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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.



a quarterly e-magazine designed to promote
growth in faith and service to God



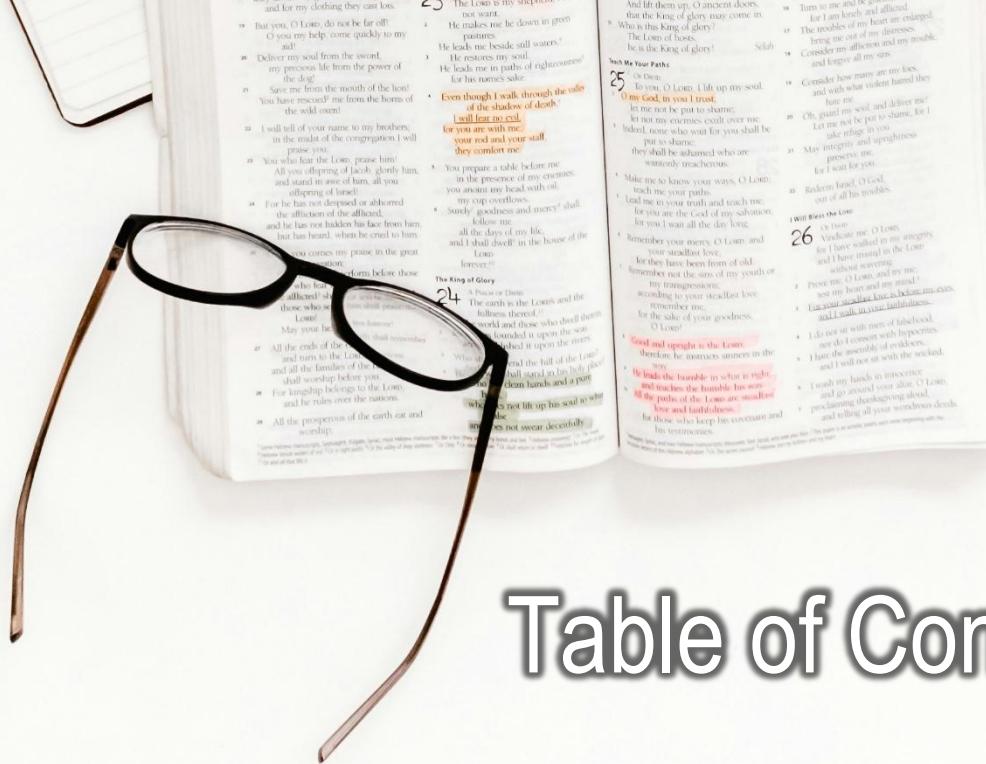


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From the Editor...

Happy New Year! Have you made any resolutions? The celebration of New Years and the making of resolutions is not new. Records indicate the practices stretched back at least as far as ancient Babylon. According to History.com, the Babylonians held a 12-day festival (Akitu) at the beginning of their new year (in mid-March, not January), which among other things, involved a reaffirmation of their loyalty to the reigning monarch, along with promises to pay their debts and return any items they had borrowed. Their belief was that if they fulfilled these pledges, the gods would look favourably upon them - and if they did not, they would not. A similar practice is found among other ancient cultures, including the Romans.

Like the Babylonians and Romans, the new year for the Jews fell in the spring of the year. The Bible is silent about any kind of celebration or activity on the first day of Nisan (also known as Abib), but one of the commanded feasts fell very close to that time - Passover (Nisan 14). In 2 Chronicles 30, Hezekiah sent a letter to the

people of Israel and Judah, urging them to come to Jerusalem for the Passover. Unable to observe it on the prescribed day, they used a provision in the law which permitted them to keep the feast on Iyar 14, a month later (30:2-3). Notice:

"So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done it for a long time in the prescribed manner." (2 Chronicles 30:5)

It was not a "new year's resolution," but it was a resolution nonetheless. When God's people have not done as they should, it is right to resolve to do better. Are there areas in our service to the Lord where we've fallen short? Let us resolve to do better, not because it is early January, but because when we realize we need to do better, then we need to do better. May it be our aim to give ourselves entirely to the Lord to His glory and honour as we enter 2024.

I appreciate our writers in this issue who have diligently studied and devoted their time to put in writing things which will help us GROW in our faith. Thank you, gentlemen. I also cherish our subscribers; for your interest in GROW magazine. May the material in this issue be helpful and a true blessing to you. GROW magazine is free, and so we encourage you to share it freely. Forward the email, use the "print" feature at the bottom of each article, or post a link to the articles on your social media. If you consider the material to be profitable, pass it on.

Now, let's GROW together!

William Stewart
editor & designer



The Hall of Faith: Moses' Parents

TYLER SAMS | SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s command.” (Hebrews 11:23)

The first people in Hebrews 11 to be described as having faith, yet left as nameless in the text, are the parents of Moses: Amram (father) and Jochebed (mother). Like many others later in chapter 11, they are praised for their faith, yet their names do not appear in the text. Their names are not omitted because their actions were unimportant or inconsequential — their story is recorded for the overwhelming role that faith played in their lives! Let’s do justice to this godly father and mother and explore the faith they exhibited which is held up as an example for us.

As the text reveals, the occasion for Amram and Jochebed to display their faith was the birth of Moses. Following the death of the patriarch Joseph, the people of Israel were cruelly enslaved and oppressed in the land of Egypt under a new pharaoh. Despite the difficult circumstances, the Israelite people were increasing in numbers, a reality that did not escape the attention of the Egyptians. To remedy the possibility of the slaves becoming more numerous than their masters, the pharaoh decreed that every son born to the Israelites was to be killed: at first directly by the hands of the midwives (Exodus 1.16) and later indirectly through drowning and neglect (1.22). Immediately, there was resistance to the pharaoh’s plan. Shiphrah and Puah, two Hebrew midwives, refused to submit to Egypt’s demands; for this refusal, they were blessed by God (1.20).

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At this point, a question needs to be addressed. The Law of Moses condemned murder. Yet, as we are talking about the birth of Moses, it is obvious that Israel has yet to receive the Law from God on Mount Sinai. If, therefore, the Law of Moses was not yet given, how could Shiphrah and Puah have acted in the fear of God (1.17) by “[saving] the male children alive”? The answer is found in Genesis 9.6. Upon exiting the ark, God gave Noah several instructions as he and his family set about repopulating the earth. One of those instructions concerned the sanctity of life: *“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man”* (Genesis 9.6). The teaching was passed down by patriarchs. For example, Reuben invoked the phrase *“Shed no blood,”* when he counseled his brothers not to murder Joseph. This teaching he would have learned from his father Jacob, who would have learned it from his father. The particular message given to Noah concerning the sanctity of life, based on the creation narrative of Genesis 1, continued to influence Hebrew thinking and conduct. Thus, when Shiphrah and Puah — or more to our point, Amram and Jochebed — were

instructed by the pharaoh to kill the baby boys, they refused because they recognized such a demand was inconsistent with the will of God as it had been expressed to the fathers. Faith demands antecedent communication (Romans 10.17); in that Amram and Jochebed acted by faith in preserving Moses alive, they acted from the basis of some communication from God. God's command regarding the sanctity of life in Genesis 9.6 was that command.

In Hebrews 11.23 it is revealed that Amram and Jochebed spared the life of Moses for two reasons: he was a beautiful child and they were not afraid of the king's command. One of these things is seemingly unlike the other. To the modern mind, with the benefit of the fullness of scripture, it is understandable why Moses' parents would not be afraid of the king's command. But why would Amram and Jochebed spare Moses "*because he was a beautiful child*"? What does his beauty have to do with sparing a child from murder?

In his **Notes on the Whole Bible**, Albert Barnes remarks that "beautiful" in Hebrews 11.23 expresses the idea correctly: "*His extraordinary beauty seems to have been the reason which particularly influenced his parents to attempt to preserve him. It is not impossible that they supposed that his uncommon beauty indicated that he was destined to some important service in life and that they were on that account the more anxious to save him.*" In their **Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible**, Robert Jamieson, Andrew Fausset, and David Brown note about Moses, "*His beauty was probably 'the sign' appointed by God to assure their faith.*" Keil and Delitzsch offer up a similar thought in their **Commentary on the Old Testament**: "*The very beauty of the child was to her 'a peculiar token of divine approval, and a sign that God had some special design concerning him.'*" A majority of biblical scholarship seems to indicate

that the exceptional beauty of Moses at birth served as a message to his parents to preserve him alive. While this idea is possible, it is not the only possibility. The Hebrew word translated as "*beautiful*" in Exodus 2.2 (from which Hebrews 11.23 is taken) is the same Hebrew word that is translated as "*good*" throughout Genesis 1 as God surveys His creation. While one may look at Exodus 2.2 and see a reference to physical beauty, such is not required by the text. What made creation "*good*" in Genesis was its consistency with the will and nature of God. Could not the same thing be said for Moses? Could not the same thing be said for any child? Moses was not the only Hebrew child spared from Egypt's bloodthirstiness (cf. Exodus 1.18). What was it that led many other Hebrews to keep their children alive in the face of Egyptian persecution? The conviction of the goodness of these children! Looking into the face of Moses, Jochebed saw beauty — not simply physical beauty (what parent doesn't think their child is beautiful?), but the beauty of a being free from sin, born in the image of God (Genesis 1.26; cf. Matthew 19.14). In a world that has sadly lost its way regarding the sanctity of life and the blessing of children, those who are godly look at infants and see them for what they are: good gifts from a gracious God.

Finally, Hebrews 11.23 notes that Amram and Jochebed preserved Moses because he was "*beautiful*" and "*they were not afraid of the king's command.*" The parents of Moses spared his life for at least two reasons. First, as noted above, they preserved his life because they understood that children are "*good*". Second, they saved Moses from death because they knew God's will regarding murder — to shed the blood of the innocent was to forfeit their own lives (cf. Genesis 9.6). They could not have lived with the confidence of God's blessing had they murdered their children: the child was innocent

and God forbade the intentional taking of innocent life. Thus, the issue surrounding Moses' life became a rather simple one for Amram and Jochebed: please the king or please the King. There could be no splitting of the proverbial baby. Moses' parents would please one authority and displease the other. Who, then, to please and who to displease? Amram and Jochebed decided to please God. Making the decision to please God led them to be unafraid of what the pharaoh might do to them. Wonderfully, scripture reveals this experience as occurring frequently in the lives of the people of God. Whether Amram and Jochebed saving Moses, Abraham offering Isaac (Genesis 22.1ff), or Daniel refusing Nebuchadnezzar's provisions (Daniel 1.3ff): when God's people resolved to follow Him, what resulted was a removal of fear from their lives. It doesn't mean that absolutely all anxiousness was

removed (witness Jesus in the Garden: Luke 22.44), but such resolve did enable these men and women to accomplish great things with perfect peace: the peace of knowing that, whatever happens, God is pleased. If we can affirm nothing else about our lives except God is pleased, we have truly gained the victory, despite the world's protests!

As the Holy Spirit notes and praises the faith of those in bygone generations, He notes for us the faith of Amram and Jochebed: a faith which saw a child as a gift of God, a faith which respected God's revelation, a faith which defied a king in deference to the King of Heaven. Looking to their example, we better understand faith, a quality that is necessary if we are to come into the presence of God (Hebrews 11.6). May God help us as we seek to have the kind of faith that pleases Him!

How Christ Relates to the Church: The Chief Shepherd

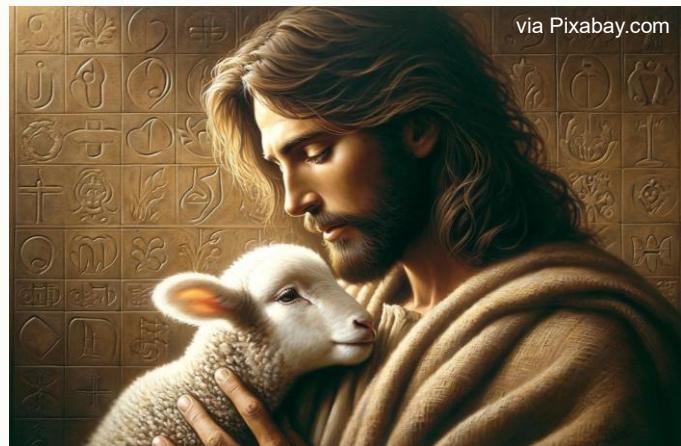
DON McCLAIN | BRYANT, ARKANSAS

“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” (1 Peter 5:4, NKJV)

There are a variety of metaphorical expressions used in the New Testament to describe Jesus. Each one gives us a unique perspective of His various positions, roles, and relationships. Each one provides us with greater insight and thus a deeper understanding of our Lord.

One of the most familiar and relatable trades in Palestine during Bible times was that of a shepherd. Literal shepherds and their flocks are referenced often in scripture, but the concept is also used many times metaphorically to illustrate the relationship between...

1. God and His people, (cf. Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10; Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:1-7).
2. Those who were given charge over His people (2 Samuel 5:2; 2 Chronicles 11:2; Jeremiah 10:21; 17:16; 23:1-4; 25:34-36; 50:6; Isaiah 44:28; 56:11; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:1-4);
3. The Messiah and those who would follow Him, [*“I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd,”* (Ezekiel 34:23-31; 37:24-28); *“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep,”* (John 10:11); *“the great Shepherd of the sheep”* (Hebrews 13:20); *“the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls,”* (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4)]



The metaphorical use of the term shepherd would immediately prompt one to think of a leader whose role is to be that of a caring provider, who values, leads, watches over, and protects those under their care. No wonder shepherds and their flocks are so often used in scripture to illustrate these relationships.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

Peter calls Jesus “the Chief Shepherd.” The terms “Chief, (*arche*),” and “Shepherd, (*poimen*)”, in the context, denote the supreme authority of Christ over the shepherds of local churches, and His care, guidance, and provision for them and His people (1 Peter 5:1-3). Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, (Matthew 28:18; 1 Peter 3:22), and is over those who shepherd His flock on earth, (1 Peter 5:4). Elders who lead as Jesus instructs will be rewarded with a crown of unending glory.

The Chief Shepherd, by His authority, has established and revealed the criteria and qualifications required for those who would shepherd His people, (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). While men are capable of adequately meeting these qualifications, only Jesus, as the Chief Shepherd, perfectly exemplifies each of them.

These qualifications are absolute in the sense that one who is appointed a shepherd, (pastor, elder, bishop), must meet each qualification. However, several of these qualifications vary in application in the sense men may possess them in varying degrees. For example, a shepherd must be able to teach, but one may be better able than another. I dare say none can teach as effectively and perfectly as Jesus.

The focus of this article is the Chief Shepherd and not the qualifications and duties of underling shepherds, but please indulge me for a moment as I make a couple of observations. I am convinced that leadership among churches belonging to Christ is a major problem.

Too many churches do not have elders. There are a multitude of reasons why this may be the case. It could be there has been a lack of commitment to train and equip their young men, or maybe they live in a depressed area where their young families move away, etc. I have also known of congregations rejecting scripturally qualified men due to their misinterpretation and misapplication of the “technical, external qualifications,” (a husband of one wife; number of children, etc.). Our interpretation and application of these qualifications should never be more lenient or more stringent than demanded by scripture. If our understanding and application of these qualifications would disqualify Jesus, then we can be certain our understanding and application is incorrect.

However, there is something worse than a congregation not having elders, that is appointing men to serve as shepherds who are not qualified. I have known of congregations appointing men who were not qualified. There are many dangers facing the Lord’s people, and without QUALIFIED shepherds, these dangers meet little to no resistance when they begin to infect a local church. These men may meet most of the “technical, external qualifications,” (a man; a husband; and children professing to be

Christians), but lack the spiritual character, experience, or knowledge needed to lead effectively. Sadly, many are incapable of defending truth and defeating error. It seems congregations place much more emphasis on the surface qualifications than on their knowledge, soundness, and ability to teach truth, to recognize and convict the gainsayer. We cannot be godly, effective leaders until we first become godly, submissive followers of the Chief Shepherd!

THE DUTIES OF THE CHIEF SHEPHERD

As stated earlier, the functions of a good shepherd were well-known to Peter’s audience. A shepherd’s responsibility was to provide for his flock, leading them to pasture and water, and protecting them from dangerous predators. Certainly, we should always guard against pressing metaphors beyond their intended purpose, but be assured, that Christ provides these duties and more for His people.

The apostle Peter states in 1 Peter 2:25 that Jesus is “*the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*” This should prompt us to think spiritually rather than physically. Jesus provides for our souls everything needed by our souls, (Ephesians 1:3-14). Just as David said: “*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.*” (Psalm 23:1-6)

When Jesus identified Himself as “*The Good Shepherd*” in John 10:11,14, the Jews who heard Him made the proper connection, even

though they did not believe Him. They “*took up stones again to stone Him*” and accused Him of “*blasphemy*,” ... saying “*because You, being a Man, make Yourself God*,” (John 10:31,33). Jesus’s claim to be “*The Good Shepherd*” was indeed a claim to Deity.

Jesus said “*and I know My sheep, and am known by My own*,” (John 10:14a). Jesus knows those who are His (1 Timothy 2:19). Such language stresses His ownership and watchful oversight. Jesus is also known by His sheep, “*and am known by My own*” (John 10:14b), which stresses their reciprocal knowledge of, and intimacy with Him, due to the fact they “*hear*” His voice, (John 10:16), and “*follow Him*” (John 10:27).

Those who hear Jesus and follow Him can be confident He will protect them and provide all of their spiritual needs (John 10:27-30). This text does not support the false doctrine of “once saved always saved,” but it does teach the security of the believer, i.e., the one who hears and follows Jesus. Not a single person receiving Jesus’s teaching and following His teaching will be lost. No one can overpower Jesus or the Father and rob Them of those who humbly submit to Jesus. However, if we stop hearing Jesus, and stop following Jesus, we will be helpless on our own to withstand Satan’s power and be destroyed, (John 17:12; 15:1-10; Matthew 7:21-27; Galatians 5:1-4; 1 Peter 5:8-9; 2 Peter 2:20-22).

The Lord is faithful in providing His sheep with all we need and protects us from the evil one.

Therefore we can be assured that if we receive the Lord’s provisions, believe in Him, and follow His teaching, We will be led to “*dwell in the house of the Lord forever*.”

THE CHIEF SHEPHERD’S REWARD

“*When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*”

Jesus gave His life for His sheep, (cf. John 10:14, 17-18; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 5:2, 25; Hebrews 9:14). By His sacrifice and victory over death, Jesus gives His sheep “*life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10). This life is described as eternal life (John 10:28). This abundant life consists of the peace and joy we can experience now, as well as having the hope of eternal life, which will be fully realized when we enter into everlasting glory (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:23, 24).

CONCLUSION

It is a wonderful thought to consider Jesus as our Chief Shepherd and our Good Shepherd, who knows us, loves us, leads us, and has given His life for us, His sheep (cf. John 10:7-18)!

To be of His flock we must recognize His authority and submit to it, (Luke 6:46). If we receive His words and follow Him, we will receive every spiritual blessing available which is in Him – including everlasting life.

Is the Lord your Shepherd? If not, please come to Him today!

Instrumental Music in the Book of Revelation

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

In the religious world, there is a basic cognizance of the need to conduct ourselves within the confines of God's authority. The apostle Paul, when writing to the brethren at Colosse implored, "...whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). Such demands that we search the Scriptures to know what is and what is not acceptable to the Lord so far as religious practice and doctrine.

When we come to the subject of proper worship in song, just as with any other topic, we must seek to know what pleases the Lord. A practice or teaching may delight us, but we are not the object nor the designer of worship. How does God instruct us to worship in song? Are we to use mechanical instruments, are we to use our voices, or a combination of the two?

Our primary focus in this article, as evidence by the title, will be the occurrences and use of instrumental music as found in the book of Revelation. A detailed discussion of the use of instrumental music in the Old Testament, and the pattern of vocal music in the New Testament can be found in previous issues of GROW magazine. For the moment, permit just a few comments on these important aspects of music in the Scriptures.

That instrumental music was used in worship in Old Testament times is sure. There are numerous texts which speak of instruments being employed in the praise of God, of which Numbers 10:10 and 2 Chronicles 5:11-14 are examples. However, the use of such by those who were then subject to Moses' law does not condone the use of the same today by those who are under Christ's law. God's



acceptance of a practice under the former covenant does not ensure His acceptance of the same under the New Covenant. We must learn what God has commanded in the New Testament so far as worship in song.

Very briefly, the consistent testimony of the New Testament is that Christians should worship God with singing (Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13). Not once do we find in the epistles an example of or instruction to use instrumental music in worship. If we are going to do and say according to the name of the Lord (ie. by His authority), then we will worship God with the use of our voices, and not mechanical instruments. To go beyond this is to act without authority.

Some might be inclined to contend, there are musical instruments mentioned in the book of Revelation, employed in worship of God Almighty. Indeed, that is the case. In fact, there are three occasions in the book of Revelation where instruments of music are mentioned in conjunction with worship. Let's consider these texts.

REVELATION 5:8-10

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four

living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.

Beginning in chapter 4, John presents to us a heavenly scene, as he was granted to see the throne room of God. When we consider the text, it must be with the understanding that the events depicted are not upon the earth, but in heaven. As such, the worship which is described in the text does not serve as an example of the worship to be engaged in by the New Testament church.

If this were Biblical instruction for worship in the Lord's church, then it would be necessary for ALL worshipers to have and play an instrument. And not just any instrument, but the text specifies that ALL twenty-four elders and ALL four living creatures had a harp. But of course, the text is not to be understood literally, for even in verse 8 itself, John identifies the figurative manner of his words. The "golden bowls full of incense" were not in fact vessels of gold containing fragrance, but were emblematic of "the prayers of the saints." This text does not teach us regarding the appropriate practice of worship by God's people upon the earth.

REVELATION 14:2-3

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song

except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

Again, the text makes it evident that these are scenes and descriptions of the heavenly realm, not the worship practice of the Lord's church. The absurdity of a literal application of the text to New Testament worship is quickly seen. Verse 3 speaks of a new song being sung (not in a local assembly of Christians, but "...before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders..."). This song was exclusive; only the 144,000 were able to learn it. Is there a song upon the earth which none other than Christians can learn? No, but in the heavenly realm (not in the assembly of God's people on earth), these harpists play their harps and sing a song which is exclusive to those present in heaven.

REVELATION 15:2-3

And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!’

Once again, we are privy to "...another sign in heaven..." (v 1) which was revealed to John. And, once more, the efforts of any who seek to use the appearance of musical instruments in the book of Revelation as justification for such in worship today, are confounded.

The description given is not like any meeting place I have been to. These harpists who were singing stood upon "...something like a sea of glass mingled with fire..." But remember, this is an image which John saw in heaven, not upon the earth. And, the harpists are those who "...have victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark, and over the number of his name..." (v 2), not those who still "...endure

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION | WILLIAM STEWART

temptation..." (James 1:12), and continue to "...wrestle ... against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness in this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Do musical instruments appear in the book of Revelation? Absolutely. Do these instruments appear in the context of worship? Indeed. Is this justification or authority for the use of instrumental music in worship today in the assembly of God's people? No. Each instance identifies heaven as its setting and incorporates figures in John's vision. As the incense vessels (5:8), the exclusive song (14:3), and the glass

sea (15:2) are signified images, it is equally plausible that the harpists and their harps are figures and not literal.

If one desires to know how we should praise God in song, such will be accomplished, not by turning to the book of Revelation, or to the Old Testament, but to the epistles of the New Testament, wherein we are given examples and commands with regard to musical worship in the church. Consistently, the testimony of the New Testament writers is that we should sing; no mention is made of the use of instruments of music. Such as the case, if our desire is to follow the word of God, we also will not use instrumental music in worship.

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Becoming Like Jesus: Prayer in the Life of Jesus

BRUCE REEVES | CONWAY, ARKANSAS

Jesus was not only the Master Teacher; He was also the Master of prayer. He prayed so frequently and faithfully that Luke records that after He finished praying in a certain place one of His disciples said to Him, “*Lord, teach us to pray...*” (Luke 11:1). There are times when we should turn to God in prayer, but don’t. Thus, it is very helpful to consider the moments when Jesus turned to His Father in prayer. While prayer was a constant spiritual discipline in Christ’s life, there were pivotal moments when prayer was a significant source of power for Him. By considering Jesus’s example we can follow our Savior more fervently and deeply in our prayer life.

Jesus Prayed in Preparation for His Ministry

Luke records that immediately following Jesus’s baptism, He was “praying” to His Father (Luke 3:21-22). The various accounts of the baptism of Christ emphasize themes of His ministry. Matthew’s account focuses on the Lord’s determination to do the will of God (Matthew 3:15), Mark highlights the actions of Jesus in coming all the way from Nazareth in Galilee to be baptized of John (Mark 1:9-10), Luke concentrates on the role of Jesus’s prayer and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s ministry (Luke 3:21-22), and John dealt with the significant events surrounding His baptism as Messiah (John 1:29-34). It is “while He was praying” that “heaven was opened” (Luke 3:21). In that moment “*the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased’*” (Luke 3:22). At His baptism, God offered visible and audible affirmation of His Son in the descent and remaining presence of the Holy Spirit in the



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fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (John 1:32-34; cf. Isaiah 11:1-5; 42:1; 61:1-3; Matthew 4:1; 12:28; Luke 4:1, 14; John 3:33; Acts 10:38).

It is helpful to notice what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were doing in Christ’s baptism as He prayed. The Father was confirming His Son’s mission, purpose, and relationship with Him. Jesus was trusting, obeying, serving, and praying. The Holy Spirit was affirming, empowering, equipping, and proclaiming Jesus as God’s divine Son. While, this was unique to Christ’s life and mission, what should we learn? We are not going to just wing it on our own, we are working with God and He is working through us (2 Corinthians 6:1). When we are embarking on life-changing work in the lives of others – let’s pray. When we are serving the family of God, let’s pray. When challenging tasks are before us – let’s pray. Whether it is sharing the gospel with others, entering marriage, having children, or beginning a new chapter of life, it is time to pray for God’s strength and grace. Such prayers will keep our eyes heavenward!

Jesus Prayed Before Major Decisions

Before the Lord chose His disciples, He “went off

to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12-13). Luke emphasizes several important aspects to Jesus's prayer before this decisive moment in His life. First, "prayer" is mentioned twice in one verse. Secondly, the writer reveals that Christ went to the mountain for the purpose of being alone with His Father. Also, Luke discloses the intensity of His prayer by highlighting its duration, "*He spent the whole night in prayer to God.*"

Why did Jesus pray so intensely for the selection of His disciples? He prayed for the work they were to do, for their strength in times of disappointment and trial, for their need to grow in faith and love, for their obedience to His word, and their reliance and trust in God when adversaries persecuted them.

When we have major decisions before us, we must fervently and faithfully pray to the Lord (Philippians 4:6-7). How many times do we make critical decisions without praying to Him? Our God is involved in our lives providentially and provides the blessings and wisdom we need. Prayer both produces and is nourished by spiritual strength, discernment, and a focused mind (Ephesians 6:17-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Peter 4:7). Are we truly relying on God in our prayers when we are making choices that will influence not only ourselves, but also many others (James 4:13-17)? Are we praying for elders, preachers, teachers, parents, and fellow-Christians?

Jesus Prayed with and for His Disciples

The Lord was going up to a mountain with Peter, James, and John to pray when the transfiguration took place (Luke 9:28-37). Likewise, Jesus reassured and prayed for His disciples shortly before His departure from this world (John 14:1-2; 16:7-14; 17:9-10, 20-21). There is something extremely powerful about praying with and for others. The Scriptures describe different aspects of our prayers. We read of "prayers" in general, "thanksgiving" for our blessings, "supplications,"

ie. expressing our deepest needs to God, and "intercessions" on the behalf of others before the presence of the Lord (Philippians 1:3; 4:4-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-5). Knowing that God's family is praying for our faith, perseverance, and spiritual resolve is an immeasurable blessing from the Lord (Ephesians 3:14-21). In our moments of pain, sorrow, and grief our brothers and sisters are there to pray with and for us. We gather together with one heart and soul as God's people in prayer before the throne of God (Acts 2:42; 4:32).

Jesus Prayed in Times of Emotional Distress

Even when Christ was in the most intense agony He was concerned about His disciples' spiritual strength. Jesus encouraged His disciples to do what He was doing and that was "*pray that you may not enter into temptation*" (Luke 22:40-41, 46). Luke indicates that the disciples were asleep or exhausted from sorrow. Perhaps, their emotions had overwhelmed them because Jesus had told them He would have to depart from them. When we are sad, sorrowful, and emotionally exhausted Satan will attempt to attack our vulnerabilities to overcome our spiritual alertness and principles. If Jesus found it necessary to pray, should we not be praying in our moments of emotional distress? Consider the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, "*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done*" (Luke 22:42).

It is amazing to see Jesus's trust and dependence on the Father in His prayers in the crucible of His heart-wrenching sorrow. The Scripture says, "*And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground*" (Luke 22:44). Christ was successful against the wicked one through His reliance on the Father's purpose. The angel of God came to strengthen Him to do God's will, not remove obedience to God. Interestingly, it is after the angel comes that Jesus continues to pray more fervently and feel intense agony. The term

“agony” refers to intense struggle with sorrow and distress (Luke 22:44). Matthew also accentuates the depth of Jesus’s emotions when he describes Him as being “grieved,” i.e., “to be sad, to be extremely sorrowful.” We also read of Christ as having been “distressed” or “troubled,” “in anxiety,” or “to be very heavy” (Matthew 26:36). It is as if Jesus was saying, *“I am so sad and sorrowful I feel like I am going to die”* (Matthew 26:38). Yet, the Hebrew writer would describe Jesus’s agonizing grief in the context of “godly fear” or “reverent submission” (Hebrews 5:7). Prayer ensures that we navigate our suffering through godly fear and faith.

Jesus Prayed When He Was Facing His Death

The prayers of Jesus on the cross are very revealing and instructive. Christ kept God and Scripture at the very center of His suffering and sacrifice (Matthew 27:46). He prayed for those who hurt Him to repent and receive God’s

forgiveness (Luke 23:34). Even in his very last moments he fully surrendered His life into the hands of God and completion of the will of God (Luke 23:46; John 19:30). Someone may say, “But this was Jesus!” Yet, Stephen in his last moments had a forgiving spirit like Jesus and Peter encourages believers to follow in the footsteps of our Savior (Acts 7:59-60; 1 Peter 2:21-25).

Oh, that in our last moments godly thoughts and words can be on our lips in our prayer to the Father. Jesus died as He lived, that is in faithfulness and devotion to God. Christ not only prayed in his last moments, but He also prayed throughout His life. People who pray, trust, and obey the Lord throughout their lives will do so in death. Let’s follow Jesus’s example in turning to God in prayer. Paul writes, *“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...”* (Ephesians 6:18).

The Furtherance of the Gospel

JIM MICKELLS | LEWISBURG, TENNESSEE

When Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy, he told this young evangelist to commit what he had heard from this great apostle to faithful men who would be able to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). All who are faithful to the Lord should be concerned with fulfilling the great commission, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19). In the next verse of the commission, the ones who had made disciples were told “*teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). What had Jesus just told the eleven disciples (Matthew 28:16) which those who were converted were to imitate? Go make disciples. Each member of the body of Christ should be busy trying to teach the gospel of Christ to the lost, which when obeyed will save their souls by the grace of God (Romans 1:16).

In writing to the church at Philippi, while in a Roman prison (1:7, 13, 14, 16), it seems some thought that Paul’s effort in the progress of the gospel would be hindered. “*But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear*” (Philippians 1:12-14). Instead of stopping its progress, it actually led to its furtherance or advancement. There are four things mentioned in chapter one which led to the spreading of gospel message through out all the world.

1. By Fellowship. Paul commends them for having fellowship with him in the preaching of the gospel (Philippians 1:3-7). At least a part of this fellowship, joint participation, or



cooperation, involves financial assistance. We are told about the aid they sent to this preacher even when he was in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:15-16). Epaphroditus was the one sent to Paul from the church at Philippi with this support, which he described as “*a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God*” (Philippians 4:18). Individually or collectively aid might be supplied so one might give themselves totally to the preaching of the gospel, so the lost might be brought to God through Christ. There are several things one might do to help those who are busy working in the kingdom. You can pray for them, write to them, call, visit, etc., to encourage them to keep pressing forward with their efforts.

2. By Opposition. There are two different groups of people who were preaching the gospel which the apostle identifies. One which he says, were most of the brethren who were much more bold to speak without fear by seeing the example of this great man (Philippians 1:14). They were preaching from goodwill and out of love, knowing he was appointed for the defense of the gospel

(Philippians 1:17). Yet there were others who preached from envy and strife, hoping to add even more affliction to Paul (Philippians 1:15-16). It seems they were jealous of this servant of Christ. Did they have a problem with the fact he was an apostle, the power and influence he had with those whom he contacted, and how successful he had been in his efforts to preach the word of God? There is no way for us to know. Yet the opposition faced by these New Testament Christians did not stop the gospel from spreading throughout the world, it caused it to spread even further (Acts 8:4). Opposition should cause us to be even more determined to share the truth with the lost.

3. By Demonstration. The Philippians were told to let their conduct be worthy of the gospel they had believed and show in their lives it had made a difference in them (Philippians 1:27). I am sure you have heard the expression “I had rather see a sermon than to hear a sermon any day.” Actually, we should be busy doing both, teaching the gospel and practicing it in our lives as well. In Paul’s writings to Titus, the bondservant was instructed to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things before their masters (Titus 2:10). Wuest defines the word adorn as “*it must then, by good works, be rendered attractive to them that are without*” (**Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New**

Testament – Volume 2, p. 192). The Lord expects us to be the salt of the earth and lights to a world filled with darkness (Matthew 5:13-16).

4. By Proclamation. The apostle rejoiced that the gospel was preached whether in pretense or truth (Philippians 1:18). It is not that he approved of those who preached out envy and strife. They needed to change their hearts, being motivated out of goodwill and love for God, the truth, the souls of men, and for their brethren. The truth when taught in its purity and simplicity, even from the wrong motives, will still lead the sinner to salvation through the grace of God. When Jesus began to call those who would eventually become His apostle, He said, “*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matthew 4:19). Over the next three and a half years the Lord trained them to become effective preachers and then sent them to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). May we each learn from the Lord so we can become fishers of men. Have the love and compassion for our fellowman to share with him the gospel. Be willing to spend the time and effort to lead the lost to Christ.

May the God of heaven open our eyes to see the fields white to harvest and may our hearts burn with desire to share the gospel with those lost, so we might say “*Here I am! Send me*” (John 4:35; Isaiah 6:8).

Of Kisses and Betrayals and Swords and Ears

SCOTT LONG | MARIETTA, PENNSYLVANIA

As Jesus neared the end of his earthly life, He looked forward to celebrating the last Passover meal with His apostles.

“When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’” (Luke 22:14-15)

During that short time in the upper room, Jesus taught His disciples, prayed for them, washed their feet, and instituted the Lord’s supper, among other acts.

Additionally, He made this statement:

“But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end.” So they said, ‘Lord, look, here are two swords.’ And He said to them, ‘It is enough.’” (Luke 22:36-38)

Why did Jesus tell His apostles to buy swords? Many commentators make the point that Jesus was preparing them in some way, and this makes sense according to verse 35,

“And He said to them, ‘When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?’”

Jesus was referring to Matthew 10:5ff, when He had sent the apostles two by two to preach the kingdom. In His provision, they depended for their needs from those to whom they preached; but even in that context from verse 9 on, He warns them of difficult times to come.



That point, however, does not really answer the question: why did Jesus tell the apostles to buy swords? According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary, there are four possible reasons:

“(1) Some understand the words as a rebuke to the disciples. If that were the case, then Jesus was saying, ‘Enough of this kind of talk!’ (Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 310)”

Would the apostles have understood this as a rebuke? They had just heard Jesus tell them to sell a garment and buy a sword and would have assumed He meant just what He said. If having swords was not the point or necessary, why did He allow them to keep the swords?

“(2) Others understand the words to denote the fact that even two swords are enough to show human inadequacy at stopping God’s plan for the death of Christ. Swords could not stop God’s purpose and plan.”

The crux of the matter is that nothing, not even a multitude, could stop God’s plan. And who needed to know that, the apostles? They had already been told that what had been written about Jesus would be fulfilled. And those

gathered to crucify Jesus had no idea what God's plan was. It seems silly to think that Jesus was going to use two swords to show someone that God would not be stopped.

"(3) Jesus may simply have been saying that two swords were adequate for the 12 of them." This point is likely true in any event and doesn't really address the question.

"(4) Others see the clause in conjunction with the quotation from Isaiah and understand Jesus to mean that by possessing two swords they would be classified by others as transgressors or criminals. This fourth view seems preferable."

This prophecy is found in Isaiah 53:12 "And He was numbered with the transgressors." Note that Jesus specifically says that the prophecy must be accomplished "in Him." He does not include the apostles. In addition, Mark, in 15:28, applies Isaiah's prophecy to Jesus' crucifixion between two thieves, not being with apostles who had swords. So much for this choice's being preferable.

Any of these, though, are marginally preferable to the thought of Elwell in his commentary, "Jesus' words on acquiring a sword (v. 36) **should not be interpreted literally** [emphasis mine, sl]; they are a sign of the conflict and opposition which the disciples will face."

This view and related ideas result from the view that Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:39, "*But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also*", means that Christians have no authority to defend themselves or others. Jesus could not possibly mean literal swords then. What would the disciples of Jesus do with literal swords?

Should we, then, take as figurative the need for a money bag and a knapsack? Jesus was not

telling them to have money, a knapsack, and a sword but merely that they would have needs and conflicts when He was gone? This thought is disingenuous.

Even if I cannot agree with everything he says here, Butler, at least, acknowledges the straightforwardness of the passage, "The present situation was quite different. Take whatever supplies and resources you have, Jesus told them. You will especially need a weapon for self-defense. Go sell whatever is necessary to get one. Satan had come after Jesus and his followers in full force. The persecution and arrests were about to begin. They must be ready to protect themselves."

I do not believe, though, any of these attempted explanations really answers the question: Why did Jesus tell the Apostles to buy swords? Though some believe the question was answered in the upper room with Jesus saying in essence, "never use swords," I disagree. His lesson is yet to be taught, as we shall see.

Jesus, we have seen, already said that what was written had to be accomplished. He had predicted they would find a donkey and room for the supper. He identified his betrayer. He gave detail as to His impending death in Luke 18:31-3. In Matthew 26:31 "*Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."*" He predicted Peter's denial in Luke 22:34, "*Then He said, 'I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.'*" John 18:4 speaks of Jesus' "*knowing all things that would come upon Him.*"

Here we have a bit of a quandary. Either Jesus carelessly and ignorantly allowed the most impetuous apostle, Peter, to keep a sword in the face of the upcoming betrayal or Jesus knowingly allowed Peter to cause injury to another person with that sword.

Let's put the gospel records together to try to understand.

"Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, having received a detachment of troops with a great multitude with lanterns, torches, swords, and clubs, came from the chief priests and Pharisees and elders of the people.

Now His betrayer had given them a sign saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely.' Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come? Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?' They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am He.' And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, 'Whom are you seeking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,' that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.'

Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.'

The word for detachment according to Mounce can be "used for a Roman cohort, about 600

soldiers." Judas came potentially with 600 armed Roman soldiers and a multitude, some of whom carried swords, and at least one servant of the High Priest as we shall see. What could twelve men with two swords have done against such a gathering? Obviously, Jesus knew that two swords would not be "enough" to thwart such a gathering. Why, then, did Jesus tell His apostles to buy swords?

When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' And suddenly, Simon Peter, who was with Jesus, having a sword, stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

The apostles sensed danger and asked Jesus if they should use the two swords He told them were enough. Before the words were out of their mouths, Peter drew one sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus must have known Peter would do what He did. He knew that the result of that action would be the wounding of someone else.

But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Permit even this.' And He touched his ear and healed him. 'Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?'

Here is where Jesus teaches the lesson He wanted to teach His apostles about swords, and He makes several points in doing so. First, He tells Peter to put his sword "in its place." Aside from a command to cease fighting, Jesus was telling Peter that the place for the sword in this type of situation was in the sheath. Second and further, He tells Peter what we commonly shorten to "live by the sword, die by the sword." Was Peter "living by the sword?" Peter took up

the sword and used it in offense. Jesus was showing that this is not going to be the proper use for a sword after He was gone. Times of persecution for the word will not demand the use of a literal sword. Third, Jesus shows how unnecessary such an action is when He could call thousands of angels to His defense. And fourth, His death had to take place. It was the fulfillment of the Father's plan to save mankind. Was Peter thinking he could stop what was happening? If so, Jesus was telling him not even to try.

Why did Jesus tell the apostles to buy swords? Because He knew that Peter would have the sword, that Peter would use the sword to attack, and that He could illustrate that it was not going to be so after He was gone. The gospel is not spread by the sword, not a literal sword anyway, Ephesians 6:17. It would be the preaching of Jesus and their examples and the working of God in signs, miracles, and wonders

that call people to God. Interestingly, we never see the apostles using swords. They learned the lesson of that night in which Jesus was betrayed. But I wonder about Malchus. Of all those Peter could have struck, it was a mere servant of the high priest. We know nothing about him: how big or small, how young or old. We do know that in one moment his ear is gone, his head is bleeding profusely, he is holding his hands over the place where it was, maybe he is moaning or in shock. Then in the next moment, his ear is back on his head, the blood is gone, there is no pain. It is as if it never happened. I would love to know what Malchus thought and what Malchus did as a result of that miracle's being performed publicly in front of the crowd but also directly on his person. Was he hardened against the way? Or did he change his mind about it? It is the choice all men have to make in light of this incredible man, Jesus.

APRIL 2024 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Jesse Flowers continues our series looking at the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11, focused on Barak.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba brings us the first article in a series on the seven churches of Asia, focused on Ephesus.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

William Stewart continues the series focused on instrumental music; this time looking into the instrumental music in history.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Tim McPherson pens our next article in the “Becoming Like Jesus” series, focused on forgiveness.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Chadwick Brewer discusses evangelistic methods and the spread of God’s word in various places in the world.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Mike Stephens focuses on the grace of giving.

PSALM 22:14

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