⁶ I Timothy 4:3-4

¹⁷⁷ Romans 8:5-6

One is truly spiritual when one is able to enjoy life.¹⁷⁸ The ability to spend money from time to time on the good things in life is evidence that one truly believes that God is one's Source, that He isn't going to "run out of money" so to speak, and that the reality of one's faith is dependence upon God – not upon one's ability to be acetic, frugal and thrifty.¹⁷⁹

Also, frugality is relative to the material and financial blessings one has been given. I remember the testimony of some wealthy friends who owned a chain of department stores: In surrendering their lives to the Lordship of Christ, they felt He wanted them to "downsize" their house to one which had just a regular in-ground swimming pool in the back yard, instead of one that housed an Olympic-sized indoor swimming pool – and maybe this year they should pass on their annual vacation in Acapulco. Most of us live somewhere in between a mansion in Monaco and a squatter camp in New Delhi. "It's all relative" as they say. Where we find ourselves in this world has largely been ordained by God; and God is there with us. He desires in every place "to make known His manifold wisdom through the Church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places".¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Galatians 6:8

¹⁷⁹ Matthew 6:25-34

¹⁸⁰ Ephesians 3:10

The Wisdom of Simplicity

The apostle Paul offers pastoral wisdom in what are known as his “pastoral epistles”. He says that the grace of God comes **“instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.”**¹⁸¹ The Greek word here translated “sensibly” is *sophron*, which can also be translated *self-controlled, sound, or sober minded, temperately*. Its meaning applied to our material/financial lives is *thrifty or frugally*. Paul explains both what it means and doesn’t mean “to live godly in this present age”: **“But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”**¹⁸² A study of the word “contentment” will show that it simply means “not wanting what one doesn’t have”.¹⁸³

Paul explains further that a “godly life” is a “quiet life”. He writes: **“Also, make it your goal to live quietly, do your work, and earn your own living, as we ordered you. Then your way of life will win respect from those outside [the church], and you won't have to depend on anyone else for what you need.”**¹⁸⁴ The Greek scholar, Thayer, says the word translated

¹⁸¹ Titus 2:12

¹⁸² | Timothy 6:6-10

¹⁸³ (Greek) *autareia*

¹⁸⁴ | Thessalonians 4:11-12 *God's Word Translation*

quietly is “a description of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ (Greek) *hsucazo*. Also found in II Thessalonians 3:12. *Thayer and Smith's Bible Dictionary*.

The Key to Simplicity

Jesus, Himself, gave us **the key to simplicity** – that inward reality that will result in an outward lifestyle of simplicity. In His Sermon on the Mount, He said: **“So don't worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.”**¹⁸⁶ There is only one thing that brings **simplicity - a focus, a unity - to the whole of life**. In other words, there is only one thing to be concerned with – namely, **“seeking first the kingdom of God”**. Jesus said: **“Don't worry, don't be anxious... seek first the kingdom of God.”** Freedom from worry and anxiety is **the inward reality of simplicity**. Freedom from worry and anxiety is **the evidence of “seeking first the kingdom of God”**.

But what does that mean? What is the “kingdom of God”? The “kingdom of God” is an immense topic in itself, but for our purposes here, suffice to say that the “kingdom of God” (in this age, on this earth) is **His rule, provision, and protection in the life of those who submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ**. “And His righteousness” refers to the day when His righteous reign fully comes to the new earth.¹⁸⁷ We are to eagerly seek this.¹⁸⁸

I believe in his epistles, the apostle Paul gives us some significant phrases which offer **simplicity - a focus, a unity to the whole of life**:

¹⁸⁶ Matthew 6:31-33 *Holman Christian Standard Bible*

¹⁸⁷ Revelation 21:1-2

¹⁸⁸ Galatians 5:5, and Romans 8:23, I Corinthians 1:7, Philippians 3:20, II Timothy 4:8, Titus 2:13

- **“single (or simple) devotion to Christ”¹⁸⁹**
- **“... fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith....”¹⁹⁰**
- **“From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”¹⁹¹**

¹⁸⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:3

¹⁹⁰ Hebrews 12:2

¹⁹¹ Romans 11:36

The “Small but Wise”

Let’s now look at our foundational Scripture passage –

Proverbs 30:24-28

“Four things are small on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise:
The ants are not a strong people, but they prepare their food in the summer;
The rock hyraxes are not mighty people, yet they make their houses in the rocks;
The locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks;
The lizard you may grasp with the hands, yet it is in kings' palaces.”

The corresponding Scripture passage for us humans is this:

“ ... Consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.”¹⁹²

As we apply to humans what is said about these four “small” animals, we will see that wisdom is essentially having the aptitude to recognize and compensate for our human limitations. Notice that the proverb says: “Four things are small on the earth, BUT” Ants are not strong, BUT ...” “Hyraxes are not powerful, BUT ...” “Locusts have no king, BUT ...” “Lizards can be seized with the hand, BUT” Each is small and weak, BUT through God-given wisdom their very weakness is made into a

¹⁹² 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

strength. This should remind us of what the Lord said to the apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for **power is perfected in weakness**." And Paul's response was: "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses ... for when I am weak, then I am strong."¹⁹³

We need to recognize our weakness, find contentment with the "smallness" of our humanity – that is the humility component; and then seek God for the wisdom which turns that very weakness into strength – again the "Humility – Wisdom Connection".

¹⁹³ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

The “Small but Wise” Ants



The proverb says: **“The ants are not a strong people, but they prepare their food in the summer.”** Their **“smallness”** is they **“are not a strong people”**. Their **“wisdom”** is they **“prepare their food in the summer”**. This means that they **HAVE FORESIGHT AND MAKE PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE**. These **“small but wise”** ants can be likened to a particular tribe of people back in history, and also to a people the Lord is **“forming for Himself to declare His praise”**¹⁹⁴. Let’s look at a very interesting passage of Scripture describing a people – a particular tribe of Israel as the tribes gathered together under David at Hebron. I Chronicles 12:23 reads: **“The kingdom of Israel had been taken away from Saul, and it now belonged to David. He was ruling from Hebron, and thousands of well-trained soldiers from each tribe went there to crown David king of all Israel, just as the LORD had promised.”**¹⁹⁵

Firstly, I’d like to point out two things that relate to the subject matter:

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Isaiah 43:21

¹⁹⁵ *Contemporary English Version*

- 1) The Hebrew name, *Hebron*, means “**joining together**” in an alliance or association, in a confederation or company, a union.¹⁹⁶ We will see that such a “**joining together**” is wisdom.
- 2) The context of this Scripture passage is a **time of change** in Israel’s history – a **time of transition** from the leadership of Saul to the leadership of David – Saul representing rule of Man, and David representing the rule of Christ. It was a **time of a new expression of the kingdom of God**.

I Chronicles 12:23 then finishes with: **These soldiers, who were always prepared for battle, included...**¹⁹⁷, and it gives a list of the various tribes including ...

The Sons of Issachar

And in verse 32, it says: “... **the sons of Issachar, (were) men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do...**” The Hebrew name, *Issachar*, means “he brings a reward”.¹⁹⁸ The ants had **foresight**. These sons of Issachar also had **foresight** – they “**understood the times**”.

“Understanding the Times”

I’d like us to consider this phrase “**understanding the times**”: Where did they get this **understanding**? It was God-given. It is in our own best interests to not look to the world system¹⁹⁹ for “**understanding the times**”. The world system lacks the **understanding** that God gives. The world

¹⁹⁶ *Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names*, Dr. Judson Cornwall & Dr. Stelman Smith

¹⁹⁷ *Contemporary English Version*

¹⁹⁸ *Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names*, Dr. Judson Cornwall & Dr. Stelman Smith

¹⁹⁹ Namely, “the present condition of human affairs in alienation from and opposition to God.” *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

system propagates information. But there is a difference between information and **understanding**. I am referring to making God and His word our source for understanding, rather than the world system and its media as our source for understanding. You see, **understanding** comes when one has **insight** into the information. And we need to “**understand the times**” from God’s perspective rather than from the perspective of the world system. **The media is our culture’s major tool in the shaping of people’s perspectives, attitudes, and behavior.**²⁰⁰ This goes beyond the saying: “You can’t believe everything you read in the newspaper”, etc. The media – especially the electronic media - have **a powerful and effective potential for propaganda**. Depending on the surrounding culture, media propaganda can be obvious or understated, but in either case it will be powerful and effective in shaping perspectives, attitudes, and behavior. It is the rich and powerful who own the media; and they are rich and powerful because they own the media.

A quote from the *Columbia Journalism Review*: “*The U.S. media landscape is dominated by massive corporations that, through a history of mergers and acquisitions, have concentrated their control over what we see, hear, and read.... Our media wasn’t created by the free market. It is the direct result of policies made by Congress and the Federal Communications Commission in Washington.... Do the laws benefit the public or do they just benefit big companies that can afford high-priced lobbyists?*”²⁰¹

Notwithstanding the plethora of media information, journalists themselves are concerned about the objectivity and quality of journalism in America.²⁰² I don’t have an easy solution for finding objective information

²⁰⁰ This is a real and chronological sequence. Perspectives give rise to attitudes, which in turn influence behavior.

²⁰¹ “*The Big Six*”: General Electric, Time Warner, Walt Disney, News Corp., CBS, and Viacom (*Columbia Journalism Review*: “*Who Owns What*”). <https://www.freepress.net/issues/media-control/media-consolidation/who-owns-media>

²⁰² <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/state-of-the-news-media/>

in the media. All news organizations have a bias – from the progressive secular humanist to the conservative Christian. The secular humanist perspective is obviously at odds with the Biblical worldview. Personally, I agree with the perspective of most, not all, but most, Christian reporting, I just think that it is typically limited in its choice of topics and issues, and therefore doesn't offer a full picture of all the forces at work in the world. I try to find a variety of sources, including world news organizations and journalism outside of the major media corporations and networks, and then try to put the information in the context of a Biblical worldview and perspective of the future.

Information plus insight gives **understanding**. We need to get our insights from the Holy Spirit rather than from the "spirit of the world".²⁰³ We must recognize the fact that there are "false prophets" both in the world and in Christendom.²⁰⁴ The Lord said through Ezekiel: "... **they lead my people the wrong way by saying, "Peace!" when there is no peace. When the people build a weak wall, the prophets cover it with whitewash to make it look strong.**"²⁰⁵ And through Jeremiah He said: "**They tried to heal my people's serious injuries as if they were small wounds. They said, 'It's all right, it's all right.' But really, it is not all right.**"²⁰⁶ If Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation"; then anyone saying, "Peace, it's all right", must be a false prophet.

Gaining understanding of the times requires the ministry of "the watchman" – a people who call upon God and seek God in prayer. This is what the Lord said through Isaiah: "**I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest.**"²⁰⁷ We also need to realize this: It is

²⁰³ 1 Corinthians 2:12, Ephesians 2:2

²⁰⁴ Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1

²⁰⁵ Ezekiel 13:10 (also verse 16) *New Century Version*

²⁰⁶ Jeremiah 6:14 (also 8:11) *New Century Version*

²⁰⁷ Isaiah 62:6 *New International Version*

much more important to devote ourselves to understanding **what the God of history is doing in the world** rather than what the world system is trying to accomplish; because in the end, it is God's purposes – not the world's agendas – which will prevail. So, we need to be like **the ants** and **the sons of Issachar** – having **foresight** and **spiritual insight**.

Preparation for the Future

But the Scripture also says that the sons of Issachar had “knowledge of what Israel should do”. Like the ants, the sons of Issachar were a **diligent** people. We all have some idea of what it means to be **diligent**; but the Hebrew word, *charuts*, and the Latin root, *diligere*, communicate an original meaning which our English usage has lost. The original meaning of **diligence** is *to choose, to decide*. To be **diligent** is *to act in a decisive, determined way*. The sons of Issachar had the faith and confidence *to act in a decisive, determined way*, because they believed that God had given them the wisdom to do so – wisdom to truly understand the times, and wisdom to know what the people of God should do.

Like **the ants**, they knew how to make **preparation for the future based on the understanding of the times** given to them by the Spirit of God. The ants “prepare their food in the summer” in **preparation for winter**. They prepare during the summer days for the winter's night. Isaiah wrote: “**Watchman, how much of the night is left? Watchman, how much longer will it be night?**” The watchman answers, “**Morning is coming, but then night will come again. If you have something to ask, then come back and ask.**”²⁰⁸

About 770 years later, Jesus confirms this perspective by saying: “**We need to be energetically at work for the One who sent Me here, working**

²⁰⁸ Isaiah 21:11-12

while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over.”²⁰⁹ This seems to indicate that as human history progresses up to the time of “the great tribulation”, doing the work of God on the earth may become increasingly difficult.²¹⁰ The apostle Paul, therefore, admonishes us: “So then, be very careful how you live. Don’t live like foolish people but likewise people. Make the most of your opportunities because these are evil days. So, don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord wants.”²¹¹ “These are evil days”. We need to seek God to know what He wants - His wisdom to know how to live – His wisdom to make the most of every opportunity He presents to us – being “watchmen” who “understand the times” and know what to do – now and in preparation for the future.****

²⁰⁹ John 9:4 *The Message*.

²¹⁰ Some Scriptures that seem to support this idea: Daniel 7:25, Isaiah 51:6, Matthew 24:9, 12, 21, 29, Mark 13:24, Revelation 2:10

²¹¹ Ephesians 5:15-17 *God’s Word Translation*

The “Small but Wise” Rock Hyraxes



Next we turn to the ROCK HYRAXES.²¹² Let’s read what the proverb said about these **small but wise** creatures: **“The rock hyraxes are not mighty people, yet they make their houses in the rocks.”** Why do they “make their houses in the rocks”? Psalm 104:18 tells us: “High in the mountains live the wild goats, and **the rocks form a refuge for the hyraxes.**”²¹³ So we see that the “smallness” or weakness of the rock hyraxes is that they “are not mighty people” – these rabbit-like creatures are lacking in natural defenses and quite vulnerable to attacks from predators.²¹⁴ But their God-given **wisdom** is that they have the instinct to **take refuge in the rocks.**

²¹² (Hebrew) *shaphan*: (*Hyrax Syriacus*). Various translations: *Conies* (KJV, NIV), *rock badgers* (GWT). It is definitely of the *hyrax* species, and it definitely lives in the rocks – thus I think *Rock Hyrax* is the best rendering. Of interest to me, because I lived in South Africa, this is the animal the Afrikaans refer to as a *dassie* (*Procavia Capensis*) Cape Hyrax or Rock Hyrax.

²¹³ *New Living Translation*

²¹⁴ Their predators are snakes, eagles, buzzards, leopards, dogs, mongoose.

Christ, Our Rock

As with all of these four “**small but wise**” creatures, we too need to **acknowledge our weaknesses and appropriate the Lord’s provision. And the provision of the Lord, for those who are humble enough to believe and receive Him, is Christ. Christ as our Rock** is a concept introduced by Moses in the Old Testament²¹⁵ and confirmed by the apostle Paul in the New Testament.²¹⁶ Isaiah said: **“Trust in the LORD forever, for in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.”**²¹⁷ And these are the words of David:

- ❖ **“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”**²¹⁸
- ❖ **“From the ends of the earth, I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety.”**²¹⁹
- ❖ **“He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken.”**²²⁰
- ❖ **“Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress.”**²²¹
- ❖ **“Blessed be the LORD, my rock....”**²²²

Throughout his life, David was assailed by many enemies – foreign armies, other kings, at times, his own subjects, and even one of his own

²¹⁵ Exodus 17:6, Deuteronomy 32:4, 30, 31, 37

²¹⁶ I Corinthians 10:4

²¹⁷ Isaiah 26:4

²¹⁸ Psalm 18:2

²¹⁹ Psalm 61:2

²²⁰ Psalm 62:2

²²¹ Psalm 71:3

²²² Psalm 144:1

sons.²²³ He was a man who had to learn how to seek refuge in the Lord, **his Rock**. Just one example, which affords a vivid picture, is when he took refuge from his arch-enemy, Saul, in the Cave of Adullam. Along with David, the writer to the Hebrews tells us that other ancient “heroes of faith” – “men of whom the world was not worthy” - also overcame by “wandering in caves”.²²⁴

As human beings, we are vulnerable to various spiritual, emotional, and physical attacks, and much of the time, we can feel as defenseless and weak as rock hyraxes. But **Christ is our Rock**; and He Himself has invited us to “abide” or live in Him.” As the rock hyraxes “make their houses in the rocks”, we need to **abide or live in Christ, who is our Rock**. But what does it mean to “abide” or live in Christ?

Well, when Jesus invited us to “abide” or “live” in Him, He did so using a parable in order to help us understand what He meant. He said: **“Abide²²⁵ in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”**²²⁶ The branch simply must **continue to remain in the Vine**, and it will **draw its life from the Vine**. In other words, we must live by **faith – trust in and dependence upon Christ**. The prophet, Habakkuk, gives insight regarding this when he says: **“Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.”**²²⁷ Here is that **“Humility – Wisdom Connection”** once again: Those who are proud refuse to live by dependence upon Christ; and consequently are “on their own” when dealing with Satan’s attacks and the common adversities in life. But those

²²³ Absalom

²²⁴ Hebrews 11:38

²²⁵ (Greek) *meno*: continue, remain, abide. *Thayer and Smith Bible Dictionary*.

²²⁶ John 15:4-5

²²⁷ Habakkuk 2:4

who are **humble** receive the righteousness which comes from God²²⁸ because **they live by their faith, that is, their trust in and dependence upon Christ**. There are a couple things the apostle Paul mentions in his second letter to the Corinthians which reinforce this concept. He wrote: **“We felt that the death sentence had been passed on us. But this happened so that we should rely, not on ourselves, but only on God, who raises the dead. From such terrible dangers of death, He saved us, and will save us; and we have placed our hope in Him that He will save us again.”**²²⁹ The key? **“That we should rely, not on ourselves, but only on God... and place our hope in Him....”**

The other thing Paul shared with the Corinthians is something we have already mentioned: The Lord said to the apostle Paul: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for (My) power is perfected in (your) weakness.”** And Paul’s response was: **“Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses ... for when I am weak, then I am strong.”**²³⁰ This was true with the four “small but wise” creatures, as well as, with the apostle Paul: Through God-given wisdom their very weaknesses were made into strengths. Why? Because **they acknowledged their God-given weaknesses and human limitations and then appropriated God’s provision, that is, the life and power that come from abiding in Christ**. Paul was able to say: **“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”**²³¹ Likewise, we also need to “tap into” the wisdom of **“abiding in Christ”**. For as Paul said, **“In Him we live, and move, and have our being.”**²³²

²²⁸ Romans 1:17, 3:21-22

²²⁹ II Corinthians 1:9-10 *Good News Translation*

²³⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

²³¹ Philippians 4:13

²³² Acts 17:28

The “Small but Wise” Locusts



Now, we turn to the **LOCUSTS**: “**The locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks.**”²³³ A single locust is hardly noticeable. In the Scripture, locusts are often symbols of insignificance and weakness. When the Israelite spies came back from spying out the land of Canaan, having seen the inhabitants of the land, ten of them said, “we became like **grasshoppers** in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”²³⁴ When describing his weakness, the psalmist said, “I am passing like a shadow when it lengthens; I am shaken off **like the locust.**”²³⁵

Coordination & Cooperation

The psalmist was referring to a single locust; but when locusts gather together, they are strong. Their strength is a “strength in numbers”. Their strength is that “all of them go out in ranks”. In Scripture, locusts are also

²³³ Proverbs 30:27

²³⁴ Numbers 13:33

²³⁵ Psalm 109:23

frequently likened to an army. The prophet Joel describes them in this way: “They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers; and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths. They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path; when they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks.”²³⁶

“The locusts have no king”, so their strength does not lie in the abilities of some leadership figure. Their strength lies in the “team-work” of the “ranks” – “the rank and file”. Solomon wrote: **“A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”**²³⁷ In the Hebrew text, “in ranks” means “gathered together”. Haddon Robinson, former-president of the Denver Seminary and the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has written: “Although the New Testament urges us to possess a personal faith in Jesus Christ, it says nothing about a private faith. We need other believers, and other believers need us.”²³⁸

The Body of Christ

The wisdom of the locusts is in each doing what God has instructed them to do, but also realizing that what God has instructed everyone to do combines into a co-coordinated, co-operative, systematic strategy. This is a picture of **co-ordination and co-operation**. And this is a picture of **the Body of Christ**. Listen to the apostle Paul’s instruction to the church: **“Because of the grace that God has shown me, I ask you not to think of yourselves more highly than you should. Instead, your thoughts should lead you to use good judgment based on what God has given each of you**

²³⁶ Joel 2:7-8

²³⁷ Ecclesiastes 4:12 *New Living Translation*

²³⁸ *Our Daily Bread*

as believers. Our bodies have many parts, but these parts don't all do the same thing. In the same way, even though we are many individuals, Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other. God in His grace gave each of us different gifts...."²³⁹ "So there are many parts but one body. An eye can't say to a hand, "I don't need you!" Or again, the head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" The opposite is true. The parts of the body that we think are weaker are the ones we really need. The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we give special honor. So, our unpresentable parts are made more presentable. However, our presentable parts don't need this kind of treatment. God has put the body together and given special honor to the part that doesn't have it."²⁴⁰ Of all the comments one could make about these passages, it suffices to say for our present purpose that none of us are self-sufficient – spiritually or naturally.

“His Inheritance in the Saints”

The apostle Paul prayed for the Church: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know ... what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” Paul says that God has placed “His inheritance in the saints”. God has invested “in the saints”, and so should we. I think it an interesting phenomenon that if we waste **the Lord’s inheritance**, we also are wasting **our own inheritance**. The Lord’s inheritance is “in the saints”, and if we do not properly discern, appreciate, and support the saints, we can miss out on some of our inheritance in Christ.

I believe Jesus warned us about wasting our blessings in a few of His parables: In Luke 15, Jesus tells the parable of the “Prodigal Son”. The

²³⁹ Romans 12:3-6 *God’s Word Translation*

²⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:20-24

subject matter of the story is summarized in the meaning of the word “prodigal” – **the wasting of physical blessings**. In Luke chapter 16, Jesus continues in the same subject matter. Verse 1 says: “Jesus told his disciples: **“There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.”** (This too, is a parable about **the wasting of physical blessings**.) The story goes on to say that this manager, when he realized he was going to lose his job, quickly gave away the rich man’s possessions in order to make **friends who would in turn help him when he was needy**. Then in verses 8 & 9 it says: **“The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”**²⁴¹ Jesus’ purpose for telling the parable is to commend this type of shrewdness or wisdom - except in this case, it was applied in a dishonest manner. He commends and recommends the **“use of worldly wealth” to “make friends” “with your own kind”**. “The people of this world” do this, and Jesus is saying that “the people of light” don’t, but should also do this – that is, **“USE WORLDLY WEALTH” TO BUILD UP THE SAINTS**.

I believe two passages from Paul’s letters to the churches support this idea. In I Corinthians 7:31, Paul writes: **“... use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them....”**²⁴² And in Galatians 6:10 he writes: **“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”**, that is, “the saints”, the Body of Christ. Most other religious groups (e.g. Jews, Moslems) and fraternal groups (e.g. Free Masons) practice supporting their members in business. This is a way of “keeping the money in the family”, thus helping to strengthen the group’s well-being and witness. Simply put: Whenever

²⁴¹ *New International Version*

²⁴² *New International Version*

possible, we should give our business to Christians. It goes without saying that we have all been “burnt by a brother”. But it is also true that we have all been “burnt” a multitude of times by all those outside the “household of faith”. At least with those who claim to be brothers, we may have some measure of accountability.²⁴³ We should not expect “favors” from Christian businesses. But our expectation of Christian businesses is that they would deliver what any good business would deliver - good work or a good product at a good price.

Again, Jesus’ words were: **“I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”** This coincides with some advice that Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. He taught us to “make heavenly investments.”²⁴⁴ We need to “use our worldly wealth to make friends” with those in “... **Mount Zion...the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, ... the general assembly and church of the firstborn... whose names are written in heaven.**”²⁴⁵ We need to “use our worldly wealth to make friends” with those within the Body of Christ. Why? For the sake of God’s eternal plans and purposes, to prosper His work here on the earth, and so the saints can bless one another. On the one hand, this is a “no-brainer”: If Christians prosper, the Body of Christ will benefit from the financial support for the work of ministry. On the other hand, this requires a life-altering paradigm shift from self-centeredness to God-centeredness – a shift from self-consciousness to Body-consciousness.

We need to consider what the Lord spoke through the prophet, Haggai: **“So the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: “Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in**

²⁴³ On a related issue: We would be shocked if we were to become informed about the many anti-Christian and non-humanitarian agendas being supported by corporations to whom we give our money through the purchase of their products and services. I believe we should exercise the power of boycott in such cases.

²⁴⁴ Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:33-34

²⁴⁵ Hebrews 12:22-23

ruins? This is what the LORD Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! You have planted much but harvested little. You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up. You have wine to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst. You have clothing to wear, but not enough to keep you warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes! "This is what the LORD Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD Almighty, while you are all busy building your own fine houses."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Haggai 1:3-9 *New Living Translation*

The “Small but Wise” Lizard



Lastly, we look at the LIZARD²⁴⁷: **“The lizard you may grasp with the hands, yet it is in kings' palaces.”**²⁴⁸ Its “smallness” is that it is so defenseless it “may be grasped with the hands”. Its “wisdom” is that it finds its way into “kings’ palaces”.²⁴⁹

What the proverb said about the lizard is amazingly similar to what Jesus said about His disciples: **“I am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves. So be as wise as snakes and as innocent as doves. Watch out for**

²⁴⁷ “spider”: KJV, NKJV

²⁴⁸ Proverbs 30:28

²⁴⁹ The lizard is the only animal the author refers to in the singular. Does this have any particular significance? We saw that part of the strength and wisdom of the ants and locusts is that they work together. The rock hyraxes also live in colonies and are dependent on one another to give an “alarm call” when danger is approaching. But the lizard does seem to be a singular sort of fellow, in that when sighted, they are usually alone. When the Lord brings one into “kings’ palaces”, is it the nature of the case that it be a solo mission rather than a group assignment? In any case, we spot lizards in amazing places. Haddon Robinson said he saw one on the 26th floor of a hotel in Acapulco, Mexico, and asked himself, “How did it get there? Did it climb the stairs? Take the elevator? Scale the walls?” I suppose one answer is: By being **persistent** the lizard can get to wherever he wants to get to – even a king’s palace. While this may be true, I don’t think being persistent is necessarily equivalent to being **“exceedingly wise”**. I think the more significant issues concerning the lizard in kings’ palaces are: **Why is he there? How did he get there? And what is he supposed to do now that he is there?**

people who will take you to court, and have you beaten in their meeting places. Because of me, you will be dragged before rulers and kings to tell them and the Gentiles about your faith.²⁵⁰ Jesus said: “Because of Me....” the disciples “will be dragged before rulers and kings”, that is, because of their faith in Christ. So, the disciples were arrested – arrested under various accusations of civil disobedience. In every case, the “civil disobedience” was essentially ministering the word of God. Some of the more well-known disciples who were arrested are John²⁵¹, Peter²⁵², Stephen²⁵³, Silas²⁵⁴, and Paul²⁵⁵.

Some Historical Background²⁵⁶

Some historical background might help us “understand the times”: Rome allowed the Jews to self-govern their people according to their religion, as long as they also accommodated the Roman syncretism, which was an “everyone believes everything” type of religious environment. Ultimately, this did not work out well with the Jews (nor with the Christians). The two ruling parties for the Jews were the Pharisees - the “peoples’ party”, which was devoted to the Jewish law and tradition, and was antagonistic towards Rome; and the Sadducees - the aristocratic party, which very willingly aligned itself with Rome. The Roman military was present to maintain law and order in the provinces.

Jesus had referred to Herod as a “fox”²⁵⁷, but the “wolves” He referred to were the Jewish rulers – the leaders of a religious system that was

²⁵⁰ Matthew 10:16-18 *Contemporary English Version*

²⁵¹ Acts 4:1-20

²⁵² Acts 4:1-20; 5:17-42

²⁵³ Acts 6:6-7:60

²⁵⁴ Acts 16:16-40

²⁵⁵ Acts 16:16-40; 18:12-17; 19:24-41; 21:27-26:32

²⁵⁶ See: ADDENDUM

²⁵⁷ Luke 13:32

waiting for a different messiah – a messiah after their own liking – a different messiah than the One God had sent. It was these religious “rulers” who initiated the arrests of the disciples, brought them before the Sanhedrin - the Jewish court - and then appealed to the Roman government, which reserved the right to administer the death penalty. The “kings” were puppets kings of the Roman government - King Herod, and later King Agrippa, who answered ultimately to Emperor Caesar.

The Issue of Government

A key issue - indeed, a foundational aspect of this message, is the question of government: **Who will govern us? The God of Heaven or the “god of this world”?** Like Daniel in the lions’ den, and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the blazing furnace, the apostles John, Peter, Stephen, Silas, and Paul all ended up “dragged before rulers and kings” for one reason – in the words of the apostles: **“We must obey God rather than men.”**²⁵⁸ The issues of civil obedience and civil disobedience are worthy of many messages in and of themselves; but not being able to devote time to a full exposition in this message, I’d like to simply state a serious concern I have – and that is this: In the future we will not be able to continue in our superficial, one-sided understanding of certain Scripture passages like Romans 13:1-5 and 1 Peter 2:13-14, which the Western Church has patriotically parroted.

These passages have to do with the individual Christian’s responsibility toward the state in terms of civil obedience. But does the state always deserve our unquestioning obedience? What of the state’s responsibility toward society? Insofar as the state and its rulers exercise their authority in keeping with God’s will, they act as God’s ministers for

²⁵⁸ Acts 5:29

the good of society. If, however, the authority of the state runs counter to God's will, then the authority should not be understood as God-given. From Revelation 13 and 18, it is quite clear that the state can be taken over by powers of darkness and evil forces diametrically opposed to God's will. Revelation 13 pictures the state as a beast opposed to God's will. Revelation 18 pictures the downfall of any nation that becomes a modern Babylon, corrupted by wealth, materialism, and injustice.

In *Hard Sayings of the Bible*²⁵⁹, Peter Davids says: "In the gospels, we see that Jesus did not accept all legal and governing authorities as ultimate dispensers of God's will. Wherever He went, He bucked the system, upset the status quo, and challenged the authorities' claim to the right and the truth."²⁶⁰

Likewise, in Acts 17:6-7 Jesus' disciples are described as **"men who have caused trouble all over the world...They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus."**²⁶¹ In other words, the disciples were not **"dragged before rulers and kings"** to receive good citizenship awards – they were accused and arrested for civil disobedience.²⁶² They were **"obeying God rather than men."**²⁶³

²⁵⁹ *InterVarsity Press* (1996)

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 574

²⁶¹ *New International Version*

²⁶² I believe that some in the Church are particularly called to what I refer to as "prophetic" evangelism to expose deception (Ephesians 5:11-17) and proclaim truth. Daniel's ministry to Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius is an excellent example (Daniel 1-6). As with the ministry of "apologetics", I personally believe that this ministry of proclamation is essentially "declaring the praises of God" (1 Peter 2:9), which, in itself, is a type of spiritual warfare (Psalm 149; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). This ministry of proclamation isn't limited to, but may include, addressing the government and society in the public arena. I am not necessarily referring to "group demonstrations", which somehow end up giving the wrong witness even if sending the right message. In the Scriptures, we see that while prophets did seek the Lord and fellowship in "schools", they found themselves alone when speaking publically. This type of prophetic public presence may incur accusations of "civil disobedience". However, considering our Savior's example in Isaiah 53:7, there is certainly no place for violent civil disobedience in the Church.

²⁶³ Acts 5:29

As Jesus said: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”²⁶⁴ He did not tell us to render to Caesar the things that are God’s. That is specifically the Antichrist agenda.

God’s Purpose “in Kings’ Palaces”

Now, God has a purpose in all this. Jesus said His disciples would be **“in the kings’ palaces”** for this purpose: **“to tell them about your faith”**. In the Book of Acts, we see the apostle Paul telling the people: **“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”**²⁶⁵

Paul was arrested and imprisoned in Jerusalem, but once there, he also appeared before the Governor Felix²⁶⁶, Governor Festus²⁶⁷, and King Agrippa²⁶⁸ - and to each he **“told them about his faith”**. The reason Paul appeared before each of these nobles is because he had made an appeal regarding his Roman citizenship and his right to appeal to Caesar. In doing so, he proved to be, as Jesus said: **“wise as a snake and innocent as a dove”**. Like the lizard, Paul could be **“grasped by the hands”** of the Jews and Romans although he was **“innocent as a dove”**. And like the lizard, Paul conducted himself **“as wisely as a snake”** in that he appeared **“in king’s palaces”** and seized the opportunity to **“tell them about his faith”**. Paul

²⁶⁴ Matthew 22:21

²⁶⁵ Acts 20:22-24 *New International Version*

²⁶⁶ Acts 24:1-17

²⁶⁷ Acts 25:1-27

²⁶⁸ Acts 26:1-32

lived up to his charge to the Ephesians: **“make the most of your opportunities, for the days are evil.”**²⁶⁹

So, what is the wisdom of the lizard? It is this: He is an OPPORTUNIST – an opportunist for Christ. He is “making the most of his opportunities” to **“tell about his faith”**. And this is particularly so “in kings’ palaces”. In other words, if you find yourself in a place of authority, or in a place of high visibility, realize that it is God Who has placed you there as a public spectacle for His purposes; and for God’s sake, don’t be “ashamed of the gospel”²⁷⁰ – seize the opportunity to **“tell about your faith”**.

²⁶⁹ Ephesians 5:16 *The Charles Williams Translation of the New Testament*

²⁷⁰ Romans 1:16

ADDENDUM

Politicized Christendom

There is some historical background which may reflect parallels between the first and second coming of Christ, and in turn, may give us some added insight into the times in which we live:

When Jesus came the first time, a great majority of God's people had a perspective which was more political than spiritual. I believe that when Jesus comes again, it will be to a people whose majority has a perspective which again has become more political than spiritual.

There were religious groups in Jesus' day which I believe correspond to religious groups in the Christendom today. These are people who seek a kingdom without the Cross of Christ. It is interesting to note that there was a 400-year period in between the Old and the New Testaments. It is known as the Inter-Testamental Period. It is also known as the 400 Silent Years. There was so little happening spiritually, that God had nothing to say to His people. I believe these 400 years of spiritual darkness for God's people under the rule of various worldly powers corresponds to the 400 years of physical bondage of God's people in Egypt. I also personally believe that it corresponds to what Jesus called "the times of the gentiles" (Luke 21:24) - I think the Greek word, *ethnos*, is better translated "nations" - "the times of the nations", that is, the times in which the Church lives in this world under the rule of the nations' governments. In any case, it was during these spiritually dark times that these various religious groups emerged.

In the first century there were Jewish sects which all were waiting and looking for a Messiah, but each rejected Jesus as the Christ, because He was a Crucified Christ. In this history, I believe there are lessons to be learned for Christians today.

The Herodians: The sons of Herod ruled Palestine under the license of Rome. Because they wanted to maintain their position of rule, they would politically align themselves with the Roman government. But they also looked for the day when the national kingdom of Israel would be restored free of Roman domination and would be ruled by one of the sons of Herod. This can be compared to any religiously-based movement with a political agenda, of which there have been many. Their perspective seemed to be focused on a messiah who would be one of the sons of Herod. Far from accepting a Crucified Christ, we know from the second chapter of Matthew's gospel that Herod tried to crucify Christ himself.

The Sadducees: Since they were the high priests and temple leaders, the Sadducees aligned themselves politically with the secular government and culture because it allowed them to carry on their occupations in the temple. Their interests being more political than spiritual, the Sadducees did not believe in the spirit world or an afterlife, and therefore, their religion was very much oriented to this world. Today we would identify this perspective as humanistic, "progressive", and social-justice oriented.

The Zealots: Their perspective evolved from a zeal for the Law of God to a zeal in the form of a radical, political activism. Essentially they were a "national resistance" movement plotting the violent overthrow of the Roman government in order to establish a Jewish state. The out workings of "liberation theology" in various nations are examples in modern history of this perspective.

The Pharisees: I took the Pharisees out of alphabetical order and saved them for last, because they most represent the majority of Evangelical Christians today. The name "Pharisee" means "those who are separated". They considered themselves to be "separated", and therefore holy, because of their observance of legalistic rituals. They believed that their style of "holiness" would quicken the coming of the Messiah, who would overthrow the Gentiles, re-gather and restore Israel, and rebuild the temple and the re-

institute the sacrifices in Jerusalem where He will set up the throne of His kingdom. The nations will bring their taxes to Jerusalem and will be converted to temple worship. It was an earthly kingdom the Pharisees expected, not the Kingdom of Heaven. Today we call this “Zionism”.

As I said, each of these first century Jewish sects were waiting and looking for the Messiah, but each rejected Jesus as the Christ, because He was a Crucified Christ. We must see the kingdom through the Cross.²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Suggested Reading: My articles “Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross”, “Who is this King of Glory?”, “The Way of the Cross”, “The Cross & The Powers of Darkness”, “The Weakness of God” – complimentary .pdf copies can be obtained by emailing AtChristTable@gmail.com

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

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