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growth in faith and service to God



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From the Editors...

Happy New Year! We are excited for the year ahead and the prospect of GROWing in our knowledge, understanding, and application of God's word. Thank you for being a GROW magazine subscriber. If you believe this e-publication is worthwhile, we'd be delighted for you to share it with others. You can forward the notification email, post a link to our website on social media, point people to our Facebook page, use the "Print Friendly" button at the bottom of any page to print a copy of an article, or share the entire issue in this PDF.

We appreciate the writers who have contributed to this quarter's magazine. Our aim is to provide material that will provoke us to think and dig deeper into God's word.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,
Sean P. Cavender, chief editor
William Stewart, editor & designer



Jesus In The Book Of Matthew

KYLE BOYD | WICHITA, KANSAS

None of the Gospel writers make a case for Christ quite like Matthew. His attention to detail and methodical writing style results in a book filled with all the evidence one needs to be sure that Jesus IS the long-awaited Messiah as prophesied centuries before. Written to a Jewish audience, Matthew carefully lays out his case leaving the reader with no doubt that Jesus IS the Christ and that He IS Lord and King. Let's briefly examine three points Matthew uses to show beyond doubt that God's Anointed One has come.

Genealogy

Matthew begins his case with Jesus' lineage. As soon as **verse 1** of the first chapter, Matthew ties Jesus to David and Abraham. **Matthew 1:1**, *"The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham."* In this chapter, some of the most significant promises about the coming Messiah were given to these two men. In **Genesis 12:3**, God told Abraham, *"And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."* In **2 Samuel 7**, God promises David that one of his descendants will sit on the throne, ruling eternally. The genealogy in Matthew 1 legally links Jesus back to Abraham through Joseph, His earthly stepfather. The genealogy included patriarchs, kings, and private citizens and would have carried a lot of weight with Matthew's audience. No longer did they need to hold on to the promises of old because Jesus is the promise. Matthew then calls Jesus the Messiah three times in the first 17 verses because He is the Messiah, and the genealogy supports it.

Prophecy

Matthew continues his case by offering powerful evidence through fulfilled prophecies.



Throughout the entire gospel, Matthew reminds the reader of the many prophecies spoken long before. Then, Matthew shows how Jesus is the fulfillment of those prophecies. A few to consider: **Matthew 2:4**, *"And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For from you will come forth a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"* This was spoken by Micah the prophet 700 years before its fulfillment. **Matthew 4:13-16**, *"and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This happened so that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a Light dawned.'"* Isaiah prophesied centuries before this happened. Lastly, in

speaking of His disciples' response to His betrayal, **Matthew 26:31-32**, *"Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"* Zechariah spoke this prophecy approximately 500 years before Christ. Carefully comb through the pages of Matthew and find many more fulfilled prophecies. Matthew doesn't just tell you what happened; he tells you what happened had been foretold, and by seeing the connection, you may believe.

Miracles

Miracles are found throughout Scripture. From **Genesis 1:1** through the book of Revelation, God has used miracles to prove His existence and power. In Matthew's writing, Jesus' miracles play an integral part in proving His deity. Miracles also show His compassion, His power over the physical body, the natural world, and the spiritual world. However, most importantly, they prove that He can perform the ultimate miracle: forgive sins. In **Matthew 8**, Matthew begins his section on miracles, moving them into the centerpiece of his argument. Jesus touches a leper and heals him in **verses 1-3**. He then heals a centurion slave in **verses 5-13**, then curing Peter's mother-in-law in **verses 14 and 15**. Matthew then moves on from showing Jesus' power over the natural body. Then Matthew shows Jesus' power over the spiritual world by casting out demons in the *"many who were demon-possessed"* in **verse 16**. And then Matthew shows His power over the physical world by calming the storm in **verses 23-27**. These miracles are significant to Matthew's argument. So Matthew continues to inform readers of Jesus' incredible power in **chapter 9**. He heals a paralytic; He raises a girl from the dead. He heals two blind men, and in **verse 35**, *"healing every disease and every sickness."* These would have greatly affected Matthew's audience

since many of Matthew's audience were still alive when it was written! All of these miracles are a fantastic case for Christ. However, of all the miracles mentioned in these chapters, the most significant is found in the beginning of **chapter 9. Matthew 9:2** Jesus forgives a man's sins. There is nothing more important in all of human life. And these miracles mentioned illustrate that Jesus can forgive you of your sin! Out of all of the benefits people received in Jesus' miracles, they pale compared to the benefit the world would receive through the miracle of Jesus' resurrection. I'm confident the words of Matthew's contemporary, the apostle John, ring just as true for Matthew's gospel as they do for his own. **John 20:30-31**, *"So then, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name."*

These three points are not an exhaustive list of Matthew's case for Christ, and much more could be said. Read through the gospel and let Matthew walk you through all the evidence you need to believe that Jesus is the Christ. But what's great about Matthew's gospel is that he does not just limit his gospel to giving evidence. He also wanted his readers to know what Jesus cared about, what He focused on, and what His priorities were while on earth. All three can be summarized with one word: Kingdom. Jesus' cousin John the Baptist in **Matthew 3:2** devoted his life to preaching this message, *"Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand."* After defeating the devil in the wilderness, Jesus begins His preaching by saying, *"Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand"* in **Matthew 4:17**. The kingdom of Heaven was atop of Jesus' list. He taught more about it and emphasized it more than anything else. He wanted the world to know what this kingdom

was, what it would take to enter into it, and what it would look like for one to be one of its citizens. The entirety of Matthew's gospel is filled with the answers to these questions. Certainly, the word kingdom has multiple uses in Scripture. It can refer to nations, the church, or Heaven itself. Careful study of the Bible and the book of Matthew is necessary to determine which "kingdom" is under consideration. But first and foremost, the kingdom of Heaven is God's reign and rule. It is His government, His authority, that He was coming to establish. The kingdom required Jesus' divine sacrifice and the power of His resurrection to make it possible! It involves the church, but it's more than the church. It's the kingdom from Heaven brought down and established on earth through Christ that will one day be handed over to God in Heaven (**1 Corinthians 15:24.**) It's the kingdom that Jesus is ruling over on His throne in Heaven. Being a citizen of this kingdom is a choice. It's your choice, and you don't have to enter it. But God

wants you to, and He's made it possible for you to be able to do just that. Enter His kingdom by joining His people and decide to submit to the King. Believe in Jesus, turn from your sins, confess Him as Lord and make contact with Jesus' blood through water baptism for the forgiveness of your sins. And then follow the teachings of Jesus about kingdom citizenship behavior, beginning with the great sermon on the mount.

If you want to know Jesus and need proof for His life, or if you want to know what His mission was, then start where the New Testament starts. Read Matthew. Let Matthew walk you through from start to finish of Jesus' life. Let the inspired writer's words have their intended effect. God's words convict, they touch hearts, and they change lives. The Bible may not have been written directly to us, but it was certainly written for us. The Bible was written FOR you so that you can be saved. So believe in the King and join His kingdom today!

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Pondering Philippians: Congregational Profile

SCOTT LONG | MARIETTA, PENNSYLVANIA

The Circumstances

Robbed of his freedom for teaching the gospel, Paul sits in chains. It is not the first time (and it might not be the last*). Yet, as a true bondservant of God, rather than bemoan his circumstances, Paul rejoices in the twin blessings of access to teaching the “*Praetorium guard*” and increased preaching by the brethren, though some “*preach Christ even from envy and strife*.” Even in his chains, Paul has cause to remember his beloved Macedonian brethren and pray for them.

On the second journey, Paul and Silas set out to visit the cities Paul and Barnabas had visited on their first journey (Acts 15:41). They had just met and taken on Paul’s beloved Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). After going through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16:6ff), the Holy Spirit stopped them from going further into Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to Bithynia. When they came to Troas, Paul had a vision: a man of Macedonia (northern Greece) pleading, “*Come over to Macedonia and help us*.” They concluded the Lord had called them to preach the gospel there and crossed the sea to Neapolis and Philippi.

Philippi was not without note in the annals of history. In about 42 B.C., Augustus/Octavian and Mark Antony defeated the murderers of Julius Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius, signaling the beginning of the end of the Roman republic. Philippi became a Roman colony after this battle.

This being Paul’s first foray into Macedonia, it must have been strange walking into such a Roman-dominated city without even a

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synagogue (Acts 16:13). Yet Paul soon found the hearts of the citizens of Rome in Philippi to be open and caring. For example, down by the river where women prayed, they met the well-to-do Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira who worshipped God. There the Lord opened her heart to the gospel (Acts 16:13-15).

As a result of Paul’s casting out a spirit of divination from a servant girl, which resulted in a loss for her masters, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison (Acts 16:16-24). As they sang praise to God at midnight, an earthquake shook the prison, opened the doors, and loosed everyone’s chains (Acts 16:25-34). The Philippian jailor, thinking his prisoners had escaped, reasoned that this was the end for him and decided to kill himself with his sword. But Paul yelled out, “*Do yourself no harm!*” The jailor, who must have had some knowledge of Paul’s teaching, asked them that all-important question, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” That very night he heard the gospel, believed the teaching, and obeyed the gospel in baptism. After Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship, they were let go and departed Philippi.

One of the beautiful qualities of the Philippian brethren is seen in their giving spirit. Paul speaks of the Macedonian congregations in 2 Corinthians 8:5, “they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” Further, he calls them “partakers with me of grace” (Philippians 1:7). Indeed, Epaphroditus had come from Philippi to aid

Paul in his imprisonment, *“a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God”* (Philippians 4:18). Paul is moved by the gift that Epaphroditus brought, who also became deathly ill while visiting Paul. Paul says that God spared his life and great sorrow for Paul. It is interesting to ponder that, although Paul had the miraculous power to heal, he was unsure of Epaphroditus’ recovery. Epaphroditus, too, had become distressed when he heard that the Philippians knew he was sick; and so, Paul sends him back to his home with this very letter.

The Mind Of Paul

The letter to the Philippians is fascinating for its glimpse into how Paul views himself and his life. We have already noticed his love of the Philippian brethren. He calls them *“partakers with me of grace”* (Philippians 1:7), *“my beloved”* (Philippians 2:12), and *“my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown”* (Philippians 4:1). He writes, *“I have you in my heart”* (Philippians 1:7) and *“I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:8). Without question, this letter comes from a heart of love for the brethren.

In this letter, Paul looks at the dichotomies of life. For instance, we see what life and death mean to Paul. He is confident that his deliverance from chains will come because of the prayers of the Philippians and the aid of the Holy Spirit according to God’s will. Here, the Greek word for deliverance, or salvation, can mean *“deliverance, preservation, safety, or salvation.”* While many assume Paul is speaking of physical deliverance, it is clear it ultimately matters not to him. He will be delivered into eternity if he is not physically delivered from chains. Paul defines life and death in terms of what it means in his service to Christ. In Philippians 1:20, he desires that *“Christ will be magnified in my body,*

whether by life or by death.” So he says in Philippians 1:21, *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* He sees both life and death as viable alternatives. If he continues to live, it is to serve the Philippians. If he dies, it means the blessing of realizing his hope to be with Christ. He tells them that such a choice is not easy. As we all do, he wants to be with Christ, but he realizes he can help the brethren. Selflessly, he chooses instead to remain alive and help the brethren. It is *“more needful for you,”* he says.

Consequently, Paul expresses in Philippians 2:16 his hope that his labors in Christ should not be in vain. In Philippians 2:17, *“Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.”* Though drink offerings are made in the Scriptures well before the giving of the law, it is there we see them codified as sacrifices. ISBE defines the drink offering as *“A liquid offering of wine, rarely water, sometimes of oil, and usually accompanying the burnt-offering, but often with the peace offerings.”* This offering was poured out upon the altar. Here, it is Paul who becomes the drink offering, poured out upon the altar of the Philippians’ *“sacrifice and service”* (Philippians 2:17) of their faith. He rejoices that he shares in their salvation and service, urging them to rejoice with him in this.

So what does the flesh mean to Paul? The Old Covenant, with its laws, had been nailed to the cross by Jesus. Yet, many Israelites insisted that the flesh was still necessary and that circumcision was still the sign of God’s favor, whether for Jew, proselyte, or the newly-welcomed Gentiles. And so Paul warns the Philippians in 3:2 to *“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!”* That is, beware of those who would compel you to honor the flesh and be circumcised. In Philippians 3:3, he says, *“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have NO confidence in the flesh.”*

Yet if anyone were to put their confidence in the flesh, it would be Paul. He lists what he had been in Philippians 3:5-6. Yet all of that stature, those fleshly boasts, Paul saw as loss and rubbish or dung. Paul sees his fleshly attainments as no more than bodily waste. Could Paul make a stronger statement about his view of fleshly things and achievements?

Why does he feel so strongly? Because the alternative is as great as the flesh is vulgar. His attainments are loss because of *“the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”* How could the things of earth possibly compare? Paul says his concern is to “know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,” (Philippians 3:10). Also, he states so that *“I may attain to the resurrection from the dead,”* (Philippians 3:11). There you have it. What could be better than the resurrection unto eternal life?

It is amazing to think that Paul, of all people, sees himself as not having attained to that resurrection, as not having been completed. He sees that he can do so much more to help the lost of the world. He is not yet spent as he will say later to his beloved Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:6: *“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.”* As a result, he first forgets about the things that are behind (those things of the flesh, including the law) and reaches toward those things that are ahead. This mindset is crucial to understanding Paul. He had a past. Yes, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee; he also persecuted the church and considered himself the chiefest of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). These things were always in his mind, but he had to leave them behind to *“press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,”* (Philippians 3:14).

It is easy to understand Paul's view of the dichotomy of abounding and abasement with such a mindset. In chains, Paul was glad to

receive the aid that Epaphroditus had brought to him from the Philippian brethren. His joy, however, resides not in the fulfillment of his own need. Instead, he says he seeks *“the fruit that abounds to your account”* (Philippians 4:17). The Philippian aid given to Paul is good work on their part, fellowship in the gospel, and God sees it as fruit.

Paul's view on being abased (*“Reduced to a low state, humbled, degraded,”* 1828 Webster's) or abounding (*“To have or possess in great quantity,”* 1828 Webster's) is not that abounding is not better than being abased. However, there were times in Paul's life as there are in everyone's when he was in want. Such is why the Philippians shared with him, as in Philippians 4:15-16, more than once and as the only church in Macedonia to do so.

Paul says, though, that he had learned something. He knew how to live in both conditions, abounding or suffering need. We may think it strange that he would say he had to learn how to live in plenty, but the temptation to become comfortable, to expect that plenty to continue, to take it for granted, to be unthankful is always there. Paul had to learn how to live in want, with its physical and emotional discomforts, its temptations to be bitter and to steal. As Agur says in Proverbs 30:8-9, *“Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.”*

Ultimately, Paul learned contentment. The 1828 Webster's says to be content is to be *“quiet; not disturbed; having a mind at peace; easy; satisfied, so as not to...object, or oppose.”* Paul had learned how to be at peace even when he was in need and to be satisfied and not complain. When he was abounding, he learned to be thankful. How is this possible? Paul's trust is in the Lord, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,”* (Philippians 4:13). As a

result of his reception of their aid, Paul is full, abounding even in abasement, thankful, and trusting fully in God (Philippians 4:18).

Exhortation

In Paul's instruction and exhortation, he says in Philippians 1:6 that he is confident *"that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."* In Philippians 2:13, he specifies that *"it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."* Yet, Paul says to them in Philippians 2:12, *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* While this seems like a contradiction, Paul tells the Philippians to cooperate with the plan and will of God for them.

It may not seem that Paul is writing a treatise on Jesus, but Jesus permeates this letter, and the passage that deals specifically with Jesus, 2:5-11, provides the lynchpin for everything Paul is saying, from his attitude to the attitude and actions he urges on the Philippian brethren.

In Philippians 2:5, Paul says, *"let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."* The mind of Philippians 2:3-4, which Jesus perfectly illustrated in His actions. We know that Jesus was in the beginning and was with God and was God (John 1:1). Here He is said to have been in the form of God, the appearance. Although He dwelt in heaven with the Father, He willingly left that abode to come to earth. He took on flesh and the appearance of a man to become of no reputation and live as a servant. The Creator becomes the creature. Jesus did not consider His being with God and a thing to be grasped and retained. Instead, He humbled Himself and was obedient *"to the point of death, even the death of the cross."* Hebrews 12:2 tells us that He *"for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" in order "to save sinners"* (1 Timothy 1:15). It is not hard to see why Jesus did not have to retain His position in heaven and was willing to come to earth as a man.

Though His excursion to earth resulted in a terrible death, it did not end there. God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand, and has *"given Him the name which is above every name,"* that all people should bow to Him and confess that He is Lord *"to the glory of God the Father,"* (Philippians 2:9-10).

This example, or rather the mind behind the example, that Paul tells the Philippians to have within themselves.

Let's look at Paul's instructions to these brethren. We might group them into three overlapping themes of his letter, which we also see in the example of Christ. We see service, unity, and joy.

Paul's prayer for the brethren in Philippians 1:9-11 serves as a general outline of the instructions he has for them:

1. Let your love for God and the brethren abound more and more as you grow in understanding and wisdom.
2. As you grow according to the will of God, you will show forth why this will is so good for man.
3. Be filled with the fruits of righteousness that are in Christ.

Against the backdrop of this prayer, Paul weaves through his instruction to the Philippians' exhortations to greater service, stronger unity, and fuller joy.

Urging them to greater service, Paul tells the Philippians, *"let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ,"* (Philippians 1:27), *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,"* (Philippians 2:12), hold fast the word of life, (Philippians 2:16), have the mind to *"press toward the goal,"* (Philippians 3:14-15), and *"be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God,"* (Philippians 4:6).

Toward stronger unity, Paul exhorts them to “*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,*” (Philippians 1:27), be “*like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind,*” (Philippians 2:2), “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others,*” (Philippians 2:3-4), “*Do all things without complaining and disputing,*” (Philippians 2:14), and “*let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind,*” (Philippians 3:16). And there is reason to stress the unity of brethren, for among them, Euodia and Syntyche were not of the same mind in the Lord (Philippians 4:2). Paul implores these women who have labored with him in the gospel to be of the same mind and urges help for them.

With their devoted service to God and love for and unity with one another comes great joy for Paul and them. Paul says they need not be terrified by adversaries “*which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God,*” (Philippians 1:28). They “*may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,*” (Philippians 2:15). He

encourages them to press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). There is an excellent reason for joy among these brethren. Paul nears the end of his letter in Philippians 4:4-8 by saying, “*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*” The coming you are longing for is near, “*The Lord is at hand.*” Rejoice! Pray to God, and “*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” And “*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.*”

What a beautiful letter this is! Oh, how much we can learn from it. How encouraged we may be by its examples and exhortations. Let us, indeed, meditate on them deeply and be filled with the fruits of righteousness.

*Paul’s imprisonment was likely either in Caesarea or Rome. It is not within the scope of this article to deal with which it was. Others far more knowledgeable than I have waded into these waters.

Wonderful Encouragement to Worship the Great God of Heaven with Heart-felt Reverence (Psalm 95)

JOHN HAINS | SMITHVILLE, ONTARIO

Verse 1 – “Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.”

From our Psalm 95 text, this 1st verse invites and encourages us to come together to worship the Lord in song! Our worship to the magnificent God of heaven is something He deserves – with all of our hearts – and to the highest degree! Our hearts ought to be filled with songs of praise – and adoration – because **He is great and greatly to be praised!** (Psalm 96:4). The Lord is so generous and expressive to us in love, mercy, grace, and kindness that we can't keep quiet – as our hearts overflow with songs of praise!

Have you ever noticed how many other passages in the psalms teach the same thing? So, you'll be blessed to take the time to look up a large number of them with your concordance and a notebook. Those passages will encourage you to fill your heart with praises in song as part of your day, every day! Because – **He is so worthy!**

One of the most significant losses and hardships during the recent lockdowns for faithful Christians was that they were not legally allowed to physically gather for worship. We could not sing together, pray together at the building, nor were we able to eat the Lord's Supper together. We could not come together to study His precious word.

In sharp contrast, Psalm 95 gives a beautiful invitation and picture of coming or gathering together to worship the Father.

I remember well the feeling expressed by the brethren the first Sunday we were allowed to



assemble again for worship services legally. So bountiful were the expressions of gratitude! For faithful Christians, this was everything. Although there couldn't be handshakes or hugs, we could worship in songs and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts *together* to the Lord! Our study time together was rich. I learned that morning that public worship together may have been something many of us had taken for granted!

The devil hates it when God's people gather together to worship Him (Matthew 4:9-11; 3 John 9-10). On that first Sunday back, I believe we all left with our hearts full! We need to fervently pray that our freedom to worship together will be protected and never be taken away.

God is the **“Rock of our salvation,”** we can trust that He is our solid foundation in and for life! That makes us think on verses like Psalm 18:2 that express further that point: *“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”* Or Psalm 144:1-2 that affirms: *“Blessed be the LORD my Rock, Who trains my*

hands for war, and my fingers for battle — my lovingkindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and the One in whom I take refuge, Who subdues my people under me.”

Verse 2 – “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with thanksgiving.”

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,” James 1:17 affirms. When we consider the long list of blessings we receive from our *heavenly Father, not just day-by-day, but moment-by-moment*, we begin to understand that we truly have so much for which to give Him thanks! We communicate our hearts’ gratitude to Him by the words we express in our songs and prayers. It is a privilege to engage in worship with praise and thanksgiving in our hearts. And did you notice the link in this second verse between thanksgiving and joy? Again, He is so worthy! Genuine thankfulness creates genuine joy.

We need to be careful because we can easily fall into the mode of the hogs, enjoying the acorns that fell from the tree but never bothering to look up to see from where they came. It’s been said that **thankfulness comes in three levels**. Let’s consider this:

- First, the non-existent level is where we are just not thankful at all. Instead, we expect the good things that come to us. So while the Lord, most of all, along with other people, give and do so much for us, we expect all of it. Sometimes we take the givers and the gifts for granted!
- Secondly, there is the “verbal” level of thankfulness. This level is where our parents teach us to say “thank you.” Yet, isn’t it possible that we can mouth the words “thank you” a hundred times in a day and not be very thankful at all? If our hearts are not engaged or sincerely appreciative, we are

not truly grateful. Our Father, who gives us so much, certainly does not deserve this type of thanks from us!

- Then we have a third level of thankfulness: the heart-felt level, where a person is so filled with gratitude that they can’t hold it in. It spills out everywhere so easily because this person appreciates the giver and the gift so fully and genuinely. This is indeed the thankfulness level that we owe to our Lord, who is so gracious and loving to us!

We’ve all experienced unthankful people. The person who feels entitled that they never bother to thank you for anything done or given to them is not pleasant to be around.

We may admit we don’t like being around an unthankful person like that, but how does our Father in heaven feel with unthankful children? He blesses them repeatedly with so many rich blessings. Yet, they do not feel gratitude in their hearts or even notice His blessings. So, let’s determine to be gratefully joyful and thankful children of the King! *We owe Him this too!*

Verse 3 – “For the LORD is the great God, and the great King above all gods.”

Speaking of the greatness of God, King David understood this truth well. How? He knew God and wanted to give the awesome God he knew great honour and reverence. Do you remember 1 Chronicles 22:5? David said: *“...the house to be built for the LORD must be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it.”* So David made abundant preparations before his death.” The house to be built for God had to be exceedingly magnificent and great because God would live there! Similarly, do we find ourselves yearning to respond to the great God with extreme reverence, both in our private time with Him and in our public places of worship?

Here’s something to consider: when we arrive at our places of worship, reverence and respect are

present with us. Christians may discuss worldly activities, affairs, and interests later, but this is a rich time to meditate on the greatness and magnificence of our God and prepare our hearts for worship. When we walk through the doors, we are coming before the throne of God in the assembly of the saints. Imagine the scene in Isaiah 6:1-6, when, in astonishment and fear, Isaiah said: *“I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.”* What an awesome privilege that was for Isaiah! At our places of worship, when we come before Him, although we do not literally see our amazing God, we too are before the throne of *“the great King above all gods”*!

Verses 4 and 5 – “In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; and His hands formed the dry land.”

How powerful and majestic is our God! It’s said that the tallest mountain that He made in the world is over 5 miles high—that’s a lot of rock! We can’t even calculate the weight of that mountain. Nor can we calculate the weight of all the other mountains and hills of the world. Also, it’s said that the waters off the coast of the Philippines are seven miles deep, and we think, “Wow, what a great volume of water!” More than that, it’s estimated that there are greater than 326 million trillion gallons of water on the entire earth. But for God, that’s not even enough to make a mud puddle. Consider His greatness as told in Isaiah 40:12-14: *“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?”* And this is the mighty Creator we are allowed to come before and worship!

Verses 6 and 7a – “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His

hand.”

How can our spirits not yearn to worship, bow down, and kneel before the Lord, our Maker!?

God is our God. Isn’t that truly amazing!? What a blessing for each of us! And being the people of His pasture, how can we help but gratefully recognize and appreciate that *He is the One* who provides for us daily!? Both spiritually and physically. There is no safer place to be for life here and eternity! So we can trust Him with our very existence. Jesus taught this principle of great dependence on our Maker when He showed the disciples how to pray in Matthew 6:11-13: *“...give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”* So, every day, may we reverently praise and thank our Father for all the blessings He covers us with as His sheep! We need to be very thankful for all He gives to us so generously!

Verses 7b to 11 – “Today, if you will hear His voice: “Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

Reading the last few verses of this psalm, we’re reminded how easy it is to have our hearts hardened toward the Lord, even while receiving His vast blessings and love! Can we determine to give the Lord the worship and praise we owe to Him? Our hearts ought to be filled with gratitude and love in return for God’s gifts. Let us always give Him the very best we have to give.

“...the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” – John 4:23.

“Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” – Psalm 29:2

Dare To Be A Daniel

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When I was asked to write this, I had not considered my last name is closely connected to Daniel's name. It hardly ever occurs to me that I share a name with this godly example. I do not know why. Perhaps when I think of the book of Daniel, I think of the back half of it and immediately wonder what else I could teach on instead. I have often neglected the practical examples contained in the front half. This ought not to be. As difficult as the visions may be, the life of Daniel is too thrilling to ignore.

He was living in captivity among the godless. Kings ordered him to disobey God, and they threw him in a den of lions. He was placed in positions of authority among his captors. Daniel sees it all and yet still maintains integrity. Daniel is the child of God each of us is called to be. He certainly did not expect all that took place, but he faced it all with courage.

Use What You Have

Daniel checked all of Nebuchadnezzar's boxes. He was of noble birth, handsome, intelligent, discerning, and skilled (Daniel 1:3-4). Daniel had it all! Unfortunately, having it all may not have been helpful since it meant his capture. What Daniel "had" led him into a regrettable and perhaps terrifying situation.

Daniel used his skills and discernment and demonstrated himself worthy of the king's trust. This proved profitable when all the wise men could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, especially since he was in a position to request an appointment with the king without being ignored (2:13-16). This led to him earning respect. So much so, Daniel could interpret the mysterious writing on the wall (5:10-14). Daniel leveraged his wisdom.



Perhaps that does not sit well with us—to leverage our abilities—but Daniel did not use these for his glory. Do we accuse the five-talent man of arrogance for using the financial assets given to him? Of course not! We recognize his humility before the king in simply wanting to use what was entrusted to him by the king faithfully. In the Talents, the danger is not personal pride but negligence (Matthew 25:14-30). Daniel reveals the essence of being a five-talent servant.

To be clear, *Use What You Have* should in no way encourage those who are attractive or intelligent to take an if-you-got-it-flaunt-it perspective. These qualities may have put Daniel in a more agreeable position than other fellow captives, but he in no way took pride in his advantage. Instead, he used his intelligence and wisdom, not with the intended purpose of “getting ahead,” but to glorify God (Daniel 2:19-23).

Choose Wisely, but NOW

Every king who met Daniel noticed him because of his wisdom, but his wisdom was not for their pleasure. If it had that effect, all the better, but he intended to glorify God. When Nebuchadnezzar ordered certain delicacies to be eaten, Daniel

found a way to avoid the unclean meat. This was a non-negotiable in the Law, and Daniel would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8-19). Only by God's grace did Daniel and his friends escape the king's wrath. Such was not the case when an edict went out to only pray to the king (then Darius of Persia). Neglecting prayer to YHWH and diverting it to the king was also non-negotiable, and Daniel was not going to be dissuaded (chapter 6). Only by God's grace did Daniel escape the lion's jaws.

Regardless of God's physical deliverance in these situations and which kingdom was in authority, Daniel continued in wisdom because he "made up his mind" to do so *before* he was called on to act (1:8). It is remarkable how casually Daniel seemed to be able to risk it all for God's glory. When the time came to do what was right, he did so without hesitation. Though he attempted to "be at peace with all men," he zealously desired God's peace. He had predetermined who his King would be.

In my thirty years of life, it seems every year brings more warnings of looming persecutions in our country. Christians seem increasingly concerned about what is to come. Perhaps such concerns are warranted. But, ultimately, it does not matter. Taking an attitude like Daniel's, we will serve if we are at peace. If not, we will yet serve. If we are under American powers, we will fear God and honor the authority. If under foreign occupation, we will yet fear God and honor the authority. All the while recognizing the preeminence of God's authority (Acts 5:29). The circumstances will not change our walk. Decide this now. The doing of it will come much easier.

Keep Confessing

Daniel perhaps could have looked around and thought the terrible circumstances were because these Gentile nations were so wicked. He would have been correct, but Daniel knew better than to blame Babylon or Persia. He knew the problem, and thus he got on his knees to ask forgiveness

for it (Daniel 9:1-6). The problem was not the nations but Israel. Around 900 years earlier, God had instructed Israel to be faithful lest they be carried away into captivity (Deuteronomy 28:41, 58-68). Jeremiah picked up on this curse to inform Judah that God would send Babylon to take them (Jeremiah 25:11). When Daniel read this, he knew this was all on Israel.

Yet Daniel includes himself in this indictment. Throughout his prayer, "we" is a constant reminder of Daniel's recognition of personal guilt. The shame. The iniquity. The rebellion. Daniel owns up to all of it. We may look at this and brush it off as a rhetorical feature, simply taking the edge off of his *actual* pronouncement against everyone else in Israel. But I believe we would be mistaken. With all his prior demonstrations of humility, self-righteous rhetoric would seem misplaced. He feels the weight of guilt in himself. Even if he was not directly responsible for the captivity, he understood that sins such as his own sent them to Babylon. Daniel is in genuine remorse and supplication.

We, on the other hand, might rather pass the buck. "The reason our society is crumbling is because of the government." "Our congregation is failing because of our elders." "My marriage is falling apart because my wife will not pull her own weight." When will we admit, "*I am failing*"? Others are failing as well, but my responsibility in this cannot be ignored. Self-promotion is not appealing to God (Daniel 4:30-33; Luke 18:9-14). Especially when all seems to be crashing down, I must look at myself, then look to God and say, "Forgive me."

Keep Hoping

As intimidating as the dreams and visions in Daniel may be to any Bible student, they all offer a necessity during persecution – hope. In the first of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, the kingdom of God is established as a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Daniel 2:44-45). The saints receive this kingdom in the first of Daniel's visions (7:18).

Next, the Messiah was to come, make atonement for iniquity, and make a covenant (9:24-27). In the final visions, those written in the book are promised rescue and everlasting life (12:1-3). In Nebuchadnezzar's second vision, even he is promised rescue if he will acknowledge God as "ruler over the realm of mankind." (4:24-26). All of these (whether they have immediate or future fulfillment) bring the same message—hope for the humble.

Another common factor in all the dreams and visions is that God will bring down those who exalt themselves. Assuming we have humbled ourselves before the Most High, this comes as good news. The unrighteous may have ease now, but they will be brought down. Persecutions from the world are only temporary. God rules in the kingdoms of men. His kingdom cannot be shaken. Though I do not believe Daniel has much to say about the second coming, we are offered a similar hope as Israel was. Messiah will come and fix it all.

Knowing what we have now and what is yet to come demands gratitude and obedience: *"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; for our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrews 12:28-29). *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us"* (Romans 8:18). Your sufferings are not forever.

Many have said it over the last century; we, too, dwell in Babylon. Therefore, we ought not to be surprised when Babylon transitions into its more heinous appearance and devours those opposed to her. Not being intimidated by her can only be the product of three variables: we have our head in the sand, we have grown accustomed to bowing to her, or we have the faith and courage of Daniel. Let us choose the latter.

Paul the Convert: Challenges and Opportunities Facing New Converts

SEAN CAVENDER | WICHITA, KANSAS

Do you remember the joy you felt immediately after your baptism into Christ? Do you remember the excitement that overwhelmed you, and you wanted to enthusiastically share the news about Jesus Christ forgiving you of your sins? You enjoyed the relief of having no more guilt, and God's grace had removed the burden of sin.

After becoming a Christian, ideally, you will have grown and matured in your faith and service to the Lord Jesus. However, if you have been a Christian for any length of time, then you know that the emotions and joys you initially had have been battle-tested. Perhaps you have lost battles with temptation and sin that have left you cynical and hard of heart.

I want to consider the example of the apostle Paul and his early life as a Christian. He indeed became known for his preaching, letter writing, and establishing new congregations. However, Paul was once a new convert who had never preached the gospel. It's incredible to think that Paul preached his *first* gospel sermon at some point! The apostle Paul had fresh and new experiences that all new converts have the opportunity to experience. He is an excellent example from which we are to learn!

Many times local congregations focus on helping Christians grow and mature in their faith. Still, with that, they might lose sight of having new converts around who are zealous and enthusiastic about learning and growing. Hopefully, this article will help encourage new converts to become more involved with the local church with which you are a member. However, there are unique challenges that you might face



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as a new convert; I want to address some of those potential challenges. That said, I want this article to also help experienced Christians renew their energy and joy for the Lord and to find enthusiasm again for growth and service in the kingdom of Christ.

BECOMING A TEACHER

After Ananias baptized Paul (Saul of Tarsus), he *immediately* began preaching God's word (Acts 9:20). He was eager to grow, increasing in strength, wisdom, and ability (Acts 9:22). After becoming a Christian, we are primed and ready to grow at exponential rates! If you have spent any time around newborn babies, you understand that babies learn something new nearly every day. That is how it ought to be for new Christians.

Paul understood that after becoming a Christian, God did not call him to be a silent listener. Instead, God expected him to be a vocal servant for the Lord. God had a plan for Paul to serve others and share the gospel (Acts 9:15-16). Paul used God's grace as motivation for him to be

busy in the kingdom of Christ (1 Timothy 1:11-16; 1 Corinthians 15:10).

We need to immediately help new converts grow by encouraging them to become involved with the local church's work. We can help them become teachers and preachers. You might be thinking a new convert is not ready to address and teach a whole congregation of veteran Christians. Maybe that is true; perhaps it isn't. Each case will be different. But one thing is sure: we can encourage people to share the message of God's word with their friends and neighbors. The zeal and enthusiasm that a new convert has needs to be utilized to share the message of salvation. We need to encourage new converts to become teachers! Because if we wait too long to encourage them to become teachers, idleness sets in, and that becomes a difficult habit to break (Hebrews 5:12-14). When the enthusiasm is at its highest level, let's encourage new disciples to make more disciples through teaching (Matthew 28:19). Let's encourage new disciples to teach others.

FACING PERSECUTION

It would be nice if our lives would become easier after becoming a Christian. And it still might. Yet, becoming a Christian is no guarantee of a better life. Sadly, many false teachers (people like Joel Osteen) promote the great deception of the "health and wealth gospel." They want you to believe that your life will come with blessing and ease after becoming a Christian. For Paul, life became hard after becoming a Christian. Paul had been persecuting Christians and throwing them into prison before his conversion. Afterward, people plotted to kill Paul for teaching that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 9:23-25). And it happened twice soon after his conversion (Acts 9:28-30). Later, Paul would be stoned and left for dead. Then, many years later, he would be imprisoned for years and would have to appeal to Caesar to get a fair trial.

Jesus warned that discipleship would come with

a cost (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:34-39). People we once counted as friends may become enemies. Family may reject us. Yet, we must remain loyal! Jesus calls us into a life of union with Him. Just as Jesus went to the cross, we have to take up our cross (Matthew 10:38). If we turn against Christ to save our life, we will lose our soul; being a Christian requires that we lose our life for the sake of eternal salvation (Matthew 10:39).

Paul warned new converts that many trials would come upon them now that they were part of the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Persecution is unpleasant and discouraging, but it can help prepare us for eternity. The tribulations we face can help instill a strong desire for eternal rest with God in heaven. Paul would eventually give up his own life as a sacrificial drink offering (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Becoming a Christian and being a new convert will not always be easy. We might need to reframe our thoughts of becoming a Christian to be more like a volunteer soldier in the army of the Lord. We are entering a war with eternal consequences. Our enemy wants to persecute, discourage, despair, and defeat us (Ephesians 6:10-17). We need to prepare for battle!

OVERCOMING DOUBTERS

Paul had to face a second challenge as a new convert — doubts from other Christians. After being run out of the city of Damascus for preaching Jesus, Paul went to Jerusalem and wanted to place membership with the local church (Acts 9:26). However, they initially doubted his sincerity and faith. Paul had earned a reputation for persecuting Christians (Acts 9:1-2). People were perplexed by Paul's sudden conversion to Christianity (Galatians 1:23).

We can likely understand why people were hesitant to accept Paul. They surely assumed Paul was deceiving them and trying to sneak into the church to spy on them and eventually kill them.

Yet, no matter how much we may sympathize with the doubters, this had to be discouraging for Paul. It is never pleasant when people question our sincerest motives. We would like to believe that our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord would be the first to accept us rather than question us. But, unfortunately, that is not always the case.

An important lesson to remember, especially as a new convert, is that people will disappoint us; even fellow Christians will disappoint us. It is helpful always to keep the truth of the matter in perspective: we were converted to Christ, not Christians. So, even when we are disappointed by others, we can weather the discouragement.

Paul would be reminded that Christians will disappoint us repeatedly, and we will have to overcome those doubters. Two important people and influential men in Paul's life, Peter and Barnabas, would both disappoint Paul (Galatians 2:11, 13). Even when we are discouraged because people disappoint us, remember that you are a servant of the King as a child of God! You do not live to please others. You live to please the Lord Jesus Christ. When we remember that, we might be better equipped to deal with the people who discourage us and doubt our sincere motives to serve the Lord.

FINDING ACCEPTANCE AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

Even though Paul faced some initial skepticism upon his desire to join the local disciples in Jerusalem, Barnabas came to his defense, and they accepted him (Acts 9:26-27). So, likewise, the disciples welcomed Paul and had fellowship with him (Acts 9:28).

Becoming a member of the local church is a necessity for our own spiritual well-being. Local church membership gives us accountability when we sin (Matthew 18:15-17). It gives us a stable system by which we can grow. And there are many other benefits to being a member of a local congregation.

- Local church membership gives us a place to serve others (1 Peter 4:10-11)
- Local church membership provides us with a place to encourage and to be encouraged (Hebrews 10:23-25)
- Local church membership gives us a place to grow (Ephesians 4:4, 11-13)
- Local church membership provides us with a place to submit to godly leaders and examples (1 Peter 5:2)
- Local church membership gives you a place to lead (1 Timothy 3:6)

While many of these passages do not explicitly mention local church membership, membership is implied. How can you serve others if you are not among others? How can you forsake the assembling of the saints if you are not part of a local group of saints? How can you submit to elders if you are not part of the flock that they shepherd? How can you serve as an elder if there is no flock of which you are a member?

Finding acceptance among disciples of Jesus can be one of the greatest blessings to you as you begin your walk with the Lord. Local church membership will help you grow and mature in your faith while also encouraging and blessing others. Your soul may depend on joining a local church. And much more sobering of thought is this: other souls may depend on you being a part of the local church.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a Christian can present new and exciting challenges to each of us. We may face adversity and trials, but if we are committed to serving and following the Lord, we will be enriched by the many beautiful blessings of being a Christian.

As seasoned veterans of the faith, we need to help young people in the faith become engaged in the local church. We need to encourage them to take part in the work and become involved to

teach, learn, grow, edify others, and be edified themselves. If we have been Christians for a while, we need to empathize with new Christians in their development and growth. We need to be patient with them. But we also need to reflect on our lives. Have we become what

God expects us to be? Are we using God's grace as a motivator to work and serve the Lord and our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? God does not call Christians to be silent observers and passive listeners. He calls us to be doers and workers in the kingdom of Christ. So let's get to work!

Why Premillennialism Misses the Mark

SHANE CARRINGTON | SULFER SPRINGS, TEXAS

Premillennialism stands as one of the most popular doctrines of religion in modern times, joining the ranks of “Trust Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior to be saved,” “Join the church of your choice,” and “Once saved always saved.” That’s just how popular it is.

Cultural phenomena such as the “Left Behind” series of books (published 1995-2007) and movies (produced 2000-2014), Hal Lindsay’s “The Late, Great Planet Earth” (published in 1970), and televangelists like John Hagee, David Jeremiah, etc. drive this movement today. Additionally, the doctrine is written into many study Bibles, including J. N. Darby’s study notes, the Ryrie Study Bible, the Schofield Study Bible, the John MacArthur Study Bible, etc.

Fortunately, a large portion of modern scholarship opposes the doctrine. Gorman describes premillennialism as “biblical hopscotch.”

Premillennialism is well-summarized in this fashion:

*“The Rapture
The rise of a single antichrist
A 7-year tribulation
The Second Coming of Christ
The Battle of Armageddon
The judgment of the antichrist and the binding of Satan
The resurrection of the dead
The establishment of a 1,000-year reign of peace (the Millennium)
The release of Satan and one final rebellion
The final judgment
And finally...” (the above written 3/21/19 by Michelle Reyes) heaven and hell.*



What is wrong with the doctrine? Too much for one article, so let’s briefly consider four reasons “why Premillennialism misses the mark.”

Premillennialism fails to understand the true nature of the church and kingdom.

The kingdom Christ established, as discussed in Matthew 16:18,19 refers to the church. Jesus said, “*I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:18), then He promised to give the apostles “*the keys of the kingdom*” (Matthew 16:19). He was not affirming to build one thing, then give them the keys to something else. Instead, He gave them the keys to what He built and established.

In Paul’s letters, Ephesians and Colossians, both prison epistles and parallel in content, state the following: The Father made Jesus, “*head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*” (Ephesians 1:22,23). That body/church is composed of the saved. Using parallel phrases, Paul wrote, “*Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body*” (Ephesians 5:23). In Colossians, the phrasing is, “*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*” (Colossians 1:13,14). Following that statement is, “*He is also head of the body, the church*” (Colossians 1:18). These epistles show Jesus is the King and Savior of the kingdom (Colossians 1:13,14). Therefore, he is the Head

and Savior of the church/body (Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). Paul uses the terms “kingdom” and “church” to refer to the same body.

Premillennialism suggests that the kingdom was God’s original intention that the Jewish leaders foiled by rejecting and murdering Jesus. Further, they view the church as a stop-gap measure God implemented as a placeholder until Jesus can eventually come back to earth. It is only at Christ’s return that He will finally establish what the first century Jews prevented: the kingdom of Christ. The fact that the kingdom (in the sense of the church) has been established, accomplished in the first century shows premillennial theology is erroneous. Jesus reigned as King — the Lord and Christ — at the right hand of God by Acts 2:29-36!

But this is not all that premillennialism fails to recognize.

Premillennialism fails to understand the nature of spiritual Israel.

It takes a similar, erroneous view as first-century Jews: they were looking for Christ to establish an earthly kingdom. Even the apostles asked for positions of prominence in Jesus’s kingdom. For example, James and John’s mother requested Jesus, *“Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left”* (Matthew 20:20-28). But such an earthly kingdom is not why Jesus came. *“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm”* (John 18:36).

The kingdom of Jesus is spiritual: *“...the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:21). It is composed of all those redeemed through the work of the Christ. *“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the*

kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13,14).

What ancient Israel foreshadowed and anticipated, the church exists as today. Paul wrote, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:15,16). The church is:

- Composed of both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Galatians 6:15; 3:26; Ephesians 2:11-22)
- Composed of those who receive what ancient Israel had in lesser measure — “peace (shalom) and mercy (lovingkindness / steadfast love / covenant loyalty)” (Galatians 6:16; cf. Hebrews 11:39, 40).
- God’s true Israel — the true descendants of Abraham by faith (Galatians 6:16; 3:26-29).

Ancient Israel was a physical nation with many spiritual blessings and responsibilities. As God’s true Israel, the church is a spiritual kingdom redeemed by Christ’s blood (Colossians 1:13,14) and entrusted with the purpose of shining His light to illuminate the path to heaven.

Premillennialism fails to see the promises to Abraham God fulfilled.

Ancient, national Israel had incredibly important purposes. They were the vehicle through whom the Christ would come.

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ... Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.” (Isaiah 11:1,10; cf. 9:6,7; etc.)

The “stem of Jesse,” the Christ, would redeem from both Israel and the “nations...peoples” those who would come to Him for redemption.

We must view God's promises to Abraham through these lenses. The great nation and land promises were about Israel being the means through whom the Seed promise would come. *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..."* (Genesis 22:18; read Acts 3:24-26 and Galatians 3:16). Since God has fulfilled that promise, the great nation and land promises have as well. Joshua makes it crystal clear that Israel received in his generation all the land God intended:

"So the Lord gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:43-45).

With all those promises being fulfilled, national Israel has no more promises to await in these modern times.

Premillennialism fails to understand the scope of Revelation and Matthew 24

Premillennialism misunderstands many Old and New Testament prophecies. Two of these primary to their beliefs are Revelation and Matthew 24 and their parallels and counterparts.

Revelation, for example, has bookends that prohibit it from focusing primarily on the end of time. It focuses on *"things which must soon take place"* (Revelation 1:1), for which, when John wrote it, *"the time is near"* (Revelation 1:3). And he wrote it in the first century! Or, as it declares in the last chapter, John is writing about *"the things which must soon take place"* (Revelation 22:6) Even declaring an angel reported to John, *"Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near"* (Revelation 22:10). At both the

beginning and end of Revelation, the message declares it was for helping saints in their day, not just principles relating to us 2,000 years later. Premillennialists use Revelation to declare what occurs in the news today as fulfilling the specific message of the book. The book says otherwise.

Matthew 24 and its companion passages find similar misuse in premillennial theology. They declare all of Matthew 24:3 through Matthew 25:46 to be about end-times for this world, even referencing many verses as specific fulfillment of today's news items (cf. Matthew 24:6,7). While some parts of this text, especially Matthew 24:36-25:46, refer to the end of time and final judgment, there is a great deal wrong with premillennial usage of this section of scripture. We will limit ourselves to one aspect – the book ends.

The discussion in this text begins at least in Matthew 23. Notice only a small part. Like with Revelation, we have a pair of bookends. Jesus discussed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple with 1st century Jews in Jerusalem — about 40 years (a "generation") before it occurred in AD 70 — saying, *"Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation"* (Matthew 23:36). As the discussion continues, Jesus also says, *"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place"* (Matthew 24:34). These bookends show that what Jesus discusses in between them is primarily about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, not about events unfolding shortly before the end of time. The premillennial use of Matthew 23:36-24:34 to discuss "signs pointing toward the end of time" is out of bounds.

Conclusion.

Premillennialism, as one fellow told me, "Is really interesting!" Indeed. But it is also based on misuses of Bible prophecies. Premillennialism pays too little attention to the context of passages, and it misunderstands the nature of

the kingdom of Christ. Jesus is King now (Acts 2:36)! Christians are citizens in His kingdom now (Colossians 1:13)! Now we await final judgment and heaven or hell. May we obey Jesus now to live with Him eternally (Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21-23; 28:18-20)!

JULY 2022 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

David Dann will continue our series of articles looking at the Lord Jesus through the eyes of the gospel writers. He will discuss Mark's portrayal of Jesus.

CHURCH ARTICLE

John Hines continues our series of congregational profiles looking at the church which was at Corinth.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Marshal McDaniel provides the next article in our Psalms of worship series, focusing on Psalm 136.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

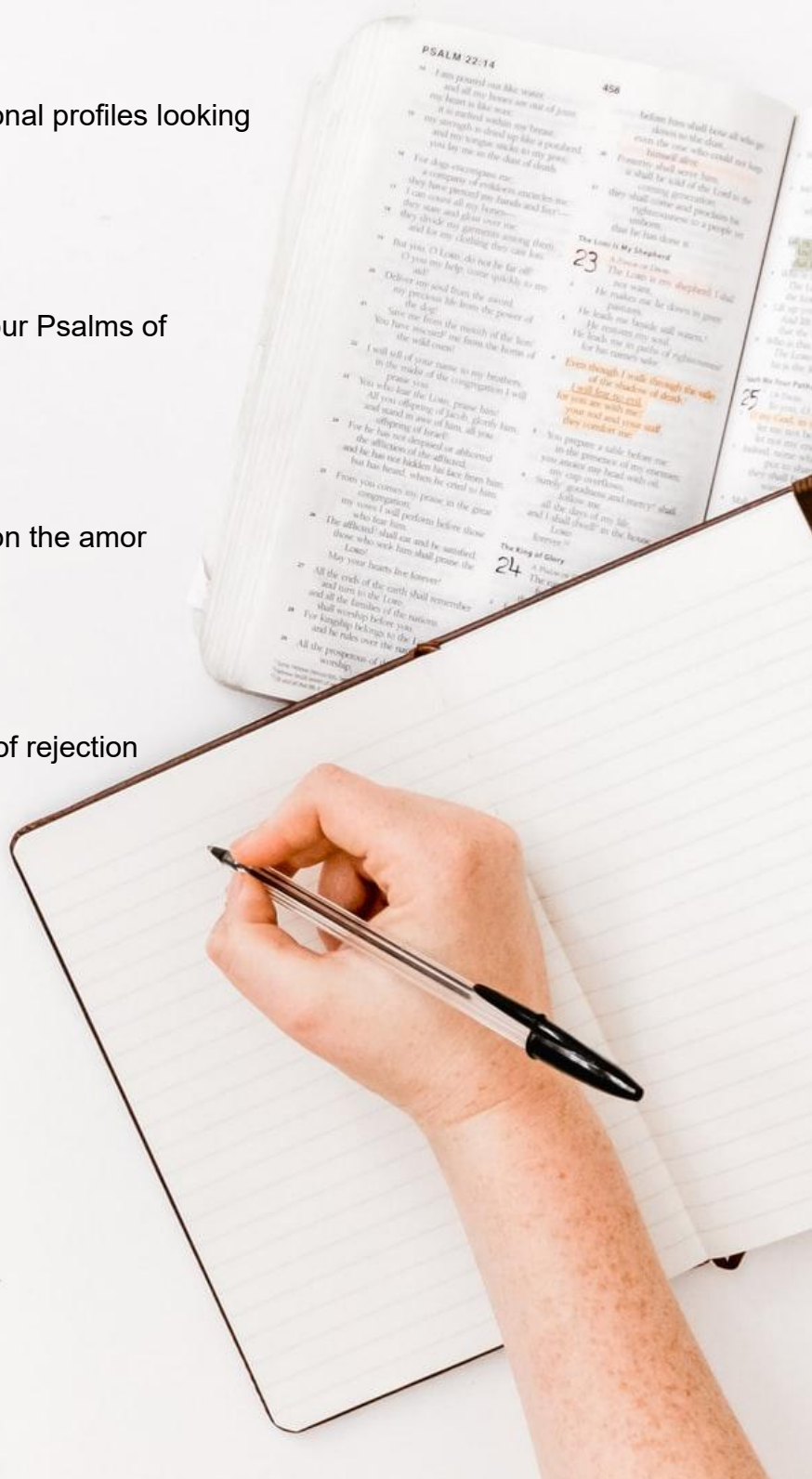
Jim Mickells addresses the need for us to put on the armor of God as described by Paul in Ephesians 6.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Mike Stephens urges us to overcome the fear of rejection when it comes to sharing God's word.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

William Stewart writes on Jesus' statement about Satan falling like lightning from heaven.



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