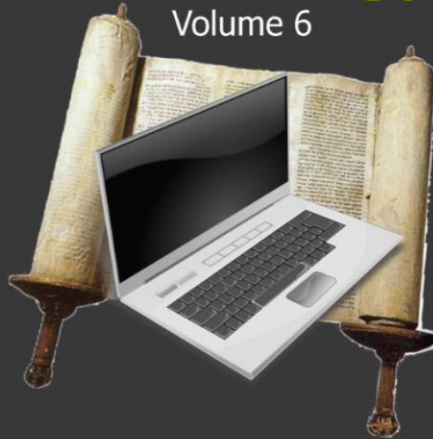


The Scrolls Anthology

Volume 6



A collection of writings
by Peter McArthur

A collection of spiritual writings by Peter McArthur

issachar.org

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The Issachar Scroll Writings Volume 6

These writings and the other Volumes in this series are some of the monthly teachings that have appeared on The Issachar Ministry web site (issachar.org) over the past 10 years or so.

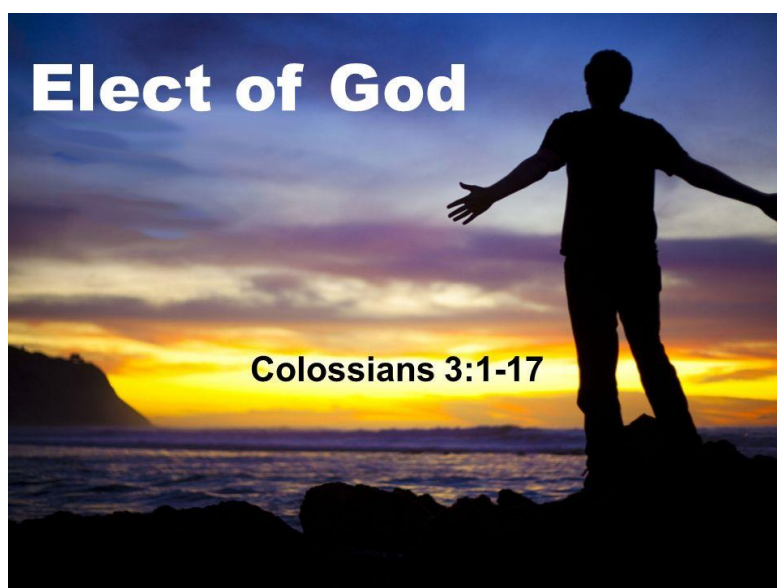
I felt it helpful to compile the writings into easy-to-access volumes rather than just have them listed on the web site and singularly at other sites. So, here they are. I hope they may help you grow in the Messiah and the Father's grand purpose for us all.

Peter McArthur

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Elect of God



Peter McArthur

There's a Jewish saying that goes something like this:

**How odd of God,
to choose the Jews.
It's not so odd,
the Jews chose God.**

This is based on the idea that Israel was an "elected, chosen" people. God chose them above all other peoples at the time. My oh my, that will really cause some people to stumble!

However in this month's teaching I don't want to go too far down that rabbit-hole of thought, but just to say the doctrine of "election" is rather a complicated one, and often gets people's backs up very quickly as they try to defend their particular understanding. So to begin with I would simply like to present a foundational thought.

Whatever you might think "election" is (being "chosen by God"), at the core is the concept that election ("chosenness") is mutual, it's a reciprocal relationship. God chooses you; you respond back to God by choosing Him. In other words, the chosen people are also the choosing people!

A bit complicated? Don't worry we're moving on in a moment to something much more exhilarating. Suffice it to say that God actually initiated the choice, because He's in control and has a divine purpose to fulfill. So even though God chose Abraham and his descendants to start with, the whole thing would've been quite meaningless if they hadn't reciprocated by "choosing" YHWH as their God. In this kind of relationship there has to be both a free acceptance **of** it and also a participation **in** it.

OK, enough of the difficult theology stuff. Now let's pick up on what Paul said about us being "**the elect of God**" (Colossians 3:12-17).

As those who have been **elect of God, holy and beloved, put on** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; **bearing with one another**, and **forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. **Above all** these things **put on** love, which is the **perfect bond of unity**. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be **thankful**. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with **thankfulness** in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving **thanks** through Him to God the Father.

That great phrase (elect of God, holy and beloved) holds within it a great wonder. It's a very deep truth that stretches from Eternity into Time, and how we choose to express it Daily as God's beloved. Note the sequence from Eternity into Time and into a Daily expression of His love. It's almost poetic in its truth. Three things stand out here - **Elect, Holy, and Beloved**. *Election* is from eternity. This precedes *Holiness* which then becomes centred in time. We the holy beloved ones, feeling God's love then choose to express it in our day to day lives.

After Paul introduces this marvellous theme he almost bluntly says "put on". Well you can only "put on" if first you "put off" the habits of the former life, the "old man". Now **put off** all these things: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, shameful speech out of your mouth (verse 8).

Then he follows through with saying there are 7 things to "put on". Note that the number 7 usually stands for perfection in Biblical symbolism. These are listed as "**a (1) heart of compassion, (2) kindness, (3) humility, (4) gentleness and (5) patience, (6) bearing with one another, and (7) forgiving each other**".

Interestingly enough the word for "**heart**" is actually *bowels* which is an ancient way of saying you express deep compassion, which was believed to have its seat in the inward parts of the body (heart, liver, lungs, etc.). It has the meaning of deep-seated emotions and affections, a place where great passion is found.

Paul then says "**bearing with one another**" (verse 13). Literally it means to "bear with one another and forgive yourself" (see Matthew 6:12 and Ephesians 4:32). It's a pronoun emphasizing the truth that we are all members of Christ's body – members one of another - so that in forgiving *each other* we also forgive *ourselves* (see Vincent's Word Studies).

The world puts it the other way around by saying we have to forgive ourselves first, and only then are we able to forgive others. That's not true. It might sound correct but it puts US first, when Scripture says put OTHERS before you. God and others first, then self.

The phrase "**bearing with one another**" actually means "*holding yourselves back from one another*". We could say "don't irritate each other and keep yourself from provoking other believers". It's about the brethren as a whole, the Body of Christ, not us as individuals! The very reverse of how the world is acting at present with "selfies" etc.

In verse 14 Paul says "**above all**". The wording is a metaphor for a garment. Some versions have "*above all*" or "*over all*" and it means to "*put on*" like an upper piece of clothing. There's a play on words here as Paul refers to the Christian's garments. Clothe yourselves with all Christian grace towards the brethren. It's been called the garments of a renewed soul. A lovely phrase.

The wording “**above all these things**” is quite important. It doesn’t mean “as well as these things” or “besides these things”. So what does he mean by “these things”? Well Paul is referring to the things that he’s just mentioned in verses 12 and 13. The seven attitudes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, and forgiving each other.

Now I dare say that all these 7 by themselves would seem to us to be pretty heavy to live by! That’s a lot of virtues to try and live out each day. But here’s Paul saying “over and above all these pretty demanding virtues I want you to put on something else”. Fair go Paul; you’re already loading us up with enough!

Well, that’s how the flesh and religion would respond I’m sure. But we are the elect, the chosen, the redeemed ones, and there’s a demand on us – we’ve been bought with a price and we are not ourselves any longer (1 Cor 6:20). So Paul (by the Holy Spirit) has every right to place an even bigger demand upon us; “**above all these things**” put on something even greater, LOVE!

Well we should expect that I suppose. Scripture is saturated with that word. Love embraces and knits together all the 7 virtues. Even the word “bond” is a reference to a girdle which binds and holds all the other garments together. So Paul is saying that self-sacrificial love (agape) acts like a girdle that holds all the other 7 virtues together in unity. What a thought.

You can have the 7 great and wonderful virtues in your life, but if agape, self-sacrificial love isn’t holding them altogether, it’s really not worth anything. We need God’s agape love to bind all things in perfect unity. That special word *perfect* or *perfectness* is a collective idea in Scripture, not a personal concept. When the world talks about being perfect it’s nearly always referring to an individual’s aspiration to attain to something greater and bigger and better.

However the Biblical concept of perfection is about the whole, the corporate Body of Christ, the ALL of us perfectly joined together in God-given unity (1 Cor 1:10). Perfection is a collective idea which goes back to what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:27 “**Christ in you, the hope of glory**”. Many Christians think the “you” refers to them as individuals; Christ in YOU the born-again believer. But it doesn’t.

Here the Greek word “**you**” is plural. Paul is saying Christ Jesus is in us corporately, that is the hope of glory. So putting on agape self-sacrificial love is the girdle, the bond that holds us ALL together as the Body of Christ as we express the 7 virtues. It’s all about the BODY folks. As difficult as it can be at times, that’s what the glory is about – loving the brethren with a self-sacrificial love. I’ve failed in it and you probably have too (or will). But at the end it’s not our attempts trying to be better Christians; it’s about having been chosen, responding to the Father’s choice, and aligning with what He is purposing. Grace would be a great word here!

Then finally he draws it together by saying let the “**word (logos) of Christ richly dwell within you**”. Again it’s plural. It’s a phrase he normally doesn’t use and only appears here in all of his epistles. He’s saying the Gospel word by which you’ve been chosen and called and is apparent in Christ, is to be clearly seen in your mutual lives. Allow it to richly and abundantly be in you and it will produce the spirit of true godly wisdom in you corporately. Of course as this is expressed in us as a Body, it has the flow-on effect of taking root in us individually. The two go hand in hand.

By letting the words of Christ’s teachings inhabit our deepest inner being it becomes a permanent part of our thinking. As this happens the “**peace of Christ rules in our hearts**” (verse 15). This word “**rules**” actually means umpire, so the point is that the peace which only Christ gives will act like an umpire to govern, control and even adjust issues that may arise among brethren.

Someone said it’s like Christ having the casting-vote in any church disagreement. And of course it will always be on the side of love. Let Christ decide, that’s the point. Just imagine what it would be like if we all practiced this as a general rule in church disagreements? Letting love truly reside and decide. The unity of the Body is a strong argument indeed for peace among the saints.

There's another level to this. While the peace of Christ can umpire in cases when there's antagonism between brethren, it can also apply to times when our individual thoughts and attitudes are in direct disagreement with the Father Himself. Most of us probably wouldn't openly disagree with the Father or challenge Him (although some do), but we can and frankly do, when we choose not to invite Him into some of our personal decision-making moments.

While we might never openly say we oppose the Father, in reality we probably do. Think of times when you've chosen NOT to ask Him for direction just in case He should give His opinion or guidance. You know what He's going to say, so better not to ask Him. Or when it's been easier to block out that Voice because you know only too well He's likely to give contradictory advice to what you're thinking or planning. Or am I the only one who's done this?

Paul wraps up all of this by inciting us to be thankful (Col 3:15-17).

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

"Whatever you do, do all" is what it literally says. This refers to both our WORDS as well as our DEEDS. An old Puritan saying goes like this: **"Let your words be right, and your deeds upright."**

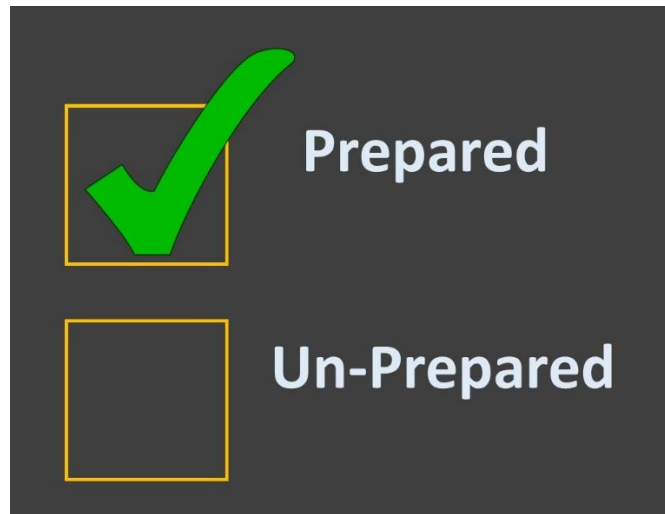
"In the name of the Lord Jesus" could be used as a kind of Golden Rule for us. Do the "all" in the spirit and attitude of Jesus!

"Giving thanks" is Paul's great exhortation to us. He sees it as a spiritual duty of very great importance; so should we. **"A thankful heart makes a victorious and attractive character."**

Peter McArthur

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The Unprepared Ones



Peter McArthur

The days of Noah and the days of Lot

One of the most important truths I've ever learnt is that wisdom is an important End-Time requirement for spiritual maturity and having the ability to "understand the times". While (spiritual) "knowledge" is good, and (spiritual) "understanding" is better, what will carry us through the mire of the coming deception is (spiritual) "wisdom".

Simply put,

Knowledge is the **acquiring** of spiritual truth;
Understanding is the **interpretation** of that truth; but
Wisdom is the **application** of both.

With so many evil, unrighteous and generally "bad" things happening on the face of the earth, as Christians we can so easily miss some important principles if we rely too much on what we think to be "truth". For example, many believers are saying we're in the "Days of Noah" because of the violence, rise of Islam, same-sex issues, apostasy in the church, etc. Just Google it and see how many sites there are! You'll note that the focus is nearly always on the ascendancy of evil and ungodliness.

The assumption being that Jesus warned us that the "Days of Noah" and its accompanying iniquity would be repeated just before His return. Therefore with so much wickedness happening around us, some say we're in those Days again. Now while it's quite true that evil is on the rise and apostasy is gaining ground, Jesus did NOT directly say those specific things were signs of His return.

Yes He DID make a comparison between the last days and the "Days of Noah" (and "of Lot" – something that's often left out in this discussion), but His central theme here was NOT that there would be great wickedness as in Noah's and Lot's time. Instead, the point He was actually making was simple and clear, things **would go on as normal for most people** right up until the End!

Read what He DID say (Luke 17:27-30).

- "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were **eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage**, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were **eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building**; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.”

And in Matthew 24:37-39.

- “For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were **eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage**, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.”

Note that in Jesus’ teaching the idea of moral corruption and the rise of evil are NOT emphasized. So was Jesus telling us that the last generation would be marked by extreme rebellion and wickedness as in Noah’s generation? Not directly, but what are emphasized are the common events found in everyday societies throughout the world and throughout history. Things like drinking, eating, marrying and building. These are the ordinary things of our common human existence that both saved and unsaved partake of; no reference here to wickedness.

Please note I’m NOT denying that the last days will be marked by ungodliness and wickedness. Of course they will, and Jesus’ reference to the “Days of Noah and Lot” indicates that. The people who heard Jesus say that, would’ve known from their scriptural texts that the times of Noah and Lot were indeed marked by great evil.

But Jesus main thrust was that the majority of people living back then simply did “not understand” what was going on until it started to happen (Mtt 24:39). That’s His point – they had no way to comprehend the times. His point for us today is the same – when the moment comes most people will be going about their normal daily routines. They simply will not recognize what will be unfolding right before their eyes! Because of that they will not be prepared for it, and therefore unable to cope.

So what’s the gist of all this? To understand the actual meaning of any of Jesus’ sayings (parables and teachings) we need to look at the last things He says. In the culture of Jesus’ day the point of any discourse was what was said at the end of the teaching. In other words, the point a teacher was trying to make was summed up in his closing remarks, almost the last few words.

In our western culture we’re more prone to dissect a parable and look at all the ins and outs, and the obscure meanings it might contain. In Biblical times this was not the case. A parable may have many facets to its meaning, but you could always understand the point of it by recalling the final few words or sentence. The concluding remark of a teacher was the point to be remembered. That’s a good solid rule of interpretation to keep in mind for us as we study Scripture.

For example, we’ve probably all heard sermons about the new wineskins (Matthew 9:17). Now without reading the text again, what’s the point of the parable according to sermons you’ve heard? Well it’s most likely to be something like “old wine skins aren’t useful anymore, we need the new wine” – “out with the old, in with the new” – “time to jettison the old revelation, time to bring in a new anointing”. Or something similar. It may surprise you to know that the point we’ve subtly been taught in sermons is NOT what Jesus was trying to tell us.

Using the rule I outlined earlier, let’s see what the parable is actually telling us. Here is the conclusion of Jesus’ teaching according to Matthew (Mark doesn’t have this particular ending, but Luke has something similar): “... **they put new** (*neos* = freshly made; youthful) **wine into new** (*kainos* = not worn out; unused; newer in quality) **wineskins, and BOTH are preserved**”.

See the point, BOTH the wine and the wineskins are to be preserved. Now how many sermons have you heard emphasize that part of the parable? Not too many I would think. The focus generally by

preachers is on the “newness” of the wine, not so much on the ability of the “quality” of wineskins to contain the fresh wine. But the point Jesus is making is that BOTH the wine and the wineskins should be preserved. (Here “wine” and “wineskins” is a common rabbinic analogy for “teaching”).

As a sideline note in Luke's version of this teaching (5:37-39) the sentence finishes off with a rather striking saying “...**the old is good**”. Again this is not often preached on either! We do need to be more discerning when deciding what to preach/teach on, and not be so selective just because a comparative text is easier to fit our pre-conceived views.

Now back to our main point in regard to the Days of Noah and Lot. What is said near the ending of that teaching is the important thing. As in those ancient days, so will it be like at Jesus' return – ordinary everyday events will continue without the vast majority of people realizing what's about to happen. Yes great catastrophic events will come upon the earth, but Jesus warns us that most will not be alert enough until that very moment.

So I'm not saying that there are no comparisons between the days of Noah/Lot and the final generation, I'm just saying it wasn't Messiah's main point in this teaching. The people of Noah's day, and those of Lot's time, were just like the unsaved will be in the final generation – lack of awareness of what's coming. They simply did not realize the end was that close. They suspected nothing catastrophic was about to hit. “As then, so now”.

Interestingly in this teaching Jesus indicates that His Coming will be a catastrophic event for the unsaved, just as the flood was in Noah's day, and the fire and brimstone was in Lot's. Gives us pause to think! When He comes it will be a day of rejoicing for the saved and prepared, but a day of great catastrophe for the unsaved and unprepared. We know, and the people of Jesus' day, all knew that the majority of people alive in Noah's day, as well as Lot's, were sinners, disrespectful of God, and unrighteous. However in His teaching Jesus mentions none of that, at least directly. His focus is on their lack of awareness – and we could add – the lack of preparedness that goes with it.

So the point being considered here is the (spiritual) **unpreparedness** of most people for what's coming. While the teaching seems to indicate Jesus is referring to the unsaved not being prepared, we could also add that many “saved” people are likewise not prepared. Hence the invariable question must arise: are WE prepared, are YOU prepared?

I will finish with this quote from a great and insightful writer, [Theodore Austin-Sparks](#) (1888-1971).

“There seems to be something in the air that says His coming must be near. We seem to feel that it cannot be far off. As the Lord's children, we “groan within ourselves” more than ever; and there is an increasing groan in the whole creation. The travail in this creation is becoming almost unbearable. But however that may be, there is something in the spirit of the true child of God which says that His coming is drawing nigh. It is the only hope; there is no hope in any other direction. Unless God Almighty intervenes, there is no hope for this world. Ah, but He is going to intervene! He is going to intervene in His Son, and there is the hope. And so the Apostle speaks of that “blessed hope” — the “appearing of the glory of our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13). May the Lord fill us with new joy in the very contemplation of His near coming, to complete all that which He has begun.”

May this be so very true for all of us in this generation. We await what is coming, not with fear - yes with some trembling perhaps – but we wait with hope and expectancy.

The point for the unsaved is “**are you prepared?**”
The point for the saved is “**HOW well prepared are you?**”

Blessings to you, Peter McArthur

End Time prophecy guidelines



Peter McArthur

Just Google “End times / Last Days / Prophecy” and see what you get. Over 29 million sites, the majority being Christian orientated. No way could you ever get through all of that; most of us would probably give up after reading a few articles, by which time we’d be completely baffled. Anyway most people tend to search out sites that confirm what they already believe to be true. It’s called [confirmation bias](#).

I really do pity some new believer wanting to know what “the Church” teaches about the Last Days and discovering such a bewildering array of opinions. So I’m definitely not going to add to the confusion (I hope), but I would like to set out some guidelines to help us get a better focus for understanding the seeming perplexity of prophetic scriptures.

First of all I’d like to say that there really shouldn’t be this kind of confusion. Is God actually hiding things from us, making it all so hard to grasp, and causing us to squirm with fear in case we miss something? We do know for example in former times He told Daniel to “seal” up the words until “the end”. But having said that, Daniel still went ahead and wrote down the visions he received anyway! Now even on that level there seems to be a little confusion. Yahweh says through the angel, “seal up the words” but Daniel goes ahead and writes them down telling us all about his visions. What’s going on here and what exactly was Daniel told to “shut up and seal”?

There are two main views about this text. One is that the prophecy was not to be actually ‘shut up’ or ‘sealed’ as if being locked away, but only to preserve the writings for later.

The other holds that in Daniel’s time the book would indeed have been sealed (hidden away from prying eyes), but understanding about it’s meaning would only become clearer to those believers who secretly diligently studied the book much later – the events ultimately being fully understood when the actual end days arrived.

The point being that obviously the message contained in Daniel's book was NOT kept secret because it's been in the Scriptures for two and a half thousand years. Even Jesus told us to understand its meaning (Matthew 24:15).

So this can't mean that it was to be locked away as such, but rather it means that Daniel was to protect and securely preserve its message. Of course part of that may have been for him and others who followed, to keep the parchments secure somewhere, but clearly not to lock it away until the actual end days arrived – because the book has been in the Jewish Scriptures for millennia.

Interestingly it was never included in the "Prophets" (*Nevi'im*) section of the Jewish Bible (*Tanakh*) but only in the "Writings" (*Ketuvim*) section. Yet Jesus did recognize him as a prophet: **"Jesus said...Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place; let the reader understand.** (Matthew 24:15).

Like so many prophecies they can usually only be properly understood when the prophesied event gets very close. I remember reading many years ago that about 80% of the Messianic prophecies about Jesus only happened in the last 48 hours of His life. Don't quote me on the precise percentage, but I hope you get the picture. Most prophecies only make sense as they're actually happening, or of course in hind-sight.

Now in this text there's an interesting observation when the angel says, **"knowledge shall increase, many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand"** (Dan 12:10).

The WISE ones shall understand. I've often said that an important End Time characteristic will be Wisdom (and its accompanying gift, Discernment).

So we have the angel tell Daniel that **"the wise shall understand"**; Jesus saying **"Let the reader understand"**; topped off in Revelation with this, **"and he said to me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand."** (Rev 22:10).

Then Rev 22:11 continues on: **"He that is unjust let him be unjust still, and he which is filthy let him be filthy still, and he that is righteous let him be righteous still, and he that is holy let him be holy still."**

If you look closely at that saying you'll note the similarity in Daniel 12:10. **"Many will be purged, purified and refined but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand."**

The wise and righteous ones WILL understand, but the wicked ones won't have a clue what's going on. Daniel is actually told that special insight (discernment) will be given to us for understanding. So it's not just having good Bible knowledge or being able to unravel the prophetic complexities that's important, we will need (and receive) special "insight" from the Holy Spirit to discern what's taking place. Forget all the movies about the end of the world, alien invasion, secret codes, etc. What we need and will receive will be illumination by God's Spirit to comprehend the Biblical prophetic texts.

Even in Daniel's time any attempt to try and understand it would've been in vain. However in the End Days when the Old and New Testament prophecies become especially relevant, understanding will be released. What then is the difference between Daniel's visions and those given to John in Revelation? One thing – **TIMING**. The things of Daniel's day were not imminent, but according to Revelation now they are. John completes the revelation which was originally given to Daniel.

So there we have it; Daniel is told to SEAL and John is told to UNSEAL.

To pick up on my opening comments; God isn't playing games with us and deliberately making us get confused about End Times events. On the contrary He's been astonishingly gracious in revealing things about it all, preserving the truth of it, and now releasing understanding to those who are righteous and wise!

While some commentators and scholars tell us that such prophetic books should be left alone because they're shrouded in hard-to-decipher symbols, unintelligible mystical language, and even fables, Jesus says, "**Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it.**" (Rev 1:3).

Religion says "leave such books alone"; Jesus says "Blessed is he who does read". Jesus the Word Himself declares such books now O-P-E-N and even understandable. Gracious God indeed!

An important side note: see the three-fold structure in the text (1) **read** (2) **hear** (3) **heed**. Here is an action, something practical to do if you want to understand prophetic texts. These three things are a kind of single unit because there's spiritual truth in the progression of them. Reading (preferably aloud) leads to proper hearing (by the Spirit) which in turn will give you inner conviction to heed and do.

I'll leave it to you to delve further – treasure this insight because there's a revelation here about how to understand prophetic scriptures: Read, Hear, and Heed. Right, so having laid a foundation let's outline some guidelines to help decipher and discern what the prophetic scriptures are saying.

Guideline 1: Don't be apathetic towards End Time prophecy – especially if it seems to contradict what you already believe. As we've just seen, understanding has been given to us to understand.

It might seem all very confusing, so a lot of believers just give up and put it aside in the "too hard" basket. But listen again to the words of Jesus: "Blessed is who who (1) **reads** and who (2) **heeds** the words" (Rev 1:3).

Maybe we should actually read the prophetic texts to ourselves and each other more regularly. Even aloud to yourself as you sit in the lounge, in the study, under a tree or whatever. Biblically speaking the scriptures are meant to be read corporately among a gathering of the saints, and aloud.

Can you imagine what it might be like if the saints gathered to hear these prophetic texts read aloud on a regular basis? And then perhaps to simply share what the Spirit revealed as the text was presented. I'm not talking about someone jumping in with their favourite End Time doctrine on the Rapture, Antichrist or whatever and then brow-beat the rest of us. But just to be humble enough to put aside any pre-conceived belief and attentively LISTEN to what the Spirit is saying to the assembled saints at that moment! It will take a lot of humility, grace and discipline, but it can be done – we just need to do it in Christian love.

The reader, the hearer, and the heeder would ALL be blessed if only we did what the Word tells us to do. Blessed is the reader, blessed is the hearer, blessed is the heeder.

Boy, then we would really have CHURCH! A gathering of the saints who are willing to actually listen to the Spirit as the prophetic texts are read aloud. There's something very special about reading the Word aloud, slowly and considerately, with purpose. Not formally or religiously, but with a desire to hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church at that moment.

A few times when I've participated in such (usually small) gatherings, what revelation and insight has come! Quite astonishing, and very revolutionary – we should do it much more often.

That word “heed” has the sense of being diligently active with strenuous care, rather than of watching over the teaching to simply preserve it. The latter was more akin to Daniel’s time, the former for our time. We’re not just to preserve the truth of it all, but we are to be active and strenuous in living it out and being prepared for the accompanying events.

In other words, READ these prophetic books, treasure them in your heart so that when the End Time events begin to unfold you’ll have an understanding of how they’ll proceed. Note that I’m not telling you to put aside food supplies, build a bunker, run off and hide to escape the New World Order police, be a “prepper” or any such thing.

That’s not my mission; you’ll need to hear the voice of the Spirit yourself HOW you act when the time gets closer. I’m simply outlining some guidelines. Sorry if you’re looking for more practical details, suggestions and assistance – that’s not what I’m called to do.

Guideline 2: Treat the texts as plainly as you can. I know this sounds dangerous, to treat the Bible as literal. People often say, “Well Jesus said to cut off your hand and pluck out your eye (Matthew 18:9); are we to literally do this every time we sin? If we did then we’d all be armless and blind very quickly!” Obviously, this saying isn’t meant to be literal and only makes sense when you realize that it was (and still is) common practice among rabbis to exaggerate something to make a point. Hearers of Jesus day would’ve understood the difference; often today we don’t.

I don’t want to get side-tracked into debating the “hard sayings of Jesus” because they’re plenty of good internet sites that can do better justice than I could ever do. What I’m suggesting is that when dealing with prophetic End Times texts it would be a wise thing to treat the words according to a plain and natural reading of the text. In other words, if the words are not obviously symbolic or in parable form, take the meaning of them on face value – as plainly as possible.

In Protestant circles (compared to Catholic, Orthodox and Liberal theology) this is called the grammatical-historical hermeneutic approach. Basically it says that the context dictates the meaning. The aim of this method is to discover the meaning of a passage just as the original author would’ve intended and what the original hearers would’ve ordinarily understood as making common sense. Any text is then seen as having only a single meaning or sense. See [here](#) for a deeper consideration.

But you need to be consistent in your approach and not just mix up your method by throwing in allegorical and symbolic meanings when you find a verse too difficult. That’s quite a common approach, even in scholarly circles, when someone treats the text literally or plainly, but when they come across a section they don’t agree with theologically or find hard to understand, they just allegorize it and push the true meaning aside.

Really, that’s deceiving and unscholarly. You can’t chop and change the text to suit your own view, you need to be consistent. This is where humility often fails. Maybe you’ve heard supposed experts say “the Bible text doesn’t always mean what it says”? That’s just a cop out, a method often used in cults by the way. With that kind of attitude you’ll find yourself playing mental gymnastics all the time as you read; very unhelpful.

So take prophetic texts to mean what they’re saying in a straightforward plain sense – unless it’s clearly symbolic. Easy to say I know but can be a bit hard to practise. Nevertheless when you get into the swing of it you’ll find the Spirit begins to show you the difference. Of course certainly pray for such insight as you read so you can hear what He’s saying; He won’t let you down if your heart really wants truth. It’s His way!

Guideline 3: See End Times through the lens of the Prophetic Feasts. For over 35 years this has been one of my mainstays in trying to resolve difficulties about the End Times. As I began to slowly learn about the Feasts of the Lord (NOT “feasts of Israel” by the way), I saw things in a clearer light. Each of the three major feasts (7 in all) is symbolic and very rich in meaning.

In Colossians 2:17 Paul says they are a “**shadow of things to come**”. Passover being the representative of Jesus’ death as the Lamb of God on that day; Pentecost as the giving of the Spirit just as the Torah was given on the same day in Moses’ time; and Tabernacles as the great ingathering of the harvest, a shadow of the End Time ingathering.

These three feasts have much deeper meanings associated with them; with Passover and Tabernacles each having other associated parts to them. Only Pentecost consists of one Feast. See my free eBook [The Three Prophetic Feasts](#).

In relation to the End Times, the Feasts give indicators to the fulfilment of prophecies about the Messiah and the Last Days. Knowing about what each of the 7 total Feasts stand for will give extraordinary insight to how the final Feast, Tabernacles (Booths) will pan out. The clues are there, and the times are indeed ripe for spiritual understanding by the Spirit – if we are wise enough to study and learn.

For example, if Jesus died at the Feast of Passover, and if the Spirit came down on the Feast of Pentecost, isn’t it obvious that something will happen on the Feast of Tabernacles at some time in the (near) future?

The pattern has been established, it’s already worked out in the first 2 Feasts, so you can be certain one day on a future Feast of Tabernacles “something” enormous is going to occur. The clues are in the three sections of the general Feast of Tabernacles, **(1)** the Day of Trumpets, **(2)** the Day of Atonement, **(3)** the Feast of Ingathering itself. Prophetically speaking the original Feasts were rehearsals of greater things to come.

Each of the above three sections of the overall Feast of Tabernacles tell us what will occur at the end of the age, in the precise sequence just as the Feast itself has a sequence. A hint – the Day of Trumpets is clearly telling us about the trumpets that will sound in the End Times (see Revelation chapters 8 to 11).

Many believers skip over the Book of Leviticus because it has so many rules and regulations and they think it’s rather boring. It’s Scripture! There’s truth in it, so read chapter 23 and hold onto your seats. In that chapter the initial seven Feasts are outlined, each being prophetic of the Father’s divine calendar. He’s alerted us ahead of time, and while much was “sealed up” it’s now open through the coming of the Messiah and the understanding given through the Holy Spirit.

It’s all there for us to unpack – if we are righteous and wise – and heed the revealed words.

Guideline 4: Avoid taking your cue from the media. Among prophetic circles in relation to the End Times it’s quite a common thing for Bible teachers to point to catastrophes and other tragic events and say “this is a sign we’re in the Last Days”. Whether it’s a hurricane, an increase in earthquakes, economic and financial woes, wars or political intrigue – all these are fuel for the End Times fire, so to speak.

Over the past 30 years I can’t keep count how many times a prophecy buff has pointed to an event in the media and said “this is a sign of what’s happening in God’s agenda”. The election of President Trump was a recent example. Because his name is “Trump” there was an immediate linking of his name to “the last trump” (KJV) of Scripture. Really saints, we need to be more honest with handling

the Word. While it might be true that there's an increase in earthquakes and that the climate is changing, these in themselves are not necessarily indicators of a Last Days scenario. We shouldn't take our cue from the headlines but it's surprising how many ministries do this. When we allow human imagination to dictate rather than Holy Spirit inspiration, we'll find ourselves all over the place.

Discernment goes out of the window and we're prone to latch onto anything that seems to support our own personal End Time scenario. It gets worse when a respected and popular pastor uses this technique and his followers accept it without discerning the accuracy of what's being presented. As a result an awful lot of time and energy goes into chasing a fad that has little true spiritual importance. And we wonder why there's so little accurate discernment in the Body of Christ today!

Optional Guideline: Understanding the Hebrew nuances of words and phrases. I'm introducing this subject because it might help you get a grip on the more subtle meanings of the language and culture used in Bible times. If you feel it isn't for you, that's fine. By the way, I'm not suggesting you become a scholar in regard to this, just a believer who is willing to read a little more about the background of the Hebrew culture and its impact on Scripture.

One of the problems we have in modern Western Christianity is that we tend to read popular books which often don't require much literary discernment. We can be very prone to take on board something from an author because they're famous or popular, and not actually THINK about what they're presenting. In past decades Christians were usually much more willing to debate and think things through. It's really a sad reflection on today's Church that we don't debate, even in our own minds. We actually tend to criticize rather than deliberate.

However my point is to encourage you to read some books that open you up to the culture that lay behind the society of Jesus' day. They're not that difficult to read, and it might do some good to read something that makes us think and consider at a deeper level. Some examples are listed at the end of this teaching if you're interested.

So what's this got to do with the End Times? Quite a lot really. Take this example from Luke 18:8 where in the parable of the Unjust Judge Jesus concludes His teaching by saying **"When the Son of Man comes will He find (*literally*) THE faith on the earth?"**

Most of today's popular commentators say that this means there won't be many believers alive when Jesus comes who will have "THE faith" or even "faith in Him". They point to how many people today don't actually accept the Christian faith anymore. However they misunderstand what the Jewish/Hebrew idea of "faith" means in its original context. As Western Christians we generally associate "faith" with a belief or trust in God. But for the hearers of Jesus' day "faith" didn't mean that at all. It meant to have tenacity, brazenness and a headstrong perseverance. Today we might call it "raw nerve" or something like that.

So when Jesus said **"will the Son of Man find faith on earth"** He was really talking about an unyielding type of determination that comes from knowing the true nature of God. He wasn't saying that when He returns He hopes there's going to be a lot people around who still believe in Him.

When He returns Jesus wants to see us with a strong tenacity, having a headstrong perseverance and doggedness about us. Not in an arrogant manner, but in standing firm, and not flinching no matter what the Antichrist or False Prophet throw at us. The saints at the end of the age will need to be of a persistent spirit with a kind of unyielding resolve. In Australia we call it being gutsy!

It may not be a polite way of acting, but Biblically speaking the Scriptures give us many examples of this gutsiness. Look at how Abraham argued with Yahweh or how Moses pleaded with Him not to destroy Israel. They just would not let go.

When Jesus often said **“your faith has saved you”** (e.g. Lk 7:50 / Mk 10:52) He wasn’t necessarily speaking of the person’s belief in Him as Messiah, or their stirred-up faith to believe for a miracle. In the context of His day He was talking about their firm unyielding determination to receive. He was commenting on their bold persistence; they wouldn’t give up and held on.

This is nothing like the claim of many in the “Word and Faith Movement” who say you just need to “have faith” and the miracle will come to you, like magic. Rather the Father loves a strong-willed determination in His nature that is evidenced by gutsiness and unyielding determination. For the Jew, faith in God is seen as bold persistence, and the people of Jesus’ day understood it that way.

Here’s another insight for us, about one of the most hotly debated verses in Scripture; **“No one knows the day or hour”** (Matthew 24:36). For most of us we’ve been taught that this means no-one except the Father knows the timing of the Messiah’s return, not even Jesus Himself. And fair enough that’s what it looks like, especially in an English translation.

It seems to say quite straightforward that we just don’t know, so don’t even try to work it out. It’s a waste of time to spend energy on it because only one person knows the exact moment and that’s the Heavenly Father, and He hasn’t even revealed it to the angels or to His Son! Ok, fair enough – but what if this saying is about something that the everyday Jew of Jesus’ day DID understand? What if there’s more to this than we generally accept?

There’s a view about this based on an understanding of a Hebrew idiom commonly used among Jews of Jesus’ time. It’s in relation to the Day of Trumpets, part of the overall Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Trumpets is a unique day among all the other Biblical holy days because it happens on the first day of the Hebrew lunar month.

The problem with the arrival of this Feast is because it can occur after either the 29th day or the 30th day of the preceding month. It depends whether the moon is first seen by two witnesses on the 29th day or not. Because of this it’s referred to as **“the feast that no man knows the day or hour of”** or sometimes even the phrase “the hidden feast”.

The new month couldn’t strictly begin until at least two witnesses had seen the very first sliver of that new moon and reported this to the High Priest. Once others confirmed this to be accurate, the priests would sound the shofar to declare the beginning of the Feast.

Until those two reliable witnesses announced the sighting of the moon, the response to whether the Feast had begun would always be “no one knows the day or the hour” when it starts. So the words of Jesus have a rather significant impact if we take the view of understanding based on a Hebrew idiom common at that time. Was Jesus saying that He would come at Feast of Trumpets (the Ingathering)? They could know the season but not the year. It’s most probable His disciples would’ve understood immediately what He meant.

Increasingly as we become more aware of the Hebrew background to many of the New Testament concepts, we realize how much the Scriptures have been separated further and further from their original Hebrew foundations. So could it be that Jesus was indicating a time of His coming without specifying the actual “moment”? I’m not trying to twist Scripture here or play word games, just trying to get to a point of truth.

If I said to someone here in Australia “It’s summer time so come around for a barbecue at my house but you’ll have to guess what day to arrive” and then smiled and said “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie” – most Australians would know I’m referring to January 26th, Australia Day.

So was Jesus inferring the day of His coming (Matt 24:30) would occur at a future Day of Trumpets by using a kind of allusion? If you read the text He actually drops a hint when He says **“and He will send forth His angels with a GREAT TRUMPET...”** (verse 31).

Now here comes a slight intervention in the text. After verse 31 we find the parable of the Fig Tree (verse 32 to 35). If you read it closely it doesn't seem to fit the flow of what Jesus is talking about. He's been speaking about His coming then drops in a small detour about Israel. Then in verse 36 He says those words **“But of THAT DAY AND HOUR no one knows.”**

Commentators give us a clue. You'll need your Bibles for this. Try reading verses 29 to 31 and then skip straight down to verse 36, omitting verses 32 to 35 for a moment. Verse 36 seems to fit better when you read it directly on from verse 31 as if it's a part of that discourse. The portion about the fig tree is interpolated into the passage, a kind of verbal interjection. If you momentarily ignore the parable guess what happens?

It reads like this: **“...they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other, but of that day or hour no one knows”**. Hint! Feast of Trumpets (possibly)?

Now some might think that if we can accept He's coming on some future Day of Trumpets, this breaks the context and plain meaning of Scripture. No, all He was saying that we wouldn't know which of the two days or at what hour (which watch during that night - see Mark 13:35) or even which year that He would come. But He did insist that we should know the times and the season and be alert about this. Perhaps that's why He gave us so many signs to look for.

I realize this may have its own problems, and by now many of you might be leafing through your Bibles finding contradictory verses that blow this view out of the water. I agree – there are problems with nearly all prophetic passages when we try to marry them together to get an easy overall view. The point I'm attempting to make is that only when we look at Jesus' words in their original cultural context and even compare other End Times prophecies, can we accurately understand what He meant. Jesus was saying that we cannot know the exact moment of His coming far in advance, but from His own lips (Mtt 24:31) it seems it might be on a future Day of Trumpets. He also told us that as long as we don't know the precise moment of His return, that in itself should give us great incentive to "stay awake".

My, how we need wisdom and humility in all of this, so let's be open to the Holy Spirit who has promised to lead us into all truth – and all of us be willing enough to jettison our views if found wanting. On an encouraging note Paul writes to us saying we will NOT be in the dark about End Time events:

“But you, brethren are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.” 1 Thess 5:4-5

Books of interest

“Jesus the Jewish Theologian” by Brad H. Young

“Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes” by Kenneth E. Bailey

“Paul through Mediterranean eyes” by Kenneth E. Bailey

“Meet the Rabbis” by Brad H. Young

“Parables: Jewish tradition and Christian interpretation” by Brad H. Young

“Manners and Customs of the Bible” by James M. Freeman

“The Everlasting Tradition” by Galen Peterson

So may it be that these guidelines help a little as we face the days ahead.

Grace and blessings in the Messiah.

Peter McArthur

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Your Purpose or God's?



Peter McArthur

According to His purpose alone

Recently I heard a preacher say we don't really know what God's purpose for us is and we don't know what His will is about. I immediately wanted to cry out **"He wants to bring many sons into His glory"** (Hebrews 2:10). Perhaps I should've yelled that out; it would've been interesting!

After momentarily recovering from the preacher's rather bold statement I flicked over to my favourite book, Ephesians. What peace it brought to my soul. My Bible is full of coloured markings, notes and scribbles, especially in Ephesians and Colossians. And quickly there I found it highlighted in blue and underlined – the Father's purpose and will for us, the world and even the entire universe.

Here it is (Eph 1:9-11): **"He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will."**

A more simplified version simply says **"He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment — to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In Him we were chosen, having been predestined according to His plan as He works out everything in conformity with His will."** (J.B. Phillips version).

What a breathtaking passage! Now I don't want to denigrate the preacher (I actually think he was trying to make a point about something else) but whatever his intention was it probably didn't make sense to a lot of people, especially new believers. And I knew from talking to some relatively new Christians a couple of months earlier that many people today see "purpose" as relating to **THEM**. "What's **MY** purpose in life; what does God want **ME** to do?" etc. It's all pretty self-focused, which is a major problem in today's society, let alone the Church.

Many years ago I decided to stop trying to find out what MY purpose on earth was all about, and try as much as I could to fit in with the Father's purpose, and what He wanted. Now as the years have passed and as I (still) try to keep His purpose my ultimate focus, it disturbs me that many today are still trying to discover their role in life before they get a grasp on what God's purpose is primarily about. Once we get a revelation about the Father's purpose, the concern about our calling, our ministry and our giftings gets into the correct focus.

So the obvious question is of course, not about OUR purpose in life, but what is HIS purpose and will. The religions and philosophies of man usually seek to answer the four basic questions of life. Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Again all these are still pretty self-focused; understandable I guess. But only when we consider God's purpose and will FIRST do these questions make any sense.

Scripture says that He created nothing by accident: (Isa 45:18) **"For thus says Yahweh who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a useless place, but formed it to be inhabited), "I am Yahweh, and there is none else."**

- (1) Father had a specific purpose (design) in His mind for each and every part of creation.
- (2) A design obviously implies a Designer.
- (3) A creation implies a Creator.
- (4) A plan implies a Planner.
- (5) A purpose implies a Person.

Evolutionists and atheists really do have a problem grasping this almost childlike concept. So we can quite easily deduct that God has a will. **"He made known to us the mystery of His will"** (Eph 1:9a) and **"predestined (us) according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will"** (11b).

Now what is this will of God? Well first we need to hold firm in our thinking that the Father wants us to know His will, His purpose and His plan. He's not hiding it from us and it isn't reserved for the spiritually elite alone to know. And while there are many texts that tell us what God's will is, it ultimately is truly only about one purpose, one thing alone that He wants to accomplish – He wants to **"sum up all things in Christ"** (Eph 1:10).

This phrase **"to sum up all things"** in the original Greek actually makes a rather staggering point because it says **"THE whole range of things"**. What a mind-blowing concept. There's going to be a great gathering together of everything, the whole range of things in creation - already underway but not yet finalised.

Here in this wonderful verse is the extended meaning **"to bring back to and gather around the main point"** meaning of course Christ as Head. Here Paul has apparently used a word which is in the neuter gender of the Greek. It is not "all persons" or "all humans" or "all angels" or even "all the elect" but it literally says all **"things"**. This purpose of God is not limited to intelligent beings at all, but also to "things" meaning to everything He has created.

This great and awesome design of God is to restore harmony in His entire universe, both spiritual and physical. Satan and sin have disarranged all of creation's relation to the Creator but now He means to gather up all together in Christ and re-establish the right order of things (1 Cor 15:28 and Col 1:20). A glorious Day yet to come but it will, and it's on the way!

Reflect just for a moment on that extended meaning above: **“to bring back to and gather around the MAIN POINT”**. It means two things, one of course that Jesus Christ is the Head of not only the Church but ALL things, and He will be seen and acknowledged as such. But this “main point” also has the distinct meaning of referring to a point in time past when there existed no separation between the Creator and His creation - the garden east of Eden and the first man and woman to dwell there without sin or alienation.

God contemplates a grand and final re-gathering, a full restoration to that former condition when all things were in perfect unity. That unity was broken by the introduction of sin. The mystery of God's will includes the restoration of this unity in and through Christ as Head; one kingdom on earth and in heaven - a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell eternally.

Paul calls this ‘Christ’s pre-eminence’. **“He Himself will come to have first place in everything”** (Col 1:18b). This means things spiritual and material. Someone said it was that Jesus became head of the Church through His incarnation and death, and is now also head of the universe in virtue of His absolute and eternal being. Christ is first in rank, first in dignity, superior in power, and of course pre-eminent in honour.

How then is this gathering being accomplished? Again we go to Ephesians. (Chapter 1 verse 11). **“...we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will”**. Everything God speaks, everything He reveals and all that He does is connected to this one and ultimate purpose. Everything we can read in the Bible is taking shape like an unbroken thread moving toward one final end – **“Christ in all”** (Col 3:11). And He chooses to use us as partakers in all that!

This is the reason the Father created the universe, formed the earth, gave His son, saved us, sent the Spirit, transforms us, etc. **“...God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”** (Rms 8:28). Note that it’s not according to MY purpose, YOUR purpose, or even combined MANKIND’S purpose. But for GOD’S purpose alone.

Romans 11:36 nails it for me: **“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen”**.

1. **“from Him”** is about PAST things.
2. **“through Him”** is about PRESENT things.
3. **“to Him”** is about FUTURE things.

It all came from Him, is being sustained through Him, and ultimately will return back to Him. He’s the source, the agent and the goal. There’s a glorious ending awaiting us and all creation, and thankfully it’s something purposed from the beginning right from the Father’s heart.

Time now to let go of our personal ambitions regarding spiritual things, time to put aside fleshly desires of wanting recognition, time to re-adjust our thinking (that’s what repentance actually means), and time to re-align back to what the Father wants. Let’s work towards these things, while we still have the time!

Now here’s something to test your spiritual maturity. What if you knew that after serving God on earth all your life, witnessing about Him, praying to Him, serving the brethren, sacrificing for Him – that you knew at the end of it all He would (kindly and without pain) annihilate you? What if you knew that would happen, that at the end of your life serving Him He had the right to “snuff you out” so that you would never receive a reward of any kind – not even heaven? Would you still be willing to serve His purpose here on earth if you knew at the end there’d be nothing for you except complete annihilation?

Of course I don't believe that at all but I want us to consider, where do our true proprieties lie? Are we serving Him because we know there's a reward at the end? Would we be willing to go through all we go through and serve Him just so His purpose can be done – with nothing for US to personally gain from it?

Obviously if this was really the case hardly anyone would follow Jesus and be committed to the Father's grand purpose. How many of us would actually put up our hands and say; "Yes I'll follow you Jesus even if at the end of it I get nothing out of it at all – except annihilation"?

Occasionally we need to stop and consider deeply, very deeply about such things. Not to disturb us or upset us, but to make us consider just where our true priorities in God are. Thankfully and graciously we DO know there are rewards (and His presence) awaiting us. But it does make you think – do we truly believe it's ultimately all about HIM! And every one of us knows that "self" still rises up to make us stumble, yet the graciousness of God has allowed for that and still He loves us, wants us, and has prepared a place for us. Grace!

One of my favourite authors, Theodore Austin-Sparks wrote **"What we are after is to see the centrality and universality of the Lord Jesus, and He is by divine appointment the centre of everything in the universe, and every phase, every aspect, and He alone is its explanation"**.

So brothers and sister, what can we end on except Scripture itself: **"Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"** (Rms 11:33).

Grace in Him,

Peter McArthur

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God's Preparation Work



Peter McArthur

PREPARED FOR US

A major and recurring principle in the Scripture is that God has gone before us to prepare a place (*position*) for us. God first prepared (*established*) the heavens to contain the earth (Proverbs 8:27). Then in the seedbed of Scripture, the Book of Genesis, we find that God had prepared a place for man to live on, the earth. (Genesis 1:1-31)

Having done that God prepared another place for Adam to dwell in, the planting of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8).

The Hebrew word for planting is *nata'* (Strong's H5193) meaning "**to strike in, to fix**". This was intended to be a fixed dwelling place, an established position.

Interestingly enough the "eastward" position of the Garden actually means "at the front, or in the foreground". So God had prepared a garden for man to dwell in at the very forefront of things. Humankind was meant to be at the head of things on earth (compare Genesis 1:26).

Right from the beginning God wanted us to be forerunners, leaders who had a special place and position prepared by God Himself. What a thought! Our whole life is a preparation. God has been preparing a place for us since eternity. This has always been His business. But do we think like this? Do we give it much thought?

Preparation can seem to be hard, but that's because we tend to isolate it from God's grand purpose. If we put "preparation" into the context of His "purpose" it becomes much easier to understand, and deal with, in life.

Now it so happens that God's basic ingredient for our personal spiritual growth is **NEED**. Without personal needs (not "wants") we would hardly grow spiritually at all. The reason our Father creates and allows needs in our lives is to turn us from all that is not of Christ, so we become centred on Him alone. "Not I, but Christ".

So let's look at some of the preparation our Father has done for us!

- Gen 1:1-31 Earth **prepared** for mankind
- Gen 2:8 Eden was **prepared**
- Gen 6:1-22 God, through Noah **prepared** the Ark (1 Pet 3:20)
- Exo 23:20 Land of Canaan **prepared** (Heb 11:3 and 40)
- Psa 31:19 God's goodness **prepared** for us
- Psa 23:5 Table **prepared** in the wilderness
- Psa 9:7 and 103:19 Throne **prepared**
- Jonah 1:17 and 4:6-8 Fish, plant, worm, east wind **prepared** by God
- Mtt 25:34 and Mk 10:40 Kingdom **prepared**
- Luk 1:17 A people **prepared**
- Luk 2:31 Salvation **prepared**
- Col 1:5 and 1 Pet 1:4 An inheritance is **prepared**
- Rom 9:23 Riches of glory **prepared**
- 1 Cor 2:9 "Something" great **prepared**
- Mtt 25:41 Even Gehenna ("hell") is **prepared**
- Jhn 14:2 Jesus goes to **prepare** a place for us
- Heb 4:9-11 God **prepared** a "Rest" for us
- Heb 10:5 A body was **prepared**
- Heb 11:16 and Rev 21:2 A city is being **prepared**
- Rev 12:6 The "Woman" has a place **prepared**
- Heb 11:3 The Ages were **prepared**
- 2 Cor 5:5 WE are being **prepared** (compare 4:16-17)

In the New Testament this "preparing" literally means "**to be adjusted by internal fitness**". While God goes about His business preparing things for us, by His Holy Spirit He is also adjusting us and fitting us out (literally = *furnishing*) us to receive what He's being preparing!

Can you see this extraordinary truth? We are being internally sorted out, refined, adjusted, purified, sanctified, made ready for something grand and eternal. I've always loved the concept that inside of us there are "spiritual rooms" as it were, where the Holy Spirit is working on us to arrange our inner abode fit for what's yet to come. Almost as if He's arranging the furniture. Utterly amazing thought!

God's preparation is two-fold, outer and inner.

(1) He is **EXTERNALLY** preparing something/s for us.

(2) And by our **INTERNAL ADJUSTING** He's refining us to be made ready for it.

Now consider this. God was able to move the whole Roman Empire (through the Census of Luke 2:1-3) just to have one baby born in the small village of Bethlehem to fulfill prophesy. If God goes to so much trouble to "prepare" shouldn't we pay more attention to these things?

Our time on earth is a preparation period. God sees a **NEED** in us, and for us, and then sets about to meet that need - for His eternal purposes, which He graciously allows us to share in. Once we're sure of His grand **purpose** we can equally be confident of the **preparation** He puts us through. Life then makes sense and has a grand outcome. It is not haphazard but planned by our gracious Father. Difficult and painful at times, yes. But always with a purpose.

CONCLUSION

A favourite verse many Christians quote is Romans 8:28 “**All things work together for good.**” Well that’s true enough but it’s very important to know the WHOLE text. We can so easily just take a portion and memorise that bit. Here is what it actually says.

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

There it is outlined in a kind of sequence. **(1)** God causes. **(2)** For those who love Him. **(3)** For those called to His purpose. Note how it’s strung together. Things do work together for good but only because the Father **CAUSES** them to do so. Plus, it works for good if you **LOVE** the Lord, and if you have been **CALLED** by Him to fulfill His purpose.

It’s quite true this pattern is for all Born Again believers, but sometimes we need to stop and consider the wholeness of God’s Word, and not simply latch on to bits and pieces of it. And of course, verses 28 and 29 are linked. This is what verse 29 declares.

“For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

The things of our Father are extraordinary in comprehension, wonderfully delightful in truth, and so amazing to reflect on. Grand beyond anything we now know. So what can we do but thank Him for all His wonderful preparing and fitting us out:

“.....being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for the sake of His good pleasure.” (Philippians 1:6 and 2:13)

Looking forward to the finished work with great excitement!

Peter McArthur

issachar.org

The Very Last Day



Peter McArthur

There's a saying I remember from years ago that went like this:

**If you're born once you'll die twice,
but if you're born twice, you'll only die once.**

I'll just let you ponder that for a bit. Got it? If you're born only once, that is, from your mother's womb you're going to die twice, a natural death first, and then after judgement, a spiritual death (Rev 21:8). Two deaths.

However, if you're born twice, first a natural birth, and then later born-again spiritually, you'll only ever die once – that is, a natural death (unless you're alive to be Raptured). For you there'll be no "second death" (Rev 20:6). Two births but only one death.

It's a good little lead-up to evangelizing because it makes people think. A kind of spiritual puzzle. If someone doesn't get it, hopefully they'll ask you what it means, and hey presto – you're off and running to witness about the need for the second birth in Christ. I've used it quite a few times.

In the same vein the other day I was pondering another puzzle, about the mish-mash of current Last Days teachings, and how confusing a lot of opinions there are about the Rapture, the Second Coming, etc. As I was thinking about it all, the Holy Spirit arrested my attention as if to say, "But what about **THE** last day?"

My mind went into top gear trying to recall that particular phrase "the last day". I knew it rang a bell, so I looked it up in Scripture and of course there it was, repeated five times by Jesus.

This is the will of Him who sent me, that of all that He has given me I lose nothing but raise it up on the last day. John 6:39

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day. John 6:40

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44

He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:54

He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. John 12:48

So, I got to thinking about what that LAST day would be like, not necessarily in terms of how it might happen or when, but along the lines of there's actually going to be A DAY that is the very final one. Imagine that for a moment; after thousands of years of God working through His people, He will bring it all to a point, a conclusion on a final day appointed before eternity.

Through all the good and bad in the history of God's dealings with us, there will come a point when it will all be concluded and come to a purposed ending, a culmination when all injustice, all wrongs, every falsehood and every corruption will be judged and dealt with. Quite an astonishing thought. Even a little scary.

John is the only writer in the NT to use the expression "the last day". It highlights a very significant fact, that Jesus the Messiah will be at work right up to the very last day, hour and moment of time (as we know it). That's not just something we would want to happen, it's also very comforting. Total justice will at last prevail.

So, this "last day" acts as a kind of glimpse into the celestial workings, opening to us the awesome truth of a day of final reckoning for all people. A time, "day" when everything will be gathered together in a designated "place" when the Great and Awesome Judge begins the judicial process that even the unsaved are vaguely aware of.

If we take the Jewish (and therefore Biblical) concept of time as a template, with a new day beginning at sunset (rather than our western idea of it being midnight or perhaps sun-rise), we come up with an intriguing thought. If Scripture refers to the "last day" then presumably this means that it begins at sunset, probably at the very start of a future Day of Atonement.

In the calendar of the Feasts of YHWH the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is the sixth feast and the most solemn and revered day in the Hebrew calendar. Hence this special day will most likely become the very "last day" of this present wicked dispensation. It will be a climatic finish to man's rebelliousness when even the earth itself will be subject to awesome changes.

Isa 34:4 The valleys will be split, all the stars in the heavens will fall down, and the skies will be rolled up like a scroll. All their starry host will fade away like leaves withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree.

Rev 6:13-14 The stars in the sky fell to the earth like a fig tree drops its fruit when it is shaken by a strong wind. The sky vanished like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved from its place.

Forget for a moment about "climate change", this climatic change will be a universal upheaval of staggering proportions!

The **"rolling up like a scroll"** is in direct contrast to YHWH **"stretching out the heavens like a curtain"** (e.g. see Psa 104:2 and Isa 40:22). God who at the Beginning opened things up, will at the End roll them up and close them. He opens up and closes up. What lovely yet awesome imagery.

In Jewish teaching the Day of Atonement is recognized as the end of one time period in preparation for the beginning of another better one. Atonement is the day for the settling of accounts between God and man. It will literally be the very final day when all is brought before the Lord for a judgement.

When speaking of the resurrection, Paul writes that Christ will come with **"those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power"** (1 Cor 15:24)

He then goes on to speak of the resurrection of the dead in a form in which the righteous will be raised **"imperishable". In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, in the last trumpet, for it shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** (1 Cor 15:52).

The New Testament encourages us by consistently reiterating the truth that when Jesus does return all evil will be finally defeated and the redeemed ones will know the fullness of life everlasting. But prior to that wonderful moment, a certain day, pre-ordained and determined by the Godhead, has been set.

Though God has overlooked those times of ignorance, he now commands everyone everywhere to repent, because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world with justice through a man whom he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. Acts 17:30-31

So, brothers and sisters, despite all the increasing persecution in its various forms, all the media and political attacks that affront us, and the prophesied apostasy of many "churches" as they applaud things like same-sex marriage, and the lukewarmness of many believers, take heart. Remember that God our Father will take care of His own in these troubled times. Jesus repeatedly said that those the Father "has given" him he will **"raise up at the last day"**.

All is according to plan. These are still days of opportunity, days when people can put their trust in the crucified and risen Lord and enter into salvation. **Yes, a day has been set** but until then we must be at work, and whether we're physically alive when the Last Day comes or not, it will surely arrive right on time, precisely as purposed by our Father.

Hebrews tells us that **"in these last days he (God) has spoken to us by his Son"** (Heb 1:2) and Peter says that Christ **"was revealed in these last times for your sake"** (1 Pet 1:20). The meaning clearly is that something grand and eternal had happened in New Testament times compared to what occurred in much earlier Biblical ages. Not only that, this same wonderful work of God is still gathering momentum, even in our age and will continue into the future unto the very "last day".

The point these passages make is to declare that God is at work in our time, right here and now. As His people we're to keep in mind that whatever happens in our lives and in the world around us, God is working out His grand purpose. In this spirit the psalmist prays, **"Show me O Lord my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is"** (Psa 39:4).

So, saints let's redeem the time when and how we can, not being slack about the things of God, and looking forward with great expectancy when He shall come again. The "day" has been set – and it may not be that very far off.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

Peter McArthur

The Celestial Railway Parable



Peter McArthur

A Satire on the Modern Church Growth Movement and other worldly invaders.

Like many others I've been through various phases of contemporary Christian "moves", some which have been born by the Spirit of God, but many born solely from the imagination of man's soul. One of the latter is known as the **Church Growth Movement**, espoused by the late Peter Wagner and taken on-board by others like Rick Warren, Donald McGavran, John Wimber, Randy White (who has now left the movement), plus an increasing host of others.

Quite a number of denominations use this ideology when they set out to "plant churches" - by which they simply mean transferring one group of believers to another place and calling it a "new work". I would hardly call it a "work of the Spirit" because it uses modern managerial practices as its foundation. Most "planted churches" have been the result of luring already existing small congregations to join a bigger one, then moving them to another location and re-branding them (another business model) under the name of the larger group. This eventually results in either a Mega Church with 2 or 3 campuses (that kind of terminology should ring alarm bells straight away) or having an over-arching "mother church" of so-called apostles who regulate the subordinate congregations. There are exceptions to this, but as a generalisation that's pretty much how it functions.

At a conference in the 90s I once heard a speaker tell all the pastors that unless they had a decent sized carpark new people looking for a church would simply bypass them on a Sunday and look elsewhere because parking would be an issue at that church! Really, he actually said that. Then he said that this was how major shopping centres operated. If they provided an undersized car park, shoppers would go elsewhere where the parking was easier, so if you want to entice people to your

church build a bigger carpark. Now where is the Spirit of God in all this? Honestly if it wasn't true it would be close to laughable.

The following allegory hints at the easiness of doing spiritual business, compared to the "narrow path" espoused by Jesus. The hard road has given away to a pleasant Sunday stroll – and so highlights how much today's church has also made things "easy" – even in the matter of Salvation, which in many places has simply become lifting up one's hand while everyone else's eyes are closed as the Pastor leads you in a prayer usually devoid of any mention of sin or repentance!

So, when I came across this parable it made me chuckle. Although it's a 19th century allegory of Bunyan's *Pilgrims' Progress*, it does have application for Christians today. The allegory rings very true, but how woefully sad that today's church has fallen for this kind of thinking. I hope it may awaken you to just how far we can often be from true spiritual life in the Spirit. May change come quickly!

Peter McArthur, The Issachar Ministry.

An allegory of John Bunyan's classic "Pilgrim's Progress" by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Not a great while ago, passing through the gate of dreams, I visited that region of the earth in which lies the famous **city of Destruction**. It interested me much to learn that, by the public spirit of some of the inhabitants, a rail-road has recently been established between this populous and flourishing town, and **the Celestial City**. Having a little time upon my hands, I resolved to gratify a liberal curiosity to make a trip there. Accordingly, one fine morning, after paying my bill at the hotel, and directing the porter to stow my luggage behind a coach, I took my seat in the vehicle and set out for the Station House.

It was my good fortune to enjoy the company of a gentleman, one **Mr. Smooth-it-away** who, though he had never actually visited the Celestial City, yet seemed as well acquainted with its laws, customs, policy, and statistics, as with those of the city of Destruction, of which he was a native townsman. Being, moreover a Director of the rail-road corporation, and one of its largest stockholders, he had it in his power to give me all desirable information respecting that praiseworthy enterprise.

Our coach rattled out of the city and at a short distance from its outskirts, passed over a bridge, of elegant construction, but somewhat too slight, as I imagined, to sustain any considerable weight. On both sides lay an extensive quagmire, which could not have been more disagreeable either to sight or smell, had all the kennels of the earth emptied their pollution there. "This" remarked Mr. Smooth-it-away "is the famous **Slough of Despond** - a disgrace to all the neighbourhood; and the greater, that it might so easily be converted into firm ground."

"I have understood" I said "that efforts have been made for that purpose, from time immemorial. Bunyan mentions that above twenty thousand cart-loads of wholesome instructions had been thrown in here, without effect."

"Very probably, and what effect could be anticipated from such unsubstantial stuff?" cried Mr. Smooth-it-away. "You observe this convenient bridge. We obtained a sufficient foundation for it by throwing into the slough some editions of books of morality, volumes of French philosophy and German rationalism, tracts, sermons, and essays of modern clergymen, extracts from Plato,

Confucius, and various Hindu sages, together with a few ingenious commentaries upon texts of Scripture - all of which by some scientific process, have been converted into a mass like granite. The whole bog might be filled up with similar matter."

It really seemed to me, however that the bridge vibrated and heaved up and down in a very formidable manner; and in spite of Mr. Smooth-it-away's testimony to the solidity of its foundation, I should be loathe to cross it in a crowded bus; especially if each passenger were encumbered with as heavy luggage as that gentleman and myself. Nevertheless we got over without accident and soon found ourselves at the Station House. This very neat and spacious edifice is erected on the site of the little **Wicket-Gate**, which formerly, as all old pilgrims will recollect, stood directly across the highway, and by its inconvenient narrowness, was a great obstruction to the traveller of liberal mind and expansive stomach.

The reader of John Bunyan will be glad to know that Christian's old friend Evangelist, who was accustomed to supply each pilgrim with a mystic roll, now presides at the ticket office. Some malicious persons, it is true, deny the identity of this reputable character with the Evangelist of old times and even pretend to bring competent evidence of an imposture. Without involving myself in a dispute, I shall merely observe that, so far as my experience goes, the square pieces of pasteboard, now delivered to passengers, are much more convenient and useful along the road, than the antique roll of parchment. Whether they will be as readily received at the gate of the Celestial City, I decline giving an opinion.

A large number of passengers were already at the Station House, awaiting the departure of the rail cars. By the aspect and demeanour of these persons, it was easy to judge that the feelings of the community had undergone a very favourable change, in reference to the Celestial pilgrimage. It would have done Bunyan's heart good to see it. Instead of a lonely and ragged man, with a huge burden on his back, plodding along sorrowfully on foot, while the whole city hooted after him, here were parties of the first gentry and most respectable people in the neighbourhood, setting forth towards the Celestial City as cheerfully as if the pilgrimage were merely a summer tour.

Among the gentlemen were characters of deserved eminence, magistrates, politicians, and men of wealth, by whose example religion could not but be greatly recommended to their meaner brethren. In the ladies' apartment too I rejoiced to distinguish some of those flowers of fashionable society, who are so well fitted to adorn the most elevated circles of the Celestial City. There was much pleasant conversation about the news of the day, topics of business, politics, or the lighter matters of amusement; while religion, though indubitably the main thing at heart, was thrown tastefully into the background. Even an infidel would have heard little or nothing to shock his sensibility.

One great convenience of the new method of going on pilgrimage, I must not forget to mention. Our enormous burdens, instead of being carried on our shoulders, as had been the custom of old, were all snugly deposited in the baggage-car, and as I was assured, would be delivered to their respective owners at the journey's end. Another thing, likewise the benevolent reader will be delighted to understand. It may be remembered that there was an ancient feud between Prince Beelzebub and the keeper of the Wicket-Gate, and that the adherents of the former distinguished personage were accustomed to shoot deadly arrows at honest pilgrims, while knocking at the door.

This dispute, much to the credit as well of the illustrious potentate above-mentioned, as of the worthy and enlightened Directors of the rail-road, has been pacifically arranged, on the principle of mutual compromise. The Prince's subjects are now pretty numerously employed about the Station House, some in taking care of the baggage, others in collecting fuel, feeding the engines, and such congenial occupations; and I can conscientiously affirm, that persons more attentive to their business, more willing to accommodate, or more generally agreeable to the passengers, are not to be found on any rail-road. Every good heart must surely exult at so satisfactory an arrangement of an immemorial difficulty.

"Where is **Mr. Greatheart**? Beyond a doubt the Directors have engaged that famous old champion to be chief conductor on the rail-road?" I asked.

"Why no," said Mr. Smooth-it-away, with a dry cough. "He was offered the situation of brake-man; but, to tell you the truth, our friend Greatheart has grown preposterously stiff and narrow in his old age. He has so often guided pilgrims over the road, on foot that he considers it a sin to travel in any other fashion. Besides the old fellow had entered so heartily into the ancient feud with Prince Beelzebub that he would have been perpetually at blows or ill language with some of the Prince's subjects, and thus have embroiled us anew. So on the whole, we were not sorry when honest Greatheart went off to the Celestial City in a huff and left us at liberty to choose a more suitable and accommodating man. Yonder comes the conductor of the train. You will probably recognize him at once."

The engine at this moment took its station in advance of the cars, looking, I must confess much more like a sort of mechanical demon that would hurry us to the infernal regions, than a laudable contrivance for smoothing our way to the Celestial City. On its top sat a personage almost enveloped in smoke and flame, which - not to startle the reader - appeared to gush from his own mouth and stomach, as well as from the engine's brazen abdomen.

"Do my eyes deceive me?" I cried. "What on earth is this! A living creature, if so he is own brother to the engine he rides upon!"

"Poh, poh; you are obtuse!" said Mr. Smooth-it-away with a hearty laugh. "Don't you know Apollyon, Christian's old enemy, with whom he fought so fierce a battle in the **Valley of Humiliation**? He was the very fellow to manage the engine; and so we have reconciled him to the custom of going on pilgrimage, and engaged him as chief conductor."

"Bravo, bravo!" I exclaimed with irrepressible enthusiasm, "This shows the liberality of the age; this proves, if anything can that all musty prejudices are in a fair way to be obliterated. And how will Christian rejoice to hear of this happy transformation of his old antagonist! I promise myself great pleasure in informing him of it, when we reach the Celestial City."

The passengers being all comfortably seated, we now rattled away merrily, accomplishing a greater distance in ten minutes than Christian probably trudged over in a day. It was laughable while we glanced along, as it were, at the tail of a thunderbolt, to observe two dusty foot-travellers, in the old pilgrim-guise with cockle-shell and staff, their mystic rolls of parchment in their hands, and their intolerable burdens on their backs. The preposterous obstinacy of these honest people, in persisting to groan and stumble along the difficult pathway, rather than take advantage of modern improvements like our train, excited great mirth among our wiser brotherhood. We greeted the two pilgrims with many pleasant gibes and a roar of laughter; whereupon they gazed at us with such woeful and absurdly compassionate visages that our merriment grew tenfold more obstreperous. Apollyon, also, entered heartily into the fun and contrived to flirt the smoke and flame of the engine, or of his own breath, into their faces and envelope them in an atmosphere of scalding steam. These little practical jokes amused us mightily and doubtless afforded the pilgrims the gratification of considering themselves martyrs.

At some distance from the rail-road, Mr. Smooth-it-away pointed to a large, antique edifice which, he observed, was a tavern of long standing, and had formerly been a noted stopping-place for pilgrims. In Bunyan's road-book it is mentioned as the **Interpreter's House**.

"I have long had a curiosity to visit that old mansion," I remarked.

"It is not one of our stations, as you perceive," said my companion. "The keeper was violently opposed to the rail-road; and well he might be, as the track left his house of entertainment on one side, and thus was pretty certain to deprive him of all his reputable customers. But the footpath still

passes his door; and the old gentleman now and then receives a call from some simple traveller and entertains him with fare as old-fashioned as himself."

Before our talk on this subject came to a conclusion, we were rushing by the place where Christian's burden fell from his shoulders at the sight of the Cross. This served as a theme for **Mr. Smooth-it-away**, **Mr. Live-for-the-world**, **Mr. Hide-sin-in-the-heart**, **Mr. Scaly Conscience**, and a knot of gentlemen from the town of **Shun Repentance**, to descant upon the inestimable advantages resulting from the safety of our baggage.

Myself, and all the passengers indeed, joined with great unanimity in this view of the matter; for our burdens were rich in many things esteemed precious throughout the world; and especially, we each of us possessed a great variety of favourite Habits, which we trusted would not be out of fashion, even in the polite circles of the Celestial City. It would have been a sad spectacle to see such an assortment of valuable articles tumbling into the sepulchre.

Thus pleasantly conversing on the favourable circumstances of our position, as compared with those of past pilgrims, and of narrow-minded ones at the present day, we soon found ourselves at the foot of **the Hill Difficulty**. Through the very heart of this rocky mountain a tunnel has been constructed, of most admirable architecture with a lofty arch and a spacious double-track; so that, unless the earth and rocks should chance to crumble down, it will remain an eternal monument of the builder's skill and enterprise. It is a great though incidental advantage, that the materials from the heart of the Hill Difficulty have been employed in filling up the **Valley of Humiliation**; thus obviating the necessity of descending into that disagreeable and unwholesome hollow.

"This is a wonderful improvement indeed," said I. "Yet I should have been glad of an opportunity to visit the **Palace Beautiful** and be introduced to the charming young ladies, **Miss Prudence**, **Miss Piety**, **Miss Charity** and the rest, who have the kindness to entertain pilgrims there."

"Young ladies!" cried Mr. Smooth-it-away, as soon as he could speak for laughing. "And charming young ladies! Why, my dear fellow, they are old maids, every soul of them - prim, starched, dry, and angular - and not one of them, I will venture to say has altered so much as the fashion of her gown, since the days of Christian's pilgrimage."

"Ah well," I said much comforted, "then I can very readily dispense with their acquaintance."

The respectable Apollyon was now putting on the steam at a prodigious rate; anxious, perhaps to get rid of the unpleasant reminiscences connected with the spot where he had so disastrously encountered Christian. Consulting Mr. Bunyan's road-book, I perceived that we must now be within a few miles of the **Valley of the Shadow of Death**; into which doleful region, at our present speed, we should plunge much sooner than seemed at all desirable. In truth, I expected nothing better than to find myself in the ditch on one side or the quag on the other. But on communicating my apprehensions to Mr. Smooth-it-away, he assured me that the difficulties of this passage, even in its worst condition, had been vastly exaggerated, and that in its present state of improvement, I might consider myself as safe as on any rail-road in Christendom.

Even while we were speaking, the train shot into the entrance of this dreaded Valley. It was gratifying to observe how much care had been taken to dispel the everlasting gloom and supply the defect of cheerful sunshine; not a ray of which has ever penetrated among these awful shadows. For this purpose, the inflammable gas, which exudes plentifully from the soil, is collected by means of pipes and thence communicated to a quadruple row of lamps, along the whole extent of the passage. Thus a radiance has been created, even out of the fiery and sulphurous curse that rests forever upon the Valley; a radiance hurtful to the eyes, and somewhat bewildering, as I discovered by the changes which it wrought in the visages of my companions.

In this respect, as compared with natural daylight, there is the same difference as between truth and falsehood; but if the reader has ever travelled through the **Dark Valley**, he will have learned to be thankful for any light that he could get; if not from the sky above, then from the blasted soil beneath. Such was the red brilliancy of these lamps that they appeared to build walls of fire on both sides of the track, between which we held our course at lightning speed, while a reverberating thunder filled the Valley with its echoes.

Had the engine run off the track (a catastrophe, it is whispered, by no means unprecedented) the bottomless pit, if there be any such place, would undoubtedly have received us. Just as some dismal fooleries of this nature had made my heart quake, there came a tremendous shriek, careering along the Valley as if a thousand devils had burst their lungs to utter it, but which proved to be merely the whistle of the engine, on arriving at a stopping-place.

The spot where we had now paused, is the same that our friend Bunyan - truthful man, but infected with many fantastic notions - has designated, in terms plainer than I like to repeat, as the mouth of the infernal region. This however, must be a mistake inasmuch as Mr. Smooth-it-away, while we remained in the smoky and lurid cavern, took occasion to prove that **Tophet** (the place of fire) has not even a metaphorical existence. The place, he assured us, is no other than the crater of a half-extinct volcano in which the Directors had caused forges to be set up, for the manufacture of rail-road iron.

Hence also, is obtained a plentiful supply of fuel for the use of the engines. Whoever had gazed into the dismal obscurity of the broad cavern-mouth, whence ever and anon darted huge tongues of dusky flame, and had seen the strange, half-shaped monsters, and visions of faces horribly grotesque, into which the smoke seemed to wreath itself, and had heard the awful murmurs, and shrieks, and deep shuddering whispers of the blast, sometimes forming themselves into words almost articulate - he would have seized upon Mr. Smooth-it-away's comfortable explanation, as greedily as we did.

The inhabitants of the cavern moreover, were unlovely personages, dark, smoke-begrimed, generally deformed, with misshapen feet, and a glow of dusky redness in their eyes; as if their hearts had caught fire, and were blazing out of the upper windows. It struck me as peculiar that the labourers at the forge, and those who brought fuel to the engine, when they began to draw short breath, positively emitted smoke from their mouth and nostrils.

Among the idlers about the train, most of whom were puffing cigars which they had lighted at the flame of the crater, I was perplexed to notice several who, to my certain knowledge had heretofore set forth by rail-road for the Celestial City. They looked dark, wild, and smoky, with a singular resemblance, indeed, to the native inhabitants; like whom, also, they had a disagreeable propensity to ill-natured gibes and sneers, the habit of which had wrought a settled contortion of their visages. Having been on speaking terms with one of these persons - an indolent, good-for-nothing fellow, who went by the name of **Mr. Take-it-easy** - I called him and inquired what was his business there.

"Did you not start for the Celestial City?" I asked.

"That's a fact" said Mr. Take-it-easy, carelessly puffing some smoke into my eyes. "But I heard such bad accounts, that I never took pains to climb the hill, on which the city stands. No business doing, no fun going on, nothing to drink, and no smoking allowed, and a thrumming of church-music from morning till night! I would not stay in such a place, if they offered me house-room and living free."

"But, my good Mr. Take-it-easy," I cried "why take up your residence here, of all places in the world?"

"Oh" said the loafer with a grin, "it is very warm hereabouts, and I meet with plenty of old acquaintances, and altogether the place suits me. I hope to see you back again, some day soon. A pleasant journey to you!"

While he was speaking the bell of the engine rang, and we dashed away, after dropping a few passengers, but receiving no new ones. Rattling onward through the Valley, we were dazzled with the fiercely gleaming gas-lamps, as before. But sometimes, in the dark of intense brightness, grim faces, that bore the aspect and expression of individual sins, or evil passions, seemed to thrust themselves through the veil of light, glaring upon us, and stretching forth a great dusky hand, as if to impede our progress. I almost thought, that they were my own sins that appalled me there. These were freaks of imagination nothing more, certainly mere delusions, which I ought to be heartily ashamed of but, all through the Dark Valley, I was tormented, and pestered, and dolefully bewildered, with the same kind of waking dreams.

The mephitic gases of that region intoxicate the brain. As the light of natural day however, began to struggle with the glow of the lanterns, these vain imaginations lost their vividness and finally vanished with the first ray of sunshine that greeted our escape from the **Valley of the Shadow of Death**. Ere we had gone a mile beyond it, I could well nigh have taken my oath that this whole gloomy passage was a dream...

It was late in the day, when the train thundered into the ancient **city of Vanity**, where **Vanity Fair** is still at the height of prosperity, and exhibits an epitome of whatever is brilliant, gay, and fascinating, beneath the sun. As I purposed to make a considerable stay here, it gratified me to learn that there is no longer the want of harmony between the townspeople and pilgrims, which impelled the former to such lamentably mistaken measures as the persecution of Christian, and the fiery martyrdom of Faithful. On the contrary, as the new rail-road brings with it great trade and a constant influx of strangers, the lord of Vanity Fair is its chief patron, and the capitalists of the city are among the largest stockholders. Many passengers stop to take their pleasure or make their profit in the Fair, instead of going onward to the Celestial City.

Indeed, such are the charms of the place, that people often affirm it to be the true and only heaven; stoutly contending that there is no other, that those who seek further are mere dreamers, and that, if the fabled brightness of the Celestial City lay but a bare mile beyond the gates of Vanity, they would not be fools enough to go thither. Without subscribing to these, perhaps, exaggerated encomiums, I can truly say that my abode in the city was mainly agreeable, and my conversation with the inhabitants productive of much amusement and instruction.

Being naturally of a serious turn, my attention was directed to the solid advantages derivable from a residence here, rather than to the effervescent pleasures, which are the grand object with too many visitants. The Christian reader, if he has no accounts of the city later than Bunyan's time, will be surprised to hear that almost every street has its church, and that the reverend clergy are nowhere held in higher respect than at Vanity Fair. And well do they deserve such honourable estimation; for the maxims of wisdom and virtue which fall from their lips, come from as deep a spiritual source, and tend to as lofty a religious aim, as those of the sagest philosophers of old.

In justification of this high praise I need only mention the names of the **Rev. Mr. Shallow-deep**; the **Rev. Mr. Stumble-at-truth**; that fine old clerical character, the **Rev. Mr. This-today**, who expects shortly to resign his pulpit to the **Rev. Mr. That-tomorrow**; together with the **Rev. Mr. Bewilderment**; the **Rev. Mr. Clog-the-spirit**; and last and greatest, the **Rev. Dr. Wind-of-doctrine**.

The labours of these eminent divines are aided by those of innumerable lecturers, who diffuse such a various profundity, in all subjects of human or celestial science, that any man may acquire an omnigenous erudition, without the trouble of even learning to read. Thus literature is etherealized by assuming for its medium the human voice; and knowledge, depositing all its heavier particles (except, doubtless, its gold) becomes exhaled into a sound, which forthwith steals into the ever-open ear of the community.

These ingenious methods constitute a sort of machinery, by which thought and study are done to every person's hand, without his putting himself to the slightest inconvenience in the matter. There is another species of machine for the wholesale manufacture of individual morality. This excellent result is affected by societies for all manner of virtuous purposes; with which a man has merely to connect himself, throwing, as it were his quota of virtue into the common stock; and the president and directors will take care that the aggregate amount be well applied. All these and other wonderful improvements in ethics, religion, and literature, being made plain to my comprehension, by the ingenious Mr. Smooth-it-away, inspired me with a vast admiration of Vanity Fair.

It would fill a volume, in an age of pamphlets, were I to record all my observations in this great capital of human business and pleasure. There was an unlimited range of society - the powerful, the wise, the witty, and the famous in every walk of life - princes, presidents, poets, generals, artists, actors, and philanthropists, all making their own market at the Fair, and deeming no price too exorbitant for such commodities as hit their fancy. It was well worth one's while, even if he had no idea of buying or selling, to loiter through the bazaars, and observe the various sorts of traffic that was going forward.

Some of the purchasers, I thought, made very foolish bargains. For instance a young man having inherited a splendid fortune, laid out a considerable portion of it in the purchase of diseases, and finally spent all the rest for a heavy lot of repentance and a suit of rags. A very pretty girl bartered a heart as clear as crystal, and which seemed her most valuable possession, for another jewel of the same kind, but so worn and defaced as to be utterly worthless. In one shop, there were a great many crowns of laurel and myrtle, which soldiers, authors, statesmen, and various other people, pressed eagerly to buy; some purchased these paltry wreaths with their lives; others by a toilsome servitude of years, and many sacrificed whatever was most valuable, yet finally slunk away without the crown.

There was a sort of stock or scrip, called **Conscience**, which seemed to be in great demand, and would purchase almost anything. Indeed, few rich commodities were to be obtained without paying a heavy sum in this particular stock, and a man's business was seldom very lucrative, unless he knew precisely when and how to throw his hoard of Conscience into the market. Yet as this stock was the only thing of permanent value, whoever parted with it was sure to find himself a loser in the long run. Several of the speculations were of a questionable character.

Occasionally a member of Congress recruited his pocket by the sale of his constituents; and I was assured that public officers have often sold their country at very moderate prices. Thousands sold their happiness for a whim. Gilded chains were in great demand and purchased with almost any sacrifice. In truth, those who desired, according to the old adage, to sell anything valuable for a song, might find customers all over the Fair; and there were innumerable messes of pottage, piping hot, for such as chose to buy them with their birth-rights. A few articles however, could not be found genuine at Vanity Fair. If a customer wished to renew his stock of youth, the dealers offered him a set of false teeth and an auburn wig; if he demanded peace of mind, they recommended opium or a brandy-bottle.

Tracts of land and golden mansions, situate in the Celestial City, were often exchanged, at very disadvantageous rates, for a few years lease of small, dismal, inconvenient tenements in Vanity Fair. Prince Beelzebub himself took great interest in this sort of traffic, and sometimes condescended to meddle with smaller matters. I once had the pleasure to see him bargaining with a miser for his soul, which, after much ingenious skirmishing on both sides, his Highness succeeded in obtaining at about the value of sixpence. The Prince remarked, with a smile, that he was a loser by the transaction.

Day after day as I walked the streets of Vanity, my manners and deportment became more and more like those of the inhabitants. The place began to seem like home; the idea of pursuing my travels to the Celestial City was almost obliterated from my mind. I was reminded of it, however by the sight of the same pair of simple pilgrims at whom we had laughed so heartily, when Apollyon puffed smoke and steam into their faces, at the commencement of our journey. There they stood amid the densest

bustle of Vanity - the dealers offering them their purple, and fine linen, and jewels; the men of wit and humour gibing at them; a pair of buxom ladies ogling them askance while the benevolent Mr. Smooth-it-away whispered some of his wisdom at their elbows, and pointed to a newly-erected temple - but there were these worthy simpletons, making the scene look wild and monstrous, merely by their sturdy repudiation of all part in its business or pleasures.

One of them (his name was **Mr. Stick-to-the-right**) perceived in my face a species of sympathy and almost admiration, which, to my own great surprise, I could not help feeling for this pragmatic couple. It prompted him to address me.

"Sir" he inquired with a sad, yet mild and kindly voice, "do you call yourself a pilgrim?"

"Yes" I replied, "my right to that appellation is indubitable. I am merely a sojourner here in Vanity Fair, being bound to the Celestial City by the new rail-road."

"Alas friend" rejoined Mr. Stick-to-the-right "I do assure you and beseech you to receive the truth of my words, that that whole concern is a bubble. You may travel on it all your lifetime, were you to live thousands of years, and yet never get beyond the limits of Vanity Fair! Yes; though you should deem yourself entering the gates of the Blessed City, it will be nothing but a miserable delusion."

"The Lord of the Celestial City" began the other pilgrim, whose name was **Mr. Foot-it-to-Heaven**, "has refused, and will ever refuse to grant an act of incorporation for this rail-road; and unless that be obtained, no passenger can ever hope to enter his dominions. Wherefore every man who buys a ticket must lay his account with losing the purchase-money - which is the value of his own soul."

"Poh, nonsense!" said Mr. Smooth-it-away, taking my arm and leading me off, "these fellows ought to be indicted for a libel. If the law stood as it once did in Vanity Fair, we should see them grinning through the iron bars of the prison-window."

This incident made a considerable impression on my mind and contributed with other circumstances to indispose me to a permanent residence in the city of Vanity; although, of course, I was not simple enough to give up my original plan of gliding along easily and commodiously by rail-road. Still, I grew anxious to be gone. There was one strange thing that troubled me; amid the occupations or amusements of the Fair, nothing was more common than for a person - whether at a feast, theatre, or church, or trafficking for wealth and honors, or whatever he might be doing, and however unseasonable the interruption - suddenly to vanish like a soap-bubble, and be never more seen of his fellows; and so accustomed were the latter to such little accidents, that they went on with their business, as quietly as if nothing had happened. But it was otherwise with me.

Finally after a pretty long residence at the Fair, I resumed my journey towards the Celestial City, still with Mr. Smooth-it-away at my side. At a short distance beyond the suburbs of Vanity, we passed the ancient silver mine, of which Demas was the first discoverer, and which is now wrought to great advantage, supplying nearly all the coined currency of the world. A little further onward was the spot where Lot's wife had stood for ages, under the semblance of a pillar of salt. Curious travellers have long since carried it away piecemeal. Had all regrets been punished as rigorously as this poor lady's were, my yearning for the relinquished delights of Vanity Fair might have produced a similar change in my own corporeal substance and left me a warning to future pilgrims.

The next remarkable object was a large edifice constructed of moss-grown stone, but in a modern and airy style of architecture. The engine came to a pause in its vicinity with the usual tremendous shriek.

"This was formerly the castle of the redoubted giant Despair," observed Mr. Smooth-it-away; "but since his death **Mr. Flimsy-faith** has repaired it, and now keeps an excellent house of entertainment here. It is one of our stopping-places."

"It seems but slightly put together," I remarked looking at the frail, yet ponderous walls. "I do not envy Mr. Flimsy-faith his habitation. Some day it will thunder down upon the heads of the occupants."

"We shall escape; at all events," said Mr. Smooth-it-away, "for Apollyon is putting on the steam again."

The road now plunged into a gorge of the **Delectable Mountains**, and traversed the field where, in former ages, the blind men wandered and stumbled among the tombs. One of these ancient tomb-stones had been thrust across the track, by some malicious person, and gave the train of cars a terrible jolt. Far up the rugged side of a mountain I perceived a rusty iron door, half overgrown with bushes and creeping plants, but with smoke issuing from its crevices.

"Is that the very door in the hill-side, which the shepherds assured Christian was a by-way to Hell?" I asked.

"That was a joke on the part of the shepherds," said Mr. Smooth-it-away, with a smile. "It is neither more nor less than the door of a cavern, which they use as a smoke-house for the preparation of mutton-hams."

My recollections of the journey are now, for a little space, dim and confused, inasmuch as a singular drowsiness here overcame me, owing to the fact that we were passing over the **Enchanted Ground**, the air of which encourages a disposition to sleep. I awoke however, as soon as we crossed the borders of the pleasant **land of Beulah**. All the passengers were rubbing their eyes, comparing watches, and congratulating one another on the prospect of arriving so seasonably at the journey's end. The sweet breezes of this happy clime came refreshingly to our nostrils; we beheld the glimmering gush of silver fountains, overhung by trees of beautiful foliage and delicious fruit, which were propagated by grafts from the Celestial gardens.

Once as we dashed onward like a hurricane, there was a flutter of wings, and the bright appearance of an angel in the air, speeding forth on some heavenly mission. The engine now announced the close vicinity of the final Station House, by one last and horrible scream, in which there seemed to be distinguishable every kind of wailing and woe, and bitter fierceness of wrath, all mixed up with the wild laughter of a devil or a madman. Throughout our journey, at every stopping-place, Apollyon had exercised his ingenuity in screwing the most abominable sounds out of the whistle of the steam-engine; but in this closing effort he outdid himself, and created an infernal uproar, which, besides disturbing the peaceful inhabitants of Beulah, must have sent its discord even through the Celestial gates.

While the horrid clamour was still ringing in our ears, we heard an exulting strain, as if a thousand instruments of music, with height, and depth, and sweetness in their tones, at once tender and triumphant, were struck in unison, to greet the approach of some illustrious hero, who had fought the good fight and won a glorious victory, and was come to lay aside his battered arms for ever. Looking to ascertain what might be the occasion of this glad harmony, I perceived on alighting from the cars, that a multitude of Shining Ones had assembled on the other side of the river, to welcome two poor pilgrims, who were just emerging from its depths. They were the same whom Apollyon and ourselves had persecuted with taunts and gibes, and scalding steam, at the commencement of our journey - the same whose unworldly aspect and impressive words had stirred my conscience, amid the wild revellers of Vanity Fair.

"How amazingly well those men have got on!" I cried to Mr. Smooth-it-away. "I wish we were secure of as good a reception."

"Never fear, never fear!" answered my friend. "Come make haste, the ferry-boat will be off directly; and in three minutes you will be on the other side of the river. No doubt you will find coaches to carry you up to the city-gates."

A steam ferry-boat, the last improvement on this important route, lay at the river-side, puffing, snorting, and emitting all those other disagreeable utterances, which betoken the departure to be immediate. I hurried on board with the rest of the passengers, most of whom were in great perturbation; some bawling out for their baggage; some tearing their hair and exclaiming that the boat would explode or sink; some already pale with the heaving of the stream; some gazing affrighted at the ugly aspect of the steersman; and some still dizzy with the slumberous influences of the Enchanted Ground. Looking back to the shore, I was amazed to discern Mr. Smooth-it-away waving his hand in token of farewell!

"Don't you go over to the Celestial City?" I exclaimed. "Oh no!" he answered with a queer smile, and that same disagreeable contortion of visage which I had remarked in the inhabitants of the Dark Valley. "Oh no! I have come thus far only for the sake of your pleasant company. Good bye! We shall meet again."

And then did my excellent friend, Mr. Smooth-it-away, laugh outright; in the midst of which cachinnation, a smoke-wreath issued from his mouth and nostrils, while a twinkle of lurid flame darted out of either eye, proving indubitably that his heart was all of a red blaze.

The impudent Fiend! To deny the existence of Tophet, when he felt its fiery tortures raging within his breast! I rushed to the side of the boat, intending to fling myself on shore. But the wheels, as they began their revolutions, threw a dash of spray over me, so cold, so deadly cold, with the chill that will never leave those waters, until Death be drowned in his own river - that, with a shiver and a heart quake, I awoke. Thank Heaven, it was a Dream!

By [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) (1804–1864) American novelist.

Discerning the Absalom Spirit



Peter McArthur

How church splits are manipulated by pride

For the Spanish version click [here](#)

NOTE: *In this teaching the “Absalom” is referred to as “he” for convenience sake. The spirit of Absalom may of course also work through a female, and in that case, it’s often allied to the spirit of Jezebel. I have avoided using the terms “leader” and “leadership” in this article, and have chosen rather to use the more appropriate biblical terms “elder” and “eldership”.*

Peter McArthur

One of the most insidious attacks against the Body of Christ comes from those who are “disaffected”. This refers to those who feel they are not appreciated, recognised in their calling, or simply have a rebellious attitude towards God-appointed and anointed eldership. This attitude has plagued the Body of Christ from its earthly inception, and was even at work in Old Testament times in one of King David’s sons, hence the term. We shall look briefly at the Biblical account as it highlights some important principles for us.

Absalom was David's third son. We read how his sister Tamar was raped by her brother Amnon (2 Sam 13:8-14), and when Absalom perceived this all he said was;

Hold your peace my sister...do not take this thing to heart (2 Sam 13:20).

Such was the heart of Absalom. He was grossly insensitive and acted unjustly.

To Amnon his brother he spoke neither good nor bad (2 Sam 13:22).

The consequence of this incest brought forth "foolishness" and "hatred" in Amnon (verses 13-15), which then resulted in "anger" and "hatred" within the family (verses 21-22).

Festering guilt mixed with anger led Absalom to plan his brother's death, after which he fled the scene and hid for three years (chapter 13). Eventually, upon returning to Jerusalem he was banned from approaching his father David (2 Sam. 14:24).

When, by another act of treachery, Absalom does get to see his father again (14:28-33) he immediately sets about to draw attention to himself by "**providing for himself chariots and fifty men to run before him**" (15:1).

The working out of this mind-set causes Absalom to not only draw attention to himself, but also to draw people to himself (15:2-6). This of course is the basic pattern and strategy of "the Absalom spirit". He wants attention, as well as the people who will give it to them! Those driven by an Absalom-spirit give the impression that they are people-orientated (and they truly might be a "people person"), but their motivation is wrong. They want an audience for their own approval and ministry.

There's a definite plan to all this. Note the sequence of how it is enacted:

1. Absalom chooses to rise early (2 Sam 15:2). He is driven by the need for approval.
2. He deliberately stands at the gate to the City, where many people pass by.
3. He focuses in on issues the people have (in Heb. lit. =*controversies*).
4. He also seemingly "approves" of their dissatisfaction (15:3), thus cunningly aligning himself to their concern, and vice versa.
5. Then he sows seeds of discontent by declaring that only he has the ability to make wise decisions (15:4).
6. The result is that people are duped and pay him homage when they should be going to their God-appointed oversight, in this case King David (15:5-6).
7. Absalom then uses a "religious ploy" to prepare the next stage of the deceit (15:7-8).
8. This brings about an uprising against the legitimate God-appointed eldership (15:10) by drawing others into the web to act deceitfully (the "spies" of verse 10a).
9. The final working out of all this is the setting up of a competitive seat of ruling power (15:10b).

So, we see the treachery that is acted out by one close to eldership. Sadly, this pattern still runs its course today and we find churches and fellowships undermined by this very same "spirit". Based on this Biblical account, what then are some of the factors to watch for?

THOSE WITH AN INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

- Clearly we are to look for those who have an attitude that betrays an independent spirit. Such a person no longer wants to serve the Body but seeks recognition and reputation for himself. It may well have been that the person initially did serve others, but often this is only short-lived.

THOSE WHO SUBTLY SEEK SELF-PROMOTION

- The next step is when such a person begins to manoeuvre to receive the praise of others. We have already seen in 2 Samuel chapter 15 how Absalom stood by the gate of the city and “stole the hearts of the people”. In modern jargon we might say, “he conned them”.

SPIRITUAL PRIDE RISES UP

- It's usually those who lack clear discernment who give accolades and praise to the Absalom-type among them. As this takes root in the heart of the perpetrator he begins to believe that he's more spiritual than others, and certainly wiser than the current eldership. He becomes unteachable.

AN OFFENDED SPIRIT COMES TO THE FORE

- The spiritual pride that resides deep in the heart of the Absalom-type turns into offence. Almost anything begins to cause offence because his “spiritual insight” isn't appreciated by the eldership. All the time he works to have his ideas, doctrines and plans promoted. When it's clear his suggestions are not being accepted, he is greatly offended and seeks out others to back him - and to get them to agree with him about the great offence caused. Disaffected people can so easily seek after others of like spirits, who in turn are drawn to him.

A CRITICAL SPIRIT BEGINS TO OPERATE OPENLY

- Once the pattern gets this far it's not too long before a critical attitude toward eldership begins to operate more openly. This will soon result in nearly every decision, major and minor, being questioned by the disaffected ones.
- About the same time that this begins to operate, the Absalom-type feels he can no longer receive any spiritual input or guidance from the eldership. Gradually he begins to distance himself from them, and complains that they're the ones who are causing all this.
- He is reinforced in his thinking that only he has the wisdom to carry the group further spiritually. Because there's no balance in his thinking he “hears” only those voices that approve of him, and he can even begin to find Biblical texts in support of this. He has entered very dangerous territory at this stage.

A SPIRIT OF COMPETITION ENTERS THE FRAY

- What now emerges is a direct confrontation, which will ultimately lead to more and more confusion. The Absalom-type will set himself up in competition to the eldership by deliberately throwing innuendo and doubt into even casual conversation with the disaffected ones.
- Because they too feel unloved they will readily nod their agreement. All the while their conscience tries to alert them to the fact that something's not quite true - yet they ignore this alarm bell and continue in aligning themselves to one of like-spirit.
- Later the Absalom will begin to distort some of the teaching given by the elders, and misrepresent certain facts and decisions they make. Thus it moves from a sense of emotional

hurt and lack of appreciation, to challenging doctrine. By this stage there's now occurred a major crisis in the pattern of this problem.

THE DELIBERATE SOWING OF STRIFE INCREASES

- Now Absalom begins to take the strife to another level, often contacting other individuals in the church to spread the dissatisfaction; always of course making sure the hearer understands that this isn't gossip, but "truth" that needs airing!
- When it's something that occurs through a chance meeting with another disaffected person, it's one thing; but when it becomes more "organised" it's quite another. By the use of phone calls, invitations to a cuppa or a meal, and even through clandestine gatherings such as home fellowships, the strife spreads like a cancer.
- Absalom is keen to seemingly promote God, the teachings of the Bible, etc, to validate the reason for speaking against the eldership. He is very careful at this point not to blow his cover; he doesn't want to be seen as divisive, so acts with seeming humility.
- However, invitations to attend a cuppa, a meal or gathering are given out to selected ones who Absalom knows will readily accept. At the outset of such gatherings Absalom makes sure that the attention isn't drawn to him - "it is God who is our focus" he readily announces! This soon changes however, and gradually the gathering turns into a meeting of bruised souls all expressing their sense of hurt and rejection.

ACCUSATIONS FLY

- The greatest accusation any believer will have to face is "You don't love me enough!". We all know in our hearts we fail at this point, so the poisoned arrow of accusation can go deep. This becomes the one great area of faultfinding, especially directed at the eldership. Usually it's not Biblical love that's the issue for the accusation here, but rather "emotional" love.
- While the disaffected ones are giving voice to their hurt, Absalom waits (somewhat impatiently) for an opportunity to turn it in a certain direction. He isn't really interested at all in their grievances; he wants to air his own feelings.
- A Bible text is usually flung about, as if to legitimise the gossip. It doesn't take too long before Absalom speaks forthrightly against faults that he's noticed in the eldership. Topping the list will be "lack of love", followed by an accusation that the current elders are "grieving the Holy Spirit", and are motivated by a religious spirit.
- Close behind these accusations will often come a "comforter" or "pacifier". In the Bible Absalom was keen to evidence loyalty to both God and David (2 Sam 15:7-9), yet his actions showed otherwise. The use of Biblical quotes or principles especially supporting the idea that we should still love the elders whom we've left brings a kind of "comfort" to the disaffected. They feel they're not really attacking God's overseers at all, because they, at least, still "love" them!
- Sadly this is nothing more than a trick of the mind; it's a spiritual and emotional somersault. If they would only listen they'd hear their conscience screaming out at them to wake up and see what's really going on.
- Attacks against eldership are often related to the spiritual qualifications required of them as set down in Scripture, and how the current elders fail to measure up. The breakaway group has now become so entrenched in their "mission of purification" that even minor failures of the previous elders are made to be seen as major flaws.

OPEN DISLOYALTY FOLLOWED BY DIVISION

- Once this has reached a certain point, it's not too long before open division rears its serpentine head. Absalom doesn't necessarily need a large group to implement his next move; even a small band of followers will suffice. He knows he has them, for he has "stolen their hearts" (2 Sam 15:6) and they have unwittingly given themselves over to him. They have come under bondage (see 2 Pet. 2:19) and they are being savagely manipulated. By now Absalom is becoming quite smug and proud.
- Soon the disloyalty is shown by the making of some sort of declaration (2 Sam. 15:10), either in public or in private. It's remarkable how often those who seek to break away declare their intention to the elders by any means rather than have a face-to-face meeting! A hurried phone call or a short letter announces their intent; it is curt, to the point and there is no entering into further dialogue.
- A final parting dart is flung at the eldership in a last attempt to inflict hurt when it's announced, "by the way, you need to know that others feel the same way I do!" (Compare 2 Sam. 15:10-13). If the elders haven't guarded their spirit and soul, they'll wilt under this very common accusation.
- Perhaps it's only at this point that the eldership actually becomes aware of the depth of the division. How necessary it is then that elders should pay attention to God's warnings via prophetic words, and even dreams!
- Now the awful truth has come into the open: and the people must make a choice between their current oversight and the Absalom who has deceived them all by his treachery. Usually the larger group are not swayed by the Absalom-type, but he has caused enough division to foster doubt in the remainder of the congregation. A un-ease now hovers over the people and a spiritual sickness begins to pervade nearly everything they do as believers.
- The elders feel sick at heart, the congregation are desperately looking for answers, and those with a rather strong-will in the church begin to demand quick surgical action. The stress grows and a whole new dynamic begins to take hold. Sunday meetings are soon tainted with doubt, unease, and a sense of loss of anointing.

A CONGREGATION TORN APART

- Amongst those whom Absalom has beguiled are the naïve ones (2 Sam. 15:11). These are those who "only wanted the best of church life", those who wanted to "move into something spiritually greater", those who truly did desire the "deeper things", and who wanted the "freedom of the Spirit". Sadly these ones don't see the truth until much later, and they become confused, while some ultimately leave fellowshiping altogether.
- Both sides are now in a flurry to re-establish and establish their respective groups. At this point the eldership may try to encourage the remnant through all sorts of ways, in a hurried attempt to stabilise them. Sadly there's often an over-reaction in this and the people sense their elders are "trying too hard" to keep them. This can actually cause further unease, and it may very well be that some of the surviving congregation begin to think that there might be something in what Absalom has been saying all along!
- Absalom however will begin to gloat, all the time making certain this isn't seen publicly. But the signs will be there, and sooner or later, what's in his heart will overflow in his words and actions.

- One thing the Absalom-type cannot fail to do is to speak out against what he's left behind. He will actively seek out "teachings" that will seemingly "approve" of, and legitimise, his actions.
- Those who align themselves with him will find some "comfort" in these teachings, as it seems to validate their choice. However the instruction they receive from him will be un-balanced and its source is often other "Absaloms". He has now cunningly set himself up as a "wise one" subtly imposing upon his group the view that he can lead them into something more "spiritual", unlike the previous eldership.
- When the Absalom sees something go wrong in the church he's just left, he's quick to say that "God's judgement" has now fallen upon them because they didn't listen. Sadly, even insignificant events will be seen as "signs" that God has approved of the split. Spiritual discernment cannot possibly function in the breakaway group because of the bitterness and pride that's taken root there.

THE JUDGMENT THAT WILL SURELY FOLLOW

- There's a Biblical principle that states: ***If the root is evil then the fruit shall also be evil.*** This simply means that a group birthed from the workings of an "Absalom" will suffer the same fate in due time. Disloyalty, gossip, and eventual rebellion will follow as sure as night follows day.
- Note that in Scripture, Absalom died in a most revealing way; his head got caught in trees and he was left dangling until he was executed. Caught by the head! In Biblical typology "the head" stands for authority and leadership.
- Absalom set himself up as head and by his head he was judged! (2 Sam. 18:9-18).

May the Lord and His teaching Spirit guide us into ALL of His wondrous ways and increasingly deliver us from the spirit of Absalom: please pray that MATURITY will be the hall-mark of today's church!

Peter McArthur

Israel and the Judgement of the Nations



Peter McArthur

Ever since I was young, even before coming to salvation in Christ, somehow, I instinctively knew that the Jews were somehow “important” even though I had no idea why. This was quite strange because I didn’t even know any Jews! But I had heard jokes about them, and unsavoury comments which I listened to but had no understanding about – neither politically nor religiously.

Yet despite that, through it all, the God of Israel sought to bring me to salvation in the Messiah, who of course was Himself a Jew. After my salvation and as the years passed by, that appreciation of the Jews in both world and church history began to grow. By the late 1980s I first recognised how often Israel was referred to in Scripture, particularly in regard to End Time events.

That recognition came, not through listening to preachers or reading pro-Israel Christian publications, but solely via the Word itself. I am always thankful for that, because it means I haven’t been initially persuaded by men and their bias towards Israel, but by Scripture itself!

After a number of trips to Israel and meeting Messianic Jews, pro-Israel pastors, and discerning the clear error of [Replacement Theology](#) I am convinced that Israel has not been forgotten by the Lord (Romans chapters 9 to 11) and will play a very major part in End Time events. Therefore, I offer this article by the late Dave Hunt, as it gives a good overview of where the nations have come to in regard to Israel, and what’s yet to come both in accountability and in judgement.

Peter McArthur

Israel and the Judgement of ALL the Nations

By Dave Hunt of "[The Berean Call](#)"

Israel is the major topic of the Bible. The word "Israel" occurs 2,565 times in 2,293 verses. More than enough prophecies have already been fulfilled in Israel's unique history to prove that "the God of Israel" (which He is called 203 times) is the true God.

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. Zechariah 12:2-3

This is an amazing prophecy not only that Jerusalem, which was then in ruins, would become a burden to the whole world, but that all of Israel's neighbours would be united against her. They have fought one another in the past. Yet today for the first time in history, "**all the people round about**" are united by Islam to destroy Israel.

For more than 50 years Israel's neighbours have launched surprise attacks against her and she has proved too strong militarily, even though they outnumber her forty to one. God said, "**I [will] make...Judah like a hearth of fire among the wood...and they shall devour all the people round about...**" Zech 12:6.

Soundly defeated every time, Israel's Muslim neighbours feign a desire for peace, hoping to deceive and ultimately destroy her - a strategy first established by Muhammad. The real battle is not between Arabs and Jews, but between Allah and Yahweh. There is no question of the outcome, but it will be costly for both sides: Israel will be severely punished for rebellion, and her enemies will be destroyed.

Exactly as foretold, Jerusalem is a burden to all people of the world. More than 60,000 individual votes have been cast in the UN against Israel. This tiny nation with one 1,000th of the world's population has occupied one-third of the United Nations' time - a burden indeed!

Sceptics accuse Christians of trying to fit current events to the Bible, claiming that no one recognized such prophecies until Israel was formed in 1948. On the contrary, for centuries most evangelical Christians have preached from the Bible the return of the Jews to their own land. Even John Owen, a leading Calvinist, wrote in the 17th century: "*The Jews shall be gathered...into their homeland.*" This was also the opinion of the poet John Milton, of John Bunyan, Roger Williams, Oliver Cromwell, and many others.

Martin Luther wrote: "*If the Jews are Abraham's descendants...[they should be] back in their own land [with] a state of their own. But...[they are] scattered and despised.*" He therefore wrote off the Jews as God's chosen people and persecuted them. But today the Jews are back in their own land after 2,500 years of being scattered worldwide, speaking Hebrew just as King David did 3,000 years ago. No other people have returned to re-establish their own nation and language after being cast out of their land for such a period of time.

Some prophecies applicable only to our day are frightening, foretelling God's judgment. The language is often graphic. Listen to this:

If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies...my sword shall devour flesh. Deut 32:41-42.

For, behold, YHWH will come...to render his anger with fury...by his sword. Isaiah 66:15-16

And the slain of YHWH shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other...they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried. Jer 25:33

The question is often asked as to whether the United States (or Canada, Australia, et al.) is in Bible prophecy. Of course! Scripture declares that every nation in the world will join together to invade Israel in the last days and be destroyed in the battle of Armageddon:

"I will gather all nations [surely "all" includes America, et al] against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken....then shall YHWH go forth, and fight against those nations..." Zech 12:9 and 14:2-4

But wouldn't the United States be spared for being Israel's friend? In fact, the US State Department has often been against Israel. This was true in the Yom Kippur War. In a sneak attack (October 1973), 80,000 Egyptians overwhelmed 500 Israeli defenders along the Suez and 1,400 Syrian tanks swept down the Golan with only one Israeli tank brigade in service to oppose them. Israel was taken by surprise. Most of her armed forces were on the Yom Kippur national holiday. The initial success of the attackers so electrified the Arab world that nine other Arab states rushed to get in on the slaughter.

Historian David A. Rausch writes: *"Jordan's King Hussein sent two of his best armoured brigades to Syria. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait financially underwrote the huge cost while sending thousands of troops to fight the Israelis. Kuwait lent her British-made Lightning jets to Egypt. Libya's Muammar Qaddafi turned over forty French-made Mirage III fighters and 100 tanks. Iraqi MiG fighter jets as well as tank and infantry divisions fought on the Golan Heights, while a squadron of Iraqi Hunter jets were utilized by Egypt. Arabs predicted the extermination of the Jewish state and the 'liberation' of Palestine...."*

The Soviet Union blocked any UN attempt at a cease-fire and re fortified the Arab forces with armaments and supplies by sea and air. It was the closest Israel ever came to being defeated. But when the war ended, the Israeli tank columns were on the outskirts of Damascus and Cairo and could have taken those cities had they not turned back. Tragically, Israel suffered about 3,000 dead - which would be comparable to the USA losing 150,000.

Except for a series of miracles from God, Israel would not have survived. Where was her friend, the United States? Dozens of notices were sent to the Nixon White House by America's National Security Administration (NSA) that an Arab Pearl Harbor was about to be launched against Israel. Nixon sat on them. Kissinger hid at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York the day of the attack and waited another three days before convening the UN Security Council. Declining to rush desperately needed military supplies to Israel, the White House said it had to be careful not to upset the Arabs and cause an oil crisis.

Six years earlier on June 8, 1967, the fourth morning of the "Six-day War" the *USS Liberty*, an electronics eavesdropping vessel, arrived off the Sinai coast and began to suck in every Israeli military communication, relaying it all to the British Secret Service's giant computer installation on Cyprus. From there, complete maps of every Israeli military move were transmitted in advance to the Arab armed forces.

With that help the Arabs might have been able to use their overwhelming numerical superiority to turn the tide of the war. Israel had no choice except to sink the *Liberty*. Of course the media screamed about this "cold-blooded attack." No one believed Israel's public excuse that the *Liberty* had been mistaken for a hostile Egyptian ship - and neither the US nor Israel has publicly told the truth.

Yes, the United States and her allies too, will attack Israel and will be punished at Armageddon. God declares plainly that He will bring all nations against Israel to destroy them:

In the latter days...I will bring thee against my land...my fury shall come up in my face...there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel...the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things [on] the earth, and all the men [on] the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence...[all nations] shall know that I am YHWH. Ezek 38: 16-23.

This is terrifying language! What causes this “great shaking” of the entire planet and every living creature upon it? God is personally coming to earth as He did at Mount Sinai when He gave the Law - and He is going to take vengeance upon the enemies of Israel!

There are two specific reasons for God’s judgment: **“I will also gather all nations...into the valley of Jehoshaphat** (between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, where God miraculously destroyed invading nations without Israel lifting a finger - 2 Chron 21:10-25) **and will plead with [punish] them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have [1] scattered among the nations, and [2] parted my land”**. Joel 3:2.

Of course all nations have participated in persecuting and scattering the Jews from country to country for 2,500 years. The second reason for God’s judgment falling on all nations however, is something that has only occurred within our generation: **“they have...parted [divided] my land.”** Israel has been overrun by invaders many times but never did any conqueror divide the land. The victor does not share its spoils with others. Since World War I, however, all nations have joined to divide the land of Israel.

The 1917 Balfour Declaration, the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, and the 1922 Declaration of Principles by the League of Nations all recognized that the land that had become known as “Palestine” (the Romans renamed Israel in AD 135) belonged to the Jews. It was set aside to become the national homeland of the Jewish people “internationally guaranteed, and formally recognized to rest upon ancient historic connection.” Of course, history ties the entire land of Israel to all of “Palestine.”

Britain was given the mandate to see that the Jews were safely settled there. The discovery of huge reservoirs of oil under Arab lands caused Britain to keep Jewish immigrants out and let in tens of thousands of Arabs. Just when millions of Jews desperately needed a haven to which they could flee from Nazi Germany, Britain’s 1939 White Paper limited Jewish immigrants to 10,000 per year for a maximum of five years, plus an additional 25,000 “refugees” during that period - then the door to Palestine would be shut entirely to the Jews. Since the Nazis had marked for extinction 11 million Jews in Europe, the quota of 25,000 defied God and conscience.

A year earlier, President Roosevelt had gathered delegates from 32 countries in Evian, France, to discuss the worsening plight of the Jews. Roosevelt made it clear that the United States would do nothing. Britain said there was no room in Palestine, and it was not to be discussed. Professing their great sympathy for Europe’s Jews that everyone knew were to be exterminated, the nations offered various excuses why they could do nothing to intervene.

Hitler shrewdly declared, *“We...are ready to put all these criminals at the disposal of these countries...even on luxury ships.”* When the conference ended with the Jews completely abandoned, Hitler mocked the participants: *“It was recently regarded as wholly incomprehensible why Germany did not wish to preserve in its population...the Jews...[yet these] countries seem in no way anxious to [receive them] now that the opportunity offers.”* The entire world was Hitler’s partner in destroying the Jews!

In 1944 Hitler offered to sell to the allies 500,000 Hungarian Jews for \$2 each - and no one would take them! England said there was “no room” in Palestine for them! In 1943, Britain and America had agreed to say and do nothing about the Holocaust, fearful that if pressed, Hitler would dump the Jews

on his critics. The Allies steadfastly refused the repeated urgent appeals from Jewish organizations to bomb the rail lines going in and out of the extermination camps. God will judge all nations!

After the war a trickle of emaciated survivors of Hitler's death machines sought to reach "Palestine" in half-sinking ships. Some who got within sight of the land God had given to them as an everlasting inheritance (1Chron 16:15-18) were driven back by the British navy and put into internment camps on Cyprus.

Many who did manage to find shelter within what would become the new Jewish State of Israel were rounded up by the British and removed to those camps. Britain created Jordan out of most of the Promised Land. The demise of the British Empire, upon which "the sun never sank," can be counted from the time Britain betrayed the Jews - one more fulfillment of the prophecy, **"I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you..."** Gen 12:3.

When the UN finally voted to partition Palestine on November 29, 1947 (UN Res. 181), God's "chosen people" received about 13 percent of the land that had once belonged to them! Thus Joel's prophecy was fulfilled that all nations would join to divide Israel. The only part of that prophecy remaining to be fulfilled is the judgment on the nations for having "parted" God's land: **"The land shall not be sold [partitioned] forever; for the land is mine"** Lev 25:23.

God's anger is growing hotter against the nations of this world for robbing Israel of what He gave to her. Yet in continued defiance of God, every peace proposal that the West has imposed upon Israel has involved further dividing of God's land. President Bush, a professing Christian, originated the so-called "road map to peace," which calls for a further dividing of the land of Israel. He ought to tremble and repent, as should President Putin, the EU and the UN, who have joined Bush to make up the "quartet" sponsoring this plan.

On her part, Israel has been willing to give away more and more land in exchange for promises of "peace" from the PLO in spite of the fact that its charter calls for the destruction of Israel and that its maps and those of the entire Arab world do not even acknowledge Israel's existence. The fact that Israel has been forced to do so by the West is no excuse. For this she will be punished severely in what is called **"the time of Jacob's trouble"** (Jer 30:7).

Yes, God will deliver her, but sadly only after two-thirds of all Jews on earth have been killed (Zech 13:8). There is no more appropriate place and way to destroy the nations that have abused Israel than when they, in the spirit of Satan, come to effect once and for all what Hitler called the "final solution to the Jewish problem."

Believers are to meet together to encourage and exhort one another from Scripture, **"so much the more, as you see the day [of judgment] approaching"** (Heb 10:25). Fulfilled prophecies are heralding that day as never before.

Dave Hunt (1926-2013).

First published by [The Berean Call](#) in 2005 and reprinted 2018.

Learning to Adjust Spiritually



Peter McArthur

One of the most pressing needs of the Church today is the adjusting of the mind to God's purposes. We who live in the western world are beset by an attitude that screams at us, "Be an individual", "Do your own thing", "Don't let anyone judge you", "Stick up for your rights". This is not a biblical mentality; it is human wisdom and it's fraught with danger because it actually sets us against God.

There's an urgent need for the Church to take stock, re-visit the Word of God, be willing to adjust to it, and move on in obedience. By doing so we'll have a much better chance of discerning the various seasons of life that come our way, both good and bad.

For example, it's hopeless to think we can navigate the treacherous reefs of a barren spiritual season if we're not firmly on-board the vessel the Lord has provided for us. Noah in the ark is a good encouragement for us. He didn't have all knowledge about what the flood was going to accomplish. He obeyed, he trusted in his God, and he waited out the difficult season he was in. His place in the whole scenario was to trust and obey; God would see to the rest. It was only after the flood that Noah began to understand the season he was in, and even then, it was still step-by-step.

So, it is for us now. Many of the spiritual seasons we find ourselves in bewilder us. We get confused, we cry out for God to intervene, and at times He can seem to be a very long way off. The season we find ourselves in, tends to make us focus on self. Have you ever noticed that? When things come against us and the normally comfortable walk of faith is suddenly pushed aside by some tragedy, problem or illness - our immediate reaction is to focus on self. "Why is this happening to **ME**?" "What have **I** done to deserve this?" "Doesn't God care about **ME**?" "Look at **MY** situation?" Who will help **ME**?"

This is really the same as when we physically hurt ourselves. Cut your finger with a knife, knock your knee on the tow bar of your car, sprain an ankle. Where does your thought fly? To where the pain is.

That's where our attention goes to, to the problem area; we focus on the spot where the pain is. This is quite normal and there's nothing wrong in it. But it does serve as a lesson for us when we're injured in our soul life, when a domestic problem arises, or someone betrays you, or a loved-one is diagnosed with cancer, etc. Our minds fly to the problem; we focus on the pain, and it's not very long before we're thinking of all the possible consequences that will soon follow. Financial worries race through the mind; emotional stress builds; how will I cope; my whole life has taken a king hit; life is suddenly in turmoil; how will I get through the months and years ahead?

What throws us off balance is not just the situation and its consequences, but all that surrounds the problem. Often this weighs us down as much or even more so, than the actual issue itself. There's a tendency within us to leap from the situation we find ourselves in, to the foreboding consequences that will accompany it.

I recall one very difficult patch we as a family endured some years ago. All the above things plagued our minds and we were in a very dark season indeed, with great stress, grief and a heavy sense of despair. We were very much like David when he said:

"I am bent down, I am bowed down exceedingly; I go mourning all the day. My loins are filled with a burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am exceedingly benumbed and crushed. I howl from the groaning of my heart. My Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs; my power forsakes me! And the light of my eyes is no longer with me." (Psa 38:6-10).

This was a dark season for all of us. But one night as the awfulness of the situation seemed to get worse, I went outside to put out the rubbish bin for pickup next morning. As I walked back to the house, heavy of heart, I looked up at a clear night sky and saw the myriad stars of the Milky Way in all its beauty. As I looked up my heart cried out to God, not to intervene, not to change things, but just to speak to me.

Instantly I heard a deep echo within, that consoling voice that simply said, "The stars will still shine tomorrow." I knew heaven had spoken. Hope had been imparted. What a relief it brought to my troubled soul! What refreshment it gave to my anxious mind! Even my flesh was relieved from the build-up of stress in it. God had answered, not by delivering us out of the horror of the season, but by assuring us that whatever the outcome, "the stars would still be shining afterwards".

You see, they were His stars, He had set them in place, and for me it served as a perfect reminder that He had appointed them for signs and seasons. In the end we were delivered from much of the negativity of that season, but we still had to go through a great deal, enduring much heaviness. When that particular season had passed us by, I knew we had to learn from it, as stressful as it was. But He was there, with us in the season, not forsaking us, but speaking hope in the midst of it.

God was eliciting a response from us by speaking to us of hope, faithfulness and stability. All of these very things came to pass out of that season, and it has brought a different level of maturity and discipleship to us. It has also made me become much more aware of the hurt and pain of others, and I am able to more closely identify with people in similar situations. Bless His name! Indeed, it is very true... **"...that the things concerning me have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel..." (Phlp 1:12).**

I share these things, not to draw attention to myself, but to encourage you that whatever seasons might befall us, the Father is totally and utterly aware of them, and fully aware of our feelings, emotions and pain during such times. Sometimes we can only truly learn something by going through it. I say this not to ignore the reality of the pain and suffering, but to highlight the reality of being transformed by it. As a Pastor I now discipline myself to not speak empty platitudes to people; they did me no good when we were suffering, when good-minded saints spoke platitudes to us (a little like

Job's friends I suppose). I know their heart was toward our situation with concern, but in the end we were going through it, not them.

I don't mean this to be an accusation in any way: loyal Christian friends are extremely supportive and their prayers most valuable. But I now realize what we needed most were words of wise counsel based on Scripture, not advice out of man's experience. Above all we needed to hear what heaven had to say! Such episodes in a believer's life add to the experience and knowledge of understanding seasons and times.

I've heard it said that African Christians look into another believer's eyes searching for the Cross. In other words, they want to know if you've been with Christ "**in the fellowship of His sufferings**" (Phlp 3:10). Whether the saying is true or not, it certainly makes the point. The point is, grace is always available in any season; it's just that in some seasons it's more apparent than in others.

The work of grace upon one's soul can be seen to act in two distinct ways. One work of the Holy Spirit on the soul is to break down all our self-centeredness. Another work is to exalt Christ as "above all", particularly over our soul-life. The result of both is for the full salvation of one's soul, and the glorification of God. The Lord will use all, and any season, to bring this about. Our seeming difficulty is discerning what the seasons mean, what is to be learnt, and how to stand firm while we undergo the season of change or trial. It's usually too late to learn the lesson if we haven't prepared for such times beforehand. This is why dying daily unto one's soul-life is vital (Lk 9:23).

It's important to take advantage of the good seasons and beneficial times as they come to us. Use such occasions for the benefit of your soul. Go into the secret place (Psa. 91:1 and Mtt 6:6) and there learn of the Father's ways. By regularly doing this in the good seasons, we prepare ourselves for any difficult season that may come. It's then far easier to stand during the times of uncertainty, because you've been inwardly prepared well beforehand.

Strange as it may seem the best lessons are learnt in seasons of affliction. So, we do need to prepare for them. It's in those seasons when temptation, distress, trouble and humiliation abound, that we learn the wonderful secrets of heavenly wisdom. Why? Because during such times we discover our own weakness, the folly of trusting in the flesh, as well as the sustaining power and love of a faithful Father.

I realize only too well that sprouting Bible texts doesn't always bring comfort and relief in seasons of perplexity, whether you're saying them to yourself, or someone else says them to you. Our soul can so easily want to give up, to walk away, to blame God, and yes, even to accuse Him of letting such things happen. But He has called us, and He remains faithful to us.

So, we find ourselves holding on when there seems to be little to hold onto. We almost want to throw it all away, yet strangely we keep on coming back. The Bible might seem veiled to us, empty of power even; but still we look at that Book on the table and maybe feel guilty because we know that in it are the truths that will fill the void. We want so much to come out of this dry, barren, deathly season, but we know so frustratingly well, that we cannot hasten its time.

Slowly we begin to understand the eternal truth that "**the times and seasons the Father has set by His own authority**" can be counted on (Acts 1:7). And when He sends the season of favour, nothing but nothing, can hold it back! The seasons of one's life, like the seasons of creation, will continue under the awesome oversight of our Father in heaven.

One of the greatest ways to adjust to the Father's purpose is to pay close attention to His grand work, the glorious panorama of what His will is truly about. By carefully and slowly reading both Ephesians and Colossians, we gain a majestic insight to the splendour of the Father's resolution to "**bring many sons into glory**" (Heb 2:10) so that in His perfect timing "**God will be all in all**" (1 Cor 15:28).

It's in Ephesians that we find Jesus depicted as Lord of the Church, and in Colossians He's declared to be Lord of the Universe. By keeping this in balance and allowing its profound truths to penetrate our minds, we are lifted in our inner life, and find that strange comfort of knowing we've seen right into the Mind of God's purposes. Astonishing!

If you've never done this, I do encourage you to set aside time and read Ephesians and then go straight into Colossians – in one reading. They are both relatively short writings, but I warn you, as you allow the Holy Spirit to stir you, you may end up spending hours in those two extravagantly rich books.

And once you've done it, do it again. Allow the Spirit TIME to work on your inner-man so the truths of those books find a deep echo within. For He who has called you and set you aside as His child wants you to come to a wonderful place of spiritual insight – something He's purposed from the beginning by making **“known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Christ”** (Eph 1:9).

So brethren, in this season we need a greater adjusting to take place in our lives, both outward and inward. The End is indeed encroaching upon us, and the call of the Spirit's voice is to be ready. Please saints, learn to **“redeem the time”** (Eph 5:16) for as Jesus said, **“the night is coming when no man shall work”** (Jhn 9:4).

However, take heart, we are being taught by Him and sooner or later all whom He has called will know the full measure of that special season when He sends **“rain and fruitful seasons to us from heaven, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”** (Acts 14:17).

So, Father we do pray, crying out to You **“teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom”** (Psa 90:12).

Grace in Jesus to you.

Peter McArthur

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Adoption and Sonship



Peter McArthur

It was always the Father's purpose to **ABIDE** with us (Genesis 3:8) and for us to dwell (tabernacle) with Him (Ephesians 2:22) as a spiritual **FAMILY**. This idea is what's behind Jesus' saying in Mark 3:31-35.

- "Then His mother and brothers came, and standing outside they called for Him. And the crowd sitting near Him said, Your mother and your brothers are outside seeking you. And He answered them saying, Who is my mother or my brothers? And looking around at those sitting with Him in a circle, He said, Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, that one is my brother, and my sister, and my mother." (Notice the catch phrase here!).

Also, Paul picks up on this: "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Ephesians 3:15).

The purpose of God to **DWELL** with humanity is why His presence descended to (1)Moses' Tabernacle tent, (2)then into Solomon's Temple, onto the (3)Incarnation of Jesus, (4)the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us, and Jesus going away (5)to prepare a place for us to dwell in the heavenlies.

He yearns to **BE WITH US** (Emmanuel = *God with us*): "Where I am you will also be" (John 14:3 and 17:24).

It's even been suggested by some that Jesus was born on or near the actual **Feast of Tabernacles** (*Festival of Dwelling*) which occurs in September-October each year. If that was so, what a wonderful prophetic truth – born at the **Feast of Dwelling**!

His miraculous conception may then well have been around December, with His birth nine months later about September/October. It's tradition (not Scripture) that places "Christmas" in December, so to see why December couldn't have been the nativity, see [here](#).

Whatever the date actually was, the Purpose has never changed; the only interruption was the Fall in the Garden. But the Father in His infinite wisdom had a Plan which He graciously inserted into His eternal Purpose. He would share Himself with us through HIS SON.

Since the Fall, His eternal purpose remained the same, to bring into existence a divine FAMILY. The saving plan to have the Cross of Redemption incorporated into the purpose was God's way to bring this about. We were not forgotten.

- **When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, having come into being out of a woman, having come under Law, that He might redeem the ones under Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba! Father!** (Galatians 4:4-6)

In verse 5 Paul refers to **"the adoption of sons"** (NOT "*children*" as some modern versions translate it), from the Greek word *huiiothesia*, "sonship."

So, let's unravel a couple of things first to set a foundation for an exciting insight.

We are all "children of God". This modern and very popular notion that "all people are God's children" is a gross misconception. Jesus Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; we however are children adopted by the grace of God. Scripturally speaking, only the redeemed and saved ones are truly "children of God". However, He doesn't want us to remain "children" but to grow up to become "sons" (mature).

Therefore, it's quite wrong doctrinally to say that all people are "God's children" – even though many people believe it. It's as if they want to be acknowledged as "godly" or at least "good" but they don't want the moral obligation that goes with it, and so renounce any need to find salvation in Christ. They want the nice bit, but not the hard bit about sin and repentance.

We're only sons because of Jesus Christ **THE** son of God, and He was eternally begotten, whereas humankind through Adam (another **"son of God"** – see Luke 3:38) was created in time. That's a huge and very important difference. Jesus was Eternally begotten; Adam was created within Time. Jesus was Wisdom incarnate; Adam was granted a Moral compass (at least to start with).

So, what about James 3:9 which says we're made in **"the image of God"**? (see also 1 Corinthians 11:7). Well, the overall teaching from Reformed Protestantism explains that the **"image of God"** has nothing to do with shape or form, but refers to holiness, pure (or full) knowledge and a righteousness imparted by God (see Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24).

Clearly Adam lost that initial image of God, so in a pure sense he was no longer a "son of God". Because he fell, we all fell with him: **"So then, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, in the same way death spread to all men because all sinned"** (Romans 5:12).

Another way of putting it is that God THE Father made Adam in His likeness, and so all of Adam's children were begotten in the likeness of their father too:

- **God created Adam, in the likeness of God He made him. Male and female He created them, and He blessed them and called their name "Adam" when He created them. Adam lived 130 years, then fathered a son in his likeness, after his image, and named him Seth** (Genesis 5:1-3).

Well, all of the above is standard orthodox Bible truth, but does need to be reinforced from time to time. But Adam certainly has a lot to answer for!

The other thing that's important to grasp is how Adoption is linked to Sonship. Scripturally speaking, sonship is a gift from God, not by our being born biologically, but through being born-again spiritually "of God".

- **"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).**

So, the concept of "sonship" goes hand in hand with the idea of "the image of God". It implies and should involve, an intimate communion with our Creator-Father.

In this study we're looking at how the Hebrew mindset understood Adoption and Sonship, not so much the Roman Law idea that Paul uses, let alone the modern concept of adoption. Now while Paul used the Roman Law of adoption as an illustration for his readers, the prophetic nature of Hebrew Adoption cannot be easily ignored. Paul after all was initially a Jew with a Hebrew mindset.

Jewish law didn't have any concept of "adoption" that was akin to Roman or even our modern culture. But a type of adoption was practiced in earlier times, as seen in this example when Esther's parents died, and her uncle Mordecai adopted her (Esther 2:7 and 15).

Even Yahweh does this when He "adopts" Israel as His chosen one. In Exodus He spoke metaphorically of Israel as his "firstborn son." God told Moses:

- **Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the YHWH says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'**" (Exodus 4:22-23)

And in Psalm 89 God says,

- **I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him... He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour.' I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.** (Psalm 89:20,26-27)

Scripture shows us that David was actually the youngest brother, not the first-born son, yet God passed by the other brothers and chose him as king. When God said He would appoint David as firstborn, he didn't mean that he would be first in order, but would be foremost in favour, status – and even in accountability.

In Hebrew thought a son had the particular role of being part of his father's character, of almost participating in his father's way of living. The son certainly had to depend on his father, but also to obey him. In this way he would be a reflection of who his father was. For the Hebrew father his strength was evidenced by having a son (especially a first-born son), and for the son his greatest role in life would be to bear his father's character and values.

The father would be responsible for instructing his son into the family trade or business, which was usually hereditary. It's interesting to note that the first recorded words of Jesus were at 12 years old when his parents found him in the Temple. When Joseph and Miriam (Mary) questioned him he replied, **"Don't you know that I must be about the things of my Father?"** (literal meaning **"at my Father's concerns, affairs"** Luke 2:49). So even though Joseph was still alive at that point, Jesus was already acutely aware of the "business" (affairs) of his heavenly Father!

Now according to John the last recorded words of Jesus on the cross were **"It is finished"** (John 19:30). What was finished? His Father's business and affairs regarding him, meaning the work of redemption via the cross: **"I finished the work that You gave me to do"** (John 17:4).

So, according to this mindset a “son” is one who reflects the father’s character and values, by first being dependent on him, and second by obedience to his father’s purpose – even unto death. It doesn’t take too much to see how this was reflected in Jesus’ life.

When the son had fulfilled all his father’s desires and plans for him, according to Hebrew thought, he was granted the title of “son” and the honour that went with it. A son (usually the first-born) is one who is both designated by the father to be a likeness (in character) of him, and then acknowledged publicly as such. This is the meaning behind Jesus’ saying, “**so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven**” (Matthew 5:45).

So, we can say that Jesus as the perfect and mature Son is indeed the very reflection (incarnation) of his Father’s will and character. In fact, like any good Hebrew son he points to his father and doesn’t seek attention for himself. “**I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me**” (John 5:30). He is devoted to his father’s purpose in life!

The next idea to address is the difference between our modern understanding of Adoption, and the Scriptural concept. They are quite different. So let’s take a brief look at the meaning of the Father-Son relationship in Scripture (this won’t cover all the concepts of Hebrew adoption, but it will set us a pattern).

- It doesn’t mean “adoption” in the modern sense of the word, where a man might adopt an orphan from another family. When a son reached maturity, his father would formally give him the “sonship.” This would be done publicly.
- The son could then act in the name of his father, and any contract he might sign would be legally binding as though his father had signed the contract himself. Hence the importance of the contract “signed” in blood of the New Covenant.
- So biblically speaking “sonship” deals with a position of authority in the family, not like our modern understanding of adoption. For the Hebrews, character was all about the father-son relationship and the acknowledgment of this in front of witnesses. It was an inward thing to be expressed outwardly.

In Biblical days there were **THREE ceremonies dealing with sonship**. This is important to understand in terms of our spiritual growth as believers. Each step occurs at a set time that’s quite important prophetically.

1. **The first ceremony** took place shortly after the birth of the son when he was 8 days old, the circumcision ceremony (**Luke 2:21**).
2. **The second ceremony** was performed when the son reached the age of about 12 years (**Luke 2:42**). That was the second level of sonship, when the father began to seriously teach his son wisdom and the family business or trade.
3. **The third ceremony** was FULL sonship, done publicly when the son was about 30 years old (**Luke 3:23**), as long as the son had proven himself to be obedient (“**You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased**” Luke 3:22). This ceremony gave the son full authority to make decisions in place of his father, for he possessed the mind of the father. He thought like his father. His values were the same as his father’s. Ideally, he was a replication of his father, and the father knew that he could now trust his son to act in his stead. Note that Joseph was **30** when he was made ruler in Egypt (**Genesis 41:46**), and the priests began to minister when they turned **30** (**Numbers 4:3**). David started to reign when he was 30 (**2 Samuel 5:4**). So in Scripture the number **30** symbolically stands for “maturity and sonship” (see my free [eBook](#)).

It's easy to see how this operated in Jesus' life. He was the **PATTERN** Son for us to follow. We are to imitate Him (**1 Corinthians 11:1**).

Adoption and Sonship are a glorious truth, often neglected in much preaching. Paul explains that our Father "**chose us in (Jesus Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In LOVE He predestined us to ADOPTION AS SONS through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed (lit. *graced*) on us in the Beloved (lit. *Son of His love*)**" (Ephesians 1:4-6).

This passage declares that our adoption was purposed by our Father from eternity past, was made possible in time by His beloved Son, and is now being made real by the Holy Spirit. A very ordered and three-fold sequence of **Father, Son** and **Spirit** tied neatly to the **Past, Present** and **Future**. How I love the sequences of God!

We are on our way to FULL sonship, to dwell (*tabernacle*) with the Godhead forever. This is the reason the final Feast of the Lord is the **Feast of Tabernacles** (meaning "*to dwell, to abide*") because it symbolizes our arrival at Home where we'll dwell eternally in the presence of the Father, Son and Spirit - just like it was envisioned before the Fall. Nothing has changed!

**The reason for all this is to learn
how to dwell with God and one another as a Family!**

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"Wisdom is a tree of life to
those who take hold of her"

Proverbs 3: 18