

NT

A pattern for life in God's House

Back to Basics The Lord's return

**The failure of atheism
Those who mourn
Human rights**

Contents

- 3 Spiritual security
- 4 Choices
- 5 Those who mourn
- Back to Basics
- 6 The Lord's return
- 8 He's coming soon
- Study feature
- 10 Judges - possess or be oppressed
- 11 Shamgar
- Deborah
- 12 Human rights
- 13 The gift of encouragement
- 14 A secretary who can't type
- 15 The failure of atheism
- 16 Taking hope to the homeless

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From the Editors' desk

Certainty

In a world that is uneasy and uncertain, both politically and economically, it is encouraging to be directed to the *sure word of prophecy*¹ and *the word of the Lord [which] stands for ever*.²

Since the promise of the Lord – “*I will come back*,”³ – to the apostles in an upper room before He went out to die, His disciples have been looking for its fulfilment. The two ‘Back to Basics’ articles in this issue of NT look at this satisfying, yet sobering, subject. It’s satisfying as we look forward to a future with Christ, and sobering as we reflect on the review of our lives and service that will take place following the coming of the Lord to the air for us.

The many aspects of future events have been written about in Needed Truth right from volume 2 in 1889. In 1970 there was a series of articles entitled ‘The Finger of Prophecy’, later published in book format (accessible on the Hayes Press website – NT article index www.hayespress.org/article_index.php categories: ‘The Coming of the Lord for His Church’ & ‘The Finger of Prophecy’). These articles are worth pursuing for further study.

‘Jesus is coming! the promise is true;

Who are the chosen, the faithful, the few,

Waiting and watching, prepared for review?’⁴

Other items in this issue of NT take us to the spoken words of the Saviour, described as the Beatitudes, on a mountainside, and in the upper room. It must have been wonderful for the disciples to hear again, “*I chose you*”⁵ – for His purpose of course. In the uncertain days of the Judges, Shamgar was a man who was chosen to serve in a specific situation.⁶ Deborah lived at the same time and is described as a prophetess, a “*mother in Israel*”.⁷ She was a woman who knew the will and purposes of God and saw to it that these were fulfilled in her life and service, as well as in the lives of those linked with her.

In an uncertain world, how reassuring it is to be reminded of the Lord’s promises and His purposes. The One who said, “*I will come back*” also says, “*I am coming soon!*”⁸

Robert



References: (1) 2 Pet. 1:19 KJV (2) 1 Pet. 1:25 (3) John 14:3 (4) E. Nathan/D.W.Whittle (5) John 15:16 (6) Judg. 3:31 (7) Judg. 5:7 (8) Rev. 22:12 Bible quotations from NIV (1984) unless stated otherwise

Spiritual security - 2011 upgrade needed?

Gilbert Grierson, Knocknacloy, N.Ireland

Imagine your computer linked to the Internet. Out there, in cyberspace, there are a whole host of potential enemies – viruses that have the ability to infect and render computer programmes useless. It's foolish to ignore the need for some security loaded on to protect against this threat, and to neglect to keep that security updated as the threat changes. A whole industry has arisen to provide internet security in this computer age. A 'Newsweek' article described the greatest potential threat to Britain's national security in the 21st century as being 'cyberwarfare'.¹

Now think about a Christian having no security against the threat posed by a host of wicked beings, led by Satan, who, like viruses, are on the look-out for vulnerable targets. But God, in His wisdom and goodness, has supplied us with a 'security system', described in Ephesians 6, that is for ever up-to-date. It just needs to be in place and operating!

First, there is the *belt of truth* which needs to be fastened on.

Then there is the *breastplate of righteousness*. What is put into our hearts will come out in our lives. Jesus taught that it is out of the heart that evil thoughts come,² and evil thoughts lead on to evil deeds. Visual images make up an important part of the weapons of mass destruction in the control of that evil adversary, Satan. Right in the beginning Eve was tempted by what she saw, for the forbidden fruit was a *delight to the eyes*.³ If we are actively living a holy life, protecting our eyes, being careful of what goes into our minds, putting to death the things of the flesh, then that part of the security is working, and our hearts are safe. In this computer age, unwholesome things like pornography are too easily accessible at the click of a button. If in this area we feel that we have already suffered defeat, the way back is via the cross and confession and taking God at His word.⁴

In this battle we need to be constantly ready for action, for rapid-response. Well-fitting shoes are essential and we need to be prepared at all times to give an answer to those who question or attack our faith.⁵ Knowledge of the Word of God is of paramount importance, or we will be easily knocked off course.

There is something that God has given to us which has to be taken up and used. That is faith, and it forms a shield. The Roman soldier's shield was large, protecting the whole body from fiery darts. God's Word says that *we walk by faith, not by sight*⁶ and that without faith it is impossible to please God.⁷ Trusting that what has been revealed to us in God's Word is true, shows that the shield is being used. Fiery darts thrown by our enemies come in many forms, whether from unbelieving scientists,



from militant atheists, or just from mockers, but faith will render their weapons ineffective.

Then there is the *helmet of salvation* and the *sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*. Our minds are being bombarded all the time, and we need to be able to discern correctly what is of God and what is of the Devil. The Devil is more interested in us being fully occupied with temporal things – getting, spending and losing.

A sword can be used for attack as well as for defence, and attack is often the best form of defence. We should not be afraid of quoting God's Word, sometimes just to ourselves, whenever we find ourselves in a situation where we are being pressurised to conform to this world and its standards.

The question of whether we need to upgrade our spiritual protection to a 2011 version is easily answered. No! The original armour, supplied by God and described by Paul in Ephesians 6, is never out of date. Each piece is vital and must be put on daily, with prayer in the Spirit. Sometimes we may have a need to press the 'refresh' button; our lives for Christ and our rewards at the judgement seat of Christ are at stake!

References: (1) Underhill, W. *Newsweek*, 20 October 2010 (2) See Mat. 15:19 (3) Gen. 3:6 (4) 1 John 1:9 (5) Col. 4:6; 1 Pet.3:15 (6) 2 Cor. 5:7 (7) Heb. 11:6

Bible quotations from ESV

Choices

Lindsay Woods, Cullybackey, N.Ireland

We make choices every day; some we remember clearly because they are very important, and many others we don't even notice. The older we get the more we look back on our lives and see how our choices have worked out. There are landmark decisions which we make that have a very big influence on our lives. When we review God's dealings with us as His children we are constantly amazed at His mercy, grace and patience, because we make so many mistakes and disappoint Him so often in our choices. Yet, in spite of our failures, He overrules and patiently works with us so that we can begin to learn from our mistakes and get our choices to agree with His will.¹

When it comes to choices, God never gets it wrong. Isaiah reminds us that God's ways are not our ways or His thoughts our thoughts,² so why should He choose us? Such amazing grace that He has chosen us for eternal life and glory. He has, in His eternal purposes and foreknowledge, chosen us, called us, justified us and already begun the work of glorifying us!³ God speaks of His people Israel as being *the apple of his eye*⁴ – a tiny people chosen out of all the world's nations to be for Him a kingdom of priests to serve and worship Him.⁵ And so it is with us – not many mighty or noble are called, but rather those viewed by the world as foolish, poor and unimportant are called⁶ to be saints, servants of the Most High. The Lord Jesus reminded His little group of disciples, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you ..."*⁷ Divine choice and the sovereignty of God are difficult subjects to understand fully, but as the hymn writer has put it, 'Where reason fails with all her powers, there faith prevails and love adores'.⁸

We have been chosen for a purpose, and by God's grace we can make the right choices now in our lives of service; choices that will bring us into the joy and blessing of doing the will of God. Chosen and created for good works,⁹ chosen to bear fruit,¹⁰ chosen to enjoy the life that we have in Christ *"to the full"*.¹¹ How then are we to make good choices? We have a free will in this matter, but there are many influences around us, and within us, that would lead us into making the wrong decisions. Peter tells us, however, that we have everything we need,¹² and the Lord assures us of that, too, when He describes the work of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.¹³ The Holy Spirit will reveal to us what God's will is in every situation of life if we ask God for that – that's His great business. Every day we need to pray to God for His guidance, and He has promised that if we are prepared to listen to the Spirit's quiet voice then we will make the right choices. Sometimes He reveals the answer through His Word and often He reinforces that with the counsel of godly friends. The Scriptures are full of godly men and women who lived like this and what a difference they made in this world! The greatest example of course is the Son of God who, when He was in this world, was constantly seeking



His Father's face in prayer to know what He should do and say each day.¹⁴ It is so beautifully summed up in His words to His Father in Gethsemane, *"... not my will, but yours be done."*¹⁵

If our choices are motivated by our own selfish interests, or influenced unduly by the ways of the world, then God will not be glorified in our lives – we will reap what we sow.¹⁶ If we have the daily discipline of waiting on the Lord,¹⁷ seeking His face for the right way to go and looking into His Word, which has all the answers, then His Spirit will guide us to make good choices that will bring glory to God.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

*in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*¹⁸

Maybe you are at a crossroads in your life, such as choice of college, career, job, or partner. Be careful not to rush into these life-affecting decisions, but wait on the Lord, and remember in every situation Christ's words, *"... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*¹⁹ He promises us, *"My Father will honour the one who serves me."*²⁰

Looking back on my life I can truly say that God has been good to me and He has guided me in life's choices. Sometimes He brings us into circumstances where it's difficult to know why, but He reassures us that *in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*²¹

God's challenge to us every day is still what it was for His people Israel, *"... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve"*.²² Let's choose to serve Him, for that will mean that we have chosen life.²³

Bible references: (1) Phil. 1:9-11 (2) Is. 55:8 (3) Rom. 8:29-30 (4) Deut. 32:10 (5) Ex. 19:5-6 (6) 1 Cor. 1:26-29 (7) John 15:16 (8) I. Watts (9) Eph. 2:10 (10) John 15:16 (11) John 10:10 (12) 2 Pet. 1:3-4 (13) John 14:26; 16:13-14 (14) Is. 50:4-5 (15) Luke 22:42 (16) Gal. 6:7-8 (17) Phil.4:6-7 (18) Prov. 3:5-6 (19) Mat. 6:33 (20) John 12:26 (21) Rom. 8:28 (22) Josh. 24:15 (23) Deut.30:19

Bible quotations from NIV (1984)

Upside down values

Those who mourn

Andrew Dorricott, Hamilton, Canada

As I sit down to explore this scripture and better understand the depth and breadth of its fuller meaning, it is impossible for me not to reflect on my own experiences of mourning. I realize that over four years has gone by since my wife's and my first child, a precious little girl born far too early, passed away despite weeks of pleading with God to heal her sick little heart. You might have your own experiences that this verse brings to the forefront of your mind. I can still feel the shortness of breath in between tears, and I can remember when I felt as though I had no more tears left. As strong as those memories are, they are but symptoms of a deeper mourning. And while God has been so gentle and gracious in granting much healing of my heart, I still mourn for Jady, and probably always will.

At the tomb of Lazarus, amidst a sea of people weeping and mourning his loss, it says of the Lord that *He groaned in the spirit and was troubled*.¹ There is of course the famous verse, *Jesus wept*² at the very same scene. His weeping was the symptom, or the release, of the deep emotions He was feeling. But His emotions were even more than what the people around Him were experiencing. This is not the way God had intended it to be when He created the world and all that is in it. He had designed a paradise for His creation to enjoy, and people to worship Him and have communion with Him. But before long sin entered that paradise and destroyed it. This perfect world had fallen so far, sin had engulfed all that was in it, and death the result of sin,³ was and is now, an everyday occurrence in life. The Lord Jesus Christ was there in the beginning with God the Father, and intricately involved in the creation, ... *and without Him nothing was made that was made*.⁴ He was also acutely aware of what was His purpose for being on the earth: to bear the punishment for all sin. His reaction was more than for Lazarus, it was for the effects of sin and death on His beloved creation which resulted in such sadness and weeping and mourning.

Do you mourn over your sin? Do you mourn over the sins of others, those whom you know, and even those whom you don't? This is the heart of a repentant person, one who is aware of their condition before God. It is the only way to salvation, the genuine confessing of sin and true repentance to God through the saving work of Christ Jesus.⁵ But it doesn't end there, the longer we are believers, the more aware we become of the sin in our lives and how we continue to fail and *fall short of the glory of God*.⁶ We realize more and more how destitute and helpless we are. Our sadness is a deep mourning, mourning that will not go away or fade over time. Our response to mourning is so aptly described by David,

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" Mat. 5:4

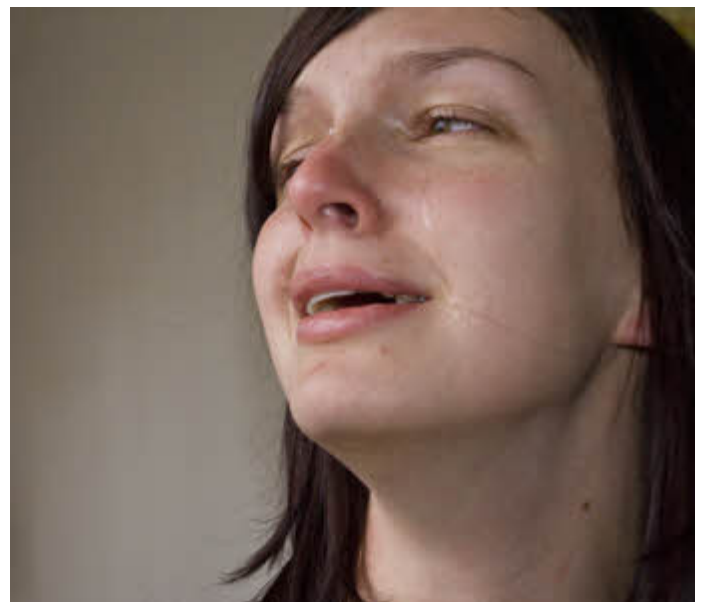
*"Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest –
I would flee far away and stay in the desert;
I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the
tempest and storm."*⁷

Where is our comfort? Where is the happiness for the sad? Simply, yet profoundly, it is in the life-giving salvation through Jesus Christ. As we grow more aware of our sin, and as our mourning intensifies, we are able to even further appreciate the salvation of our Lord, how He bore the punishment for our sins and has freed us from bondage to sin. We have the sure hope of eternity spent with Him, sealed by the giving of the Holy Spirit, who is also called the comforter and lives in our hearts.

We are expected to mourn, truly mourn, for our sins and for the sins of this world. In doing so, we will invariably find ourselves in awe, in worship, in praise and in comfort of the blessings that Christ has made available to us through His ultimate sacrifice. Looking forward to eternity with Him, yes; but we can enjoy the sweetness of His comfort even now knowing that we have been completely forgiven. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*.⁸ Happy are the sad, for they will be comforted.

Bible references: (1) John 11:33 (2) John 11:35 (3) Rom. 6:23 (4) John 1:3 (5) Rom. 10:9 (6) Rom. 3:23 (7) Ps. 55:6-8 NIV (8) 1 John 1:9 NIV

Bible quotations from NKJV unless stated otherwise





Back to Basics

The Lord's Return

Craig Jones, Toronto, Canada

In 1995, a series of sixteen fictional novels began to be published, which, over the following twelve years, would amass total sales in excess of 65 million copies. Seven of the series have held the top slot on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list between 2000 and 2005. The 'Left Behind' series, by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, has certainly propelled the subject of biblical end-times prophecies into the imaginations of mainstream literary fiction consumers over recent years.

Whilst clearly fictional in nature, these novels are nevertheless claimed to be based on teachings contained in the Bible. However, there is no full agreement amongst the various Christian denominations as to the 'true' interpretation of these biblical teachings. Whilst it is possible to establish certain future events as biblical 'fact', the precise detail and timing can be the subject of much speculation. Arguably, perhaps, the most astonishing event that will trigger the unfolding of a whole series of major prophetic events, will be the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Himself declared, "... *I will come again and receive you to Myself ...*" clearly stating His intention to return for His disciples after going to be with His Father in heaven following His death and resurrection.¹ In confirmation of this, the angel who appeared to the awestruck disciples on the Mount of Olives, immediately after they had witnessed the Lord ascend to heaven in the clouds, said, "*This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.*"² The apostle Paul also confirms this truth in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, from which we glean the expression 'the rapture' (not a word found in the English translations of the Bible, but

meaning 'taken up into heaven' from Latin '*raptus*' – taken away).

Associated at some point with our Lord's return is something the Lord Himself describes as 'a great tribulation'.³ It's a time of unparalleled worldwide suffering, and oppression at the hands of someone identified in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as *the man of lawlessness*, who rises to such a position of global prominence and influence that he eventually sets himself up as being 'god', exalting himself above the one true God in a rebuilt 'temple of God' in Jerusalem.⁴ This fits with the Lord's description of the 'abomination of desolation' in Matthew 24:15. The global acceptance of the authority of this 'man of lawlessness' will be sealed by the significance of the covenant that he will make with Israel at the start of the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy.⁵ According to Daniel 9:27, the abomination of desolation will occur halfway through this 7-year covenant period.

When all this is linked to *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*,⁶ a view emerges that the Lord's coming to the air for His Church does not take place until the man of lawlessness exalts himself in this way, at that time. Hence, in this 'mid-tribulation' view,⁷ the rapture can be precisely dated from the moment the covenant is struck, which is quite likely to be a widely publicised event at the time, thereby allowing a calculation to be made, arriving at 3 ½ years after the signing of the covenant, immediately before the great tribulation proper. However, this is inconsistent with the clear weight of scriptural evidence regarding the coming of the Lord as being both imminent and unknown.⁸

Another similar ('post-tribulation') view exists based in part on the same argument (and therefore subject to the same weakness), which further delays

THE RAPTURE – two views

Pre-tribulation Rapture

- The Lord will come for His Church before the Tribulation
- Literal view of Tribulation (in the same way that the events of the Lord's First Advent were literally fulfilled)
- The fate of Israel and the Church are distinguished (as literally required by God's Old Testament covenants & the distinct programmes for Jew & Gentile (Church) set out in Romans chs. 9-11)

Post-Tribulation Rapture

- The Lord will come for His Church after the Tribulation
- Spiritualised view of the Tribulation
- Israel and the Church are equivalent (e.g. Mat.24:22)

the rapture of Church-age believers in the Lord Jesus to be coincident with His return to the earth to judge the nations⁹ and to establish His 1000-year reign of peace.¹⁰ The implication of this is, of course, that believers in the Lord Jesus will have to live through the great tribulation. This view at first may seem supported by verses such as John 16:33 and 17:15 with regard to the 'requirement' for tribulation suffering. However, this requires a rather narrow definition of 'tribulation' as referring specifically to this prophetic period. And yet a survey of the occurrences of this word in the New Testament reveals a very general usage that includes any collective or personal circumstances of trials of faith.¹¹ An historical justification is also cited in support of this viewpoint, as, it is argued, this was evidently the belief of the early church fathers and is reflected in their writings and therefore the absence of teaching by them on any alternative understanding demonstrates a 'taken-for-granted' acceptance of the view. Anything 'new' and divergent is therefore presumed not to be tenable. We might wonder what would have happened if that kind of stance had prevailed in the times of the Reformation, when the great doctrine of justification by faith was

considered 'novel' and therefore dangerous, according to the received wisdom and understanding of the time.

So what are we to make of all this? It's significant to note that when Paul writes about this subject¹² it is intended to bring comfort and encouragement to the believers, and therefore to us also. Surely, it's difficult to find comfort in the prospect of having to endure the horrors of a time of tribulation that the Lord says will be "... *such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.*"¹³ The comfort is in the knowledge that all those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, from the time of His death and resurrection to the moment when He will appear in the clouds, will be graciously and miraculously transported from the earth to enjoy the presence of the Lord and take up their promised residence in His Father's house.¹⁴ We find further support for this in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, which promise deliverance from the wrath of God which will be meted out in righteous judgement in these end times. The return of the Lord Jesus is therefore best viewed as presented to us as being accomplished in two

phases. The first is when He comes to the air to take all believers of this present Church age to their heavenly inheritance.¹⁵ The second phase then takes place at the end of the tribulation period, when, in accordance with the prophecy in Zechariah 14:4, the Lord will actually stand again as Son of Man upon the earth, on the Mount of Olives, to begin His deliverance of Israel from their oppressors and also to judge the nations of the earth and usher in His glorious 1000-year reign of global peace and prosperity, as the great Prince of Peace.

References: (1) John 14:2-3 (2) Acts 1:11 (3) Mat. 24:9-28 (4) see 2 Thes. 2:3-10 (5) Dan. 9:24-27, where the 'weeks' are understood to represent periods of 7 years as found in Revelation (6) 2 Thes. 2:1-4 (7) some refer this term tribulation to the whole 70th week; but in this article it is the 2nd half thereof (8) e.g. Phil. 3:20; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Acts 1:7; 1 Thes. 5:1-2 (9) Mat. 25:31-32 (10) Rev. 20:1-4 (11) e.g. Mat. 13:21; Acts 7:10; 11:19; Rom. 12:12; 1 Thes. 1:6 (12) 1 Thes. 4:18; 5:11 particularly (13) Mat. 24:21 (14) John 14:1-3 (15) 1 Thes. 4:15-18

Bible quotations from NASB

What is the Tribulation?

- It's uniquely 'great' – as opposed to various trials experienced by Christians (Mat. 24:21-28; Rev. 7:14)
- It's primarily and specifically the 'time of Jacob's trouble' (Jer. 30:7-8 NKJV)
- The 'elect' are therefore believing Jews during the Tribulation; as distinct from Christ's Church (Mat. 24:22)
- Its purpose is to purge Israel and destroy Gentile world power
- Thus Mat. 24:31,41 are not describing the rapture of the Church, but a different, subsequent gathering

Back to Basics

He's coming soon

David Woods, Manchester, England

It's inevitable. At what has become known as 'The Rapture', our Saviour will come to take all born-again believers to be with Him forever. It will be an 'out of this world' gathering in the clouds where those who have died secure 'in Christ' will be raised first, and we who are alive, also secure 'in Christ', will be caught up to meet them. And so will begin the reality of our wonderful eternal existence with our Lord.¹ That day will be all about the fulfilment of Christ's promise to return for His Church, the Body of Christ, and is referred to as the 'Day of Christ'² which is different from 'the Day of the Lord'³ and 'the Day of God'⁴ that denote periods to follow after.

*"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also,"*⁵ were words the early disciples wouldn't forget. They lived each day with the Lord's promise ringing in their ears, excitedly anticipating His return. When He didn't return within their expected timescales some started to doubt, and outsiders started to mock saying, *"Where is the promise of His coming?"*⁶ Given that 2,000 years or so have passed since then, we might be guilty of the same, but we must be aware that Christ did not say when He would return. He is waiting for that moment when, according to God's eternal purposes, He will come to receive His Church.⁷ It's not for us to try to second-guess God's timing, because it's entirely different from ours!⁸ We must live expecting Him at any time!

William Barclay helpfully tells us that the Greek word *parousia*, usually translated 'coming' in verses which refer to Christ's return,⁹ was used in other Greek documents contemporary with the New Testament to denote the arrival or the actual presence of a dignitary, usually the Roman emperor. 'One of the commonest things is that provinces dated a new era from the *parousia* of the emperor ... a new section of time emerged with the coming ... another common practice was to strike new coins to commemorate the visitation ... it was as if ... a new set of values had emerged.'¹⁰ The *parousia* of One so much greater than any earthly ruler is imminent. It is sensible that we prepare ourselves, and look forward to that new era where God's high values and standards will be maintained forever.

I remember how a realisation of the Lord's return, and the prospect of my being 'left behind', made me come to the Saviour to know for certain that I would be one of those to meet Him in the air. If you don't have that assurance, look to Calvary and realise the lengths that God and His Son went to in order to secure your salvation from the consequences of your sin. Request and accept the forgiveness for sin that God offers through the sacrifice of



Christ. You'll then be ready to be called to that gathering in the air, and to eternity beyond. Be sure to be ready.

As Christians, a fresh realisation of the 'anytime soon' return of our Lord should also fuel our desire to ensure that those we work with, study with, socialise with, engage with, are made aware of the *living hope* that is ours.¹¹ Demonstrating by our actions that our lives are governed by heavenly standards so very different from those of this world and seizing opportunities to speak of *Christ ... the hope of glory*¹² will witness to the fact that *our citizenship is in heaven*,¹³ and that we *wait for His Son from heaven*.¹⁴ **Living in the light of the Lord's imminent return should galvanise our efforts to lead others to Christ.**

Those *who are Christ's at His coming*¹⁵ should be ready. The reality of the Lord's return can often be overshadowed by the mundane matters of life, or by the busyness of the legitimate things of Christian service. There is a daily need to focus our attention on our Saviour and His promise, *"... behold, I am coming quickly ... Yes, I am coming quickly."*¹⁶

Service for our Master will be reviewed at the 'judgment seat of Christ'.¹⁷ We must be ready to give account!¹⁸ John wrote, *abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming*.¹⁹ What occupies our time these days? Are we fully absorbed in our jobs, our families and our possessions? Are we continually distracted by entertainments, such as the Internet world at our fingertips? Are we giving any quality time to God in service? Are we 'abiding in Him'?

The Scriptures teach us that it's not the quantity of service that Christ will review, but the quality. Our aim should be to give of our best, offering service of the highest quality, according to God's standards, as guided and directed by Him. Take a look at 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. Often misinterpreted, this scripture should be properly understood in its context: the work of quality building within the House of God. It's here, in churches of God that together form God's house today, where men and women should render service that is precious in the sight of God. **Living in the light of the Lord's imminent**

return should make us want to surrender our lives and do the best we can in obedience to God's will.

John also wrote, *when He appears, we will be like Him.*²⁰ That's glorious! Our earthly bodies exchanged for something far superior, just like His, made ready for eternal glory! John reminds us that, by being absorbed by the certain hope of Christ's return, personal purity should be the result: *Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*²¹ Christ's return will usher in a new era of purity and holiness, but God commands His people to be holy today.²² We struggle with sin, but we thank God for the provision of 1 John 1:9, whereby forgiveness and cleansing can be sought through confession of daily sin that spoils our walk.

Living in the light of the Lord's imminent return should have the effect of purifying our lives.

James told his readers to *be patient ... until the coming of the Lord ... strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.*²³ It's not easy living in a world that is so opposed to God's ways, enduring incessant attacks that attempt to undermine our faith. We must learn patience, despite our desire to be removed and to be with the Lord.²⁴ In the knowledge that being with the Lord will be *very much better*²⁵ our hearts, our emotions and our love should be strengthened in the face of the enemy's attempts to keep us earthbound. **Living in the light of the Lord's imminent return should strengthen our hearts despite discouragement and trial.**

Having such a certain future is what makes the New Testament word 'hope' so wonderful. We have a certainty of a future, secured and promised by God, brought to us through Christ and sealed by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

STUDY FEATURE

1. What differences have you noted between the Lord's initial return to the air for believers and the return of the Son of Man to the earth?
2. Contrast and explain the descriptions of the 'Day of the Lord' with the comfort promised believers when Christ returns for them.
3. From 1 Corinthians 15, what changes in ourselves should we expect when the Lord returns?
4. How should a belief in the imminent return of the Lord affect our approach to Christian service?



Today, the people of God also lay hold of a hope that is a present-day reality.²⁶ We're to grip it tight, lay hold of it, realising that it brings us presently before God, in spirit, to experience the delights of His presence in advance of the day we're waiting expectantly for! This is the joy of the worship of the people of God, invited into His presence to appreciate something of His eternal glory & grace. This hope is anchored *within the veil* of the heavenly tabernacle, not made with hands,²⁷ and linked with Jesus having entered there *as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever.*²⁸ He's in the glory, and as a result we have the privilege to join Him in spiritual worship each week, and have a little taster of what the future holds as we *enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus.*²⁹ **Living in the light of the imminence of the Lord's return should enhance our worship and appreciation of Christ our Saviour.**

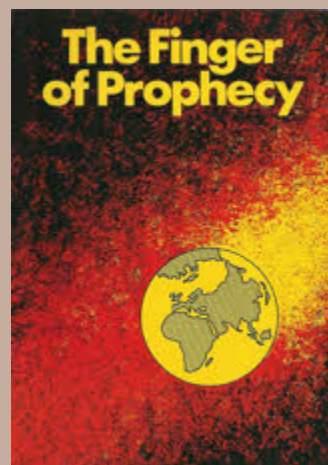
The wonderful future that is being prepared for us should make us cry out, "*Maranatha*",³⁰ "O Lord, come!" Until then, let's live in the light of His imminent return!

References: (1) 1 Thes. 4:6-11 (2) Phil. 1:6,10; 2:16 (3) many OT refs and 2 Pet. 3:10 (4) 2 Pet. 3:12 (5) John 14:3 (6) 2 Pet. 3:4 (7) Eph. 5:27 (8) see 2 Pet. 3:8 (9) e.g. 1 Thes. 2:19; 4:15; Jas. 5:7,8; 1 John 2:28 (10) William Barclay, New Testament Words (11) 1 Pet. 1:3 (12) Col. 1:27 (13) Phil. 3:20 (14) 1 Thes. 1:10 (15) 1 Cor. 15:23 (16) Rev. 22:7,20 (17) 2 Cor. 5:10 (18) Rom. 14:12 (19) 1 John 2:28 (20) 1 John 3:2 (21) 1 John 3:3 (22) 1 Pet. 1:16 (23) Jas. 5:7-8 (24) see 2 Cor. 5:2 (25) Phil. 1:23 (26) Heb. 6:18 (27) Heb. 9:11 (28) Heb. 6:20 (29) Heb. 10:19-23 (30) 1 Cor. 16:22

Bible quotations from NASB

The Finger of Prophecy

For the reader who wants to find out more ...



This recently reprinted booklet consists of a series of papers by Jack Ferguson and Bob Armstrong. It takes an in-depth look at future events alluded to in these two articles on the Return of Christ, plus many more.

Copies are available from Hayes Press (see inside front cover).

The book of the Judges

Possess - or be oppressed!

Martin Jones, Toronto, Canada

Recent events in Egypt have put a 30-year peace treaty with Israel in jeopardy and left Israel fearing complete military and religious oppression in the Middle East. Such a precarious position has often been Israel's lot and it was no different in the day of the Judges.

Looking back at then recent history, God pointed out, "... *the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites* (Midianites) *oppressed you ...*".¹ But that wasn't how God had intended it to be.

God had made it clear through Moses that enjoyment of the Promised Land was conditional on them possessing it and displacing the people who lived there. Under Joshua's leadership and with God's help they had made an excellent start² and so the land was divided up between the tribes to possess.

But Judges 1 records how, for various reasons, the tribes of Joseph, Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Asher, Naphtali and Dan each failed to drive out the remaining inhabitants of the Promised Land. And Judges 2 describes how God, because of the disobedience and wickedness of Israel, refused to drive out the people for them. The consequences were dire.

Successive chapters record a catalogue of different types of oppression:

- **Physical** – The Israelites were at the mercy of those who had



superior weaponry (like Jabin of chapter 4) or sheer numbers (like the Midianites of chapter 6).

- **Economic** – Throughout history, oppressors like Eglon³ have demanded tribute in monetary or other forms. The heavy cost could often bankrupt a nation.
- **Racial** – The Israelites took the daughters of the enemy in marriage and gave their own daughters to the sons of their enemies⁴ and so, insidiously, the identity of Israel was diluted and jeopardised – by their own actions!
- **Spiritual** – Other gods like Baal and Ashtoreth were very visible and their followers very successful in enticing the Israelites away to idolatry⁵ – (more on this later in this series).
- **Moral** – Leviticus 18:1-24 gives us a list of the horrors of everyday practice in the land. Sexual sins, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and perversion with animals are listed. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 adds witchcraft and the occult. Even if the Israelites did not participate in such evil, they certainly tolerated it by living beside them.

Some oppression was temporarily relieved by the judges that God sent – but what was missing was long term commitment to the covenant that the people had entered into with God through Moses at Sinai,⁶ and which was renewed at Shechem through Joshua.⁷

Scholars have likened such covenants to suzerain/vassal (lord/subject) treaties which were common in the Near East in that era. The treaty typically consisted of six sections:

- 1) a preamble, which named the suzerain formulating the treaty.



- 2) A historical prologue which listed the benevolent acts of the suzerain on behalf of the vassal.
- 3) A set of stipulations, the obligations to which the vassals bound themselves.
- 4) Detailed instructions for depositing the treaty in a safe place and for reading the treaty at designated intervals.
- 5) Witnesses called to confirm the treaty.
- 6) Blessings and curses upon the vassal for obedience or disobedience to the treaty.

Look at the relevant chapters to spot the parallels.

It was the repeated breaking of these 'treaties' on many levels that caused God to abandon Israel to their oppressors. How ironic, then, that it was the people who sought later to replace their divine suzerain with an earthly monarch – no wonder God took it as a direct insult!

The pattern of recommitment and regression is a key theme of the book of Judges, and is in fact replicated throughout the Old Testament. But God has never forgotten, even today, his unconditional covenants with Abraham⁸ and David⁹ to establish a great nation and a permanent throne.

It is the same God we aim to serve, about whom we can gratefully still say today in relation to our personal discipleship commitment – *If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.*¹⁰

References: (1) Judg. 10:11-12 (2) see Judg. 11 (3) Judg. 3:17 (4) Judg. 3:6 (5) Judg. 3:7 (6) Ex. 20; Deut. 30-31 (7) Josh. 24 (8) Gen. 12,15,17 (9) 2 Sam. 7 (10) 2 Tim. 2:13

Bible quotations from NIV

Shamgar

Ben Jones, Toronto, Canada

Israel's judges served as leaders of the tribes, but not leaders according to our modern definitions of government, or like the kings of the surrounding nations. Judges were people raised up for a specific time to solve a particular crisis or problem facing the people of Israel as a whole. In Shamgar's case, no mention is made of his history, his family or his rise to prominence; we are simply told of his saving of Israel by killing 600 Philistines.¹ This man was a war leader who appears on the page to tackle a specific military threat.

Shamgar's identity might be a mystery to us, but his role was clear: God had a task that needed to be accomplished and Shamgar was called to fill the role. Not only was he called, but he stepped up to the plate and took on his appointed task. When we are called to a task, the emphasis is on us to accept the position to which God has called us. In Shamgar's case, and in ours, it is God's choosing that indicates the best man or woman for the job. God always selects exactly the right person, regardless of our opinion, and we must follow His direction for service.

Shamgar also accomplished his task with seemingly inadequate tools: the oxgoad that served as his weapon was just a simple farm tool, and yet with it Shamgar saved a nation. We may think that the tools that are given to us are not ideal, and we may not consider ourselves to be adequate, but God's strength is made perfect in our weakness.²

Shamgar's service was such that he was recognised in God-breathed Scripture, his accomplishment recorded to inspire future generations – truly a *“good and faithful servant”*.³ What an honour to be remembered for service to the Master!

Bible references NKJV: (1) Judg. 3:31 (2) 2 Cor. 12:9 (3) Mat. 25:21



Deborah

Ira Williamson, Buxton, England



Bees are a valuable and necessary part of our world. These diligent workers are the only source of honey, and the main pollinators of many crops.

In the Hebrew language, Deborah's name is 'Bee'. Read the story of Barak and Deborah from Judges 4 to 5. Raised up by God to a place of feeding and guiding the people of God, she sat under the Palm of Deborah and the people came out to her. As a prophetess, it's apparent that she 'fed' God's word to the people – just as she did for Barak: *“Has not the LORD ... commanded ...?”*¹ Barak apparently knew God's will, but needed the encouragement from this diligent worker in order to undertake it. Further, Barak seemed to require more than God's word and command – he required Deborah's presence too. Barak saw the apparent futility of Israel fighting against Sisera. Nine hundred of the most up-to-date war machines and an army that would dwarf Israel's must have been a daunting consideration. Deborah knew it too. She also knew that her place was not on the battlefield – but her faith in God's promise of victory allowed her to immediately agree to Barak's demand for her presence. She knew what God expected of her and, by faith, worked to do His will. Barak's lack of unconditional faith did not change the outcome of God's plan for Israel, but it did affect his reward.

It was the loss of relationship with God that resulted in us missing the mark of God's desire for us. Conversely, having a relationship with God through Christ allows us to reach toward the highest goal through the power of the Spirit.² Perhaps we could learn from Deborah that God knows best and that our role should be one of simple faith: hear His commands and keep them. In other words – and not wanting to stretch the 'bee' analogy too far – God's call is for us to be all we can be.³

Bible references NKJV: (1) Judg. 4:6 (2) Eph. 4:13 (3) Phil. 3:12

Human rights

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

The extent of human rights, indeed their very existence, is a matter of heated debate. International forums have split them into ‘civil and political rights’ and ‘social, economic and cultural rights’, and nations do not fully agree as to what they are. Obviously, this very wide subject cannot be discussed in this short article; our purpose is to consider rights in relation to the belief, practice and preaching of a faith, particularly the Christian faith.

Where do rights come from?

The most famous statement of human rights is that of the American Declaration of Independence:

‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’

This refers to the Creator, who has given men conscience, intellect and responsibility; without His overriding right there would be no rights at all. Nothing could be said to be right, just a matter of feeling or opinion, and the inevitable result would be the victory of the strongest – ‘might is right’. Someone (unknown) said, “Only God has rights” – and he was right! Each human right has a human responsibility attached; for instance, the right to life implies *You shall not murder*.¹

Does everyone have the right to practise and speak about his faith?

Yes, for it is indeed a basic human right deriving from the Creator. This does, of course, mean that those who have a strong religious conviction have the right to express it, even if it conflicts with the values of the society they live in. A New Testament example is the reaction of Peter and the apostles, when instructed not to preach the gospel – they said, “*We must obey God rather than men.*”² Changing public attitudes should make no difference to this, although a judge in a recent UK case where a Christian couple refused a double bed in their guesthouse to two homosexuals justified his decision by saying that “public attitudes have changed in the last fifty years”.

Although the attitudes of the UK media and political elites are becoming more anti-Christian, this is nothing compared with what Christians suffer in some countries. The ‘Open Doors’ organisation annually compiles a World Watch

List of countries where the persecution of Christians is most severe, and for the last nine years the Communist dictatorship in North Korea has headed that list. It is claimed that even owning a Bible can result in the death penalty or long incarceration in a prison camp; whole families are taken away because children have been persuaded to admit that their parents read the Bible. All of the next eight on the list are Islamic countries: Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Yemen, Iraq and Uzbekistan. They vary in the extent of persecution, and some have freedom of worship in theory, negated by the prohibition of seeking to bring Muslims to Christ. There are many examples of violence against Christians, some by government forces.

It must be admitted that persons using the name ‘Christian’ have not been guiltless in this regard in the past, but no Christian should be guilty now. A Muslim or a Buddhist (or a Dawkins!) has the right to express his beliefs, and we have the right to say that they are false, even if that offends him. Truth is more important than sensibility or wounded pride.

Why do they do it?

Regrettably, religion is often inextricably mingled with politics. In the worst current example, North Korea, the people are brought to worship their Great Leader, sixteen years dead, because he represents their impoverished and backward nation. Christianity is seen as the religion of the enemy, America. Similarly, many Islamic fundamentalists see America as the ‘Great Satan’, and some have turned to terrorism, as every airline user knows. Saudi Arabia is still counted as a friend of the West, but conversion to Christianity is potentially punishable by death there. Opposition to Islam is seen as opposition to the government.

What should we do?

Or first, what should we not do? We must make it very clear that conversion to Christ does not mean opposition to the government. Christians are specifically told that they must be subject to the governing authorities,³ and the Lord Jesus said, “*My kingdom is not of this world.*”⁴ We can pray, both for those who are oppressed and for their oppressors, for the Lord said, “... *bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*”⁵

References: (1) Ex. 20:13 (2) Acts 5:29 (3) Rom. 13:1 (4) John 18:36 (5) Luke 6:28 ESV

The gift of encouragement

Geoff Hydon, Mount Forest, Canada

No, this is not technical stuff about the gift of exhortation (or encouragement) found in Romans 12:8. Nor is it a study of the lives of Bible people noted for their encouragement. It is an appeal for encouragers to use their gift well.

Isaiah's words could have motivated Barnabas,¹ Dorcas² and Priscilla,³ who perhaps exemplified the gift:

The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned,

That I should know how to speak a word in season to him (or her) who is weary.

He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.⁴

Our little extract from Isaiah's grand poetry gives three pointers for every encourager:

1. The gift is especially for the weary; God's loving provision for them.
2. It is a renewable resource. In fact, it requires daily replenishment. Encouragers need to have a frequent experience of contact with the God of all comfort.⁵
3. Knowing what to say to encourage is not information provided in our text. You may guess straight away this may be because every situation is different. We have all the Scriptures to help us,⁶ but we must ask for wisdom to use the right ones.⁷

If you have never felt the need of encouragement, it is unlikely this gift has been given to you, for it springs from sympathy. But surely you can relate to Isaiah's words: *who is weary?* Not just from a hard work-out in the gym, more often the ongoing demands of everyday tasks get to us, for instance caring for young children. The jobs need doing again, and again. God did not opt to expand the population with robots, but with growing and very demanding youngsters, whose ignorance always leads to accidents and whose growing knowledge never ceases to bring new challenges. And of course teens and spouses can be very demanding too, especially in the context of a busy work-life! Life is so symmetrical, and elderly ones may again experience childhood problems, coupled with larger required solutions. Something

common to encouragers in all these situations is keeping positive when your efforts seem to be either ignored or even defiantly rejected. You can either see that as an affront, or as an indication of need in the one you love. A wearying environment is where the encourager often works best and is needed most. Those with the gift of encouragement are able to focus on the other person, and they equip themselves with tools from the Word of God.

Have you been given the tongue of the learned (meaning disciples or well-instructed ones)? We can see this describes the life of the Lord Jesus. What a privilege, then, to use a gift that is so Christ-like and so honouring to Him. And since encouragement and correction are linked, we really do need to display our Master's grace and mercy. The Lord is now separated from sinners,⁸ but with the experiences He went through as a friend of sinners on earth, and with fullest sympathy, He now guarantees grace and mercy to meet needs.⁹ He may use you to do so. With so many Scriptures to choose from, how do we know what will first strengthen us and then help others? Well, how did the Lord know what to say? He treated communication with His Father as a constant priority. Jesus was daily shown by His Father what was going to confront Him and given the words to say.¹⁰ His disciples are assured that even in extreme circumstances, and with too little time to prepare what to say, they can be given the words too.¹¹ And if we haven't been given the words to use, we may be better to simply encourage by silent example,¹² until it is the right time to speak up.

Encouragers are alert to those in need, as we sustain them with our words (and Dorcas-like with our example). Our own past experiences are not just useful as anecdotes; "I remember what happened to me ..." stories. No, more than that, what we have felt ourselves of the application of God's Word can help us to share in our heart the challenge the other person is feeling. Our gift is for them, for their help, not just a nice way to enable us to talk about ourselves.

References NKJV: (1) Acts 4:33-37; 11:21-23 (2) Acts 9:36 (3) Acts 18:26 (4) Isa. 50:4 (5) 2 Cor. 1:3 (6) Rom. 15:4 (7) 2 Tim. 4:2 (8) Heb. 7:26 (9) Heb. 4:14-16 (10) John 8:28,38 (11) Mark 13:11 (12) John 8:6; 12:3



A secretary who can't type

An interview with Michael Elliott, Crowborough, England

Michael Elliott acts as recording secretary of the Conference of Elders of the Churches of God, secretary of the Fellowship Literature Committee, but mainly as editor of 'Intelligence' magazine, the global information magazine of the Churches of God.

Mike, is it really true that you can't type?

Michael: Well that's an exaggeration. I never learned keyboard skills in any formal way, and if you watched me use a computer you would see that only two fingers do most of the work! However, there is really no alternative to typing to get the work done efficiently, and in fact some of the software we now use to complete these tasks is as leading-edge as they come. Of course, my tasks include editorial work, which demands different skills.

These tasks have been undertaken by various men over the last hundred years. How is the work different now than in former generations?

Michael: The main difference is that information is distributed and received digitally and virtually instantaneously. This obviously means that information from around the world can be shared with the minimum time delay. After all, a news magazine is best enjoyed by the readers if it is current. It also means that I can concentrate on fulfilling the role of editor including 'approving' content and deciding what material should go in any particular issue. For the last two years my son Guy has taken on the responsibility of graphic design and magazine layout.

As for producing the reports of conferences of overseers, the brief is still to produce an approved and accurate written report of the conference which can be used as a reference book detailing all that has

taken place at any particular conference.

Thinking particularly of the news magazine, we don't often see your own work for the Lord detailed there. Can you tell us what you have been doing and how your own experience helps you know what is important to report?

Michael: I would be very diffident in speaking much about my own work for the Lord. I have always believed it is important to work as part of a team. The essential thing for me is to keep my personal relationship with the Lord right, which of course means being constantly in the Scriptures and understanding the privilege of prayer. I find Paul's words in Philippians 4:13 of great encouragement – *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*. And, of course, I could do none of these things without the long-suffering support of my dear wife Sylvia.

For the past seventeen years or so I have been privileged to serve the Lord virtually full time.

In the north-west of England the work was centred on outreach, involving 'door knocking', leaflet posting, speaking to people in town centres, etc. Naturally, whenever working with a local church, there would be responsibilities of gospel and ministry presentation. For a number of years I had close association with full-time evangelists using our double-decker bus in outreach work in town centres. I was also part of a team working in Ballinasloe, Ireland, seeking not only to reach out with the Gospel, but also to present church truths. More recently, a substantial part of each year has been spent in North America working with various churches of God, most particularly in Victoria, BC and in Mount Forest, Ontario, but



to a lesser extent in Vancouver, Denver and Toronto.

It is important that such work for the Lord is supported in prayer by His people, and reports in the magazine can encourage that activity.

You have successfully brought about several improvements in the production and presentation of Intelligence magazine: colour pictures, attractive layouts, challenge articles and use of technology, etc. What further improvements would you like to see?

I think the main challenge is how it can be made available on the Internet. It can already be provided as a PDF (portable document format) file and therefore anyone with a computer could receive the equivalent of a paper copy via the Internet. I appreciate that not everyone has a computer or wishes to receive the magazine on their computer, but in the near future, as people depend more on their computers and less on paper documents, this will have to be considered.

The future! I personally believe that the Lord's return is imminent. The Bible exhorts us to redeem the time, to buy up every opportunity. To that end I try to keep a balance between desk work and outreach. Secretarial responsibilities are important, however, and I am very grateful for the confidence others place in me to undertake my various duties.

The failure of atheism

Brian Johnston, Leigh, England

If atheism is true, then life is ultimately without purpose.

The Nobel prize-winning scientist, Steven Weinberg, an outspoken atheist, writes: ‘The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless. But if there is no solace in the fruits of our research, there is at least some consolation in the research itself ... The effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy’.¹ Weinberg considers life as being ultimately without purpose, but he does talk about how a passion for actually doing science gives life a temporary lift above the level of farce – and he finds a crumb of comfort in that.

On the other hand, a real sense of purpose is to be found in the fact that *we [were] ... created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*²

If atheism is true, then life is ultimately without meaning

In an address to the American Academy for the Advancement of Science in 1991, Dr. L.D. Rue encouraged his distinguished audience to cheat on their atheistic worldview if they wanted to be happy. He recommended that they should deceive themselves into believing some kind of ‘Noble Lie’ which gave them and the universe some meaning. He said: ‘The lesson of the past two centuries is that intellectual and moral relativism is profoundly the case.’ He explained that this, when taken to extreme, results in a drive by each of us to live only for ourselves without a sense of community. To avoid the fabric of society being destroyed in this way, Dr. Rue saw only two possible solutions to overcome this logical result of atheism. One was a totalitarian state, where the wishes of individuals were suppressed by the state imposing its own values on all of society (he didn’t want that). The alternative was to embrace some form of Noble Lie. A Noble Lie ‘is one that deceives us, tricks us, compels us [to go] beyond self-interest, beyond ego, beyond family, nation, [and] race.’ Why call it a lie? His answer was because it tells us the universe is infused with value and because it makes a claim to universal truth – things which atheists deny. Rue adds: ‘Without such lies, we cannot live.’

On the other hand, Jesus Christ said: *“I am the way, and the truth and the life.”*³ What Dr. Rue judged to be missing is to be found in Christ, and so in the Noble Truth of Christianity, as Christ’s faithful followers live selflessly *for the interests of others.*⁴

If atheism is true, then life is basically unlivable

The German philosopher Nietzsche, who died in the year 1900, made popular the saying: ‘God is dead.’ People at



that time failed to realize (and many still do) the consequences of killing God philosophically by declaring He doesn’t exist. That’s why Nietzsche concluded ‘I have come too early. This tremendous event is still on its way’.⁵ But 45 years after his death, the time had come, and everyone since then should know the terrible consequences of believing there’s no God. The point Nietzsche anticipated was this: in a world which believes there’s no God, objective right and wrong can’t exist, and so all things may be permitted. When Nietzsche’s fellow-country-man, Hitler, put Nietzsche’s ideas into practice, the world soon learnt the horrors that follow when we live consistently with the idea that God is dead, and life is senseless. If God doesn’t exist, then our world becomes an Auschwitz. This is man without God. It’s life without sense.

On the other hand, Jesus claimed: *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*⁶

If atheism is true, then it is not supported by scientific explanation

Atheistic scientists like Richard Dawkins concede that science has no ‘strongly satisfying’ explanation for why the universe appears to have been fine-tuned with the precise conditions ideally suited to life as we know it, but he urges his readers⁷ ‘not to give up hope’ in ‘some kind of multiverse theory’ (the totally speculative idea that a trillion trillion and more parallel universes exist simply to explain the remote chance of this one being as it is). In this unpublicized section, Dawkins appeals to his readers not to give up hope in the discovery of some new scientific theory that will one day save atheism!

On the other hand, *that which is known about God is evident ... for God made it evident ... For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes ... have been clearly seen ... through what has been made ... [but] they did not honor Him as God ... but they became futile in their speculations.*⁸

References: (1) Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* (2) Eph. 2:10 (3) John 14:6 (4) Phil. 2:4 (5) Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Parable of the Madman* (1882) (6) John 10:10 (7) *The God Delusion*, pp.157,158 (8) Rom. 1:19-21 NASB

Taking hope to the homeless

Kevin Jones, Vancouver, Canada

It's 6:40 pm, and the doors are at last open. Some have been waiting for an hour or more in the cold to ensure they get dinner tonight, but there are no guarantees. Many shuffle in from the street with a nod to those who count them in on a clicker and greet them with a smile, not a few by name. Others are clearly sick, with sticks, crutches and a few wheelchairs, nearly all clutching a plastic bag of prized belongings. But there are some smiles returned by regulars and they do have something to smile about, although you might not think so. Once they wandered the streets, near to death, smashed on drink and drugs, bruised and abused from unhealthy relationships or prostitution. But someone came to them, fed them, clothed them and gave them emergency shelter while guiding them back to some sort of normality. En route many recognized the hands of grace and the touch of God; they heard the voice of Jesus who said, *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt. 11:28).

This is the Church of God in Vancouver's input into work amongst the homeless of Vancouver, as is done in many other Canadian cities. The centre on East Cordova in downtown Vancouver serves three meals a day, 365 days a year and runs many rehabilitation programs. It was back in 2005 that the Church was introduced to this work by one of its number and some inquiries led to a door of opportunity being opened to share in the gospel area of their work. For five years now, between 8 and 10 of us have been going on the third Thursday of each month to serve a group of 80-100 and lead them in praise, followed by a short gospel message. Usually there are two services which means up to two hundred people are ministered to with words and works of kindness. As people file out to the dining hall, each is offered a further gospel opportunity in the form of a gospel leaflet. In 2010, one of our number was able to extend the opportunity and begin a weekly visit taking the Monday lunch time service.

Sadly for many western churches, the decline in numbers or static congregations have left many



services lacking in wholeheartedness. Here, you enter the domain of the homeless; you're their guest and if anyone is a stranger or looks out of place, it is most likely to be you! The very knowledge that there are so many unredeemed souls before you brings a sharpening to the message preached. Believers among those who attend express their appreciation for the visits in no uncertain terms and rarely do we depart from the centre not uplifted ourselves and grateful for the time we have enjoyed.

As for the results from such work, we can say for certain that one man has come almost every week for over two years now to the Breaking of the Bread by the Church of God in Vancouver. Furthermore, we would be reminded of the teaching the Lord gives on such work. Matthew 25:31-46 is strictly about help given to saints in the future, but we can draw from it how the Lord may value even menial tasks done for others in His Name: *"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, you did it to Me.'"*

