

# Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 27, Number 1,2

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AN OPEN DOOR

# January- April 2018

Volume 27, Number 1,2

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In Revelation 3:8, Jesus Christ promises the church in Philadelphia "an open door, and no one can shut it." Most people do not realize that He is referring to a prophecy found in Isaiah 22 that relies heavily on understanding the office of a steward, treasurer, or prefect of a royal house. In this way, Philadelphia's open door may signify something far different than the church's ability to preach the gospel.

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# Why Hebrews Was Written

## Part Two

Part One built a necessary foundation for this series on the reasons for the writing of the book of Hebrews. It came about as a reaction to significant misunderstandings within the package of doctrines that many who claim to be Christian believe the New Covenant teaches. A central theme of these misunderstandings could be stated as, “God’s moral laws are done away.”

They erroneously claim that Christians are not under the strict necessity of keeping God’s commandments to be saved, therefore the Christian is essentially free to choose which ones he will observe. That is a dangerous belief! An individual’s carnal nature can easily invent a justification that sets him free to devise his own god according to his desires.

A second careless misunderstanding is that the New Covenant, about which the epistle to the Hebrews is particularly concerned, provides authority to do away with our responsibility to keep the commandments. It does no such thing.

A third misunderstanding is that, under the Old Covenant, a person was saved by his keeping of the commandments. This has never occurred even once in mankind’s sinful history! God has forever and always granted salvation to human beings by His merciful grace through faith.

As early as the seventh century BC, during the lifetime of the prophet Jeremiah, God assured humanity that He had prepared a new covenant, which was ready to be presented and ratified between God and men. The specific time of its institution was not revealed then, only that He would make it with a reunited Israel and Judah. However, the Bible shows that God did not wait for physical Israel and Judah’s reunification into one nation, but instead, He introduced the New Covenant into the Christian church as a precursor agreement through and under Jesus Christ as the church began. This was part of God’s Plan, and He is continuing to use its standards to prepare a people within the present-day church to fulfill its operations under Jesus Christ when Israel and Judah reunite after His return (Revelation 14:1-5).

The New Testament teaches that the Temple sacrifices and ceremonies commanded under the Old Covenant are indeed set aside. But God’s setting aside of the ceremonial focus, as explored and expounded in the epistle to the Hebrews, does not automatically do away with any other laws dealing with public and private behavior relating to loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves.

God's institution of the New Covenant within the church has been a more intimate and effective guide for producing higher-quality relationships with Him and His Family than the Old Covenant. When combined with His appointment of Jesus Christ as our spiritual High Priest, this system features a personal, anytime, all-the-time relationship with Him that enhances the creation of the spiritual characteristics that God desires in His children. These elements allow us access to God that those under the Old Covenant did not have. We can approach Him anytime through Christ!

Much of the book of Hebrews is, according to chapter 8, focused on Jesus Christ's qualifications for fulfilling His responsibilities within the spiritual process that God has instituted under the New Covenant. Jesus Himself teaches us about our vital need of Him in John 15:4-6:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

“Abide in Me, and I in you.  
As the branch cannot bear fruit  
in itself, unless it abides  
in the vine, neither can you,  
unless you abide in Me.”

JOHN 15:4

The close intimacy of the relationship with Jesus Christ that the New Covenant provides for us makes it extremely valuable to us. In turn, our spiritual relationship with the Father and Son influences our life's activities. His role is to assist us in making good spiritual use of the gifts God has made available to us when we accepted the New Covenant (Romans 5:1-5). Our goal now is to bring glory to God by yielding to His creative genius and power as we live our lives, being formed into Christ's character image. Jesus

Christ *never* sinned. It is this quality of righteous living that honors the Father. Thus, we are called to walk in the steps of our Savior. Peter writes in I Peter 2:21-22, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.’”

The New Covenant does not abolish the Ten Commandments at all. Jesus' life proves that. We are to follow what He did. God's appointment of Jesus Christ as High Priest to aid us and His institution of a more effective system for preparing us for His Kingdom removed the typical Temple system of animal sacrifices and ceremonies. He replaced them with the far superior personal, individual, and spiritual attentions of Jesus Christ. At the same time, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus raises our behavioral responsibilities, teaching us to keep the commandments in their spirit. This elevated standard makes them more refining and restraining than they are in the mere letter.

### The Author of Hebrews

It will be helpful to address some particulars about the epistle to the Hebrews before plunging into the specifics of the instruction itself. For instance, only God knows for certain who wrote it. Whatever God's reasons might be, He does not require that we know this fact, so we are left to speculate. Unlike nearly every other human author of a portion of the Bible, this author fails to identify himself explicitly. It really does not matter since God Himself, as the Inspirer of the human author, is the real author (II Timothy 3:16). Even so, according to most researchers, the most likely author is the apostle Paul.

Shortly after God took dramatic action to convert Paul on the road to Damascus, He told Ananias, who was commissioned to baptize him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Though Paul called himself an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), this commission statement supports the fact that Paul directly authored thirteen epistles containing spiritual guidance for the congregations he served in his ministry. Why not one more? II Peter 3:2, 14-16 says:

That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior. . . . Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and

consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

Peter’s words substantiate the idea that Paul’s letters were passed from congregation to congregation. It also validates that his commission covers, not only the geographical areas within which Paul traveled, but also the people to whom he was directed to preach. In any case, whoever authored Hebrews had an unusually clear understanding of worship under the Old Covenant as a participant as well as a keen observer. Moreover, it was Paul who learned at the feet of Gamaliel, a highly respected Pharisaic teacher of his day (Acts 22:3).

Except for its final chapter, Hebrews contains instruction with some commentary about the effects of who Christ was and how His teachings and death affect the church. Most of the early converts were Jewish, especially those in and around Jerusalem, as most of them—directly after Christ’s ministry and crucifixion and the giving of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the church—lived in the area.

From there, the gospel’s impact spread as God began converting Gentiles, and they too began to understand and appreciate the Old Testament connections the apostles’ teachings about God’s relationship with the Israelites provided them. Their sermons gave them the foundational roots of living by faith, as their recounting of the stories of the Old Testament spiritual greats named in Hebrews 11 showed that they had lived by faith just as we must. Paul was familiar with these things even while he was a persecutor.

However, the epistle’s writing style varies somewhat from Paul’s other letters. It lacks the normal, pedestrian roughness researchers expect from Paul’s writing in other epistles. Some researchers have described Hebrew’s prose as “elegant,” the best written of all New Testament epistles in terms of quality of grammar. At its beginning, it is organized as a treatise, a formal and systematic account of a subject, and reads as though it is a college lecture. It concludes as a personal letter from a church pastor, as Paul’s epistles normally do.

Some speculate that Luke or Apollos wrote Hebrews, and others have even suggested Priscilla, but I believe those are vain speculations. I suggest that the apostle Paul’s was the human mind that provided

the accurate material contained in the epistle, but someone more skilled grammatically than “smoothed out” his writing. The best candidate for its human authorship is the apostle Paul, but in the end, it remains speculation.

### When Written? To Whom?

Hebrews is also undated. Internal evidence—such as the usage of present tense in certain passages—provides the distinct impression that the Temple still

“For to this you were called,  
because Christ also  
suffered for us, leaving us  
an example, that you should  
follow in His steps:  
‘Who committed no sin, nor was  
deceit found in His mouth.’”

I PETER 2:21-22

stood, and priests were still offering sacrifices at its altar. Conservative scholars conclude, though still somewhat speculatively, that it was written in the mid-AD 60s. Note that this date is more than thirty years after Jesus’ resurrection, and by this time, its instruction was sorely needed to unify understanding and practice churchwide, as Acts 15 indicates.

Acts 11:22 establishes the fact that a congregation existed in Jerusalem early in the church’s history, in fact, immediately following Christ’s resurrection. The title of the book printed in our Bibles reads, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” but no truly reputable researcher claims this title is inspired. Yet, that does not mean it is entirely wrong because it is a reasonable conclusion from evidence within the epistle itself. More than just the internal evidence suggests this, as the history of the times provides additional, reputable evidence.

I Corinthians 1:1-2 is an example of how most biblical books get their titles:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at

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Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

This title is inspired because it is drawn from a portion of the contents of the epistle itself. Verses 1-2 are inspired, which is where the title comes from.

We know the title given to the epistle to the Hebrews is reasonably correct for the same reason. Hebrew 1:1-2 provides the internal proof: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” God sent His prophets to the Hebrew Israelites, including the greatest prophet of

“God, who in various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”

HEBREWS 1:1-2

all, Jesus Christ. There is no evidence He sent prophets to other nations with any regularity.

However, we must understand that this epistle was not written to Hebrews in general. Like the other epistles, it is directed primarily to Hebrews—Jews or Israelites—who had converted and were fellowshiping in church congregations. Paul, Peter, James, John, Jude, and Matthew were all Israelites, as were others converted through them. Note that other apostles did not send their epistles to the world; they sent them to church of God congregations. Paul explains this spiritually, writing in Romans 2:28-29, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is

that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” The “Jews” addressed are people with God’s Spirit.

The epistle to the Hebrews is inspired, and Christ’s words to His church were passed around to all the congregations. This epistle was most certainly not restricted only to Hebrew Christians but was fully intended for all Christians since its instruction is vital to everyone’s salvation. Yet, it went first to aid the Hebrews because of what was happening at that time both spiritually and culturally within their nation because of their faith in Jesus as Savior.

The author writes in Hebrews 5:12, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” This verse indicates that the Hebrew recipients were not young in the faith. Acts 8:1 records what was happening immediately after Stephen’s martyrdom: “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” Hebrews 10:32 reminds the epistle’s original recipients about their earlier persecutions: “But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings.” We can conclude that the epistle was written to a group of Christians who were not young in the faith.

Hebrews 13:24 adds: “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you,” giving the impression that the congregation may have been relatively large. It also suggests that the epistle probably went first to the congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22) and then copies were made and sent elsewhere.

### **An Urgently Needed Message**

Besides the pressures being exerted against the church by outside persecution, the book of Acts reveals that the church urgently needed the doctrinal teaching the epistle to the Hebrews contains. Its purpose was to instruct Jewish converts first and then Gentile converts as God began calling them to know, understand, and use the gospel in their lives.

Acts 15:1 provides insight into a significant doctrinal issue that had to be overcome: “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” A major purpose of the epistle, then, was to be a unifying

*(continued on page 15)*

# The God of the Old Testament

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
and we beheld His glory . . .”*

*—John 1:14*

**I**s the God of the Old Testament a God of wrath while Jesus Christ of the New Testament is a God of love? Often Christianity presents Jesus—notice the pictures of Him—as the kinder, gentler Son of His more stern and harsh Father. Do Christ and the New Testament support that view of the Old Testament God?

Who is the God of the Old Testament?

How surprising and straightforward is the answer; yet it eludes the thinking of many. Genesis begins with God creating our world. The apostle John opens his gospel similarly by revealing who that God is:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-3, 14)

As this passage patently declares, the Word is Jesus Christ. He is God and is the Creator God of Genesis. “All things were made *through Him*.”

“Word” here is translated from the Greek *logos*. *Strong’s Concordance* begins



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its definition as “something said.” In his *Key Word Study Bible*, Spiros Zodhiates begins his entry with “to speak.” Recall the method the Creator God used to create: He used words; He spoke. The Logos, the One who speaks, spoke this world and everything in it into existence (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, and 26).

Paul also testifies in Colossians 1:16 that Christ was the Creator:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Paul repeats John’s idea in John 1:1 of the world being created “through Him,” indicating that Another authorized the works carried out by the Word. In the same verse, John affirms that another God Being was present: “the Word was with God.” Genesis 1:26 begins, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image.’” The “Us” is the Word and the other God, the One we now know as the Father (John 17:5).

In His last message to His disciples, Jesus confirms that He continued to follow the creation pattern. He spoke the words given to Him by the other God, God the Father: “For I have given to them the words which You have given Me . . .” (John 17:8).

In Genesis 1, the Creator God is called “God,” translated from the Hebrew word *elohim*. While this Hebrew word is plural in form, it often appears in combination with singular verbs and adjectives, indicating a body, group, class, or family that contains more than one member. John’s description agrees. Both were God, both with the surname *Elohim*, of the Family called God, which is currently composed of the Father and the Son, as revealed in the New Testament.

### Yahweh Elohim

As we have seen, the Bible establishes that Christ is the Creator God of the Old Testament. Notice what Genesis 2:4 adds about the Creator God: “This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.”

This verse marks which member of the *Elohim* Family is the Creator God. He is *Yahweh Elohim*, the LORD God. The entry in *Strong’s* for “Jehovah” (*Yahweh*) reads: “(the) *self-Existent* or Eternal: *Jehovah*, Jewish national name of God:—Jehovah,

the Lord.” Zodhiates says of *Yahweh*, “The covenant name of God most prominently known in connection with His relationship with the nation of Israel.”

From the Bible, we see that Christ is the Creator God and that the Creator God is *Yahweh*—the God of the Old Testament. Therefore, it follows that Jesus Christ is the God of the Old Testament.

As further confirmation, notice two verses:

- “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last.’” (Isaiah 44:6)
- “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.’” (Revelation 2:8; see also Revelation 1:11, 17; 22:13)

*Yahweh* of the Old Testament and Christ of the New refer to themselves as “the First and the Last” because both are the same self-existent, eternal Being.

Consider this exchange between God and Moses in Exodus 3:13-15:

Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. *This is My name forever*, and this is My memorial to all generations.’” (Emphasis ours.)

Here, the God of the fathers of Israel reveals His name as “I AM.” Therefore, the LORD God (*Yahweh Elohim*) whom we now know as Jesus Christ also forever goes by the name “I AM.”

To this, we must add this New Testament passage where Jesus confronts the Jews:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Then



they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (John 8:56-59)

Jesus declares that He is I AM, their God. No wonder their immediate reaction was to stone Him! They considered it the ultimate blasphemy instead of essential truth revealed.

## The Law

The Bible identifies Jesus Christ as the God of the Old Testament, *Yahweh Elohim*.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, when Jesus speaks, He is both the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. Consider this fundamental characteristic of both:

- For I, Jehovah [*Yahweh*], change not; therefore ye, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6, *American Standard Version*)
- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

Considering this unchanging nature, why would many in Christianity paint such different pictures, in many cases literally, of Jesus Christ and the Old Testament God? Knowing that *Yahweh Elohim* is also Jesus Christ requires rethinking a core issue—the law. Because *Yahweh Elohim* and Jesus Christ are one and the same, a Being who does not change and is the same yesterday, today, and forever, it is inconceivable to believe that He came to do away with the very laws that He created to be obeyed by His people.

He said as much in Mathew 5:17: “Don’t suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning” (*Contemporary English Version*® Copyright © 1995 American Bible Society. All rights reserved.).

Contrary to Christ’s warning, but true to human nature (Romans 8:7), many do suppose He did away with His laws. He proves how wrong that is by the verses that follow. As examples, in verses 21-22, about murder, and verses 27-28, about adultery, He explains that a full understanding covers not just the physical acts but also the *thoughts* and *motivations* that lead to those actions.

In each of these instances, rather than abolishing the law, He expands it, making it more sweeping than it ever was in the Old Testament. No longer is physical obedience sufficient. Our Savior adds the

higher standard of spiritual compliance.

Because Israel was a physical nation without access to the Holy Spirit, only physical obedience was possible. Since the first Christian Pentecost in Acts 2, we have access to God’s Spirit and a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26-27). With that Spirit, *Yahweh Elohim*, Jesus Christ, now charges us to accomplish His full intent by walking in His statutes, keeping His judgments, and doing all this from a new spiritual heart.

Because Christ made plain the spiritual intent of the law He created as *Yahweh Elohim* in the Old Testament, Paul could later write that the law is spiritual (Romans 7:14) and that “the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12).

For those who think and teach otherwise, Christ says to them:

- 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. (Matthew 5:19)
- Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:22-23)

Contrary to Christ’s explicit warning, many do suppose and conjure up various reasons and explanations as to why the law is no longer in force. The unchanging Christ says to them what He said to the Jews of His day: “. . . making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do” (Mark 7:13).

Why do some push to do away with the law and commandments that we now see Christ created? Have we ever wondered what is so terrible about them? What is so bad about honoring one’s parents and not murdering, committing adultery, stealing, or lying that they must be done away? Is it because to justify rejecting one commandment a person must reject all?

## The Sabbath

While most Christians would not outrightly reject nine of the Ten Commandments, there is one that

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most do—the Sabbath.

In Mark 2:28 and Luke 6:5, Christ says, “The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” “Lord” here is from the Greek word *kurios*. Zodhiates defines *kurios* in this way: “Lord, master, owner, as the possessor, owner, master, e.g. of property.” Christ, as the Creator of the seventh-day Sabbath, is rightly claiming to be the owner of that Sabbath. Nowhere in the New Testament does He trade that day for another. A Catholic cardinal concurs:

But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify. (Gibbons, James Cardinal. *Faith of Our Fathers*. First published 1876)

Cardinal Gibbons is correct. No such scripture exists that shows the owner of the Sabbath, Christ, ever relinquished ownership over the day nor that the writers of the New Testament ever traded it for another day (nor could they, as they did not have the authority from God to do so).

Therefore, by what authority do some observe a Sunday “Sabbath”? Christ, His disciples, and the first-century Christians kept Saturday, the seventh-day Sabbath. Who authorized a Sunday “Sabbath”? Who made this change? How did it occur?

History gives the when and who of the change from a Saturday to Sunday Sabbath (from <http://cgi.org/who-changed-the-sabbath-to-sunday/>):

- When Emperor Constantine I—a pagan sun-worshipper—came to power in AD 313, he legalized Christianity and made the first Sunday-keeping law. His infamous Sunday enforcement law of March 7, AD 321, reads as follows: “On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed.” (*Codex Justinianus* 3.12.3, trans. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5th ed. (New York, 1902), 3:380, note 1.)
- The Sunday law was officially confirmed by the Roman Papacy. The Council of Laodicea in AD 364 decreed, “Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s day [*sic*; Sunday is not the Lord’s day] they shall especially honour, and,

as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ” (Strand, *op. cit.*, citing Charles J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, 2 [Edinburgh, 1876] 316).

- Again, “The Catholic Church, . . . by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday” (*The Catholic Mirror*, official publication of James Cardinal Gibbons, Sept. 23, 1893).
- “Protestants do not realize that by observing Sunday, they accept the authority of the spokesperson of the Church, the Pope” (*Our Sunday Visitor*, February 5, 1950).
- “Sunday is our mark of authority. . . . [T]he church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact” (*Catholic Record of London*, Ontario Sept 1, 1923).

The law created by *Yahweh Elohim*, Jesus Christ, included a seventh-day or Saturday Sabbath. Neither Christ nor the apostles sanctioned the change to Sunday. Nearly three hundred years after them, the Church of Rome did. That church and her daughters, the Protestant churches, continue to bow to that church’s authority rather than that of Jesus Christ, *Yahweh Elohim*.

It is interesting that many in Christianity do not know who the God of the Old Testament is, even though the Bible teaches it plainly. It is also interesting to see how that blind spot has colored their view of God’s law and commandments, particularly the Sabbath. Finally, it is sobering to realize how that blind spot has led many to unwittingly accept papal authority—human authority—over the authority of the Creator God, the God of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ.

—Pat Higgins

<sup>1</sup> In only a handful of verses in the entire Old Testament can we understand *Yahweh* to refer to another member of the God Family, God the Father (see Psalm 2:2, 7, 11; 110:1-2, 4; Isaiah 61:1). *Yahweh* appears 6,807 times in Scripture, and all but these few refer to the Creator God who became Jesus Christ. In each of these exceptions, the Israelites understood them to refer to the Creator God interacting with a man (the type), but New Testament revelation shows that they can be understood as interaction between the Father and the Son (the antitype).

# The “Open Door” of Philadelphia

The church of God gives scant attention to Isaiah 22 these days, which is surprising because it not only contains a Messianic prophecy, but it also holds the key to understanding one of the church’s most hotly contested verses in Scripture, at least in recent decades. If Isaiah 22 were better and more widely understood, we might not still be witnessing the competition and one-upmanship in the greater church of God.

The first half of Isaiah 22 (verses 1-14) contains a prophecy against Jerusalem. The prophet foretells the captivity of his countrymen due to their unfaithfulness to God and the covenant they made with Him. Even though God had “called for weeping and for mourning, for baldness and for girding with sackcloth” (verse 12), the unconcerned Jews carried on with “joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating meat and drinking wine: [saying] ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’” (verse 13).

Isaiah continues with a proclamation concerning two government officials:

Thus says the LORD God of hosts: “Go, proceed to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the house, and say: ‘What have you here, and whom have you here, that you have hewn a sepulcher here, as he who hews himself a sepulcher on high, who carves a tomb for himself in a rock? Indeed, the LORD will throw you away violently, O mighty man, and will surely seize you. He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball into a large country; there you shall die, and there your glorious chariots shall be the shame of your master’s house. So I will drive you out of your office, and from your position he will pull you down. Then it shall be in that day, that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe and strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The key of the

*“I know your works. See, I have set before you  
an open door, and no one can shut it;  
for you have a little strength, have kept My word,  
and have not denied My name.”*

—Revelation 3:8, NKJV



## Prophecy Watch

The "Open Door" of Philadelphia

house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house. They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the posterity, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers. In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'the peg that is fastened in the secure place will be removed and be cut down and fall, and the burden that was on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken.'" (Isaiah 22:15-25)

Verse 15 introduces us to a man named Shebna, called the "steward" who was "over the house," that is, the royal household. The word for "steward" can also indicate the treasurer or the prefect of the palace, both pivotal positions. All indications point to Shebna being the man in highest authority under Hezekiah. He was essentially the king's right hand, not unlike Joseph in Egypt under the Pharaoh.

God gave Isaiah the task of delivering His judgment to Shebna, which began with removing him from office. After this, Scripture refers to him as "Shebna the scribe" instead of "Shebna the steward" (II Kings 18:18-37; 19:2; Isaiah 36:3-22; 37:2), having been given a position of lesser authority. The remainder of God's judgment was that he would be deported to another country—likely Assyria—where he would die.

God's charge against Shebna deals with his ostentation and presumption. He was not the king, yet he presumed to have a burial place among the royal dead, who were interred in sepulchers of prominence on a mountain. He tried to give himself greater honor than had been bestowed upon him—a bold move that indicates his mind's tendency. He was more interested in his own affairs and his place in history than he was in simply doing his job.

His "glorious chariots" of verse 18 illustrate a focus on image and reputation rather than on substance. He was more concerned about his own glory than in the well-being of the nation, which was

crumbling around him. Because of his focus on himself instead of God's will, God took away his authority and later removed him from the land altogether.

### ELIAKIM

God then fills his office with His servant, Eliakim. *Eliakim* means "whom God will raise up" or "the resurrection of God," both of which apply to Jesus Christ. God gives Eliakim the substantial authority and responsibility that Shebna had. Verse 21 says he "shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah," much as Joseph said, God "has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt" (Genesis 45:8). For both Eliakim and Joseph, their authority was exceeded by only one other person.

Take note of Isaiah 22:22, as Christ quotes it in the letter to the church at Philadelphia: "The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open." Eliakim's authority to "open . . . and shut" is a result of "the key of the house of David" being put "on his shoulder." We can compare this with Isaiah 9:6-7, another Messianic prophecy:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and *the government will be upon His shoulder*. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, *Everlasting Father*, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His government* and peace there will be no end, *upon the throne of David and over His kingdom*, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Emphasis ours throughout.)

The key of the house of David, then, represents God's governance, specifically His governance over Israel. The Bible even names the royal throne—the throne on which David and Solomon sat—as "the throne of the LORD" (I Chronicles 29:23; see

***"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;  
and the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,  
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—Isaiah 9:6, NKJV

II Chronicles 9:8)! God has sworn that David would always have an heir to sit on that throne (Jeremiah 33:17).

Thus, the key on Eliakim's shoulder represents the power of the government that would ultimately rest on the Messiah's shoulder. It involves the royal line of David and all the authority that resulted from God's covenant and promises to him. The Messiah would come from that same line, and He will sit on that throne when He returns and establishes His Kingdom (Isaiah 9:7).

In his position as second-in-command, Eliakim served as the ultimate gatekeeper, granting or denying access to the house of David at his discretion. He could open the door, and no one could shut it. Having the door opened meant access to the king's presence, and thus to the God-given authority and blessings of the royal line, as well as to all the resources of the treasury and storehouse. But if the steward shut the door, all of that access was blocked, and no one could overrule his decision.

It was a significant position. It is no wonder that God would not tolerate the likes of Shebna in it, who was more interested in his legacy and earthly pomp than fulfilling his office with gravity and faithfulness.

### A PEG IN A SECURE PLACE

Verses 23-24 continue with God's elucidation of Eliakim's role:

I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house. They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the posterity, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers.

God likens the role of a steward to a securely fastened peg or nail. At the time, houses and other buildings commonly had durable spikes or large pins affixed to the walls during the building process. They were attached in places strong enough to bear the weight of whatever would be hung on them: usually, all sorts of utensils and vessels. In contrast, God compares unfaithful Israel to a peg made of a flimsy vine branch—utterly unfit for the service He required (Ezekiel 15:3).

Both the Tabernacle and Temple featured such pegs (Exodus 27:19; 38:20), and Ezra, reflecting on God's graciousness, refers to being given "a peg in His holy place" (Ezra 9:8). However, unless Eliakim was a priest—and there is no indication that he was—he would not have been serving in the

Temple, so the "secure place" probably refers to something else.

The word translated as "secure" ("sure," KJV) is used to describe something that is well-supported, stable, assured, certain, and trustworthy—a thing in which a person can put his faith. Specifically, it is used to describe the house or dynasty of David (I Samuel 25:28; II Samuel 7:16; I Kings 11:38), a house that is assured because God continues to support it. Thus, the meaning is that God fastened Eliakim like a nail into the "secure place" of the house of David, and he would serve as a trustworthy implement in supporting the many "vessels"—people—who were part of that house.

The NKJV reads that Eliakim would be "a glorious throne to his father's house." The *New English Translation*<sup>1</sup> renders this, "he will bring honor and respect to his father's family." This detail, too, is reminiscent of Joseph, who brought great honor to his father, Jacob, through the glory given to him by God in Egypt (Genesis 45:9-13).

Both ideas of being "fastened in a secure place" and bringing glory to the house of one's father are, however, even more applicable to Jesus Christ, who is so steadfast and certain that He does not merely support "vessels" but is now "*upholding all things* by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). All of the members of His Father's house—all His brothers and sisters—can confidently look to Him for stability and support, yet one of His main purposes has been to glorify His—our—Father.

The last part of God's declaration through Isaiah is ambiguous in its reference: "In that day," says the LORD of hosts, "the peg that is fastened in the secure place will be removed and be cut down and fall, and the burden that was on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 22:25). Scholars offer differing opinions as to whom God is referring.

Because this prophecy follows His calling Eliakim "a peg in a secure place," it seems to imply that Eliakim, too, would become unfaithful and eventually be cut off. However, notice that it is prefaced with "in that day," just as Shebna's demotion and Eliakim's promotion would happen "in that day" (Isaiah 22:20). This linking of the events to "that day" suggests that the "peg" that is removed and cut off in verse 25 represents Shebna, who would be replaced with a peg that would become glorious, Eliakim.

### AN OPEN DOOR

As mentioned previously, Christ quotes Isaiah 22:22 in the preamble of His letter to the church at

## Prophecy Watch

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Philadelphia: “These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’” (Revelation 3:7).

In identifying Himself to the church, He quotes what He said through Isaiah concerning Eliakim. If we want to understand the letter to Philadelphia, we must begin with this reference. Jesus clarifies that Eliakim’s role was a type of the stewardship role that He Himself now fills. In other words, in quoting Isaiah, Jesus declares that He is the ultimate fulfillment of Eliakim’s position as steward of the house.

Now consider verse 8: “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” Christ announces that He has set an open door before this church and tells them *why*.

It is imperative to catch the way Jesus says this. The reason they have an open door is *because* they have a little strength, have kept His Word, and have not denied His name. Thus, the open door is mentioned in response to their condition coupled with their faithfulness. We need to grasp this to recognize what the open door is. The *Holman Christian Standard Bible*<sup>2</sup> captures this aspect well: “I know your works. Because you have limited strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name, look, I have placed before you an open door that no one is able to close.”

What is this open door? The conventional interpretation among those who have come out of the Worldwide Church of God is that Christ has given the Philadelphians an open door *to preach the gospel*, an idea that is not without merit. In three of Paul’s epistles, he uses an open door as a metaphor for an opportunity to preach (I Corinthians 16:9; II Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3). This metaphor has no connection at all to Christ’s quotation of Isaiah 22:22, but we will follow the rabbit hole to see where this typically leads us.

Christ promises to keep the Philadelphians from the hour of trial, boosting the importance of being a

Philadelphian because it involves protection during the Tribulation. Consequently, it then becomes imperative to determine which church group appears to have *the* open door to preach the gospel, because—the reasoning goes—God will protect that group.

Suddenly, a tremendous interest then arises in accumulating “proof” of an open door, since it will apparently establish that a group is Philadelphian and guaranteed protection. The “proof” is then held up as the reason all church members should join that group instead of another. But when this is the primary approach, what people usually focus on are not the things that truly matter but numbers—like how many radio or television stations the group is on, how many new people are attending services, how many subscribers or website hits it receives, or what percentage of its income a group spends on preaching the gospel.

We can add to this heady mix the incongruity of boasting about preaching the gospel with great strength. Remember, Christ identifies the Philadelphians as having only “a little strength”! It cannot be both ways.

The idea has been that, if we want to be protected and to “escape all these things which will come to pass” (Luke 21:36), we have to be with the group whose door to preach the gospel is open just a little wider than the rest. Yet, if our motivation is nothing more than self-preservation, something is dreadfully wrong. Christ specifically warns of this approach when He says that he who seeks to save his life will lose it (Luke 9:24; 17:33).

When the open door is interpreted to mean an opportunity to preach the gospel, the fruit has been exclusivity, comparing ourselves among ourselves (II Corinthians 10:12), division, competition, and a pitiful supply of love—works of the flesh rather than fruit of the Spirit. This occurs largely because people keep pushing God and all He is doing out of the picture. It is easy to focus on the works of men—which harkens back to God’s controversy with Shebna.

(continued on page 18)

***“These things says He who is holy, He who is true,  
‘He who has the key of David,  
He who opens and no one shuts,  
and shuts and no one opens.”***

—Revelation 3:7, NKJV



(continued from page 6)

factor under Christ so that church members could be speaking and acting as one. The circumcision issue caused extensive turmoil during this critical period. The specific issue will be addressed in far more detail later in this series.

We can learn a great deal by accepting the reality that the church does not exist in a vacuum. It affects and is affected by the surrounding culture its members live and operate within. God intends it to be this way. We can understand this better by reviewing what is happening in our times as several major cultural issues have burst forth on us recently. Somewhat similar events were taking place in Judea and reshaping daily life there.

1. The term “Christian” does not present a unified doctrinal view to the world. Americans claim to live in a Christian nation, but its Christian churches have never presented a united view as to exactly what a Christian is or what Christian doctrines are. Christianity is more divided now than it has ever been. Is Christ divided? This disunity increases cultural conflict.

2. Cultural conflict exists because Muslims, for example, want to convert us to their religion and at the same time passionately desire to conquer us. We can combine this with the fact that immigrants—many of whom also have a conquering mindset—make little or no effort to blend in or assimilate with American culture. Those migrating to the U.S. undoubtedly have needs that are not being met in their home nations, which are torn with dangerous turmoil. Nonetheless, rather than working to improve their countries, they demand that America take care of them no matter the expense or effect on American citizens.

3. This nation is experiencing cultural conflict because secular citizens are doing their best to convince nominally religious Christians that God does not exist and that human intellect is sufficient to overcome all cultural problems. At the same time, through the courts, they actively persecute those who believe in God. While this kind of persecution has slackened recently, it is still happening here and there.

4. Cultural clashes are occurring over the role and style of our government. Many people want to alter the government to become socialist or communist to force wealth-creators to

redistribute their wealth to those who are, for whatever reason, not working. In other words, they promote a form of theft under the guise of fairness, equality, and compassion.

5. To gain advantage and push their agendas, people both in government and in media are twisting truth to advance their cause of the day. “Fake news” has become the phrase of the day, and it is widening the divisions among Americans both politically and culturally.

No matter when in history God calls an individual into His service, human nature never stops attempting to gain control of cultural life to achieve its self-centered ends against God. Romans 8:7-8 records a human constant: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” In practical fact, this means that first-century Judea was in many ways not much different culturally—and certainly religiously—than today’s America. It had a constant undercurrent of low-level, cultural turmoil.

When Christianity began, Judea’s culture had already been unstable for several decades. First-century Judea was rife with political, religious, and economic strife. The Jews were under the military and political thumb of the all-conquering Romans, and that kept the cultural pot continually simmering with barely suppressed resentment. Authors consistently portray the Romans of the time complaining about Jewish religious activists inciting people emotionally. Satan is expert at revealing injustices to people who then cannot hold their tempers in check. They go on to agitate others into joining with them to secure an advantage over those they believe are oppressing them.

The comedic movie, *Time Bandits*, portrays this theme well using midgets as the central figures. The movie illustrates that, no matter what period of history the characters crashed into, the culture was at some level of uproar and agitation. The movie even had a scene portraying Satan sitting on his throne above all this commotion, actively keeping the cultural pot stirred through his incessant meddling in human affairs.

## Enter Jesus, the Gospel, and the Church

Jesus was born into this simmering culture. Religious Jews had high expectations of the Messiah’s arrival. Without a doubt, God drew attention to Jesus’ birth, moving people to talk about the unusual activity

## Personal

*Why Hebrews Was Written*

taking place in Bethlehem. In this way, the cultural pot was kept simmering for thirty years as Jesus matured and began preaching the truth of God's awesome purpose. Large crowds of people gathered to listen to His messages.

Increased attention was focused on Him especially when news of His miracles entered the mix. The biblical accounts record that, just before the Passover of His crucifixion, huge crowds in Jerusalem wanted to proclaim Him king. His popularity

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

ROMANS 8:7-8

helped spur Jewish authorities into public action against Jesus, adding more kindling to the growing attention and turmoil surrounding Him. His trial, conviction, crucifixion, and resurrection stoked the cultural fire even higher. However, things exploded on the Day of Pentecost when God poured out His Holy Spirit, and people heard Peter's sermon explaining what they were witnessing.

The term *gospel* essentially means “good news.” The book of Acts chronicles the impact of the first few years of preaching God's wonderful purpose to the people of that area of the world, combined with His miraculous interventions to amplify its influence. It is not difficult to perceive of Acts as a collection of news bulletins from the front lines, informing the church membership of the astounding effects of the gospel message. By following God's overview of events as given in the book of Acts, we can come to understand why He inspired the book of Hebrews to be written.

In Acts 2:29-43, Peter explains from Scripture what the people were witnessing as Acts begins unfolding its story:

“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and

buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

This event is only the beginning of the cultural impact of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and of the early church through the efforts of the apostles in Jerusalem. Notice Acts 3:11-21:

Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy One and

the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

Peter preaches the gospel with vigorous authority. The Jewish authorities respond in Acts 4:1-4:

Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of men came to be about five thousand.

The number of those converted was up to 5,000 in just a few days. Though the focus is Jerusalem, the surrounding culture in Judea was receiving quite a shock.

God continues the powerful revelation of His good news, stirring the Jerusalem area as it had never been before. Acts 4:13-21 details the first weak, satanic counterattack against the apostles by the carnal religious elements:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, “What shall we do to these men? For indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who

dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.

These initial actions against the apostles had no effect at all. Acts 5:14, 17-18 reports:

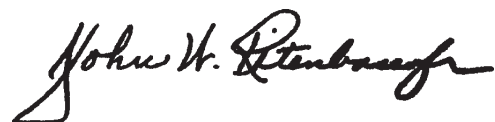
And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. . . . Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

The authorities, failing to discourage the apostles, imprisoned them, but an angel of the Lord released them from their imprisonment. The religious authorities subsequently tried them, but Peter and the other apostles proclaimed in Acts 5:29, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Though this infuriated the religious authorities, the highly respected Pharisee, Gamaliel, calmed them down by warning them to take care because they could be fighting God rather than men.

By the close of Acts 5, though still very angry, the Pharisaic mob relented, deciding to do no more at that time than strongly warn the apostles to speak no longer in Christ’s name and give them a beating. Paradoxically, their actions produced a high measure of joy in the apostles because they saw it as being proved worthy to suffer shame for His name. Acts 6 begins by reporting that “in those days, . . . the number of the disciples was multiplying.” Clearly, God was frustrating the unconverted Jews from making any headway in their attempts to thwart the knowledge of His purpose from expanding.

We will continue to gather evidence for the main reasons why the church needed the epistle to Hebrews.

In Christian love,





(continued from page 14)

## OTHER INTERPRETATIONS

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins contains another open door, one that allows the wise to enter the wedding yet keeps the foolish out. However, a problem with this interpretation is that it is tantamount to Jesus giving an unconditional guarantee of inheriting the Kingdom.

Scripture consistently teaches faithfulness until the end rather than a promise of success before it is over. In His letter to Smyrna, for example, Jesus says, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." A crown awaits them only if they remain faithful until death. All the other promises in His letters are conditioned on overcoming, so it is unlikely that Philadelphia's open door is an unconditional guarantee of an entrance to the wedding.

Another common usage of the door metaphor is that of the grave. Graves are opened, and they have doors or gates at the entrance. An open door with regard to the grave could refer to the resurrection, as Jesus also says He holds the keys to Death and Hades (see Revelation 1:18). But this is also not a good fit, since the reference to Eliakim is about granting or withholding access, specifically access to greater authority and abundance. If we suppose that Jesus promises an open door from the grave into the first resurrection, we run into the same problem of Jesus guaranteeing eternal life before the end. It is unscriptural and would corrode Christian character.

Scripture also uses doors as metaphors for physical deliverance. This usage shows up in a few places in the book of Acts, where God provides the apostles with literal open doors to escape imprisonment. This interpretation could coincide with the promise to keep the Philadelphians from the hour of trial. However, it is difficult to draw any cogent connection between this idea and the example of Eliakim, which Jesus purposefully used.

When we understand Christ's reference to Eliakim, that He is now the fulfillment of that role, we can understand the open door without having to force anything. Consider the access He grants, saying in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" Through Christ's blood, we have access to the Almighty, the Most High God.

After the seven letters, in Revelation 4:1, John is shown an open door in heaven. To see what is behind the open door, we must read and meditate on the rest of the chapter. It is profound, describing where we approach in spirit when we pray. Far from suggesting that the Philadelphians are going to heaven, the chapter reiterates the fact of their access to the One in heaven. Through Christ, we have entrance into the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of the Great God, which we may enter with boldness (Hebrews 10:19).

Notice what Jesus says in Luke 11:9-10, 13:

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. . . . If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

If we knock and keep knocking (as the Greek indicates), God opens the door. The Philadelphians have had to knock because they have only a little strength, and they know it. But they also know that the only way to courageously endure (Revelation 3:10) is to seek the strength of God. Thus, the One they seek responds, giving more of His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the means by which the Father and the Son dwell within the adopted sons of God. By giving the Spirit, He gives more of Himself. No one can shut that open door, though we can certainly ignore it and "neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3).

The letter to Philadelphia is not about the mighty works of powerful men. It begins with the tremendous help that is available to those who are weak, but who keep God's Word, who do not deny His name, and who persevere in faith. Because they consistently knock, Christ reminds them of His pivotal position as second-in-command to the Absolute Deity and that through Him as Steward, they have access to the throne of God.

The Philadelphians' strength is small, but God's is without limit. They are not those who seek after earthly glory, like Shebna, but they are faithful in their responsibilities to the Most High God, like Eliakim—and like Jesus Christ.

—David C. Grabbe

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# The Politicization of Motherhood

## — Part Two —

The political assault on motherhood and the nuclear family continues.

In Part One, we discussed the growing political divide over the traditional role that a mom plays in the rearing of her children. Erica Kommissar, a psychoanalyst and self-professed liberal, is convinced, despite her political leanings, that stay-at-home mothering is critical to the development of emotionally healthy children, especially for the first three years of life.

This idea runs contrary to most liberal thinking that mothers should focus on returning to work as soon after childbirth as is possible, while, if need be, leaving their newborn to be raised at a daycare center.

While many mainstream news outlets have actively ignored Kommissar and her book, others have openly tried to invalidate her research and controversial conclusions by accusing her of inflicting guilt upon working mothers. One such rebuttal was headlined “New Moms Have Plenty to Deal With at Work. Don’t Add More Guilt,” written by Lauren Smith Brody:

I was stunned to read author and therapist Erica Kommissar extolling the virtues of mommy guilt in a recent *Wall Street Journal* interview. Her new book, *Being There*, urges mothers to stay home with their children for their first three years of life; my new book, *The Fifth Trimester*, gives new mothers the tools and agency to go back to work with a small baby, even if they must do so *before they are physically and emotionally ready to be there*, as 75 percent of the women I surveyed reported had been the case. (Emphasis ours throughout.)

It is noteworthy that Brody is shaming Kommissar for the guilt she imposes upon new mothers while she shamelessly promotes her own book by admitting that 75 percent of the new mothers she interviewed are returning to work “before they are physically and emotionally ready to do so.” Reading further exposes a more dubious agenda:

I discovered in my research that when a mother feels guilty for working, she’s feeling anxious about a supposed “choice” she made in the context of societal norms—to work, to leave her baby, to invest in her career’s future and strive to make more money in spite of the *gender pay gap*.

Instead of offering an objective rebuttal to Kommissar’s research and conclusions, Brody, and

most of the progressive left, seem far more concerned about addressing the gender pay gap in America, while striving to eliminate any guilt that an absentee mother quite naturally feels.

It is not our purpose to demonize daycare, which, in and of itself, is not evil. It is but one facet of this world, operating without a knowledge of God. Many fine people devote their working lives to helping children, and there is no good reason to doubt their sincerity or their utility to society. Financial circumstances force many well-intentioned mothers into the workplace despite their better desires.

However, society suffers when infected with the political agendas of the feminist left. This godless strategy seeks to destroy the traditional institution of marriage, and it degrades motherhood by teaching that a woman’s worth is solely determined by only one of the many hats she may choose to wear—that is, her job outside the home and her family. The following quotes expose the evil nature of this toxic way of thinking:

- Feminist blogger Amy Glass writes, “You will never have the time, energy, freedom or mobility to be exceptional if you have a husband and kids.”
- Sheila Cronin, a feminist and leader of the National Organization of Women, claims: “Since marriage constitutes slavery for women, it is clear that the women’s movement must concentrate on attacking this institution. Freedom for women cannot be won without the abolition of marriage.”

Raising children is a team effort. Ideally, mothers do not do it alone, which is one reason why marriage is such an important institution in God’s Plan for humanity. If one or the other parent is not there to raise and nurture a child, then the extended family should help, including grandparents, aunts, and uncles, if possible. As children grow older, others come into play, such as neighbors, teachers, coaches, ministers, employers, and so on. However, research shows the mother lays the all-important foundation for emotionally healthy children.

Finally, while she may choose to wear other hats—as a wife, daughter, church member, employee, or employer—her role as a mother is critical to the future of the family, the community, the church, and the nation.

—Mike Ford

## Are You Justified?

Our final judgment would be grim if not for a remarkable manifestation of God's grace. In anticipation of our final Day of Judgment, our heavenly Father demonstrated His justice—His commitment to set things right—in Jesus Christ's death. Consequently, He *justifies* through grace all those who have faith in Christ, demonstrating their trust in God's plan (Romans 3:24-26).

The verb "justify" occurs 39 times in the New Testament, and 29 of these usages are by Paul. The apostle presents Christ as the second Adam whose righteousness and substitutionary death have justified all who place their faith in Him. His death and resurrection provide the basis for the believer's justification and salvation.



1. What does "justify" mean? Romans 8:33.

**COMMENT:** The verb *justify* (*dikaiō* in Greek) is a legal term meaning "to acquit, to declare as righteous"; it is the opposite of "condemn." Synonymous terms are "count righteous," "remit sins," and "not count sin" (Romans 4:5-8). Since only a judge can justify the accused or offer pardon, our justification must proceed only from our supreme Judge—God the Father—whereby He makes us acceptable and sets us in a right relationship with Him, vindicated and declared to be in the right.

2. What does God require of a person before being justified? Romans 4:5-13, 23-25.

**COMMENT:** Before all else, God requires a person to have faith in order to be justified. Then, he must repent of his sins (Psalm 51; Matthew 3:1-2; Acts 2:37-38; 3:19) and upon baptism, be born from above (or made spiritually alive) by the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8). Much more than a simple human decision, justification is God's recognition and acceptance of an individual's repentance and decision to be baptized. At that time, a faithful individual becomes a part of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13) through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:24).

3. Is justification a one-time action by God? Romans 5:1; I Corinthians 6:11.

**COMMENT:** The death of Christ provided—once and for all—the sacrificial blood needed to atone, reconcile, or justify all repentant sinners to God. However, justification is a process that involves prior, current, and future applications to the sinner (Romans 8:33; 2:13; Galatians 5:4-5) and relates to the beginning of conversion, its continuation, and its culmination. Romans 5:1 uses an aorist passive participle to convey the act of justification, indicating an action being performed upon us by someone else (God). Because man continues to sin after his initial justification, to remain properly aligned or reconciled with God, he must continue to

repent and overcome so that he might continue to be justified (Hebrews 2:1-3; 9:28; 10:26-27).

4. Did God always intend for justification to be necessary? II Corinthians 5:14-19.

**COMMENT:** God always planned for our justification by faith. As for all who lived faithfully before Christ's human life, death, and resurrection, it is applied retroactively (Romans 4). Since God knew Adam and Eve would misuse the freedom of choice He gave them, leading to sin, He made provision for their justification (and ours) through the blood of Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world (Hebrews 9:26; I Peter 3:19-21; Revelation 13:8).

5. How does Christ's justification of a sinner become personal? Romans 10:6-13.

**COMMENT:** It becomes personal "by faith" (Romans 5:1). Faith requires our acceptance of the substitutionary sacrifice Christ performed on our behalf to accomplish what we are unable to achieve on our own—reconciliation with God. It is not inherent, but the result of our individual belief—our acceptance and appropriate response to the calling we receive from the Father (Romans 4:3:22; 10:4, 9-11; Ephesians 1:13, 19; Acts 16:31).

This faith is not some impersonal, abstract phenomenon. Instead, it is a concrete, spiritual manifestation of the will of God, given by God personally and individually through His Son and must also be received personally and individually by the one being reconciled to Him (I Peter 1:7). Nor is it faith in anyone else, but only in Jesus Christ, personally. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God *through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (emphasis ours). Faith in anyone else will not declare a person justified. Our faith must be in the One who bore our sin in His own body, the One in whom the fullness of the divine nature dwelt (Colossians 2:9; Romans 8:3; Galatians 1:4; I Peter 3:18; I John 1:9; 4:10; Revelation 1:5).

—Martin G. Collins