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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.



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



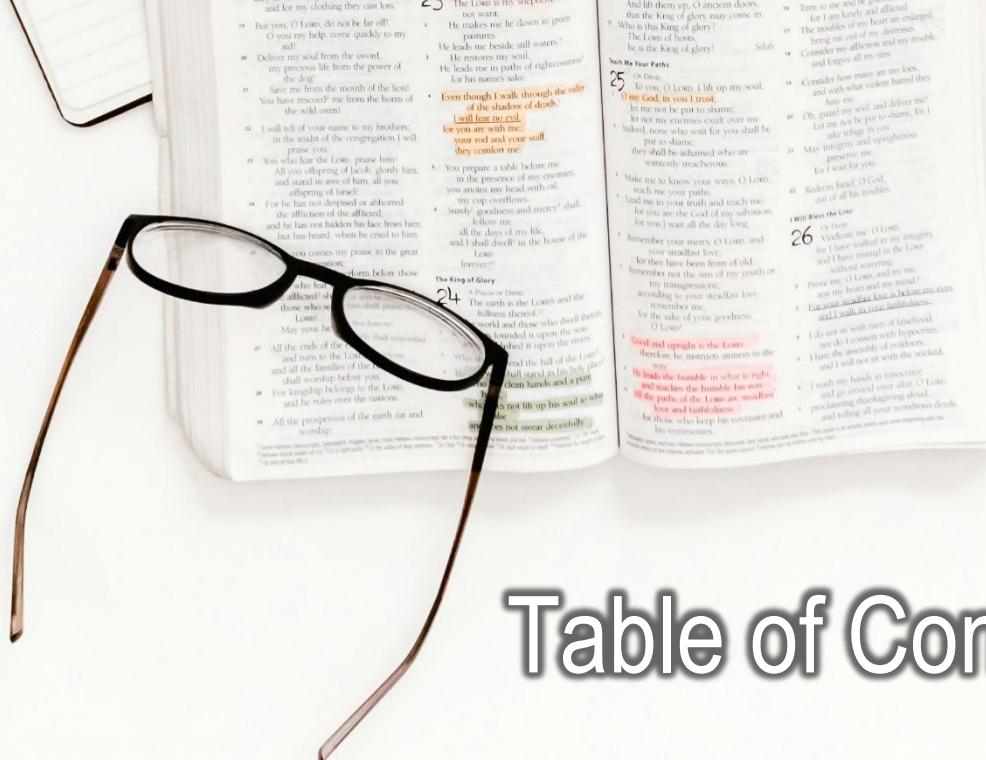


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From the Editor...

Autumn is a season of change. The leaves trade their summer green for vibrant shades of red and gold; the air grows crisp, and the days shorten as creation gently prepares for rest. For many, this is a favourite time of year - a reminder that God has set the seasons in their order (Genesis 8:22), and that each has its purpose.

Spiritually, autumn reminds us of harvest. The Psalmist wrote, "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5). The farmer who patiently planted in spring now gathers the fruit of his labour. Likewise, as Christians, we are called to sow the seed of the word and to cultivate faithfulness in our lives, trusting God to bring forth the increase in His time (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Autumn also carries a quieter lesson. The fading leaves remind us of life's brevity: "As for man, his days are like grass; as the flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone" (Psalm 103:15-16). Yet in Christ,



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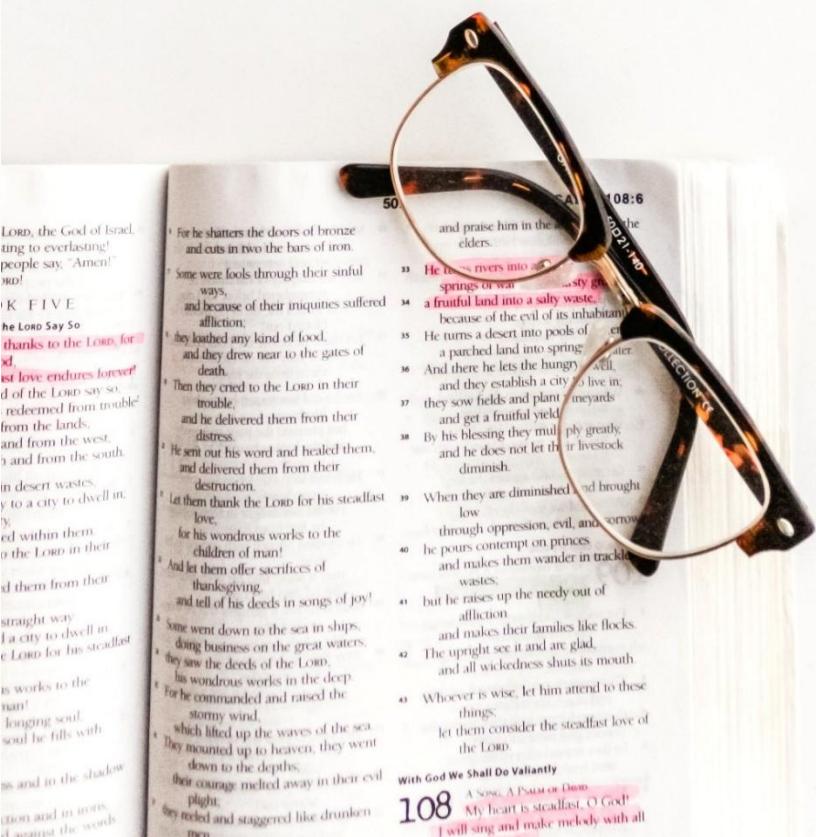
we find assurance that while outwardly we are washing away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

May we GROW in faith, bearing fruit to the glory of God. Let us prepare ourselves for eternal life, for the day will come with the flowers fade and are gone.

I am thankful to the writers who continue to participate in GROW magazine. And we appreciate you, our subscribers and readers. If you benefit from GROW, share it with a friend – forward the notification email or PDF copy, share the [website link](#) or our [Facebook page](#).

Now, let's GROW together!

William Stewart
editor & designer



The Hall of Faith: Jephthah

JEREMY DIESTELKAMP | TORONTO, ONTARIO

The Misunderstood Judge (Hebrews 11:32)

It is not too difficult to understand why the writer of Hebrews, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, selected who he did as men of faith in the first 31 verses of Hebrews eleven. Abel and Enoch were exemplary men who believed in and obeyed God before the flood. Noah and his family were the only ones saved by God's grace from the flood when Noah obeyed God by building an ark. Abraham and Sarah were faithful by leaving their own country and moving to a strange country that they were told would become an inheritance to their descendants, despite having no children and Sarah being past child-bearing years at the time. Moses was faithful by deciding to suffer with his people and lead them out of Egypt rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. Rahab was a faithful woman by hiding the spies, and then sending them out another way (though lying to do so was not justified). These were all men and women of old that we would have selected as those whose faith we should emulate.

And then you come to verse thirty-two and get to men like Gideon, Samson, Barak and Jephthah. All of these were described as men of faith, and yet all of them are extremely flawed. Gideon and Barak lived around the same time, when the men in Israel had a lack of courage to do what must be done. Gideon had to be thoroughly convinced by God that God would deliver Israel, while Barak needed the encouragement of Deborah before he led Israel into battle. Samson was a man with a violent temper who had a weakness with women which led to the source of his physical

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strength being discovered by the enemy, resulting in his capture and death. These specific traits are not ones that Christians should copy, and the Hebrew writer isn't suggesting that we do. Why are these men held up as men of faith? Because in the end, they believed in God, and they believed that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek them (Hebrews 11:6). All three of these men, in spite of their flaws, did obey God's commands, and did defeat Israel's enemies with God's help. That kind of attitude is what we are called on to follow.

What then of Jephthah? Perhaps what Jephthah is most remembered for is his foolish vow, and while that vow I believe is largely misunderstood (something we will discuss later), there's more to Jephthah than his vow, and that something more, is the reason he is included here in Hebrews 11. If you were to look at Jephthah and judge him by his appearance and backstory, let's just say, he is not likely a man that we would want our daughters to date. He was the son of a prostitute, who was kicked out of the house by his brothers because they didn't want to share their inheritance with him (**Judges 11:1-2**). This

caused him to make his living as a pirate, where he along with some other men raided the surrounding villages (**Judges 11:3**). Judging by appearances would lead us to condemn a man like Jephthah, and maybe even not see him as likely to obey the Gospel. And yet, God lifted this man up to be a judge in Israel. Why? Well, it wasn't because he was a pirate, for the ten commandments told Israel that they were not to steal. It was because of his faith in God.

The reason that Israel needed a judge in the first place is because of a land dispute between the eastern tribes of Israel and people of Ammon. Back in the days of Moses, Israel had come up after their forty years of wilderness wandering and sought passage through Amorite land bordering the Ammonite territory to the west. Sihon of the Amorites refused and was subsequently defeated, with Israel taking control of this Amorite land. The tribe of Reuben would later inherit much of this land. Fast forward about three hundred years, and the Ammonites decided that Israel didn't deserve to be controlling land east of the Jordan, for that land should belong to them. Now of course, the Ammonites didn't control the land Israel had won in battle, but little things like facts have never stopped countries before if they really want something. In rebuffing the advances of the Ammonites, listen to how Jephthah described the past Israelite victory:

"And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. 'And now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it? Will you not possess whatever Chemosh

*your god gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God takes possession of before us, we will possess." (**Judges 11:21-24**).*

Jephthah was a man who believed in God. He believed that God led Israel out of Egypt. He believed that God protected Israel from her enemies. And he believed that God gave Israel the promised land, and if God gave it to Israel, who were the Ammonites to think that they could simply take away that which God gave? This faith also caused Jephthah to trust that if the Lord had rewarded Israel in the past for diligently seeking Him that he would reward her again, if they diligently sought Him and trusted in Him for victory (**Judges 11:30**). Jephthah was even willing to give God all the credit for the victory, for he knew that God was able to deliver them. It is this type of faith that the Hebrew writer is telling us to emulate. A faith that trusts in God even when things look bleak. A faith that trusts in God in spite of long odds. And a faith that trusts in God to keep the promises that God has made. For the Christians, God has promised us salvation in Christ. He has promised us the forgiveness of sins made possible through the blood of Christ. And he has promised us eternal life with Him in Heaven. None of these were made possible by following after the Law of Moses, just as none of these men and women of faith were justified by the Law of Moses either. Salvation was only made possible by obeying God in faith, meaning that we believe in God and we do what God says (**James 2:14-26**).

What then are we to make of Jephthah's vow? The vow itself was that if the Lord would deliver the people of Ammon into Jephthah's hands, that whatever came out of the doors of his house to greet him when he returned in peace, would be the Lord's and would be offered up as a burnt offering. The first thing

we can say is that this vow was a foolish one. Why? Well first of all, vowing something to the Lord was not going to change whether or not the Lord was with Jephthah. Either God was with Jephthah or he wasn't. No amount of bargaining or sacrifice would change that. So this vow was unnecessary in order to secure victory. But the second reason that this vow was foolish, is because Jephthah didn't know what he was actually vowing. And since Jephthah didn't know what he was vowing, when time came to pay that vow, chances were high that he would be disappointed.

We do not get the Lord's response to this vow, but what we do know is that the Lord gave Jephthah the victory. And after this victory, Jephthah returned home from war, excited, ready to offer to God that which he vowed. The problem was: his daughter, who was his only child, was the first to greet him upon his return. Jephthah's demeanor immediately changed, for he tore his clothes in sorrow. He told his daughter about his vow, and she told him that he must fulfil his vow. The only thing she requested was that he give her two months so that she could go with her friends into the mountains and bewail (or sorrow) her virginity, for she was not married and had never had sexual relations with a man (nor would she because of this vow). Jephthah agreed, and upon her return the passage says that he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed and that after that, for four days every year the daughters of Israel went and lamented the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

The question that everyone has is did Jephthah really offer his daughter as a sacrifice on an altar to God? And a cursory reading of the text could very well lead us to conclude that Jephthah did. Wouldn't that be against God's law? Most certainly it would have for Leviticus 18:21 is where God condemns human sacrifice as an abomination to him under the Law of Moses. So

if Jephthah did this, Jephthah would have sinned and incurred God's wrath. And yet we don't read of God's wrath. We don't read of the author of Judges commenting on the evil of Jephthah's actions (like he spoke about the evils of Israel's idolatry constantly throughout the book). Chapter 12 will continue with the story of Jephthah telling us that Jephthah would judge Israel 6 more years after this with nothing more said about this incident. And then in Hebrews 11, Jephthah is referred to as a man of faith, in the same chapter as Abraham and David and Moses. How could Jephthah be referred to this way, if he offered his daughter on an altar to God, something that is an abomination to God and is worthy of death?

One answer to this is to say that Jephthah could have repented and God forgiven him, something that is true, but something we don't read of either (like we did with David when he sinned). Whenever we're faced with a tough scripture like this, it is best to go back and examine if our conclusions are correct. Judges 11 does say that Jephthah vowed to offer a burnt offering the first thing that came out of his house, but does the passage say that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter on an altar to God? No, it does not. If Jephthah's daughter was to be a burnt sacrifice though, how is it possible that Jephthah fulfilled his vow without offering her up on an altar to God? For that, we need to recall a few things about sacrifices under the Law of Moses.

First of all, Leviticus 27 made provision that anything vowed to the Lord could be redeemed. This included persons according to verses 1-5 of that chapter. With this being the case, why couldn't Jephthah simply redeem his daughter? Because of the fact that she was his firstborn, and as such Exodus 13:1 says that she was dedicated to the Lord and was considered His already. Had she

been a son, she would have been redeemed from serving in the tabernacle on account that the Levites did that, but it wouldn't have changed the fact that as the firstborn, she would have been considered dedicated to the Lord already. Thus, if she was vowed to the Lord in a separate vow, the person who made the vow, could not redeem her from the vow according to Leviticus 27:28, for she already belonged to the Lord and that which belonged to the Lord could not be redeemed. So, we now understand why she couldn't be redeemed, but that doesn't mean that she wasn't sacrificed on an altar, for she was to be a burnt offering.

Which brings us to the second point, which is not all burnt offerings were actually burnt on an altar. Numbers 15:3 tells us that freewill offerings were referred to as burnt offerings, and yet 2 Chronicles 31:14 and Ezra 8:28 makes clear that freewill offerings included things that could be distributed, such as money, and would thus, not be burnt on an altar, but still be considered a burnt offering. Lost on us sometimes is the meaning and purpose of a burnt offering: it was an offering given wholly over to God. The meat of the animal of a burnt offering according to Leviticus 1 was not eaten as was proscribed with some of the other sacrifices, but wholly burnt on the altar. Therefore, if something was being wholly given over to God, it could be described as a burnt offering, even though it might not be burnt on an altar. This is almost certainly what Paul has in mind in Romans 12:1-2 when he says that Christians are to present our bodies as living sacrifices, meaning we're to devote our lives wholly to God and his service. He is harkening us back to what the burnt offering was to be.

So, coming back to Judges 11, are there signs in the chapter, which would tell us that Jephthah's daughter was a burnt offering to God but not physically burnt on an altar? Yes! To

begin with, when she asked for two months, what was the purpose? To bewail her virginity, not her shortened life. Someone who was destined to die, would certainly bewail their death too, not simply the fact that they would shortly die as a virgin. Next, Judges 11:39 says that Jephthah carried out his vow, and his daughter knew no man. If the daughter was dead, of course she knew no man, for she was dead. But if Jephthah carried out his vow, but his daughter was not dead, only devoted to the service of the Lord in the tabernacle, then such a statement would make sense for she would have remained a virgin all of her life because of that service in the tabernacle. And then finally, you have a lack of condemnation for such an egregious act, either here in Judges, or anywhere else that Jephthah is mentioned. It should be said that silence alone does not prove anything, however, in this case that silence does speak volumes. David's sin with Bathsheba is called out and remembered. Abraham's lie to Pharaoh is called out and remembered. Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it is called out and remembered. Men of faith do sin, but their sin is pointed out as wrong by God, and when it is repented of, only then is it forgiven. Sin is never overlooked and then later celebrated. Jephthah's vow, though foolish, and though costly in that he would not have any heirs, is not condemned as sinful when it is completed, and since it isn't, we should be careful to call it out as such when there are other options that would be perfectly in line with what the scriptures do say.

Jephthah is a complicated man and a misunderstood man, not only during his time, but in our time as well. He was not a perfect man, but he was a man of faith because he believed in God, and trusted in God to deliver him. And he was a man that would need to be

forgiven of his sins, something that God has promised to do in Christ for those who obey Him in faith. May we seek to emulate the faith of Jephthah and obey Jesus Christ fully today.

Seven Churches of Asia: The Church at Pergamum

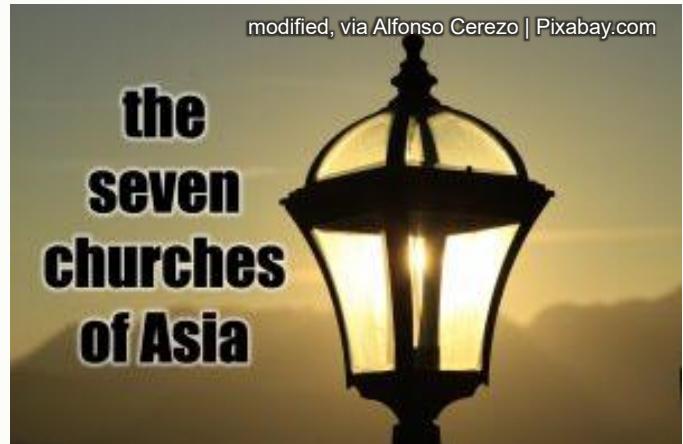
JOSHUA WELCH | KILLEN, ALABAMA

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12-13, NASB1995).

In the Hebrew context, the “word of God” has the ability to accurately judge the heart, bring to light that which is hidden, and surgically dissect the soul of man with pinpoint accuracy. Like Adam, we may try to hide from the soul-searching God, but we will ultimately fail. Rather than avoiding God’s decrees, we must allow God’s Word to do its work in carving us into the people God calls us to be.

This context is helpful as we consider the opening description of Jesus to the church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17). As Jesus speaks to this first-century church He describes Himself as “He who has the sharp two-edged sword” (Revelation 2:12; cp. 1:16). He sees. He knows. He is able to penetrate through the exterior of man and with X-ray vision and laser accuracy view the interior. In this letter, Jesus wants to dissect the church’s problems and carve out the cancerous spiritual tumor that might be infecting it (which is also a relevant metaphor to a city that worshipped the “healing god” Asklepios). So, consider some of the key points of dissection Jesus strikes with His divine scalpel.

As Jesus places Pergamum upon the examination table, He admits the church in Pergamum is in a difficult place. He says the



church “dwells, where Satan’s throne is...where Satan dwells” (Revelation 2:13). The first-century skyline of Pergamum would have been dotted by temples intended to honor Roman emperors, Greek gods, and more. Idolatrous worship had saturated this city. Satan was hard at work in Pergamum. The persecutors of the Pergamum saints had become so intensely opposed to Christianity that “Antipas” is noted as “*My faithful martyr, who was killed among you*” (2:13). Despite the civic, cultural, and moral pressures there were still some who “*hold fast to My name.*” Jesus offers a note of compassion coupled with a tone of appreciation for those who have been in the epicenter of the devil’s playground and were refusing to compromise.

Unfortunately, not everyone was handling the Pergamum peer pressure with steadfastness. Jesus exposes the reality of deceitful traitors in the midst of the Pergamum church. Jesus says, “*I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality*” (Revelation 2:14, NKJV). The “doctrine of Balaam” here is clearly a reference to

some type of sinful compromise taking place akin to the relationship Balaam, the prophet of Israel, had established with Balak, the king of Moab, in the Old Testament (see Numbers 22-24). This compromising relationship displayed Balaam's disloyalty to God, a failure to fulfill his duties to God's people, and led to a spiritual sinkhole in this period of Israel's history.

The New Testament Scriptures warn of the character of Balaam in two other places. Jude 11 warns of those who "have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit" (NKJV). Additionally, 2 Peter 2 admonishes against those who are heading towards apostasy because "they have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2:15, NKJV). In both passages, notice the turning from truth to error, the motivating cause (profit/wages), and the ultimate result: apostasy. With this trifecta of New Testament references, it becomes apparent we should study the compromise of Balaam carefully so we might avoid his character and his actions in our walk of faith. So, what might that be? What was the possible "doctrine of Balaam" plaguing many in Pergamum?

Balaam's first step down the slope of Mt. Compromise was his worldly desires. Just as the Christians in Pergamum were close neighbors to "Satan's throne," so Israel was neighboring on the border of the sinful people of Moab (Numbers 22:1-3). Balak, the king of Moab, wanted to use Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam knew it. After all, Balak was clear about his intentions (Numbers 22:6). So, why didn't Balaam just walk away from evil Balak? Take a look at the text in Numbers 22 and notice a few details that kept Balaam hanging around Balak: "the diviner's fee" (22:7), "the princes of Moab" (22:8), "princes, more numerous and more honorable," (22:15), "honor" (22:17). It sure did sound like Balaam

was claiming to stand for truth, but the money, prestige, and personal glory offered appealed to his pride. So, instead of walking away he kept hanging around Balak and his messengers. A compromise happens because we have a desire to please both parties in an issue. On the one hand, Balaam wanted to please the God of Israel. Yet, on the other hand, there was some money and prestige he would be leaving on the table if he were to just walk away from Moab. So, the appeal to his worldly desires kept him in the game longer. Clearly, the Christians in Pergamum understood what was involved in serving Christ and the blessings involved in such service. Yet, living for Christ in Pergamum likely meant they would be losing income, be treated like outcasts, and would be viewed as dishonorable for opposing the cultural traditions and immorality of the city. They were struggling with compromise because their worldly desires were at war with their heavenly pursuit. This war between worldliness and godliness is still being waged in men's hearts today (James 4:4).

Secondly, Balaam's "doctrine" was one built upon questioning rather than obeying God. Read through the text of Numbers 22 and note God gave a clear, definitive answer to Balaam: 'you shall not curse the people' (Numbers 22:12). Balaam gives the appearance of saying all the right things to Balak too: "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more" (22:18). So, if the doctrine was settled, why does Balaam go back to God a second time and re-ask him on behalf of Balak (22:19). Then, why does he go a third time and ask God again (23:3)? Simply, there is still money on the table. So, perhaps, Balaam is hoping God might change his mind and he can take that "diviner's fee" after all! He wants to please God and keep the money. He wants to simultaneously be the prophet of Israel and grow in popularity with the rich and renowned princes of Moab. He was a

“for-profit” prophet. So, he questions God, and hopes if he can ride the fence a bit longer he can have it both ways. Sometimes, we cannot have it both ways! We must preach the truth and doing so may have negative consequences in the financial and social realm! Like Balaam, Pergamum needed to stand for God rather than waffling between the will of God and the will of the city. They needed to quit pretending they just were unsure as if God’s will was uncertain. Some preachers sound a lot like Balaam. They preach their doubts, their uncertainties, their questions to appease those with doubts in their audience rather than standing for the certainties and clarity of God’s will. We must preach with less question marks and more exclamation points! Be content to speak the simplicity of God’s will plainly and unequivocally.

Thirdly, Balaam’s compromise led to Israel’s demise. Balaam’s willingness to spend time with Balak was apparently a bad influence on Israel. Balaam may have left Balak’s presence, but much of Israel stayed (Numbers 24:25; 25:1). Meanwhile, Balak had learned enough about Israel to figure out how to curse them himself—entice them to sin! Balaam’s compromising and lingering relationship with Balak allowed Moab to influence Israel to sin (25:1-3). One person’s compromise and questionable behavior can be a stumbling block to others. Some, in Corinth, had excuses for eating in idols’ temples but were not to be stumbling blocks (1 Corinthians 8:1-13). Some, in Pergamos, likely had similar justifications but were not to be stumbling blocks (2:14). We should be careful to avoid being a hindrance to others by our compromising actions (Matthew 18:6-7; Romans 16:17-18). One parent’s liquor

cabinet may become their teen child’s drunk driving accident one day. One sister’s trip to a lascivious dance might become another one’s parking lot pregnancy as lust reaches its peak. Sharing the pulpit with one false teacher (even if he does not teach falsely in our church) may open the door to the acceptance of false doctrine by those who become his disciples. One person’s compromise can become another person or group’s demise. Balaam was negotiating with the spiritual terrorists of Israel and there can be no negotiation with the enemy. The church in Pergamum was faltering because of such self-willed compromises and their influence was stagnating.

Conclusion

What was Pergamum’s key problem? Compromise. What is it we really do when we compromise? We try to find middle ground with the enemy, Satan. Give Satan an inch and he’ll become your ruler! What is it that motivates us to compromise? Like Balaam, we are covetous of profit, popularity or social promotion! Pleasing God should be more important than pleasing man (Galatians 1:10). How will our compromise affect others? Putting ourselves in questionable, misleading situations will lead others to make the same and worse choices. Pergamum needed to think of their influence! To get back on the right track, there was a simple command: *“Repent, or else...”* (Revelation 2:16). This compromise could be “overcome” and beautiful promises were attached to the overcomers (2:17). When it comes to compromise, the question for each of us is—will we overcome the temptation for short-sighted fulfillment and seek the greater promises God has laid up for us? May God root out the “Balaam” that exists in our hearts so Christ may rule entirely. *“He who has an ear to hear, let him hear!”* (Revelation 2:17).

The Audience of Worship

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

Who is the audience when we worship? This may seem like an odd question, but it strikes at the very heart of what true worship is about. In an age where churches seek to tailor services to attract people, we risk forgetting who worship is *for*. Is the focus of our worship on pleasing human participants and observers—or is our aim to honour the living God?

Worship designed to appeal to man's preferences is measured by how it makes the worshipper feel rather than whether it truly glorifies God. Such shifts the purpose of worship from God-centered to human-centered and mistakes man as the audience of worship rather than God.

Worship Has Always Been About God

True worship begins and ends with God. From the first offerings of Abel (Genesis 4:4) to the songs of heaven in Revelation 5, worship is directed to the Lord. The word itself—whether Hebrew *shachah* (to bow down) or Greek *proskuneō* (to kiss toward)—implies reverence and submission to one greater than ourselves.

When the Israelites gathered at the tabernacle, every sacrifice, song, and prayer was an acknowledgment: “*The Lord, He is God!*” (1 Kings 18:39). Their worship was not entertainment for spectators but a humble response to the divine majesty.

The significance of worship is certainly not exclusive to the Old Testament. Jesus emphasized that true worshipers “*will worship the Father in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23-24). The Father is the object or the audience of our worship, and what we offer Him must align with His nature and will. Our worship is a spiritual response to God, not a performance for



ourselves or others

The Danger of Human-Centered Worship

Measuring Worship by Our Feelings

In modern culture, people often ask, “Did you enjoy the worship today?” or “Was the worship good?” Those questions reveal much about our focus. They imply we are the judges and our *emotions* determine whether worship succeeded.

But worship is not meant to be *evaluated*—it is meant to be *offered*. When the focus is on self-satisfaction, style, or personal preference, worship becomes horizontal rather than vertical.

Israel fell into that trap many times. God said through Isaiah:

“This people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me.” — Isaiah 29:13

Their worship became nothing more than a hollow ritualistic display, for their hearts were focused on self rather than God.

The Entertainment Trap

Human-centered worship easily drifts toward

performance. How moving and awe-inspiring was the music? Was the sermon fascinating and riveting? Did we have an engaging atmosphere? Were the PowerPoint slides compelling and eye-catching? Lights! Camera! Action! We must be cautious, for our hearts can subtly be trained to think of worship as a *show* designed to impress an audience of people. If worship is designed primarily to please the congregation, then God has been demoted from Audience to Spectator. How is that not a form of idolatry disguised as true worship?

God-Centered Worship: The True Focus

God Is Both Object and Audience

God-centered worship remembers that He is both the object (the One we adore) and the audience (the One we address). Every prayer, every song, every act of giving, and every moment of meditation should have Him in mind.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

“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

The Father seeks worshipers. God Himself desires our worship. It is not that He needs our praise; rather, it is the appropriate response of the creature to the Creator and of the saved to the Saviour.

Worship That Centers on His Worthiness

The word *worship* comes from the old English *worth-ship*—to ascribe worth. God-centered worship begins by acknowledging His greatness.

In Revelation 4:11, the heavenly beings declare:

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things.”

The essence of worship is the recognition of God's worth, not our feelings. A song that exalts God's holiness, even if sung off-key, is more pleasing to Him than a flawless performance aimed at impressing people.

Worship That Responds to Revelation

God-centered worship always responds to what God has revealed about Himself. When Isaiah saw the Lord *“high and lifted up”* (Isaiah 6:1), his first reaction was humility: *“Woe is me!”* Then, after being cleansed, he offered himself: *“Here am I! Send me.”*

The early church's worship was a direct response to the apostolic teaching. Acts 2:42 reads:

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer...”

They didn't invent and experiment with new forms of worship; they continued diligently in what was revealed. Their praise, prayers, and fellowship were all rooted in what God had made known through the gospel.

Examples of Misplaced Audience in Scripture

Scripture gives us several sobering examples of what happens when worship turns inward or outward instead of upward.

- Cain refused to give what would essentially be a sin offering (Genesis 4:3-5), instead, giving what would be akin to a grain offering. He gave what he wanted, what he was comfortable with, not what he was expected and commanded to give. His worship was not about God but about himself.
- Nadab and Abihu failed to seek God's instruction for the offering of incense. Instead, they did what they thought was right and presumptively used profane fire (Leviticus 10:1-2). Their innovation minimized the Lord and His will. Their worship was self-directed not God-directed.

- Saul allowed the Amalekite sheep and oxen to be spared so they could be used for sacrifice to the LORD (1 Samuel 15:17-23). He perceived this to be good, but Samuel identified Saul's actions as rebellion, stubbornness and a rejection of the word of God. One cannot rightly offer to God in worship what He has rejected.
- The Pharisee prayers were on display to garner attention from the people and boast of their self-righteousness, not to praise God (Matthew 6:5; Luke 18:9-14). Their fasting was not about focusing the mind and attention upon the Lord; it was a public display to exalt themselves before the masses (Matthew 6:16). And of their teaching and preaching, Jesus cited the prophet Isaiah, "...in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

Whether the root cause is arrogance or ignorance, any effort at worship which sets aside God's will and focuses our attention or that of others away from God is vain and supplants the true audience of worship – the Lord God.

Practical Marks of God-Centered Worship

How can we know whether our worship is truly God-centered? Here are a few indicators drawn from Scripture:

It Aims to Please God, Not People

Paul wrote:

"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." — Galatians 1:10

If our aim in worship is to please or appease men, something is wrong. God and His way must be central to our worship. Worship that please man does not necessarily please the Lord. If worship that pleases the Lord does not

please us, we've got a heart issue.

It Is Rooted in Truth

Worship must be informed by God's Word. Emotional intensity is no substitute for spiritual authenticity. The worshipers of God must worship "in spirit and truth." Truth guards us from self-deception and ensures our worship aligns with God's revealed will.

It Exalts God's Character, Not Man's Creativity

God-centered worship aims to proclaim and honour the name of God. All aspects of our worship should be rich in content about God, His way, and His holiness, not a showcase for our talents or eloquence. The Psalmist wrote, "Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 29:2). True worship is about God and His holiness, not us and our style, expressiveness, or passion.

It Leads To Obedience Beyond The Assembly

When God is the focus, worship changes us. It deepens humility, strengthens obedience, and renews joy. We come away with greater love for God and desire to do His will. Genuine God-centered worship doesn't end with the closing prayer – it will yield outcomes in our daily life. Peter described Christians with worship-related language (spiritual house, holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices), and noted the transformative effect it has – "...that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light ... having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles..." (1 Peter 2:5, 9, 12).

The Congregation as Participants, Not Spectators

In a God-centered assembly, every person present is an *active worshiper*, not a passive audience. The "performers" are not those on a stage or at the front of the assembly, but the whole church lifting hearts together toward heaven.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul writes:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

We sing to one another and to the Lord. We pray together. We partake together. Worship is not a concert to watch; it's a communion to share (Ephesians 4:15-16; 5:19-21). The preacher is not performing for approval or to demonstrate his oratory prowess. He speaks the word in the presence of God and before fellow worshipers. His duty is to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) and the hearers have a responsibility to be attentive (Acts 10:33; 17:11). The goal is not entertainment but edification—to build up the body in truth and love.

When Worship Becomes Truly Satisfying

Ironically, when worship stops being about *us*, that's when it becomes most satisfying. Human-centered worship feeds momentary emotion, but God-centered worship nourishes the soul.

David said,

“As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” — Psalm 17:15

Satisfaction in worship is not found in the music, the preacher, or the atmosphere. It is found in

beholding and imitating the character of God. It is about knowing God more and more. Indeed, when we come together, our aim should echo the heavenly chorus:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” — Revelation 5:13

Conclusion: The Audience That Matters Most

At every worship service, two potential audiences exist: one human, one divine. The approach to one is outward (or perhaps even inward), the other is upward. A focus on the human audience will ask, “What did I get out of worship today?” A focus on the Lord will inquire, “Did God receive glory from me today?”

In worship, God has not come to a show we are putting on. No, it is we who come to Him that we might appear in His presence. As we do so, may our hearts be humbled, our songs sincere, our prayers reverent, our giving with liberality, our remembrance of the Saviour with gratitude, and our teaching with faithfulness to God's word. In all this, God will be glorified. Indeed, that is the highest purpose of worship—to delight the heart of our Creator and Redeemer.

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory.” — Psalm 115:1

Becoming Like Jesus: Compassion

JEREMY WOODMAN | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is one of Jesus's best-known parables. Like the story of David and Goliath the general outline is known even amongst worldly people. The phrase 'the good Samaritan' has entered the popular lexicon to describe any altruistic deed one stranger performs for another, like helping someone whose car has broken down. While this surface interpretation is true it also misses the deeper points Jesus is making and in this parable what Jesus did not tell us is instructive as well.

Before examining the parable it is worthwhile to look at the context. Why did Jesus give this parable? It is in response to a question from a lawyer, *"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life"* (Luke 10:25)? Speculating on a person's motive is generally unwise but in this instance the Spirit reveals to us that the lawyer wished to test him (v 25). Jesus returns the question to him and the lawyer responds by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, which commands man to fully love God and love his neighbour as himself. This answer, which interestingly enough is also the answer Jesus gave when questioned about which was the greatest commandment, is accepted by Jesus. The lawyer asks a follow-up question, *"and who is my neighbour?"* (v 29). The parable is the answer to that question. Again we are told the motive; he wished to *"justify himself"* (v 29), that is to say, he wished to be proved correct on some point. Consider the implications. If one can define neighbour to exclude certain people then one can eliminate the obligation to love that category of people. It is an attempt to limit the scope of the command of God, to find a loophole in the law of God, and perhaps to



justify past sinful behaviour on the lawyer's part. How Jesus answers this question then has serious implications.

What follows is the parable itself and the following analysis assumes the reader has read the text. As mentioned in the introduction, the focus will be on the details we are not told. For example, we are not told anything about the robber's victim. Was he a good man? Was he an evil man? We don't know. Nor does the Samaritan make that a factor in his decision to help him. We see no attempt on the Samaritan's part to get out of helping this man by suggesting he deserved his fate. What we do know is that the robbed man, absent intervention, would die. He desperately needed a saviour. The spiritual parallels to our own circumstances are clear. Paul writes to the Romans that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Roman 3:23) and *"the wages of sin are death"* (Romans 6:23). This means that every person living that is old enough to understand that difference between right and wrong and chooses the wrong is in the same condition, spiritually, as the robbed man – dead, absent intervention. That intervention came from Jesus, *"for when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly"* (Romans 5:6).

The Samaritan assisted the man at cost to himself, without expectation of reciprocation. First he took on a personal risk to his safety. Then, as now, it is possible that a person fakes distress to lure in people. That was not the case here but the Samaritan did not know that. He assumed the risk and helped nonetheless. He used his own supplies, he searched for accommodations, he paid for the robbed man's recovery at an inn, and bore the responsibility for any additional expenses (v 34-36). The man's care was not cheap, costing the Samaritan two denarii, or the equivalent of two day's wages. He did not transfer the financial responsibility to the robbed man. Spiritually, Jesus not only paid with his physical life but gave up the glory of heaven to serve God and man (Philippians 2:5-11), "*while we were sinners*" (Romans 5:7) and "*when we were enemies*" (Romans 5:10) of God! While the point of this sacrifice is to demonstrate love and motivate man to repentance, in contrast to the earned wages of death, the grace and mercy of God are described as "*the free gift of God (which) is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23). At the first sin God could have chosen to send us to hell and He would be justified in doing so, however, out of love He chose to have compassion on us. The good Samaritan is simply a lesser example of the compassion that Christ Jesus had on us, and all that would respond to the gospel message.

We are also never told why the priest and the Levite chose not to help. Were they afraid for their own safety? Presumably, given the road was from Jericho, a Levitical city, to Jerusalem, both may have been bound for their temple service rotation. Were they concerned that they would be late to report for duty if they stopped to help the robbed man? Did they believe the robbed man was evil and

somehow deserving of his fate? We are not told their motive, but it is clear in praising the Samaritan's compassion, that Jesus does not accept their excuse. In fact, Jesus subverts expectations here. The Jews viewed the Samaritans with even more contempt than the Gentiles, considering them apostates and enemies. The parable could have made its point by having a Samaritan as the victim, assisted by either the priest or the Levite. However, in doing so a major lesson would have been lost. In showing that a sworn enemy understands who his neighbour is and exercises compassion, Jesus goes beyond answering the lawyer's question by admonishing him to do better. It is reminiscent of His praise of the centurion before the people of Capernaum, "*I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!*" (Matthew 8:10).

At the conclusion of the parable Jesus asks the lawyer, "*so which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?*" (v 36) and the lawyer correctly answers, "*he who showed mercy on him*" (v 37). Whether he was pleased with the answer we are not told but he understood the lesson, the term neighbour is applicable to all mankind and not limited in its scope. What lesson can we take from this teaching? Physically, we have an obligation to assist those in need, even when they have been hostile to us, "*if your enemy is hungry feed him, if he is thirsty give him a drink*" (Proverbs 25:21). Spiritually, each day we encounter people who have been overcome by something much worse than robbers, they have been overtaken by sin and are in need of a Saviour. Friends, will we not have compassion on them, teaching them the gospel, and leading them to the One who can save them, like someone had compassion on us when we were in need?

Developing a Mindset of Evangelism

JESSE FLOWERS | COOKEVILLE, TENNESSEE

I think that most, if not all members of the Lord's church would agree, that the greatest work that New Testament Christians can actively participate in is sharing the good news of salvation with the lost all around us.

But how many local churches of Christ (and its individual members) are focused regularly on this great and noble task? For too many, I fear, the evangelistic mindset is 2-3 times a year when the local church hosts a gospel meeting, and even then, the focus may be more on the saved rather than on the unsaved.

How can we improve and grow in this vitally important area of spreading the gospel both near and far? How can we be more consistent? In other words, how can we go about developing a mindset for **DAILY** evangelism, instead of making it an *occasional* emphasis and priority?

Let us first consider some New Testament examples of those who possessed such a mindset and then be motivated and inspired to imitate their evangelistic example.

New Testament Examples to Imitate:

1. Of course, Jesus is the absolute, perfect example for us to emulate when it comes to saving the lost. Why? Well, because that's the reason that He left Heaven and came to this Earth. Bringing salvation to a lost humanity was **THE** focus of His earthly ministry. Jesus declared in Luke 19:10... "*for the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost.*" For instance, he sought Philip (John 1:43), the Samaritan woman (John 4), tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:27-32; 19:1-10), a great multitude of Jews (Matthew 9:35; Mark 6:34), the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), and countless others



in order to save them. As followers and imitators of our Lord, we too, must seek and save that which is lost today!

2. **Twelve Apostles.** Jesus specifically chose these men for the purpose of evangelism. He said to them: "*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). And so, He trained them for three years to catch lost souls for Him. He sent them out first on the limited commission to preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 9:36-10:42). And then, shortly before His ascension He delivered to them the great commission. "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Matthew 28:19). "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:15-16). And this is exactly what they did, beginning "*in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8; cf. Luke 24:47). Disciples of Christ today must be the ones who "**go**" teaching the

gospel to the world!

3. **The Apostle Paul.** After his conversion in Acts 9, this man of God imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1) in that he taught the gospel to those he encountered 24/7. For example, **immediately** after his conversion he preached Christ in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:20) and continued teaching small and great (Acts 26:22) until he took his last breath. Because of his steadfast efforts, countless souls were brought to salvation, and numerous local churches were established. This apostle of the Lord declared: *“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more...I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”* (1 Corinthians 9:19, 22). Let us too, make ourselves a servant to all, so that we might win the more to Christ and thus to salvation!

4. **Persecuted Christians.** Following the death of Stephen we read, *“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles...Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word”* (Acts 8:1, 4). Luke, the author of Acts, picks up this same narrative later in chapter 11. *“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only”* (Acts 11:19). If persecuted Christians *“went everywhere preaching the word”* then surely un-persecuted Christians could do so today!

5. **The Church in Thessalonica.** The apostle Paul gave the church a wonderful commendation when he wrote: *“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything”* (1 Thessalonians 1:8). How many churches and Christians today could it be said that they are sounding forth the word of the Lord in every place? How many congregations are actively focused on spreading the gospel? Every 21st century local church of Christ today should strive to imitate this 1st century church when it comes to the work of evangelism!

Attitudes and Conduct Necessary to Successful Evangelism:

- Obedience to the Lord’s command.** Teaching the lost the gospel is commanded of all Christians (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). If we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15), including this one.
- Love for lost souls.** If we truly love our neighbor as ourselves (James 2:8), we will not then share with them the words of eternal life (John 6:68)?
- Diligence to study and know the Bible.** We cannot effectively teach others the truth that will set them free from their sins (John 8:32), if we do not possess knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 3:15).
- Compassion for the lost that moves us to action.** Jesus’ compassion for the lost moved Him to teach them many things (Mark 6:34). If we are truly compassionate for their lost condition, then we will do the same.
- Courage to engage non-Christians with the gospel.** We must remember that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7; Acts 18:9-10; 19:8).
- Zeal to energetically spread the gospel.** We must not be slothful in zeal, but

fervent in spirit (Romans 12:11) in teaching and preaching the gospel.

7. **Humility in correcting those in sin and error** (2 Timothy 2:24-26). We must approach the lost with humility, not arrogance, for them to be receptive and responsive to the gospel.
8. **Speech that is with grace, seasoned with salt** (Colossians 4:5-6). We must speak the truth boldly and plainly, but also in love (Ephesians 4:15). It matters greatly HOW we teach the truth.
9. **Pray for open doors and open hearts** (Colossians 4:3-4). Pray for God's wisdom (James 1:5). Pray for strength and courage (Ephesians 6:19-20).

The “Daily” Mindset

1. We are to pray daily (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
2. We are to read and study the Bible daily (Psalm 1:2; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15).
3. We are to take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23).
4. We are to exhort our brethren daily (Hebrews 3:13).
5. We are to be joyful daily (Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16).
6. So, why wouldn't we also strive to share the saving gospel message **DAILY** (Acts 5:42)? After all, we are to “always” abound in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). What greater activity regarding the Lord's work could we possibly be engaged in than sowing the seed of the kingdom?

Practical Ways to Evangelize Daily:

1. **Look for opportunities in ordinary situations.** We encounter ordinary situations every day, whether at the doctor's office, hair stylist, neighbors, other parents at a ballgame, a trip to the grocery store, the

mechanic, the server at a restaurant, etc. We just need to lift up our eyes because the fields are white unto harvest (John 4:35).

2. **Start our conversations with others with a spiritual goal in mind** (John 4:6-15). We may talk to others about their physical health, but our primary concern is their spiritual well-being. We may talk to others about the weather, but our primary objective is to discuss the God who rules all nature. Ask them where they attend church, if they believe the Bible is inspired, what they believe about baptism, etc.
3. **Keep the message plain and simple.** Jesus did so (Mark 12:37), as did Paul in Athens (Acts 17). Ask people how much they know about the Bible in order to start where they are to be most effective in instructing them in the word of God.
4. **Possess the every creature concept of evangelism.** Jesus did. His disciples did. And so must His disciples today. No matter how religious or irreligious a person may be, they are still a prospect for the gospel. No matter how moral or immoral a person may be, they are still a prospect for the gospel. Everyone is a prospect for the gospel until proven otherwise.
5. **We must go to the lost.** We must leave the safe sheep in search of the one which is lost (Luke 15:4). Setting a good example is crucial (Matthew 5:13-16), but we must also “go and teach” (Mark 16:15). We can't expect the lost to come to us. We must “go” to the lost just as our Savior did.

(*Main points in this section come from a Dempsey Collins lesson, “At Jacob's Well”.)

Conclusion:

As Jesus declared, “*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*” (Matthew 9:37-38). The shortage is not

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lost souls to teach, but disciples of Christ to go the Lord (the Day of Judgement) that is coming, do this great work of soul-saving. let us do our best to persuade men with the Remember, “he who wins souls is wise” gospel (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). Paul taught (Proverbs 11:30), and “those who turn many to “publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). righteousness” shall shine “like the stars forever May every Christian today also have that Acts and ever” (Daniel 12:3). Knowing the terror of 20:20 vision, throughout the day, every day!

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Who are the Sons of God in Genesis 6?

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

The phrase “sons of God” appears ten times in the Bible; five in the Old Testament (Genesis 6:2; 6:4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) and five in the New Testament (Matthew 5:9; Luke 20:36; Romans 8:14; 8:19; Galatians 3:26). The New Testament use is evident – it refers to the people of God, to Christians.

Notice:

- Galatians 3:26, “...you are **all sons of God** through faith in Christ Jesus...”
- Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called **sons of God**.”
- Romans 8:14, “...as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the **sons of God**.”

Obviously, the Old Testament use is not about Christians. Neither is it about the people of Israel, for every instance of it appears before the formation of national Israel. So, who are the sons of God in these Old Testament texts, and specifically in Genesis 6? Here is the text in question:

*Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the **sons of God** saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’ There were giants on the earth in those days and also afterward, when the **sons of God** came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty*



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men who were of old, men of renown. (Genesis 6:1-4, NKJV)

There are 4 major views concerning the sons of God in this text. We will mention three of them briefly and then pursue in detail the interpretation which this author believes to be correct.

A FEW POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS

1. A modern theory (mid-to-late 19th century) is that the text is mythological, showing the mating of gods and humans, as can be found in various pagan religions. The Bible presents it as a reality, something that indeed happened. If it is merely a myth, what else in the Bible can be conveniently written off as myth?
2. Some teach the sons of God are the descendants of Seth (the godly line) and the daughters of men are the descendants of Cain (the ungodly line). This view was held by Augustine and later church fathers. First, it seems problematic to focus on Cain and Seth alone, as though their descendants were the only people on earth. They were not. Adam and Eve had other children (Genesis 5:4). And on what basis should we conclude that all

of Cain's descendants were evil and all of Seth's descendants were godly? When the flood came, any of Seth's descendants who were alive perished, except for Noah and his immediate family. Also, to identify people as good or evil based on the deeds of their father violates God's message in Ezekiel 18:20, among other places. Additionally, this explanation fails to adequately address why the offspring of the sons of God and daughters of men would be Nephilim (giants).

3. Others teach the sons of God in Genesis 6 were powerful men (kings, rulers, nobles) who took women by force. There is no evidence of this view in Jewish writing or early Christian writings. It appears to have arisen in the middle-ages. While it presents a scenario which no doubt took place at various places and times throughout history (Artaxerxes pursuit of a wife comes to mind as an example), there is nothing concrete in Genesis 6 or elsewhere in support of this being the legitimate explanation of Genesis 6. Like the Sethite theory, this also fails to address why the offspring of rulers and captive women would be Nephilim (giants).

DISOBEDIENT SPIRIT BEINGS (ANGELS)

A fourth possibility, and the one which I believe best addresses the text and finds support elsewhere in Scripture, is that the sons of God in Genesis 6 are unfaithful angelic beings. Granted, there is nothing in the immediate text which would lead to this conclusion, but that is the case with the other theories as well. Let's consider the bulk of evidence for this interpretation.

A Historical Interpretation

While the other theories mentioned above are all reasonably new (the Sethite explanation seeming to be the oldest), the sons of God being disobedient spirits is the historical interpretation of the text. Some manuscript

copies of the Septuagint (LXX) read "sons of God" while others read "angels of God." The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, dated to 250 BC. Basically, all English translations draw from the Hebrew Masoretic text (200 AD) for the Old Testament, thus the reading "sons of God."

In the Intertestamental Period (430 BC – 30 AD), there are documents which identify these "sons of God" as angels. These are uninspired writings by the Jews, not Scripture. But, they reveal what the ancient Jews believed about the text.

- 1 Enoch 6:2-3, *"The angels, the children of heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children."*
- 1 Enoch 15:3-10, *"Wherefore have ye left the high, holy, and eternal heaven, and lain with women, and defiled yourselves with the daughters of men and taken to yourselves wives, and done like the children of the earth, and begotten giants (as your) sons? ... you were formerly spiritual, living the eternal life, and immortal for all generations of the world. And therefore I have not appointed wives for you; for as for the spiritual ones of the heaven, in heaven is their dwelling..."*
- Jubilees 7:25-26, the text describes "...the fornication wherein the Watchers against the law of their ordinances went a whoring after the daughters of men..."
- Documents found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (the "Genesis Apocryphon" and the "Damascus Document") refer to these "sons of God" as "Watchers" and "fallen from heaven."

Evidence indicates the Jews in the first century as well as the early Christians believed these were angels. Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in the latter half of the first century AD cited Genesis 6 in his work,

“On the Giants,” identifying the “sons of God” as “angels.” He indicated some other philosophers called them “demons,” but Philo affirmed Moses spoke of angels. Josephus, a first century AD Jewish priest and Roman historian, identified the “sons of God” as “angels of God” (Antiquities, Book 1, Chapter 73).

In the first century, Christian apologist Clement of Rome said of the “sons of God” in Genesis 6, “...having assumed these forms, they convicted as covetous those who stole them, and changed themselves into the nature of man...” (Homily 8:13). Of their offspring, he wrote, “...they were sprung of angels; yet less than angels, as they were born of women” (Homily 8:15). In the second century, Justin Martyr wrote, “...the angels transgressed this appointment, and were captivated by love of women...” (The Second Apology, ch. 5). Also in the second century, Irenaeus wrote, “...for a very long while wickedness extended and spread, and reached and laid hold upon the whole race of mankind, until a very small seed of righteousness remained among them and illicit unions took place upon the earth, since angels were united with the daughters of the race of mankind...” (Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching, section 18). There are also quotes from Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Commodianus, Athenagorus, Lactantius, Ambros, Julius Africanus, and more. This was the view of the early church. That doesn’t make it true, but it does establish the long acceptance of the view.

Sons of God in the Other Old Testament Texts
Since there is question about the meaning of the phrase in Genesis 6, we should look at Job 1, 2 & 38 to see how it is used there. The context of Job 38 is about creation. Verses 6-7 read, “To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” These were not humans,

Sethite or otherwise. There were no humans present to watch and shout for joy as God laid the foundation of creation. But the angels were present.

Job 1:6 says, “...there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.” The next chapter begins, “...there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD.” These texts are not about believers assembling to worship God. There is no evidence of such assemblies from this early in human history. Further, whatever these “sons of God” were doing, Satan also did (2:1, “...Satan came also ... to present himself before the LORD.”). The idea is they were giving account of themselves. I suggest these are angels giving account of themselves before the LORD.

What are they giving account concerning? There is no way for us to know the exact details. But Scripture indicates that certain angels were charged with responsibility over the nations. Deuteronomy 32:8 reads, “When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel.” What does that mean? God set the boundaries of the nations according to “the number of the children of Israel”? The ESV reads differently. It says, “...he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God.” Why the difference?

The NKJV and most other translations rely upon the Masoretic text, produced at the end of the 2nd century AD. The Jewish rabbis tried to counter the common teaching at the time that “sons of God” were angelic beings. In Deuteronomy 32:8, it seems they removed the reference to “sons of God,” choosing to use “sons of Israel” or “children of Israel” instead.

The Septuagint, which dates to 250 BC, reads, “...he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God.” The ESV rendering of Deuteronomy 32:8 is based upon the Septuagint and documentation found in the Dead Sea Scrolls rather than the Masoretic text, using language consistent with references in Job and Genesis. And of course, the verse makes much more sense as “sons of God” or “angels of God” rather than “children of Israel.”

New Testament References

There are three New Testament references which specifically mention disobedient angelic beings. In 1 Peter 3, the apostle spoke of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In verse 19, we read, “...He went and preached to the spirits in prison...” Who are these spirits, and why are they in prison? Verse 20 sets a limited timeframe, taking us back to Genesis 6, “...in the days of Noah...” Certainly, Genesis 6 speaks of the wickedness of man, but Peter is not speaking about men. He is referring to the disobedient spirits of Genesis 6:2-4.

Again, notice 2 Peter 2:4-10. There is a lot going on in this text. Peter gave three examples of God’s judgment: verses 6-7, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Lot’s time (Genesis 19); verse 5, the destruction of the ancient world in the flood (Genesis 7-9); and verse 4, the casting down and imprisoning of angels who sinned. If that’s not a reference to Genesis 6, then I am not sure what it is. It is the same circumstance which Peter spoke of in 1 Peter 3, set in the timeframe of “...in the days of Noah.”

Finally, Jude 5-7. Like Peter, Jude also gave three examples of the Lord judging the wicked. In verse 5, he wrote of the exodus generation, who perished in the wilderness. In verse 7, he wrote of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were given to sexual immorality. And in verse 6, “...the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode...” The language is the

same as used in 1 Peter 3 and 2 Peter 2. He specifically identified them as “angels” and reveals at least in some detail what they did – “...they did not keep their proper domain...” They departed from their God given role and realm to do what was not theirs to do. Again, they “...left their own abode...” (NKJV). Other translations say they left their “proper habitation” (ASV), “proper dwelling” (ESV), or “abandoned their assigned place” (ISV). They left the spirit realm and lived upon the earth as though they were men. There is a connection between verses 6 and 7. Of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jude said, “...in a similar manner to these...” (verse 7). What did Sodom and Gomorrah have in common with the angels who left their proper domain and abode? Sexual sin. For Sodom and Gomorrah it was homosexuality; for the angels it was marrying human women and mating with them.

Some may protest – angels don’t marry – Jesus said so (Matthew 22:30). Indeed, there is no marriage in heaven. But that’s the key – in heaven. These angels mentioned in Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:5 and 1 Peter 3:19-20 left heaven and dwelt upon the earth as though they were humans. Angels were not created to marry and have children. Humanity was created and told to be fruitful and multiply. However, don’t assume that because they were not intended to marry and have children that they could not do so. Angels were not made to eat human food, but they did so at times (Genesis 18:8; cf. Hebrews 13:2).

CONCLUSION

The phrase “sons of God” in Genesis 6 has long been debated, and while alternative views exist, the testimony of Scripture, Jewish tradition, and early Christian writers consistently points to disobedient angels as the best explanation. This perspective harmonizes with the use of the phrase elsewhere in the Old Testament, accounts for the New Testament references to imprisoned

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spirits, and explains the unique offspring described in the text.

Ultimately, the lesson is not just about angels or ancient history. Genesis 6 reminds us of the seriousness of sin, the reality of God's judgment, and the danger of leaving the place God has assigned. Whether it be angels who abandoned their domain or humans who ignore

God's will, the result is destruction. Yet, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). Why? Because "*Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God*" (verse 9). Friend, let us walk faithfully with God, trusting in His grace and staying within the boundaries of His word.

OCTOBER 2025 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Wayne Goff will write our next article in the Hall of Faith series from Hebrews 11, looking at the life and faith of King David.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Colton McDaniel looks at the fourth in our series on the seven churches of Asia, the letter to the church at Thyatira.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

Jeffrey Smith will focus on the benefits of mutual edification in worship.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

Jason Schrader will bring our next article on becoming like Jesus, focused on reverence.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Daniel Sanders gives us an article on the need to focus on the simplicity of the gospel.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Keith Sharp considers what it means to deny yourself.



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EDITOR / DESIGNER

William J. Stewart

kgnprchr@gmail.com