

# *Forerunner*

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Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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Volume 26, Number 6

November-December 2017



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IN THE  
CLOUDS

# November-December 2017

Volume 26, Number 6

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Every Christian is eagerly waiting for the return of Christ in great power and glory. In several passages, Scripture describes just how He will come back to earth, and they consistently include the detail that His return will be accompanied by clouds. While many biblical scholars ignore this common detail, it contains significant symbolic meaning and teaching on the character of our soon-coming King of kings.

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# Why Hebrews Was Written

## Part One

We have reached the point in our progress through the covenants God has made with those He has sanctified for His purposes where it becomes helpful to study significant portions of the epistle to the Hebrews to better understand Christ's and our parts in the New Covenant. In each covenant since He created Adam and Eve, God has been adding depth to our understanding, not merely of mankind's destructive history, but far more importantly, of God's character, giving us a better vision of the leadership qualities He aims to create in us.

In all of the covenants, some responsibilities are always the same—such as the requirement to keep His commandments. However, in each, there are also specific objectives for dealing with the times in which those covenants were made, as well as specific responsibilities for which God is also preparing us to fill after our resurrection to eternal life. Therefore, each covenant is necessary to refine our grasp of the realities of God's creative purposes.

We have just concluded a long series explaining several detailed covenants God made with people, primarily drawn from among Israel,

whom He sanctified. The New Covenant introduces a significant addition to their number: God begins adding Gentiles into the mix as He continues to form the church.

His overall intention regarding covenants is to give His called ones specific direction about what He desires of those within His purpose and about living by faith. This truth is essential to us because we are already on the path toward completing His purpose in our lives. Overall, He is not aiming for qualities the world extols and rewards. He seeks to continue developing personal leadership qualities of character and attitude in His image that we are to use within family and local community life.

As we begin this next series expounding important aspects of the epistle to the Hebrews, we need to recall a few basic points about covenants, since much of the Bible's history of the outworking of God's creative purposes revolves around three covenants. Perhaps even more important is that the content of Hebrews and the New Covenant fit together hand in glove. Three covenants impact on us more directly than any of the others: the covenant made with Abraham; the covenant made with Israel at

Mount Sinai, commonly called the Old Covenant; and “a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22), made with the elect, most often called the New Covenant.

Using the term’s most basic definition, a *covenant* is nothing more than “a formal agreement between parties to accomplish a goal together.” Throughout the world, businesses commonly make covenants to state and guide the specific obligations of each party involved in its purpose.

Covenants are thus the primary way in which the Bible formally assigns responsibilities in the relationships between God and His people. To a limited extent, they also serve to guide humanity in general, giving mankind a basic awareness of its obligations to its Creator. For converted church members, having clearly assigned and defined responsibilities within a covenant is a significant advantage. The covenants leave us little doubt about our obligations to God and fellow man as we try to accomplish the purpose for which we have been called and tasked to achieve together.

Formal covenants may not have been necessary if humanity would follow God by keeping His commandments as He does! The most basic fact on this subject is that no covenant with God excludes this absolute obligation; covenants with God always require that we keep His commandments. Despite what many think, this unequivocally includes the New Covenant!

“Behold, the days are coming,  
says the Lord, when I will  
make a new covenant  
with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah . . . ”

JEREMIAH 31:31

However, even the very best of us fail to do this as well as we should. Mankind as a whole has plainly never shown the willingness to set such high standards as God’s covenants require. Only the converted—those genuinely living by faith—will set their minds to accomplish them. Making a covenant with God is an exceptionally arduous undertaking because, since the carnal mind is fixed

on earthly aims, the converted person’s mind must be set to achieve heavenly goals.

A second ever-present reality is that all covenants made with God are between unequal parties. God is the sovereign Creator who initiates the covenants, makes our obligations clear, and penalizes us when we break them. He is always the principal party and always actively involved. There is no such thing as a person independently setting his own ways and standards under one of God’s covenants, including the New Covenant.

Whenever we read the language of any of God’s covenants, we receive the distinct impression it is being conferred, almost imposed, on the sanctified. His voice is transcendent; there is no dickering. He sets the obligations, and His promises and rewards for obedience, though always generous, also require earnest, faithful devotion. Why do the obligations seem so demanding? Partly because we are making the agreement with God. He is not a fellow human, which is intimidating. Dealing with Him by faith is daunting because we cannot equivocate on anything. He is always aware.

Directly connected to this fact is the almost overwhelming amazement that prompts us to realize the serious purpose of this relationship. We have literally become part of God’s personal Family. Never forget that, though standards seem so incredibly high on occasion, they are never unreasonable and are always within what we can accomplish with the help of Jesus Christ. God is very sensitive about losing any of us!

## The New Covenant Is Not New

God says in Jeremiah 31:31, 33-34:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD; I will put My law in the minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

Most people associate the New Covenant with the New Testament, unaware that Scripture’s first

mention of the New Covenant is in the Old Testament. God reveals it as a prophecy of what will happen far in the future from Jeremiah's time. Yet, the New Covenant was not truly "brand new" even then; it was new only in terms of being publicly prophesied then. Regardless of when He chose to announce it, the New Covenant reflects God's unchanging and eternal standards of judgment and fulfilling His creative purposes, as well as His standards on how we should live.

Even in Jesus' time, nothing changes about God's purpose. He is still reproducing Himself and creating man in His image. How can He change what He is? Any change in Himself would be damaging to His purpose, and God unmistakably proclaims, "I do not change" (Malachi 3:6). God is Himself the model toward which we are being transformed. When Jesus came to live as a human, He kept the law flawlessly, and so must we strive to do likewise. The New Covenant does away with no standards of godly behavior.

He is always the faithful God (Deuteronomy 7:9; I Corinthians 1:9; 10:13; II Corinthians 1:18), a truth we must always keep in mind. He is ever faithful to the covenants He enacts and the purpose He continues to work out.

## A Brief Overview

Hebrews 8:1-6 reads:

Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

The author directly states that this idea is the primary reason for all he has written so far. Chris-

tianity is earth's only religion that is led by a spiritual High Priest sitting at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven. Within the material the author has written are two major points:

First, the qualifications of this towering Figure, who holds such an important office, make Him indispensable to the salvation of all God's sanctified ones. Indispensable? Absolutely! Jesus tells us Himself in John 15:5, "Without Me you can do

"Therefore know that the Lord  
your God, He is God,  
the faithful God  
who keeps covenant and mercy  
for a thousand generations with  
those who love Him and keep  
His commandments."

DEUTERONOMY 7:9

nothing" in terms of producing fruit that glorifies God. He has *much* to offer. The epistle to the Hebrews identifies these qualities.

The second major reason is not named here. Some may consider it unimportant in comparison to the first. However, God, who knows precisely where His creation is headed and who sovereignly controls its direction and speed of advancement, never intended the Old Covenant to last forever.

Remember, God Himself publicly introduced the New Covenant six centuries before the writing of the book of Hebrews. Its introduction within the flow of the history of the church and the world began to force key cultural changes to take place within Judea especially, but also in majority Gentile areas of the Middle East. Many Jews were being converted. Within the church itself, both the leadership and membership were asking many questions about what they needed to do to adjust to this new way of life. Those converts required direction from on high to secure them in living by faith in Jesus Christ.

The transition from Judaism to Christianity following Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and the church's receipt of the Holy Spirit—all in the

early AD 30s—needed purposeful instruction from heaven to confirm to the church the direction that Christ wanted the daily, spiritual operations of Christianity to proceed. Just as the book of Leviticus contains detailed instruction for daily functions under the Old Covenant, so similar education was necessary under the New Covenant because of what God was working in the church—and is still working today.

### A Tragic Misunderstanding

The epistle to the Hebrews contains such instruction, enabling those who have entered the New Covenant with God to make the necessary adjustments to maintain their lives by faith and grow spiritually. In this way, they can glorify God by

“If anyone comes to Me  
and does not hate his  
father and mother,  
wife and children,  
brothers and sisters,  
yes, and his own life also,  
he cannot be My disciple.”

LUKE 14:27

maintaining their relationship with Christ while preparing for the Kingdom of God.

Many hold the mistaken belief that the New Covenant transforms living by faith and glorifying God into a far easier task than under the Old Covenant. “Easier” is an erroneous descriptor. Even though a convert is forgiven of past sins and receives wonderful gifts from God, including the Holy Spirit, the New Covenant also requires him or her to become a living sacrifice. Sacrificing one’s life in humble submission to God is not easy, as the New Testament attests. Jesus lists some requirements in Luke 14:25-27:

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother,

wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Almost all who call themselves Christian today hold the opinion that, through the New Covenant, God has made salvation much easier to obtain. The central pillar in their belief seems to be that since Jesus kept the laws perfectly, and since He paid for the forgiveness of our sins through His sacrifice, when one accepts Him as Savior, the convert’s obligation to meet the New Covenant’s demands is somehow magically reduced or even eliminated. People carelessly say, “Jesus did it all for me.”

In plain language, a high percentage of professing Christians accept as true that God’s law is essentially done away. They believe that Jesus kept it for us. While that idea contains truth, it has been twisted into a misleading concept: that we need not be as concerned about keeping it as those who lived under the Old Covenant. Nothing could be further from the truth! Why? Our willing, devoted, and careful participation in keeping His law is absolutely necessary to be created in God’s image!

For example, Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38 contains detailed instruction on the maintenance and use of the incense altar and of the incense itself. It required a high level of careful dedication by the appointed Levites to maintain the purity of each element. To those of us living now, the incense offering may seem to have been a rather minor affair, but it was not trivial to God. With Jesus Christ as our Guide, *spiritual* maturity is our goal. How much more important is the creation of godly character in human beings? Jesus admonishes us in Matthew 5:48: “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The reality is that the New Covenant establishes what we might call graduate-level requirements of keeping God’s law. However, God compensates for our weaknesses by providing the spiritual tools to reach those levels. Jesus *did* keep the commandments for our benefit, in that God is mercifully willing to accept His righteous life and death to pay our debt to Him for our sins because we do not have sufficient righteousness to pay the cost to have the death penalty removed.

But something is missing in people’s misunderstanding of this reality, so their trust in it is also skewed. What is missing is what radio broad-

*(continued on page 15)*

# The Nature of God: What’s Love Got To Do With It?

*“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God,  
and God in him.”*

*—I John 4:16*

In 1984, R&B singer Tina Turner resurrected her fading pop-music career with the release of the pop-single, “What’s Love Got to Do with It.” Written by Graham Lyle and Terry Britten, the Grammy-winning song cautions the listener to avoid confusing physical attraction and emotional affection with true love. A similar sentiment and warning also apply for Christians to exercise caution while attempting to understand or define the biblical concept of love—especially as it relates to the nature of God.

Lending weight to this concern, 1 John 4:7-8, 16 furnishes Christians critical marching orders and guidance while providing crucial insight into our Creator’s nature—all centered around the word “love”:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. . . . And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Twice in these three verses, John declares that “*God is love*” (emphasis ours throughout). He also implores us to “love one another” and to *know* God, and then he identifies God as the *source* of love. Furthermore, our Savior

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commanded His disciples, earlier in John 13:34-35 (see also John 15:12, 17), to love one another “*as I have loved you.*”

With these verses in mind, consider that God has created humanity physically in His image (Genesis 1:26), and further, is re-creating those whom He has called into His spiritual image (II Corinthians 3:18). To that, we must add our standing orders to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), to seek Him (Matthew 6:33), and to establish an intimate relationship with Him that we might become more familiar with the image that Christ came to reveal and that we are to become (John 1:18).

### It's the Relationship

Consider also the following quote from John Ritenbaugh's 1992 sermon, “Do You See God?”:

We are beginning to see an application to you and me. Will God be working in our lives if we don't *see* Him? If we don't *recognize* Him? If we don't *understand* His purpose, what He is working out in you and me? I don't think so!

In like manner, from his 2006 sermon, “God, the Church's Greatest Problem,” he opined:

Since eternal life lies in the relationship with God, it is extremely important how frequent and accurate our thoughts about Him are. We can conclude that what one knows about the true God Himself and how one uses that knowledge are the two most important issues in life.

We have established, then, that a strong relationship with God is critical to attaining eternal life, and the strength of that relationship depends upon an accurate understanding of who He is—His nature. To that end, we have the written Word of God, the Bible, to guide us as it reveals the true nature of God. Moreover, since the Bible teaches us that God is love and that our ability to know God will be determined by our willingness and capacity to love, it is vital that we understand the true meaning of love, particularly as intended by the apostle John's inspired writings. In fact, without this understanding, how can we possibly proceed with our marching orders to seek God—to know Him—and to reflect His will in our interactions with all mankind?

### A Challenge for Defining Love

But, everyone is familiar with the concept of love, right? After all, virtually all of civilization is absorbed—even obsessed—with the idea of love. Throughout man's history, countless writers, performers, pundits, and deep thinkers have devoted much—if not most—of their respective careers trying to define and even display love. So, determining the meaning of this simple, four-letter word should not be too great a challenge, right?

Perhaps it is not as easy as one might think. In fact, if we study the world's most common usages and descriptions of love, we find that they have little or nothing in common with the divine nature of our Creator. Stated another way, we discover that John's use of the word “love,” as translated from the Greek word *agape*, has little to do with our modern, worldly concept of love.

So, what happened in the interim between the writings of the apostle John and today? Has our understanding of the concept represented by the word “love” been altered or adulterated? If so, by whom and why?

### The Old Deluder

With love playing such an enormous role in our calling, could our adversary, Satan the Devil, have influenced a gradual blurring or alteration of the definition of “love”? Just as Christ was sent to reveal the Father's nature (John 1:1-3, 18; John 14:6-10; Matthew 11:27; Colossians 1:15; etc.) and to exemplify love as His disciples' most definitive attribute (John 13:35), Satan, the archetypal antichrist, exists to misrepresent, obscure, and water-down the divine idea behind it all.

The Bible warns of Satan's cunning ways, but we must be able to read and study what is written in the Bible to figure that out (Genesis 3:1; II Corinthians 11:3; John 8:44; Revelation 12:9). Our ability to read and comprehend biblical truth—our literacy—is a gift from our Creator that we often take for granted today, but we were not always so dispassionate about it.

As a matter of fact, in 1642, the legislative body governing the Massachusetts Bay Colony zealously commenced a five-year effort to promote a more literate population to prevent Satan from using illiteracy to keep men from the knowledge of Scripture. From their efforts



came three different pieces of legislation, the most famous of which was called the “Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647.”

Its first paragraph reflects a healthy sentiment that all God-fearing persons should appreciate:

It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue [language], so in these latter times by persuading from the use of tongues, that so that at least the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded and corrupted with love and false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers; and to the end that learning may not be buried in the grave of our forefathers, in church and commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors.

Antiquated language notwithstanding, this legislation is credited for helping to establish the first public school system in America. By promoting and even requiring greater literacy among the colony’s general population, the legislature hoped that more citizens would be able to read the Bible. They argued that literacy would lead to a greater comprehension of the truth. This truth, they believed, would expose the malicious efforts of the “old deluder, Satan,” to prevent all men from seeking, recognizing, and understanding the nature of God, as well as a prime responsibility of all Christians—both centered around the word “love.”

By expanding, adulterating, and reshaping the meaning of love, Satan has promoted and encouraged its overuse, and, at the same time, diluted its meaning.

### Watering Down Love

Is there a more abused, overused, or bastardized word in the all the English language? Consider all the ways we use the word “love.”

We *love* a dress on a particular actress or a sharp-looking suit on an actor. We *love* those shoes, that song, that band, that movie, or the weather, a baseball team, a color, a car, or a restaurant.

Do we not *love* a good bottle of wine with our steak?

We *love* chocolate. We *love* our children. Yes, we can even love wallpaper!

How about the act of procreation? We *make love* to our spouse!

Tennis anyone? *Love* also designates zero points.

So far, we have a word used to express our desires or our preferences, our affections for family (which we count on being reciprocal), the act of sexual intercourse, and zero points in a tennis match. Is God’s nature in there yet?

Let’s look at how the rest of the world uses the word “love.”

A recent Internet search for the expression “love is” returned over one billion hits, while “love songs” yielded over two hundred million. There were just under eight million possibilities for “classic love poems,” while “books about love” yielded over one billion more. Searching for “Shakespeare’s love sonnets” produced over eight million hits. The Internet Movie Data Base claims there are nearly fourteen thousand different movies with “love” in the title, and one website even boasted that it contained exactly 34,250 different quotes on love. The following is a tiny sampling:

Love is a temporary madness.  
Love is a four-letter word.  
Love is fleeting.  
Love is to be avoided at all costs.  
Love is a second-hand emotion.  
Love is blind.

Popular music teaches us:

*Love Is a Battlefield*<sup>1</sup>  
*Love Bites*<sup>2</sup>  
*Love Lies Bleeding*<sup>3</sup>  
*Love Hurts*<sup>4</sup>  
*Love Stinks*<sup>5</sup>

We sing along to *Love Will Keep Us Together*<sup>6</sup> and *You Make Loving Fun*.<sup>7</sup>

There is *Radar Love*<sup>8</sup>, *Tainted Love*<sup>9</sup>, and *A Groovy Kind of Love*<sup>10</sup>.

And one day we are a *Prisoner of Love*<sup>11</sup>, but the next day *Your Love Has Set Me Free*<sup>12</sup>.

We become *Lost in Love*<sup>13</sup> but then learn that *Love Will Lead You Back*<sup>14</sup>.

We wonder *Where Is the Love?*<sup>15</sup> and then learn that *Love Is All Around*<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, if *Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher*<sup>17</sup>, why do we cry, *Don’t Let Love Get You Down*<sup>18</sup>?

Is there any other word that has captured our

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imagination and inspired such a diversity of thought?

Have we ever considered the ultimate message behind *If Loving You Is Wrong, I Don't Wanna Be Right*<sup>19</sup> or *All In Love Is Fair*?<sup>20</sup> Should love be something that justifies lying, infidelity, or abandonment, or the breaking of any of God's commandments?

Moreover, many of our poets, scriptwriters, and songwriters insist that we "fall" in love in the same way we fall into a trap, as if love is something to be feared and avoided—as if love somehow weakens our resolve.

### Must Love Feel Good?

Let us contemplate the considerable efforts of Christian or "faith-based" charities, dominated by the mainstream Protestants, Evangelicals, and Catholics and their mainstream ideas of love.

In the name of love, these charities do many good works for the needy of our society. From soup kitchens, shelters for the homeless, poor, orphaned, battered, and addicted, their list of good works is virtually endless. Their works are difficult to criticize.

Even so, how many of the volunteers—the laborers on the front lines of these charitable efforts—would continue to volunteer if their efforts to "love" their fellowman were not reciprocated with a strong sense of emotional well-being? Though all Christians should respect their efforts and learn from their zeal, these faith-based organizations tend to reduce love to an emotional experience that is heightened in response to doing good.

### A Dangerous and Deceptive Conclusion

Then there is the "self-help" or "self-love" crowd, popularized by the secular humanist movement, which teaches that to give and accept love, we must first learn to love ourselves. Not only do these movements encourage us to let go of our inhibitions and to put our own aspirations ahead of others, but they reverse the direction that true love moves by definition—from outward to inward—teaching us, instead, "to thine own self be true."

If we carry those thoughts to their logical, but dangerous, conclusion by restricting or defining love based on our level of self-indulgence—being true to our carnal nature and our wickedly deceptive heart (Romans 8:7;

Jeremiah 17:9)—we will eventually arrive at the deceptive conclusion that love for self must trump everything, including our love for God.

It is this conclusion for which Satan has worked so hard for so many years to place inside the hearts of men and women. Instead of a selfless, outgoing, and unifying attribute that defines the nature of God, love becomes a selfish, introverted, and destructive force that prevents a person from ever knowing or loving Him—or others—in the manner He commands. With this kind of "love" dominating us, God will not be able to complete His task of spiritually re-creating each us in His image, and our final steps in this sanctification journey will come to nothing.

However, our destiny does not have to be tied to that deceptive conclusion.

As cunning and crafty as that old deluder, Satan, is, let us counter his efforts by continuing to read, study, and work to comprehend the Word of God. We must resist Satan and his sad, sick world (Ephesians 6:11-16; James 4:7), as they try to redefine the nature of our loving God, who has, is, and always will supply our every need (Philippians 4:19). He completed the Creation, gave us His commandments, became human, gave us His Spirit, and inspired each word written in the Bible—all to define and reveal His nature—to show us definitively *what love's got to do with it*, after all (John 14:21-23).

—Joseph B. Baity

<sup>1</sup> Love is a Battlefield (Knight-Chapman, 1983)

<sup>2</sup> Love Bites (Lange, 1987)

<sup>3</sup> Funeral for a Friend/Love Lies Bleeding (Taupin, 1973)

<sup>4</sup> Love Hurts (Bryant, 1960)

<sup>5</sup> Love Stinks (Wolf-Justman, 1979)

<sup>6</sup> Love Will Keep Us Together (Sedaka, 1959)

<sup>7</sup> You Make Loving Fun (C. McVie, 1977)

<sup>8</sup> Radar Love (Kooymans-Hay, 1973)

<sup>9</sup> Tainted Love (Cobb, 1964)

<sup>10</sup> A Groovy Kind of Love (Sager-Wine, 1965)

<sup>11</sup> Prisoner of Love (Columbo-Gaskill, 1031)

<sup>12</sup> Your Love has Set Me Free (Lamb, 2011)

<sup>13</sup> Lost In Love (Russell, 1979)

<sup>14</sup> Love Will Lead You Back (Warren, 1989)

<sup>15</sup> Where is the Love (MacDonald-Salter, 1972)

<sup>16</sup> Love Is All Around (R. Presley, 1967)

<sup>17</sup> (Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher (Smith-Miner, 1967)

<sup>18</sup> Don't Let Love Get You Down (McFadden-Whitehead-Carstarphen-L. Huff 1976)

<sup>19</sup> (If Loving You is Wrong) I Don't Want To Be Right (Banks-Hampton-Jackson, 1972)

<sup>20</sup> All In Love Is Fair (Wonder, 1973)

## “Behold, He Is Coming With Clouds”

The Feast of Trumpets brings with it a confident hope and an energizing sense of anticipation. It foreshadows the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings, the resurrection from the dead, and the establishment of the government of God on earth. This annual Sabbath has been called *the* central, pivotal holy day because it looks forward to the most important events of this age.

In contrast to the day’s significance, a relatively small number of scriptures describes the actual return and appearing of Jesus Christ. Even so, all of those scanty descriptions contain an important detail, one about which we rarely give any thought. Bible encyclopedias and topical studies barely give it a mention, yet for something as momentous as the return of the Messiah, every detail is relevant and significant.

Jesus’ well-known Olivet Prophecy contains probably the most familiar description of Christ’s return:

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:30)

Other passages describing this event echo this common element:

- I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. (Matthew 26:64)
- Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. (Mark 13:26)
- [Y]ou will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming

*“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”*

—Matthew 24:30, NKJV

## Prophecy Watch

*“Behold, He Is Coming With Clouds”*

with the clouds of heaven. (Mark 14:62)

- Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (Luke 21:27)
- Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
- Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him. (Revelation 1:7)

While some of these verses also speak of “power” and “glory,” the common element in all these descriptions is the mention of *clouds*.

This detail at first may not seem relevant, but it shows up repeatedly, so we may wonder why God consistently inspired the Bible’s writers to include that little detail. We know that He does not inspire empty or superfluous words; everything about His revelation is deliberate and meaningful. What meaning do the clouds hold in the Bible? Why are they significant to the return of our Savior to the earth?

### *A RAINBOW SET IN THE CLOUD*

As with many other topics, the first time the Bible uses a word or concept frequently sets the stage for how God inspired the human writers to use throughout the rest of His Word. Clouds are no exception. We find clouds first described immediately after the Flood:

And God said: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be

seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.” (Genesis 9:12-17)

Here, clouds are linked to the sign of the rainbow and God’s everlasting promise that He will never again flood the earth. Today, we are far removed from the events of the Flood, so it may be difficult to grasp what it and its aftermath were like—every man, woman, and child dead, except Noah and his family. From the genealogies, we know that humanity had been on the earth about a millennia and a half, and before the Flood, people lived much longer lives and produced numerous children. Only God, and perhaps the angelic host, knows how many millions or billions of people that cataclysm destroyed.

God forcefully and deliberately ended that age. Yet, lest we think that all is hopeless and that another worldwide catastrophe could wipe out all life on the planet, God gives us this promise, repeating it several times: He will not destroy all flesh again.

Of course, we know from many verses that the end of this age will involve fire rather than another worldwide flood. But this does not nullify God’s promise. The point remains that God will not destroy all flesh by any means, whether by flood or by fire.

Genesis 9:12-17 indicates that the rainbow is the sign of that promise, but they also show that the setting and the context of that promise is the clouds. In the promise we see elements of God’s faithfulness, but the backdrop is God’s *mercy* in not destroying all of mankind.

***“This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.”***

—Genesis 9:12-13, NKJV

### *“CLOTHED WITH A CLOUD”*

An interesting parallel to this appears in the book of Revelation. Genesis and Revelation mirror each other in many ways; frequently, when a matter is introduced in Genesis, it is resolved or concluded in some way in Revelation. As bookends of the Bible, they contain many of the same themes. Notice what John describes in Revelation 10:1:

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on [H]is head, [H]is face was like the sun, and [H]is feet like pillars of fire.

Studying into this chapter makes plain that this Being is no mere angel, but it is in fact Jesus Christ. In the sequence of events, this chapter might be called “the beginning of the end” because it shows the mystery of God being finished and the point at which there would be no more delay in everything reaching its conclusion.

Here at the end, John’s vision pictures Jesus with a rainbow, showing that He has not forgotten His promise to mankind. Even as He is about to unleash tremendous destruction on rebellious humanity, the sign of His promise not to destroy everyone is literally at the top of His head. Notice that He is also clothed with a cloud. It is covering Him, allowing only the brightness of His face and the fiery brilliance of His feet to show.

To understand the significance of this cloud, consider what a cloud is and does. By way of definition, a *cloud* is “a visible mass of droplets of water or frozen crystals, suspended in the atmosphere.” Sometimes clouds bring rain, which can be either a blessing or a curse depending on the circumstances, but other times they pass by without sharing a drop. Nevertheless, there is one thing a cloud will always do, if it has any size at all: It will impede light, such as the light of the sun or the moon. Since it is clothing Jesus Christ, this

cloud filters some of His breathtaking glorious radiance.

This is not the only way the Bible uses clouds. It also uses them to represent multitudes of people (Isaiah 60:8; Hebrews 12:1), the sins of men (Isaiah 44:22), or the impermanence of the wealth of the wicked (Hosea 6:4; 13:3). They can represent the empty words of false teachers (Jude 12; II Peter 2:17), the unfulfilled promises of faithless men (Proverbs 25:14), and a number of other things. But when the clouds surround God Himself, they are a covering that mercifully impedes His full brilliance. They represent the unsearchableness of God, His mysterious depths, and how futile it is for carnal men to try to understand His ways (II Samuel 22:12; Psalms 97:2; Ezekiel 1:4).

This covering is critical because the undimmed brightness of a God-being is lethal to mankind. Moses had to be hidden from the full glory of God in the cleft of a rock, or he would have died (Exodus 33:19-32). After that, the Israelites could not stand to look at Moses’ face, and he had to use a veil—a cloud made of cloth, if you will—because even when the glory of God was reflected and vastly dimmed, it was too much to take (Exodus 34:29-35).

As already mentioned, Jesus Christ will be returning in glory, and that awesome glory has a terrible, lethal effect on sinful flesh. In particular, II Thessalonians 2:8 foretells that “the lawless one” will be “consume[d] with the breath of His mouth and destroy[ed] with the brightness of His coming.” Apparently, Christ will not always remain behind a cloud but will allow His full glory to show for the purpose of destroying unholy men.

### *“UNAPPROACHABLE LIGHT”*

We can thus see why being surrounded by clouds is an act of mercy on God’s part: Mere men cannot abide the sight of One so pure and holy.

Near the end of Paul’s first epistle to Timothy, he mentions the return and appearance of Jesus Christ:

*“I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on [H]is head, [H]is face was like the sun, and [H]is feet like pillars of fire.”*

—Revelation 10:1, NKJV

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... which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. (I Timothy 6:15-16)

Notice he writes that He dwells in “unapproachable light” and that no man can see Him. He implies that no man can see Him *and live*, not that He is invisible. His goodness, purity, holiness, and character are so penetrating and absolute that they overwhelm anything made of weak, mortal flesh. So, when He deals with human beings, He clothes Himself with the clouds, allowing mankind to continue existing.

When God descended on Mount Sinai to make the covenant with Israel, the whole mountain was covered with clouds. God told Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you” (Exodus 19:9, *New International Version*<sup>1</sup>). For the sake of Moses and the children of Israel, God let Himself be heard—which was terrifying enough (Hebrews 12:18-21)—but not seen.

The situation at Mount Sinai is reminiscent of the end of the book of Job, where he says, speaking figuratively, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You” (Job 42:5). When the same book says that God answered Job out of the whirlwind (Job 38:1; 40:6), it does not speak of a little tornado. The word indicates a hurricane (*cf.* Psalm 55:8; 107:25-29; Isaiah 29:6; Jonah 1:4, 12)! God had wrapped Himself in a mighty storm, and seeing that tempest of clouds—along with spiritually seeing himself in relation to his Creator—caused Job to abhor himself and repent in dust and ashes. Undoubtedly, he was extremely grateful that the clouds were there!

As God led the Israelites through the wilderness, He remained in a cloud the whole way for their

sakes. He dwelled with them—He tabernacled with them—but He had to do it in a way that would allow them to keep living. Such an allowance is just one thing that God does to make such a mismatched relationship work. Because who and what He is so overwhelms His creation, He is willing to confine Himself to clouds and thick darkness rather than allow His glory to radiate fully.

### WE SHALL BE CHANGED

At the time of the end, when God begins to intervene dramatically on earth, His glory will leave men scrambling in terror to get out of sight:

For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought low. . . . The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, but the idols He shall utterly abolish. They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which they made, each for himself to worship, to the moles and bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the crags of the rugged rocks, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. (Isaiah 2:12, 17-21)

The people go seeking out blackness because, even when God is enveloped in thick clouds, as He is described elsewhere, His glory is still intensely uncomfortable to carnal man.

Even we who have been called and forgiven by God and who are taking on His spiritual image

*(continued on page 18)*

***“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”***

—I John 3:2-3, NKJV

(continued from page 6)

caster Paul Harvey called “the rest of the story”: the truth that godly character is not imposed but built, created, with the willing and dedicated assistance of the person being transformed. The world’s flawed conclusion dismisses the fact that God’s creation of each person into His image is only *just beginning* at the individual’s forgiveness and baptism into the church and the Family of God.

## The Law Continues On

Anyone thinking of baptism should consider—if we have little need to be concerned about sin—why Jesus is so solemn and stern in His admonition in Luke 14:25-27 about His disciples following such high standards. Not being discussed at this point is that, despite Christ’s wonderful gift in sacrificing Himself to pay our indebtedness to God, the reality is that the wages of sin, death, remain because the existence of the laws continues.

What we find is that God not only forgives us, but in our calling He also gives us the spiritual tools to fight and win the spiritual battles we engage in to keep sin from re-enslaving us. The fight against sin continues. God provides the tools for us to go on to perfection (Hebrews 6:1-2) if we will believe in them and use them. Colossians 2:13-14 helps to clarify this:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

When we choose to be baptized, we come to Christ physically alive but spiritually dead because the death penalty still hangs over our heads. Our sins have been recorded, but this spiritual death, paying the penalty for sins, has not yet been paid by means of Christ’s blood. Following our repentance, God accepts Christ’s death as the means of redemption, paying the debt in our stead. This act of justification erases from existence the death penalty against us. Even so, that erasure does not remove from the book the laws we broke, only the *penalty* for breaking those laws.

Notice this clear New Testament—New Cov-

enant—illustration in I Corinthians 15:55-58, where Paul writes to Christians:

O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Is it still possible for us to sin and experience sin’s sting? As long as the laws that define sin exist, the possibility of death remains because it is possible for us to break those laws. This is why verse 58 urges us so strongly to be steadfast and immovable in the work of the Lord. His work in us as individuals is to refine our character so that we never sin. We are in training to be in God’s image, and God does not sin.

The term “sting” illustrates what is painful about sin. The most painful element involved in sin is death, and with death, all hope is lost. Sin kills. Do we believe that? Sin is the cause of death. The function of the laws of God is to provide knowledge of sin. God’s laws give us knowledge of what to do and what not to do. Sin is still to be feared!

We must be careful, though, because our carnal nature is so deceitful that by giving us knowledge of what not to do, sin can actually play a role in arousing us to desire a taste of it, to experience its excitement. And so we can give in to sin. We must fight this desire with all our being. After God commanded her not to eat of the tree in the midst of the Garden of Eden, Eve failed to fight the intriguing desire, and she ended up sinning! God’s laws have never been against us. They continue to give us guidance about what is right.

Recall the family relationships Jesus lists in Luke 14:26. They are the people with whom we tend to spend the most time and generally want to please to the highest degree—and who also prove to be the most influential in attracting us to follow their patterns of living. We tend to let our guard down while in their company.

Our sins imposed the death penalty on us—and ultimately on our Savior—in the first place and still do if we continue sinning after He pays the debt. God’s laws have not changed, and the penalty for breaking them remains the same despite Jesus’ merciful payment on our behalf. Irrespective of the New Covenant, the laws continue to define sin. If we continue sinning, His death for our

benefit is absolutely wasted. Specifically, at our baptism, His death pays only for sins committed in the *past*.

Christ's death is the means, the way, that opens the door for completing the perfection of our character into the image of Jesus Christ in preparation for the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit God gives us through the laying on of hands is the means of keeping His laws far more perfectly than before our

“Do not think  
I came to destroy  
the Law or the Prophets.  
I did not come to destroy  
but to fulfill.”

MATTHEW 5:17

calling. Sins committed after accepting His shed blood can put one on the road to the Lake of Fire because His death did not remove our obligation to obey the law. We must repent of sins committed following baptism so they do not produce more severe consequences.

God's laws still exist and are still in force, guiding us in living God's way. To confirm this, we will look closely at what Christ stated when beginning His ministry. It is basic instruction directly from Jesus as He laid the foundation for more expanded teachings that followed.

### According to the Spirit

In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus admonishes His listeners:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness

exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

My New King James Bible titles this paragraph, “Jesus Fulfills the Law.” The sense in which many professing Christians use the term “fulfills” is not inspired Scripture. In this case, it does not mean “accomplishes by keeping” or “does away with,” as judged against what He taught in what immediately follows. *Fulfills*, in this case, means “fills to the full,” “fully exemplifies the conduct it covers,” or “expands to its fullest intent.” Consider His subsequent illustrations carefully:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.” But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:21-26)

His teaching shows Him raising the acceptable level of obedience far higher than what people ordinarily considered as satisfactory behavior. Jesus expands the scope of sin in the sixth commandment from outright murder to also include a high level of anger in certain situations! Matthew 5:27-30 shows the same pattern in this teaching on the seventh commandment:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your



members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

The same conclusion is true of this commandment and also for each of the others He expands during His Sermon on the Mount. Far from doing away with God's commandments, He raises the standards of acceptable behavior far higher.

Revelation 12:9 asserts that the great Dragon has deceived the whole world. What a cruel joke Satan has played on the masses and even on those unconverted who are sincerely striving to obey God to the best of their present understanding.

## Sacrificing Has Not Ended

The reality of the New Testament's teaching is that becoming a true disciple of Jesus Christ obligates a person to a great deal of sacrifice—even to the point of becoming what the apostle Paul calls being “a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). The disciple of Christ is clearly the sacrifice. Why do the sanctified ones make these sacrifices since the price they pay for forgiveness is dedicated, obedient devotion to the leadership of Jesus Christ?

This price requires the sacrifice of every function of a Christian's body, mind, and spirit to the way of God. It can be very costly. It may cost the Christian His employment because of Sabbath work requirements. He may lose his family attachments because the family may not accept his membership with this strange group. He may lose his general acceptance within a community for the same reason.

We commit to Christ for two primary reasons. The first is personal and somewhat self-centered: We want to be delivered from the burden of the death penalty, and we desire the awesome rewards God promises like everlasting life and sharing eternity with our Creator and Savior. The second is generally slower to grow within us but proves far more critical in the end: We love God and desire the completion of His purpose in us. Through baptism, we want the means to express that love for God and for others as He continues with His creative purposes, preparing us for active participation in His Family in the Kingdom of God.

We should never let the encouraging Romans 5:1-5 slip from our minds:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

These verses, naming gifts God gives us upon our agreeing to the New Covenant, remain as a brief but constant reminder of how the New Covenant enables us. They inspire and empower our faith in ways no prior covenant, even with God, has. But the New Covenant does not erase God's laws, just the penalty we have incurred by breaking them. Even the sacrificial laws involving animals, though they no longer have to be physically made, remain part of the Word of God because we can learn so much from them. They deepen and broaden our understanding of the sacrifices we must make under the New Covenant to show love to both God and men.

The author of Hebrews writes Hebrews 8:7-13:

*“Now hope does not disappoint,  
because the love of God  
has been poured out in our  
hearts, by the Holy Spirit  
who was given to us.”*

ROMANS 5:5

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I

## Personal

### *Why Hebrews Was Written*

took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In that He says, "a new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

These verses outline some major objectives within the workings of the New Covenant. Merciful forgiveness for breaking God's laws is a major one. The author provides an intriguing overview of

God's objectives using the means of the New Covenant as His tools. This overview provides a clear statement that God will be an even more hands-on Creator, working in His people's behalf more than ever before. It clearly states that law-keeping and sinlessness are major objectives in its institution, giving no indication of any kind that moral laws are being "done away."

The excitement is building toward seeing what He will lead each of us to become in our lives. It should be abundantly clear that God's law will be a primary tool in creating us into the image of Jesus Christ so that throughout eternity we are prepared to follow Him wherever He goes. He kept God's laws perfectly.

With this as a foundation, we are better prepared to search into the epistle to the Hebrews in more detail.

In Christian love,



## Prophecy Watch

### *"Behold, He Is Coming With Clouds"*

*(continued from page 14)*

cannot literally stand in His presence. We who are mortal and corruptible must be given immortality and incorruptibility (I Corinthians 15:53; Romans 6:23). We must be resurrected or changed so that this relationship can continue once our temporary existence ends.

We must also be given new, spiritual bodies like His to complement the character He is creating in us (I Corinthians 15:42-49). We must be brought up to the God-level in order to know Him fully and to ensure that nothing comes between us—nothing that hinders us seeing Him as He is. We must go through a change so that the light in which He dwells is no longer unapproachable. Instead, this change will enable us to be part of that glorious light.

Notice how the apostle John describes this:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but

we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (I John 3:2-3)

God will transform our lowly, mortal, corruptible bodies to be like His glorious body so that, when He is revealed, we can see Him without any hindrance or limitation. At this point, nothing will stand between us.

For those who are not changed at His appearing yet are judged worthy to live into the Millennium, He will still appear in clouds so He can continue to work with them without obliterating them with His glory. In God's mercy, He obscures Himself so that pitiful man is not erased in an instant, but He is working toward that day when all His children will see His face in full glory—and live.

—David C. Grabbe

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# The Politicization of Motherhood

For decades in America and most of the Western world, the modern feminist movement has led an outright assault on the nuclear family, attempting to redefine the once-beloved and sacrosanct role of motherhood. With roots dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, radical feminist thought slowly wormed its way into contemporary political conversation. Slowly shedding their radical stigma, feminist leaders masterfully appealed to the emotions of Main Street, small-town America, convincing many that a life exclusively dedicated to raising children and running a home was a shameful waste of time and resources and beneath the dignity of any “intelligent” woman.

Diatribes from feminists and their slavish, media sycophants dominate American political conversation, focusing only on the importance of equality in the workplace. “We need women fighting fires, fighting wars, and commanding battleships,” they say. And if a woman does decide to have a child instead of an abortion, then the only enlightened way to proceed is for mom to drop that kid off at daycare and let someone else raise it! It is too important for the movement that “mom” returns to her “real” job outside of the home as soon as possible.

Amidst all this liberal absurdity, though, comes author Erica Komisar and her new book, *Being There: Why Prioritizing Motherhood in the First Three Years Matters*.

Journalist James Taranto interviewed Ms. Komisar about her new book in the October 28-29, 2017, weekend edition of the *Wall Street Journal*:

Motherhood used to be as American as apple pie. Nowadays it can be as antagonistic as American politics. Ask Erica Komisar.

Ms. Komisar, a political liberal, tells me she has become “a bit of a pariah” on the left. The premise of [her] book—backed by research in psychology, neuroscience, and epigenetics—is that “mothers are biologically necessary for babies,” and not only for the obvious reasons of pregnancy and birth. “Babies are much more neurologically fragile than we’ve ever understood,” Ms. Komisar says. She cites the view of one neuroscientist, Nim Tottenham of Columbia University, “that babies are born without a central nervous system” and “mothers are the central nervous system to babies” especially for the first nine months after birth.

What does that mean? “Every time a mother comforts a baby in distress, she’s actually regulating that baby’s emotions from the outside in. After three years, the baby internalizes that ability to regulate their emotions, but not until then.” For that reason, mothers “need to be there as much as possible, both physically and emotionally, for children in the first 1,000 days.”

The regulatory mechanism is oxytocin, a neurotransmitter popularly known as the “love hormone.” Oxytocin, Ms. Komisar explains, “is a buffer against stress.” Mothers produce it when they give birth, breastfeed or otherwise nurture their children. “The more oxytocin the mother produces, the more she produces it in the baby” by communicating via eye contact, touch, and gentle talk. The baby’s brain, in turn, develops oxytocin receptors, which allow for self-regulation at a later age.

Women produce more oxytocin than men do, which answers the obvious question of why fathers aren’t as well-suited as mothers for this sort of “sensitive, empathetic nurturing.” People “want to feel that men and women are fungible [mutually interchangeable],” observes Ms. Komisar—but they aren’t, at least not when it comes to parental roles.

Ms. Komisar’s research reflects the hope that some common sense can be injected back into the political discussion—long since abandoned by most conservative or religious politicians, corporate heads, or community leaders—that children and society are better served when mom is encouraged to stay home, raising and nurturing her young children just as our Creator designed. Immediately, the words of Solomon from Proverbs 29:15 come to mind: “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.”

Predictably, however, the liberal backlash has been considerable.

In the next issue, we will focus on this backlash and the trouble it portends for a civilization teetering on the edge of disaster in these troubled end times.

—Mike Ford

## The Miracles of Jesus Christ

### *A Second Large Catch of Fish (Part Two)*

Part One set the stage and context for this final miracle of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry, allowing this Bible Study to focus on Christ's intentions, as well as the spiritual growth of His disciples between the first (Luke 5:1-11) and second (John 21:1-14) fishing miracles. When set side by side, we find parallel elements binding these two miracles into a single teaching, leading to Christ's all-important commission establishing His church.



1. Why do the disciples initially fail to recognize Christ on the shoreline? How does Peter respond once he figures it out? John 21:4, 7, 12.

**COMMENT:** Verse 4 reveals that none of the disciples initially recognizes the Lord. In fact, all the disciples consistently failed to recognize the post-resurrection Christ (Luke 24:1-11, 13-16, 36-45; John 20:14). Physical and emotional circumstances notwithstanding, their failure was the result of weak faith or spiritual immaturity and the corresponding confusion and unbelief—spiritual blindness.

Following His resurrection, Christ changes (I Corinthians 15:44-45; Hebrews 6:20; Ephesians 4:9-10), but His disciples, still lacking understanding, have not. Verse 12 provides insight: “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and eat breakfast.’ Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are You?’—knowing that it was the Lord.” While they eventually figure out that their Master, Jesus Christ, is with them on the shore, there is something different about Him that they are unable to comprehend fully without His assistance (Romans 8:5; John 15:5; I Corinthians 13:12).

After John manages, however, to identify the stranger on the shore as “the Lord,” Peter immediately dresses and dives into the water to swim about 200 cubits (100 yards), eager to join Him on the shore. Contrast this passage with the first large catch miracle where all the disciples were “astonished” at the catch, while Peter, overwhelmed by the miraculous power of Jesus, begs Him to “depart from me” (Luke 5:8).

2. Does Peter's response to Christ's advice to recast the net on the “right side of the boat” exhibit his growing faith? How do the disciples react to the challenges presented by the miraculous catch? John 21:6, 8, 11.

**COMMENT:** John's narrative indicates no hesitation on Peter's part to follow Christ's direction to cast the fishing net, this time on the right side of the vessel. This contrasts with the first large catch miracle (Luke 5:1-

11) where a newly-recruited Peter resists His direction before submitting.

Subsequently, the fishing net is brimming with a massive catch, yet it does not tear, nor are any of the men anxious or overwhelmed. In fact, Peter jumps back into the water to finish dragging the miracle catch back to shore by himself. Conversely, during the first large catch incident, the net tears and the two fishing boats involved begin to sink (Luke 5:6-7).

Taken together, we see how the first large-catch miracle marks the beginning, while the second miracle signals the completion of the disciples' three-and-a-half-year education under God's direct tutelage. We also witness the disciples' efforts to overcome several challenges common to most Christians: learning to recognize or *see* God; following His commandments in faith, and learning how to remain steadfast in the midst of overwhelming circumstances (John 21:8-12).

3. What can we learn from the final miracle of Christ's earthly ministry? What did His efforts ultimately produce?

**COMMENT:** The narrative of the second large catch begins with an anxious and bewildered—perhaps even backsliding—group of disciples that struggles initially to identify their Lord and Master. Nonetheless, even with their initial lapse of faith, by the end of this incident, we witness good fruit from the disciples' unique and uncommon apprenticeship: their weak faith buttressed, their unbelief dissolved, and their capacity to serve wholly enriched by the presence of God.

Because each disciple's flaws are compounded in his Lord's absence, each will soon receive the indwelling of His Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Christ's commission, then, recognizes and rewards their growth and points to the beginning of their new vocation (John 21:15-17). No longer will they be only “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17), but soon they will work as pioneering ministers in the nascent church of God, tending and feeding all who are called into “the Way.”

—Martin G. Collins