

# Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 28, Number 1

January-February 2019



*Where Is Your*  
**TREASURE?**

# January-February 2019

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The recipients of the epistle of Hebrews were allowing themselves to drift away from what the apostles had taught them. The distractions of coping with the chaos at the end of an age wreaked havoc on their ability to discern what was truly valuable, and their zeal for God was faltering. Because we, too, live on the cusp of the crisis at the close of the age, we must ask ourselves, "Am I seeking treasures on earth or laying up treasures in heaven?"

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# Why Hebrews Was Written

## Part Five

A goal of this series is for the Christian to gain both a greater understanding of God's purpose as well as a sense of urgency about applying His truths to daily life. God's calling of us to reveal His truth is of such high value that our religious life cannot be confined to a mere one-day-of-the-week routine. Will we let the greatest gifts a human can receive slip from our grasp through sheer carelessness? Our calling to be a member of God's Family is a full-time responsibility that we must be fulfilling in appreciation of His creative activities on our behalf. A good measure of urgency pleases God and must accompany our participation under His leadership.

Jesus says in John 5:17, "My father has been working until now, and I have been working." By this, He is indicating that His and the Father's labors in the creation are non-stop. We need to be as honest as possible in evaluating our level of conformity to this standard given by Jesus Christ because we owe it to Him. By not working urgently on our character, could we be like a closed door that keeps Him from

providing us with even more wonderful gifts (Revelation 3:20)? By comparison, He does not even sleep (Psalm 121:4)! He is always aware of the overall state of His program—and that includes each of us personally.

In terms of our spiritual lives, nothing is hidden from Him (Hebrews 4:13). He already knows what we are like now. He also knows our awesome potential for growth toward the function for which He is preparing us. God called us for what we can become, not for what we are now. His calling proves that He loves each of us as individuals. We have His attention, so we must not risk disappointing Him through inactivity.

Our lives have only just begun. Being human, we may have become accustomed to wasting a great deal of time. What are we waiting for? Now is the time to focus on overcoming whatever holds us back from achieving what God desires of us. He has called us to please Him, and it pleases Him when we make progress in transforming into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.

## A Major Gift

The major reason why God supplied the epistle to the Hebrews to us is to make us more specifically aware of the source of spiritual strength readily available to us through our High Priest, Savior, King, and spiritual Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. As close as a prayer away, He has unending wisdom and resources to come to our aid. If we exercise faith, we can readily go to Him. No locked doors bar our access to Him. Perhaps the only things holding us back are our resolve and our fear of failure. He already occupies the above offices and more besides, and He declares that He is willing to come to our assistance. He promises in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

In John 15:1-5, Jesus informs us that God is pleased when we produce fruit that glorifies Him and that without Jesus, we can produce no fruit. If we truly want to be in God's Kingdom, these facts make our responsibility clear. The letter to the Hebrews supplies many details of the practical, spiritual acts our High Priest performs for our eternal benefit. We need the guidance that this vital, scriptural aid offers in combination with the spiritual support our relationship with Him provides. We need to grow and overcome because

"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."

JOHN 15:5

the course God has laid out for us, which we can navigate with Jesus' help, demands our fullest attention.

The book of Hebrews fills the gaps in our understanding of what we must do to fulfill our part in preparing for eternity. Among the first of these Christian works is to live by faith every day. We must rise to meet this challenge. In chapter 11, the epistle supplies us with the names of

twenty examples of those who went before us, setting standards of faithful conduct and works. They establish beyond a doubt that what God has called us to do can be done with our High Priest's assistance. Within their callings, they operated by faith even under great pressure. As worldwide events ratchet up the pressure on us to bail on our calling, we truly need Christ's assistance to follow in their footsteps and produce fruit that pleases Him.

## Caught in a Distracting Storm

In the last three generations, because God has permitted the invention of electronic communications devices, humanity can send and receive information worldwide at a mind-bending, even frightening, pace that demands our attention. We must make choices about what news we should listen to. In one sense, issues like those in our time have always occurred, but as far as we know, they have never before occurred at this accelerated pace for this long a time in man's history. Here in America, it almost seems as if Pandora's Box has not just been cracked open but thrown wide open. And so, we must face the unceasing necessity of making such choices. Some broadcasting stations even proclaim, "All the news, all the time."

Time is an important issue for us all, providing the context during which we accomplish the activities of life. Whatever activities we choose to do, time will be consumed. It is a reality that time waits for no one. Because we realize it is vital to our calling and growth within it, we may already have concerns about time. Most of us, especially those who are a bit older or have been "through the mill," as the saying goes, are also aware that we are running out of it. Are we merely fretting about it, or are we resolved to do something about it?

Hearing news reports can be distracting and even destroy progress because it makes us aware of events of which we have been ignorant. We cannot control the making of news; events will occur as a result of the actions of millions of people living their lives. Nor, for the most part, can we control what news is available to us. However, we can exercise control over what news we choose to consider valuable enough to listen more thoughtfully to and perhaps to act upon.

Time is passing at the same rate of speed as it was when God first called us, but with each second, our time is running out. God called my

wife and I in January 1959, and we were baptized in the same year. As I write, my wife turned 87 just a month ago, and seven weeks before that, I turned 86. We are in our sixtieth year in the church, and those 60 years have seemed to pass in a flash. Neither of us has a lot of sand left to drain from the top of the hourglass, a major reason this subject is percolating through my mind.

These thoughts are not burning a hole in me, which explains my use of the term “percolating.” Throughout this year, I have spoken or written briefly on principles I felt were necessary for me to expound. I usually placed these thoughts at the beginning of a message to help provide motivation that would help church members make better use of their calling. I often chose a subject from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount because the subjects He chose to include in that message are foundational to a disciple’s ability to follow Him, glorify God, and be prepared for His Kingdom.

This article’s principle comes from Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:19-21:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Perhaps among the most underappreciated gifts that God gives when He calls us is the time to amass treasure in heaven. Jesus’ focus on treasure is important to His progress through the sermon at this point because He chose to illustrate first what we choose to do with our available time. At the outset, we must make sure of our aim in life. Overall, He is most interested that we make the best use of our faith, but in this section of His sermon, His concern is our use of time. What we choose to do with our time reflects on what we consider most important to achieve. Our use of time determines how much we will accomplish.

“Treasure” represents what we deem to be valuable enough to spend one of our most valuable resources—time—to obtain. It is what we hold dear, maybe even believe costly enough to give our life obtaining or defending once we have it. Perhaps our treasure is something we do not yet hold but what we are searching for or working to achieve.

## What We Value Matters

Jesus used “treasure” to represent something we consider more important than something “common.” It is something we would eagerly work for if we knew it is available and achievable. Due to the nature of what the term represents, treasure can, with no effort, motivate a person to decide to use his time in its pursuit, unlike an ordinary or common thing. Because of a person’s perception of its value, treasure can move him to action almost as soon as he becomes aware of its availability.

“All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

J.R.R. TOLKIEN

In the Western world, treasure often means wealth—money, riches. It, however, may not connote money per se, but rather what money can buy: an impressive home in an exclusive section of town, a specific make of automobile, a prime section of land, or fine clothing. What a person strongly desires is an indicator of his or her treasure. In our thinking, we must not limit “treasure” to wealth. For some, treasure might be becoming a great athlete, entertainer, or artist. In other cultures, people treasure different possessions, but they are almost always things a person feels will bring him the respect, admiration, and esteem of others within his culture.

The treasure motivates the use of its seeker’s time, and if he uses his time pursuing that treasure, due to the way God has arranged His creation, that time is forever lost. It is totally consumed, never to return. This fact is a stark reality to which we must give serious thought in view of what we hold valuable. Everything we do uses time, and events and circumstances will never return. We do not have to think of this as a matter of life and death, but we must afford it thoughtful attention. We must deal with it as an unalterable reality because God’s calling is that valuable. We cannot avoid it if we wish to be in God’s Kingdom. We must not let life simply “fly by” as if time is of no consequence.

Jesus is not declaring that every earthly thing we desire is inherently evil. He is admonishing us that we must judiciously evaluate the use of our time and efforts against His way and purposes for our lives. Because of our calling, His will and directives are now our highest priorities. Material, earthly desires come far down the list. He is most concerned with how we use our faith because salvation is “by grace . . . through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

### Perhaps an Unrealized Effect

Right here, we face one of Jesus’ greater concerns about the possible effects of desiring a wrong treasure. At this point in the Sermon on the Mount, He does not speak much about this concern, but it is nonetheless a danger that He warns about elsewhere, so we must be aware and cautious. He says

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life.”

PROVERBS 4:23

in Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” a powerful cause-and-effect statement. If it is not carefully monitored, a person’s treasure has enough influence to alter his heart for good or evil.

The word “heart” is important in relation to one’s treasure. The Bible says a great deal about the heart, using the term 830 times. Only rarely does Scripture mention the heart as a sustainer of physical life, while referring to it frequently to express traits of what it means to be human. In most cases, what it says about the human heart is not encouraging.

God states this truth in Jeremiah 17:9-10: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of His doing.” This description of unconverted, carnal man does not place humanity in a good light. Solomon urges, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life”

(Proverbs 4:23). *Keep* possesses the sense of “guard” and “preserve.” We must understand that the heart describes or exposes human character and personality.

Scripture often uses the heart to define what in a person’s personality sets him or her apart as different from others. An unconverted person who is therefore not dedicated to God may be said to have an uncircumcised heart. Others may be described as having an evil heart or a humble heart. Ezekiel describes the process of conversion as a person transforming his heart from one of stone to one of flesh. There are frequent calls for us to seek God with all our heart. In Psalm 131:1, the psalmist claims that his heart is not proud.

In addition, the Bible uses the heart to express human emotion. In Exodus 4:14, Aaron’s heart overflows with joy when he sees Moses. Leviticus 19:17 warns us not to hate our brother in our heart. Deuteronomy 1:28 speaks of fear as motivating a loss of heart, while Psalm 27:3 illustrates courage as a product of the heart. Elsewhere in Scripture, we find that despair, sadness, trust, and anger also come from the heart.

In Matthew 15:19-20, Jesus clarifies a major teaching about human conduct:

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things, which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

He pinpoints the human heart as a primary motivator of sinful behaviors that we witness in others and, more importantly, carry out ourselves. As the many examples imply, “the heart” is not the literal, fleshly muscle pumping blood, and thus life, through our bodies, but the symbolic representation of a person’s entire inner being. In this case of Matthew 15:19-20, none of the behaviors is commendable conduct because those to whom Jesus refers are unconverted, sinful men.

The above examples testify to the uncontrolled and potentially damaging uses of the emotional powers God created us to possess. The flipside of this is that through God’s calling, the receipt of His Holy Spirit, and conversion, the heart can be brought under control. In other words, the heart’s inclinations to motivate conduct can be changed, transformed to produce the good conduct God intends.

*(continued on page 15)*

# Unity and Division: The Blessing and the Curse

Part Three: Plastered Stones and Altars—and Lack Thereof

*“And let the peace of God  
rule in your hearts, to which  
also you were called in one  
body; and be thankful.”*

*—Colossians 3:15*

In Part Two, we scanned several Old and New Testament illustrations of God’s activities, particularly judgments that resulted in division. He separates His people into two groups, often of equal size, in the context of judging. Typically, the members of one group receive blessings, while the members of the other group participate in curses. This division, which takes shape as a reconfiguration of what has existed before, may place people in unfamiliar environments and unexpected social contexts. Here in Part Three, we shall focus on a full-bodied, Old Testament example that has a singular relevance to God’s people.

Deuteronomy 27 records Moses’ instruction concerning the issuing of blessings at Mount Gerizim and curses at Mount Ebal. Joshua 8:30-35 records Joshua’s execution of these instructions shortly after the children of Israel had entered the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup>

As we look at Deuteronomy 27, keep in mind that this chapter serves as a prelude to Deuteronomy 28, the more detailed exposition of the blessings and curses associated respectively with obeying or disobeying God’s law:

That day Moses charged the people, saying, “When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to *bless* the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the *curse*: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. (Deuteronomy 27:11-13, emphasis ours throughout)<sup>2</sup>

Plain as day, here is a fifty-fifty division of God’s people. The six tribes God selects to stand on Ebal<sup>3</sup> were those who descended from Jacob’s concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah, plus the descendants of Reuben<sup>4</sup> and Zebulun, the oldest and youngest sons of Leah, respectively. Together, they received the curses. In Part Four, we will look at what those curses were all about and what they had in common.

The remaining six tribes, situated on Mount Gerizim<sup>5</sup> and representing the blessings that naturally result from obedience, were the tribes descended from Rachel, that is, Joseph and Benjamin, as well as the tribes descended from Leah—save, as mentioned above, those descended from Reuben and Zebulun.<sup>6</sup> It makes sense that the blessings should go to the tribes descended from the actual wives of Jacob, Leah and Rachel.<sup>7</sup>

### The Blessing-Curse and Obedience-Disobedience Dichotomies

We see developing, then, the blessing-curse dichotomy, which strictly corresponds to another dichotomy, obedience-disobedience. The blessings and curses are just as much opposites as are their respective causes, obedience and disobedience. They are mutually exclusive. Try as one might, an individual cannot obey and disobey the same rule simultaneously.

But there is something intriguing about this particular division of God’s people:

Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, “Keep the whole commandment that I command you today. And on the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. And you shall write on them all the

words of this law, when you cross over to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you. And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; you shall build an altar to the LORD your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God. And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly. (Deuteronomy 27:1-8)

What God says is perplexing for at least three reasons:

1. Why did God command the building of the altar<sup>8</sup> on Ebal, the mountain of *cursing*?
2. Why were the stones on which the law was written to go on Ebal and not on the mountain of blessing, Mount Gerizim?
3. Why did God limit the type of sacrifices to be offered on that altar to burnt and peace (fellowship) sacrifices? Why no sin offerings? After all, in the symbology, Mount Ebal is related to disobedience, the cause of the curse. Symbolically, Ebal relates to rebellion and sin, but no sin offering was to be offered there.

In considering the puzzle, notice Matthew 25:12, where Christ tells the five unwise virgins, “I do not know you.” They were running out of oil—short of God’s Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 2:14, Paul avers that individuals lacking God’s Spirit are unable “to see spiritual things” (J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English, Revised Edition*, Copyright © J.B. Phillips, 1858, 1859, 1960, 1972). The devout among such individuals may be able to keep the law (to a degree, at least) *in its letter*, that is, the law written on stones, but not in its deeper intent, not

*“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”*  
—Matthew 24:45-46

in its spirit, written as it is on hearts, as God puts it in Jeremiah 31:33.<sup>9</sup>

Symbolically, those on Mount Ebal are cousins to the unwise virgins, lacking the oil necessary to get them to the marriage feast, as Christ says in Matthew 25:10. Unable to discern spiritual things, they have access only to the law written on stones. In His providence, God supplied those laws to them, there on Ebal.

On the other hand, those standing on Mount Gerizim represent those who have God's laws written on their hearts. There are no stones on Gerizim. There does not need to be.

Reflect on this, too: The people on Gerizim represent those in God's church who are fully at peace with God, enjoying fellowship with Him. For them, there is no need for a *further* peace offering. They need not offer peace offerings on an altar.

Also, Christ's comment in Luke 14:33 pertains to them:

"[A]ny one of you who does not *renounce all that he has* cannot be My disciple." Those on Gerizim symbolize those who are Christ's disciples, truly

repentant and fully committed to God, living sacrifices<sup>10</sup> in His service. They have held back nothing. The burnt offering represents such a life, one lived in total dedication to God. Those on Gerizim need not offer burnt offerings anew. They do not need a stone altar, for they have *already* committed their lives to God.

Consequently, there is no more need that an altar be built on Mount Gerizim than there is for plastered stones inscribed with God's laws to be there. Both

stones and altar are superfluous to those on Gerizim. Conversely, those standing on Mount Ebal, not at peace with God, not committed fully to His service, need an altar. That is why God provided one for them—if they will make use of it.

Clearly, Deuteronomy 27 has relevance to the members of God's church today. In Part Four, we shall find even more relevance as we look specifically at the curses the Levites shouted

to those standing on Mount Ebal.

—Charles F. Whitaker  
(See Endnotes on page 18)

*"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."*

—I Corinthians 2:14

## Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal

Both Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal lie west of the Jordan River, Gerizim a bit to the south of Ebal. The peaks of the two mountains are about two miles apart. The Valley of Shechem, which runs between them, is about three miles long and 1,600 feet wide. In this straitened valley, next to the Ark of the Covenant, the priests stood, pronouncing blessings toward Gerizim, curses toward Ebal.

Mount Gerizim rises about 2,840 feet above sea level, while Mount Ebal stands about 3,650 feet tall. Mount Gerizim later became an important center of worship for the Samaritans, whom the Assyrians imported into the land after the fall of ten-tribed Israel (that is, the Northern Kingdom) in 722 BC. The Samaritans eventually built a temple there, which was reputedly torn down by John

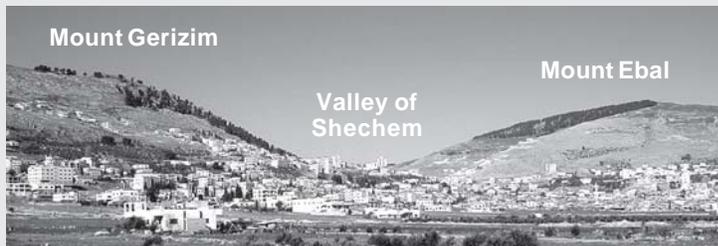
Hyrcanus in the second century before Christ.

There is some evidence that Herod the Great later built a major temple on Mount Gerizim, a rival to the one he erected in Jerusalem. Archeologists have found remains of a substantial temple complex built there by Emperor Hadrian in the early second century AD.

When the Samaritan woman told Christ, as recorded in John 4:20, that her forefathers worshipped on "this mountain," she was referring to Mount Gerizim. To this day, the Samaritans claim (wrongly) that Mount

Gerizim is Mount Moriah, the site of Isaac's abortive sacrifice. Samaritans, observing a highly syncretic belief system, still sacrifice lambs on Mount Gerizim on Passover.

The meaning of Gerizim may be "cut in two," an intriguing interpretation in terms of the thesis of these articles.



# The Falling Away

*The apostle Paul seems to have had a penchant for being misunderstood in his writings. Peter makes note of this when he describes Paul's epistles as containing "some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures" (II Peter 3:16).*

This certainly happened—and continues to happen—in relation to Paul's writings on law and grace, as well as on other doctrines. In I Corinthians, he wrote powerfully against tolerating sin and the necessity of removing immorality from the congregation. Later, he had to write II Corinthians to ensure that the actions of the congregation did not end up doing permanent spiritual harm to the offender.

Similarly, Paul penned II Thessalonians because some of the brethren had misunderstood his words in his previous letter about the time of the end. Some members began to take the wrong path, so he wrote to the congregation again, in part to give the members some clarity about what would happen before Jesus Christ's return. Chapter 2 gives several details of what must take place before the Day of the Lord:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the

son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. . . . For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (II Thessalonians 2:3-4, 7-12)

Years ago, verses 3-4 caught the attention of many who were exiting the Worldwide Church of God because these verses appeared as though they were being fulfilled. Some even went so far as to say that the Pastor General at the time was the man of sin due to his wholesale assault on God's law. They said that with his teaching, he was showing himself to be above God.

However, later in the prophecy, the man of sin—the lawless one—is destroyed with the brightness of Christ's coming, an event that obviously did not happen to that Pastor general. While a great deal of "unrighteous deception" occurred, no one performed any "signs and wonders." At best, we can say that what happened then was a *type* of the falling away. It fit this pattern but did not really fulfill what Paul foretold.

This passage outlines a basic sequence of events: Christ's return is preceded by the appearance of the man of sin, who is preceded by the "falling away." As we look forward to that Day of both darkness and light, we should watch for this falling away to help us stay focused on the surety of Christ's coming.

### APOSTASY

We are immediately presented with a challenge, however, because the Bible contains few supporting scriptures to help us understand exactly what Paul means. The Greek word translated as "falling away"

is *apostasia*, which *Strong's Greek Dictionary* defines as "defection from truth." This word is used in only one other place:

When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. (Acts 21:19-21)

The word *apostasia* is found in verse 21, in the mention of "forsak[ing] Moses." A rumor was circulating that Paul was teaching people to fall away from—to defect from—the truth revealed through Moses, which underscores Peter's observation about how easily Paul's teachings could be misunderstood. Acts 21 gives us a second reference for the usage of *apostasia*, but it tells us little about what Paul had in mind when he warned of *the* falling away—a specific and definitive falling away.

A closely-related form of this word is *apostasion*, which means "separation." In the three places it is used, it is translated as "a certificate of divorce" (Matthew 5:31; 19:7; Mark 10:4). In that related

form as well, we see the concepts of falling away, forsaking, and defecting.

*Apostasia* is also found in four places in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (Joshua 22:22; II Chronicles 29:19; 33:19; Jeremiah 2:19). In each case, the predominate theme is a king (or the whole nation of Israel) rebelling against—forsaking—God and turning to an alien belief system. Applying that to the prophesied “falling away,” we can understand that the truth forsaken in the end times is not truth as an abstract concept but truth that relates to God.

### WHAT IS THE PROPHECY'S SCOPE?

A major question about II Thessalonians 2 is the scope of the described events. As mentioned earlier, one interpretation is that it is a localized occurrence, in the sense of it happening just within the “little flock”—the church. A second interpretation is that since “the falling away” contains the definite article, it refers to a unique event in man’s history, far greater than anything that has happened before. In contrast, the church has had periods of strength and weakness all throughout its history—it goes through cycles of rallying around truth and then gradually letting it slip. This second, universal interpretation is a better fit because, when we look at the whole passage, the events and personalities are worldwide in scope.

Remember, this falling away sets the stage for the man of sin, who will have tremendous influence over mankind. Paul is not writing about apostasy in a small group of people that will give rise to an international personality, but an event on the world scene that creates the right environment to catapult this figure, backed by the power of Satan, to the heights of power.

Paul, then, is letting the church know that it does not have to be concerned about missing the end time. The events leading up to the Day of the Lord will be unmistakable to those with eyes to

see. What will happen will affect the whole world, even though the world will not grasp the spiritual significance.

In this regard, a falling away is taking place right now. Whether it turns out to be *the* falling away remains to be seen. Right now, though, we are witnessing a steady defection from the basic principles of the Bible, away from what we call the Judeo-Christian ethic. This is not brand new, but it is picking up speed. We need to be reminded of it because it can have a detrimental effect on us.

Apostasy is a defection from truth—a forsaking of one spiritual approach in favor of another. In the Old Testament, many of the kings and eventually the whole nation of Israel rebelled against God and chose opposing belief systems. We are seeing the same thing today, but at times, it is harder to recognize because we are accustomed to it, and it is not happening overnight. In the books of Kings and Chronicles, we can read the record of a given king who turned away from God and served the Baals, and the foolishness sounds quick and casual because we are reading a summary. But when a falling away happens around us, perhaps even beginning before we were born, it is easy for our minds to adjust to the point that we almost forget the continuing rebellion against God and His way.

### TRUTH FORSAKEN

In II Thessalonians 2, Paul leaves out some significant details. For example, in verse 9, he writes of the love of the truth, but he does not specify *which* truth he has in view. In verse 11, he speaks of believing “the lie,” but fails to identify it. He also mentions not believing the truth in verse 12 but provides no specifics.

The truth to which he refers does not have to indicate the doctrines that only the church of God understands. It could be as common as the truth that there is a God. The Creator gave the nation of Israel

***“... And God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”***

—II Thessalonians 2:11-12, NKJV

tremendous truth, truth His people could grasp even without the Holy Spirit. Likewise, He has given all mankind truth for which it is accountable, which is why Paul writes that humanity is without excuse (Romans 1:20). In Romans 1:18, he mentions men suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, and the truth under discussion is the simple truth that a Creator God exists, and He requires mankind's worship.

However, today we are witnessing a defection from even this basic reality. As mankind's knowledge has increased, he has misused it to deny the existence of a Creator. The theory of evolution functions as a prop so people do not have to face this reality. Evolution—now at the core of Western culture—is blindly accepted but rarely “proved” individually. Even so, the Western world has subscribed to it so extensively that a person will not be taken seriously if he speaks of Creation.

A second basic truth that is being forsaken is that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God. The apostle John gives this as an attribute of those who are “anti-Christ,” and he uses the existence of such beliefs as proof that it was already the last hour (see I John 4:1-3). We are seeing people divorce themselves from this truth as well. People will say that Jesus existed, but that He was not God but a created being, that He was just a prophet, or that He later settled down with Mary Magdalene and had children. Islam declares that the very idea of God having a Son is blasphemous. Thus, the basic truth about the nature of God—the Father and the Son—is not only being forsaken in the West, but it is also a cause for increasing persecution.

The number of those who hold even these basic truths is declining in the United States, both as a percentage of the population as well as the total number. The biggest declines are in the numbers of Catholics and mainline Protestants, but even the evangelicals' numbers are declining. On

the other hand, the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation—the “nones”—is increasing, and now nearly one-fifth of Americans who were raised with a religion now profess to have none.

In *Survey: Christians Are Not Spreading the Gospel* (November 30, 2017), pollster George Barna observes:

Given the dominant influence on peoples' decision to embrace Christ [i.e. the environment during one's youth], the future is not promising for Christianity unless current patterns change. The adults who are of parenting age are part of the generation that is least likely to be born again, suggesting that the existing and coming segments of children in America are also less likely to embrace the gospel.

Even as the number of “nones” is swelling, the number of Americans with non-Christian beliefs, such as Islam and Hinduism, is also growing. Though the relative numbers are smaller, Wicca and unabashed Satanism are surging. More sobering still is that the U.S. is the most “Christian” of all the nations of Israel. The other Israelitish nations have fallen away even more. In Britain, more people attend mosques each week than churches. We are seeing a falling away from—a forsaking of—even basic truth and a ready acceptance of just about anything else.

Even among those who still profess a belief in the Father and the Son, such belief is becoming so anemic that it is not translating into everyday life. Whereas nominal Christianity used to be a bulwark against obvious immorality, now it is succumbing to fluid definitions of murder, marriage, stealing, and lying. It is operating under increasingly shallow ideas of righteousness, grace, love, and obligation. Mainstream Catholics and Protestants may retain their professions of faith, but in practical terms, they are defecting from what truth they formally held.

***“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”***

—Romans 1:20, NKJV

## PRESSURE ON THE CHURCH

Scripture indicates just how far this defection goes. In three places, the Bible says that when Christ returns, people will *mourn* when they see the One from whom they have distanced themselves and will then be opposing (Matthew 24:30; Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:7). In Revelation 1:7, John says that every race or clan will be dismayed—apparently including most physical Israelites—because the falling away will be so widespread. The falling away does not have to include every person, but as a generality, the creation will defect from its Creator, leading to a ready support of a man who exalts himself above God.

Even though the scope of II Thessalonians 2 is more indicative of the world than the church, we can be sure that this trend will still put pressure on us. The spirit of the age guides the world, but it also always influences the church to some degree. As one evangelist once said, “If it is in the world, it is in the church.” Peter gives us advance warning:

You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (II Peter 3:17-18)

This is the conclusion to a warning that in the last days there will be scoffers, walking according to their own lusts, and denying the surety of Christ’s return. This, too, indicates a defection from once-held truth. Peter says that, since we are warned about these things, we must stand vigilant against them. He warns against falling from our steadfastness or losing our spiritual stability. Obviously, Peter did not believe what has come to be known as the Doctrine of Eternal Security, and there is

good reason for his warning.

The danger for us is probably not a ready acceptance of atheism, nor a sudden sprint into one of the rising belief systems. The greater threat is the slow and gradual one, the peril of neglect, of apathy, of little compromises that set the stage for larger defections. Without a steady walk with God and a consistent practice of His Word, we may forsake the rare understanding that we have been given in favor of the wisdom of men and the opinions of the day. Even now in corners of the church of God, baptized members shrug at things that the Creator God calls abominations. These viewpoints do not arise from the Word of God, but from its dismissal, as the ideas of the age fill in the cracks little by little.

True Christians believe that this present world will come to an end when Christ returns. God has a superior way of life for mankind, and that way is open now to those whom He has called in this age. However, when He returns, the door closes for us. Those who have a love of the truth will be on the victorious side, and those who do not will be condemned. They will have had their pleasure in unrighteousness, and God will give them over to what they have been seeking all along.

In verse 18, Peter counsels us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. If He is the desire of our hearts, we will seek Him, and He will be our reward. If the world is what we find attractive, we will love the world and perish with it.

God does not direct us to arrest the falling away that is taking place in the world but to make sure we do not let things slip in *our* lives. We are urgently warned to take heed that no one deceives us (Matthew 24:4), to take care lest we be weighed down by the cares of this life (Luke 21:34), and to take heed lest we fall (I Corinthians 10:12), so that the day of Christ’s return will be a day of victory for us rather than a day of condemnation.

—David C. Grabbe

***You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.***

—II Peter 3:17-18, NKJV

*(continued from page 6)*

Be aware that what motivates conduct can be changed in either direction. In this article, we are focused on Jesus' teaching about "treasure," in which He gets His point across in only three verses. If allowed, treasure can easily motivate humans into strenuous activity to possess it. We must take Jesus' caution in verse 21 seriously: Our heart will follow the treasure to possess it. His words are a strong, firm warning to make sure our treasure is God-approved.

## Of Rust, Moths, and Thieves

Jesus illustrates His admonishment in Matthew 6:19-20 by counseling us to consider carefully two facts when comparing earthly and heavenly treasures. First, moth and rust cannot destroy heavenly treasures. Second, thieves cannot break in and steal treasures in heaven, which we valued so highly that we worked diligently to possess them. Both categories represent the high probability of earthly treasures steadily declining in value after having cost us much time and energy in obtaining them.

The first category—moth and rust—represent all the factors existing in the natural world that cause earthly treasures to deteriorate and lose their value. Foods become moldy, garments wear out, metals tarnish—even land can lose its fertility, become infested with weeds, or be washed away. Fences and walls break down, roofs leak and cave in, and termites invade and destroy houses. Hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, fires, and floods can destroy expensive, well-built homes in a matter of minutes. What does a person have then but an empty lot that once held his family's home?

Thieves breaking in and stealing stand for the human element in diminishing or destroying value. If we do not tend to them carefully night and day, our treasures too often, either slowly or all at once, disappear into the hands of enemies. Apparently, in using this illustration, Jesus was thinking of the homes common to His area of the world, most of which were constructed of clay. Thieves could rather easily dig through the walls of a mudbrick home and steal the homeowner's valuables.

We should also consider inflation, which eats away the savings of many. There is also governmental mismanagement of national affairs resulting in higher taxes, as well as bank failures, stock market crashes, business insolvencies, and prolonged illnesses. Even the bodies and minds of the strongest

of us gradually wear down, eventually causing the individual to die.

The simple reality is that we cannot take earthly treasures through the grave. In comparison with heavenly things, such physical treasures have a limited "lifetime" of value. We could say that earthly treasures picture temporariness while heavenly ones last for eternity (II Corinthians 4:18).

## Is God Against Earthly Treasures?

The Bible provides ample evidence that God is not against the pursuit of earthly treasure as long as His sons and daughters do not allow it to deflect them away from the primary goals that He has set for us. That line between them must be prayerfully and thoughtfully worked out between the child of God and God Himself. In Scripture, a wealthy person is not automatically reprobate under God's standard of judgment.

**The Bible provides ample evidence that God is not against the pursuit of earthly treasure as long as His sons and daughters do not allow it to deflect them away from the primary goals that He has set for us.**

Genesis 13:2 states, "Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold." Note, Abram was not merely rich but "very rich." And not only that, he was the friend of God (James 2:23). On the other hand, a rich person is not automatically accepted either.

Nor does the Bible condemn the setting aside of provision to take care of possible future needs, perhaps for a disaster. Notice Joseph's advice to Pharaoh in Genesis 41:33-35:

Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. And let them

gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities.

Notice that the text later shows that God approves of Joseph's suggestion to set aside wealth to be prepared when bad times arrive.

The apostle Paul does not make a mistake in II Corinthians 12:14, where he counsels the Corinthians: "Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." Parents are to "lay up" or set money aside for their children. In the same vein, though somewhat more broadly, the apostle writes in I Timothy 5:8, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

In Luke 19:2, 9, the rich Zacchaeus, a tax collector, is called a "son of Abraham," confirming him as a man of faith like the patriarch. The gospels also indicate that the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea was a follower of Jesus, and traditional literature of the time after Jesus' resurrec-

tion mentions him accompanying Mary, Jesus' mother, in her travels.

ing of human realities than Jesus. This subject concerns two levels of diversion from what is proper within the achievement of a desire, the first being minor compared to the second. First, then, is that, humanly, we can become so deeply involved in achieving an especially desired goal that we become inattentive to virtually everything else, including God. Some refer to it as "losing oneself in the moment." We can be thankful that these kinds of diversions generally do not last long. We usually "catch" ourselves within them and redirect our efforts accordingly. How many serious accidents have been caused by this type of distraction is beyond knowing.

The second concern is far more damaging to our calling: We allow our human nature to re-enslave us to this world. This return to carnality happens when we fail to discipline ourselves daily. We fail to maintain our focus on the absolute fact that what really matters in our lives is glorifying God and attaining spiritual value in our character. We must place everything else in second, third, or fourth place in order of importance. No one can do this for us; we must do it ourselves.

Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going." His counsel, valuable within its context, applies in spades to our calling. The context does not delve into the fact that not all things a person desires and works for are of equal value at any given time. Herein lies another reality that we must resolve because heavenly treasure and earthly treasure are not equally important, especially after God calls us.

The proper balance of the time and effort we give to seeking treasure must be an important companion to determining our priorities in what treasures we seek. Once a person is called, a new effort with far greater, more important goals has entered his life. The called-out individual must never allow himself to forget that the Creator God personally and specifically called him; he is not among the elect by accident or stroke of luck.

Considering the value of being in God's Kingdom, how great is our indebtedness to Him when nobody has ever earned his way into a calling? Jesus makes this plain in John 6:44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." This reality is astounding to consider! Not one single person comes to Christ for His forgiveness, God's Holy Spirit, a personal relationship with Him, and ultimately salva-

"Whatever your hand finds to do,  
do it with your might;  
for there is no work or device  
or knowledge or wisdom in the  
grave where you are going."

ECCLESIASTES 9:10

## Godly Treasure's Companion

There is an over-arching subject that Jesus never directly mentions in the context of Matthew 6:19-21, but He was undoubtedly concerned about it. No one ever lived who had a clearer understand-

tion, unless the Father Himself individually draws him! God carefully observed His potential children before He ever specifically drew us and others to Christ!

We must add to this astounding truth what Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 to those God calls: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” This burning dedication to the same goals that God has called us to must accompany the called-out person’s efforts to be a profitable servant. Without this characteristic, we can be quite busy accomplishing, but unless we are also deeply committed to what God is focused on for us to achieve, we will merely burn time without achieving much of value in terms of God’s spiritual purpose.

God wants us to give our time and life purposefully over to attaining His Kingdom. Merely being busy and productive are not the only issues. Being focused on what God assigns works hand in glove with what one’s treasure is. Matthew 6:24, just a few verses after where we began in verse 19, gives us a significant reason why: “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

The reason may escape the reasoning of many, but Jesus clearly warns that giving our lives over to the achievement of the things of this world is blatant idolatry for a Christian! Do we truly want to place ourselves into the position of hating God—or even loving Him less than something else? The things of this world are those things God has not assigned to Christian life.

Unlike those in the world, not many called-out ones fall into such calamity, but some do and find themselves re-enslaved to the world by it. Such a person will be so preoccupied with gathering his worldly treasure that his skewed focus will play a major role in confusing his values. His achievement in that area of life will obscure the goal God has established for our spiritual existence. The human heart will follow the carnal influence rather than the godly one. We must make diligent efforts to avoid this trap because the world acts like a magnet, always trying to recapture what has been pulled from it.

The apostle Paul charges us in Philippians 3:17-21:

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told

you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

ROMANS 12:2

conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

A significant change takes place in the lives of those God calls. This change can trigger a fear that has the power to hold the person in thrall if he does not truly believe vital truths and therefore fails to act upon them during his conversion. This kind of convert fears having to sacrifice something he deeply desires; he dreads that he may have to give up even the idea of ever possessing it.

In Romans 12:1-2, the apostle Paul calls upon fellow converts to become living sacrifices in order to become holy to God:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed

## Personal

### *Why Hebrews Was Written*

(changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you]. (*The Amplified Bible*)

Jesus did not hide this level of difficulty from those He counseled for baptism, and neither do His loyal servants hide the fact that living a Christian life is not all joy, contentment, and peace. Sometimes the costs of meeting the standards of obedience to Him are high—tremendously high. He admonishes us in Luke 14:26-33, as do His servants to this day:

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. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able

to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

I hope this article has provided motivation to be more dedicated to sacrifice—even if just a small amount—in serving Jesus Christ in obedience. We should also be sacrificing more in serving others in helpful and kind ways—and ourselves less in pursuing things we do not need and are here today and gone tomorrow. Time marches on, and each second carries a bit of our lives with it. We do not have time to waste.

In Christian love,



## Ready Answer

### *Unity and Division: The Blessing and the Curse*

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The prepositional phrase “at the first” in Joshua 8:33 probably refers to Moses’ earlier statements about the two mountains in Deuteronomy 11:26-29 (which see for supplemental information about the Gerizim/Ebal division). Here, Moses introduces the concept of choice, a concept he more fully develops in Deuteronomy 30:19, where he says to the people shortly before his death: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.” Compare this to his remarks, probably made about a fortnight earlier, recorded in Deuteronomy 11:26-29:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known. And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®, ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew noun ‘*Eybal*’ means “stone” or “bare,” from a word

meaning “bald.” It is interesting to note that Ebal’s first use is in Genesis 36:23, within the genealogy of Seir the Horite. The Horites lived in Edom before Esau’s people invaded it. ‘*Eybal*’ (*Strong’s Greek Concordance* #5858) appears eight times in the Old Testament.

<sup>4</sup> God probably chose Reuben to stand on the mountain of the curse because of his incestuous relationship with his father’s concubine, Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). As a result, Reuben became cursed with the loss of his right of the firstborn (the right of primogeniture), as his father, Jacob, mentions (Genesis 49:4).

<sup>5</sup> The meaning of the Hebrew word *Gerizim* (*Strong’s* #1630) is quite obscure. It probably means something close to “cuttings off” or “cut in two.” It appears four times in the Old Testament, first in Deuteronomy 11:29. *Gerizim* is likely related to the verb *garaz* (*Strong’s* #1629, appearing on in Psalm 31:22), meaning “to cut off,” specifically from God’s sight, hence “exterminated.”

<sup>6</sup> The listing of the tribes on Mount Gerizim appears in their forebears’ birth order, while the listing of the tribes on Mount Ebal does not (see Genesis 29–30).

<sup>7</sup> Joshua 8:30-35 notifies us that the priests issued the blessings as well as the curses. Scripture, though, does not record the blessings.

<sup>8</sup> Both Deuteronomy 27 and Joshua 8 stress that the altar was built strictly according to the rules God set forth in Exodus 20:25.

<sup>9</sup> See Ezekiel 36:26 and II Corinthians 3:3. Compare Romans 2:15.

<sup>10</sup> See Romans 12:1-2.

# Western Disquietude

A troubling trend is developing among two of the most prominent nations of the West.

The respective governments of the United Kingdom and the United States are so overwhelmed with corruption and political infighting and distracted by partisan backbiting that they are struggling to get anything useful done.

Moreover, each nation faces economic and sociopolitical challenges that, if left untended, could develop into existential threats.

Historically, these two stalwarts of modern, liberal democracy have enjoyed strong, visionary leaders who were able to rise above petty politics to steer their respective nations through troubled waters. Their ability to do so created powerful empires and political systems that have dominated global geopolitical affairs since the dawn of the nineteenth century.

Each has endured challenges to its reputation and power over the past several decades, and both have sustained significant damage—especially the U.K.—but their ongoing status as faithful allies and their shared dedication to systems of liberal democracy enable them to maintain an unprecedented level of global sovereignty.

However, the year 2016 introduced equally unprecedented challenges to their respective governing machines—the U.K. Brexit vote and the U.S. election of Donald Trump—that continue to give rise to an extraordinary level of adversity and perhaps irreversible deterioration.

In June 2016, the big story in the U.K. was that the Kingdom had voted to leave the European Union (E.U.). Since then, however, the narrative has changed to an embarrassing description of extreme division, corruption, and utter incompetence within the government as it “negotiates” the departure. With unending caustic deliberations dominating the time and energies of the entire government—as well as the media—the country is no closer to departing the E.U. than it was before the initial Brexit vote.

Quoting a December 15, 2018, editorial from the *Observer*:

Brexit has paralyzed British politics: it has left the government utterly incapacitated, ministers warring and both main parties riven by splits. It is absorbing every shred of political energy. . . . We also face huge social challenges that require action now. . . . All this is going ignored, with detrimental effects on people’s lives.

From *Spiegel Online*, December 25, 2018:

Britain’s departure from the EU has paralyzed almost the entire government apparatus. . . . The very same problems that were responsible for

Brexit in the first place are worsening by the day.

Back in the States, all political norms were turned inside-out by the election of Donald Trump. As a political outsider with a churlish and childish demeanor, President Trump evokes feelings of dismay, despair, and even revulsion over his perceived inability to govern in accordance with mainstream political standards. Since day one, his opposition, in an equally childish manner, works incessantly to delegitimize his presidency. Spearheaded by the Robert Mueller “Russian collusion” investigation, Trump’s disloyal opponents hasten recklessly to counter or prevent any possible productive efforts from his administration. The nation has entered a perpetual crisis mode with seemingly nothing more than squabbling children to look to for help.

From a March 28, 2019, editorial in the *USA Today*, Kathie Obradovich opines:

All of the hubbub over the Mueller report in Congress reminds me of a fifth-grader poring over a comic book while his homework piles up on the desk, gathering cobwebs. . . . The time and energy that Congress has and will spend on either trying to take down or defend the president comes at the expense of a better future for the entire country.

Journalist Naveed Jamali, in a March 28, 2019, article published in *Newsweek*, writes: “Allowing politics to creep into what should have been a counterintelligence effort [the Mueller investigation] weakened our country and fundamentally damaged our national security.”

Ironically, the best description of our sad state of affairs comes from a true, political insider, former Vice President Joe Biden, from a recent speech:

Our politics have become so mean, so petty, so negative, so partisan, so angry and so unproductive. . . . Instead of debating our opponents, we demonize them. Instead of listening, we shout. Instead of looking for solutions, we look to score political points. . . . But no more. No more, because this politics is pulling us apart. It’s ripping this country apart at the seams.

Currently, these two nations, whom we believe to be the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh, remain strong, but their vessels are rapidly taking on water with nothing but stormy waters ahead. Without an abrupt reversal of course, we may be witnessing the beginning of the end of the modern Israelitish world order.

—Joseph B. Baity

## What Is Propitiation?

### Part Two

From the moment of Adam's and Eve's first sins, mankind was separated from his divine Creator, and the friendly relationship that existed between them was destroyed. However, long before the creation took place—in anticipation of mankind's sinful ways—God had instituted a means to satisfy the righteous demands of His law and restore the favorable relationship, without which there could be no legal provision for their salvation from an inevitable and most-deserved judgment of death (Romans 6:23).

Continuing our study of propitiation, the focus turns to three closely related Greek terms that the New Testament authors used. They are alternately translated as “propitiation,” “mercy seat,” or “merciful.” Each points to the two foundational elements behind God's will to cover and forgive mankind's sins: His grace and mercy. Each term is only used twice in the New Testament. These three Greek terms are *hilasterion*, *hilasmos*, and *hilaskomai*.

Each of these terms is derived from a fourth Greek term, *hileos*, which *Strong's Greek Dictionary* defines as “cheerful . . . propitious; adverbially (by Hebraism) God be gracious!, i.e. (in averting some calamity) far be it:—be it far, merciful.” *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* simply describes *hileos* as “propitious, merciful.” These key Greek terms all have their basis in God's grace and mercy.

Studying how various New Testament authors used these terms provides valuable insight into the concept of propitiation—one of the most critical and essential elements of the process of our salvation.



1. Was the Mercy Seat the original place for our propitiation? Hebrews 9:5; Romans 3:25; Exodus 25:17; 30:6; Leviticus 16:13-15.

**COMMENT:** The author of Hebrews uses *hilasterion* (*Strong's* #2435) to refer to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat of God. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest carried the blood of the sacrifice he offered for all the people into the Temple—behind the veil into the Holy of Holies—and sprinkled the Mercy Seat with it, which was the original, Old Testament manner of atonement or propitiation. In this usage, *hilasterion* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term *kapporeth* (*Strong's* #3727), which means “covering” and is used exclusively in the Old Testament for “mercy seat” (Exodus 25:17; 30:6; Leviticus 16:13-15). In its only other biblical usage, the apostle Paul uses *hilasterion* in Romans 3:25 as “propitiation,” that is, Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice and our reconciliation by His blood.

2. What term describes Christ's effectiveness in satisfying the legal requirements of the law? 1 John 2:2, 4:10.

**COMMENT:** The apostle John uses *hilasmos* (*Strong's* #2434) to describe Jesus Christ. In 1 John 2:2, John writes, “And He [Christ] is the propitiation [*hilasmos*]

for our sins,” which is to say that His sacrifice satisfied the legal requirements of God's law and holiness for the punishment of sin. Therefore, through the ultimate act of mercy and grace, Christ *became* our propitiation and our Advocate (1 John 4:10)!

3. Considering Christ's sacrifice, does propitiation display God's willingness to alter His legal disposition? Psalm 86:15; 89:14; 145:8-9; Lamentations 3:22-23; Ephesians 2:4-5.

**COMMENT:** *Hilaskomai* (*Strong's* #2433) is a verb translated as “be merciful” in Luke 18:13 and “to make propitiation for” in Hebrews 2:17. A gracious and merciful judge must, by definition, be willing to be gracious or to be made gracious. From before the foundation of the world, God the Father and the Word [*Logos*], who would become Jesus Christ, painstakingly prepared and executed a perfect plan that allows for both the demands of the law and the Father's holiness to be satisfied. Jesus Christ's propitiatory sacrifice became the payment for all of mankind's sins. This perfect plan allows God the Father to display His grace (Psalm 86:15; 145:8-9) and to be mercifully reconciled (*hilaskomai*) to His repentant creation (Ephesians 2:4-5)—but only through the blood of His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

—Martin G. Collins