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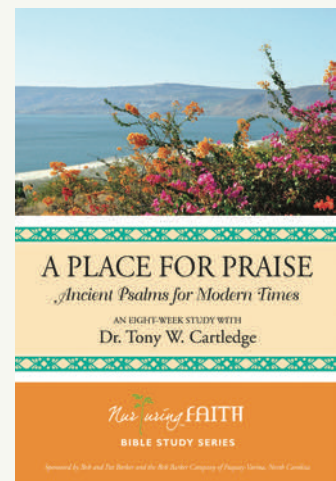
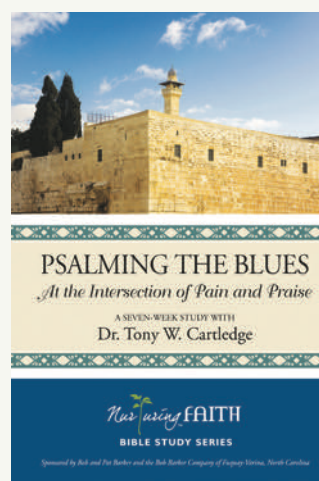
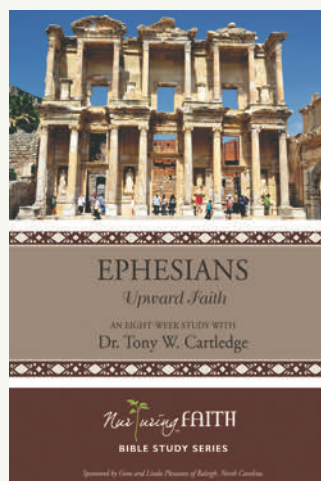
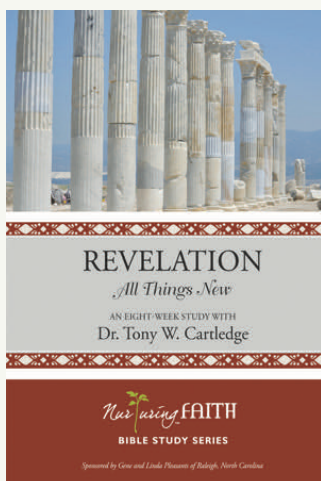


Nurturing Faith Bible Studies by Tony Cartledge are scholarly, yet applicable, and conveniently placed in the center of this journal. Simply provide a copy of the journal to each class participant, and take advantage of the abundant online teaching materials at nurturingfaith.net. These include video overviews for teacher preparation or to be shown in class.

See page 21 for more information.

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Nurturing Faith Journal (ISSN 1072-7787) is published bimonthly by: Baptists Today, Inc., P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 • Subscription rates: 1 year, \$24; 2 years, \$42; 1 year groups of 25 or more, \$18; 1 year groups of less than 25, \$24; 1 year Canada, \$42; 1 year foreign, \$100. Periodical postage paid at Macon, Ga. 31208 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address corrections to: P.O. Box 6318, Macon, GA 31208-6318 • (478) 301-5655 • © 2016 Nurturing Faith • All rights reserved.



LIFE AND WORDS

Theologian
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honored;
offers challenge

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JULY / AUGUST 2016



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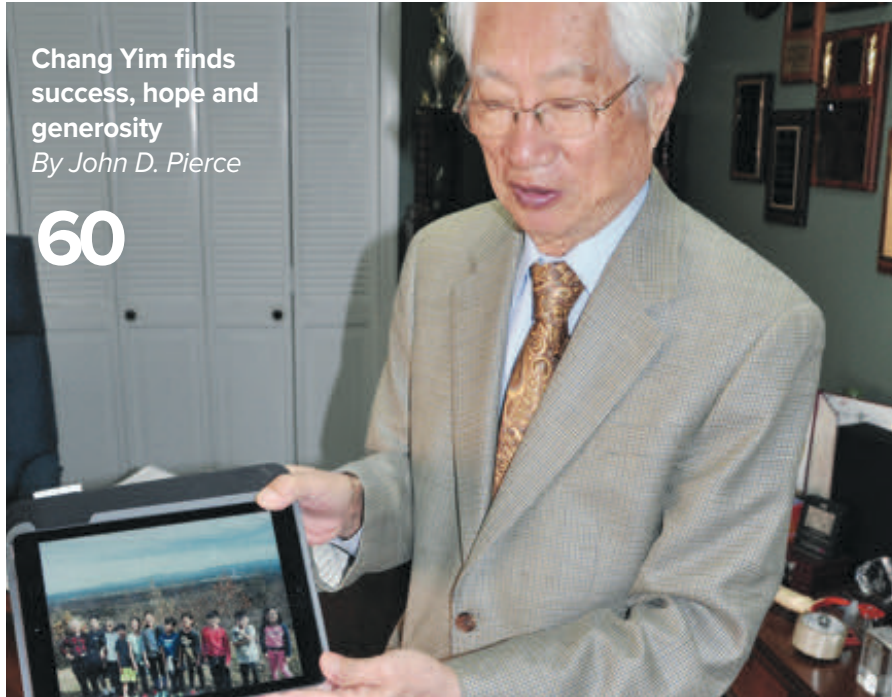
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COVER PHOTO by Bruce Gourley. White Dome Geyser erupts in Yellowstone National Park.

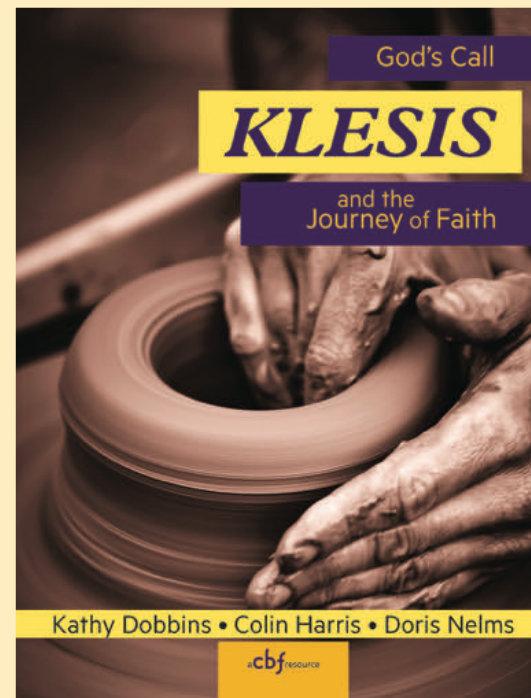
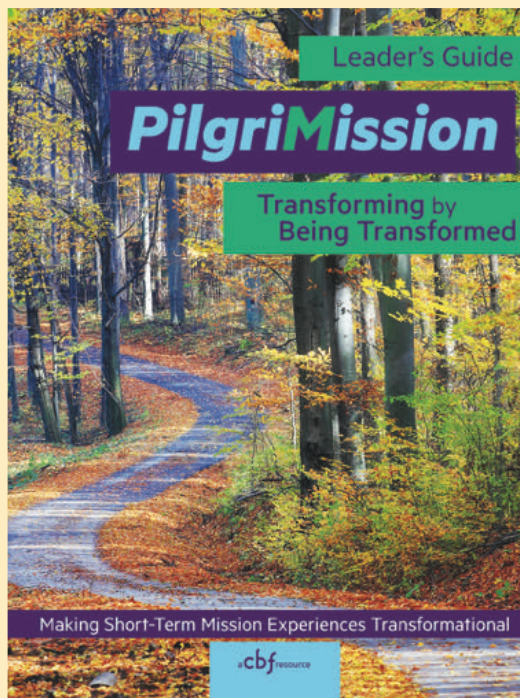
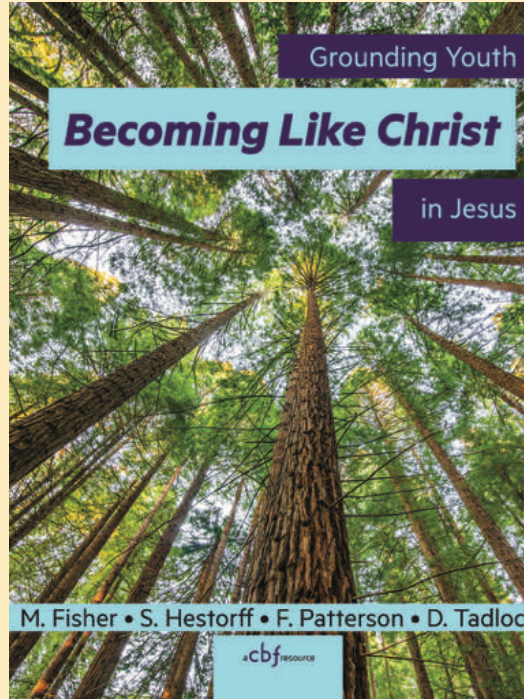
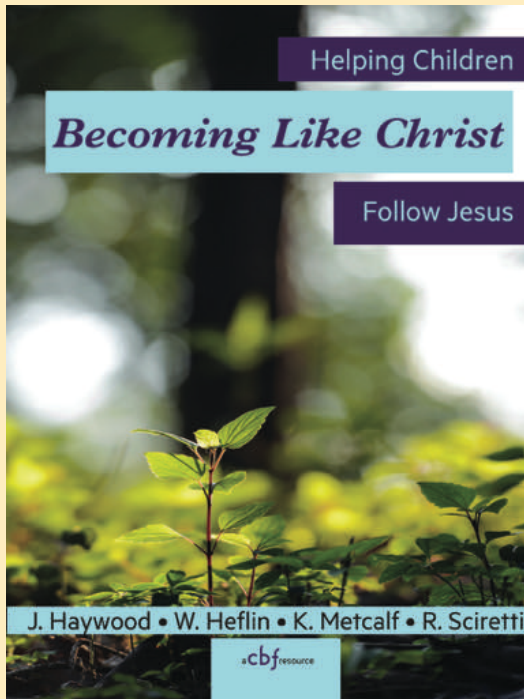
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The gifts of raising and being ‘church kids’

By Tony Vincent

“Mrs. Mildred” died in her late 80s. I had not seen her for a long time until last year. Hearing that she was ill, I drove back to the town where I was born.

I knew Mrs. Mildred from our church there. She kept me from my earliest days, loved me as her own, and never forgot me as I moved away and grew into an adult.

On the day of my visit she welcomed me into her home as always — arms opened wide for a big hug and a warm smile of recognition on her face. I felt the love and care that I’d known decades before. It was a memory-filled visit that I will always cherish.

As a child, my family lived in communities that were not home to any extended family. Because of churches, however, we developed deep, loving bonds that have remained through multiple moves and life changes.

Through the advent of Facebook, we keep in closer contact than ever before and these relationships continue to flourish. I have grandparents, uncles and aunts, and brothers and sisters in many places with whom I share no kindred blood. Such bonding is one of the great gifts of being a “church kid.”

When I walked in the door, people knew my name and I knew them. I was loved, encouraged, chastened at times, and guided into a life of faith by a myriad of people.

As I said at Mildred’s funeral, I don’t recall a single lesson from Mission Friends

or the particulars of many events at church. But I remember Mildred baking my dad’s favorite coconut cake for his birthday and how she taught me to shuck corn on her back steps.

I remember Mrs. Grace’s kind voice as we sang the books of the Bible.

I remember Mr. Jim talking about baseball with me during my short-lived career as a Little Leaguer. His advice? “Take up golf, son.” Then he gave me my first putter.

Today I see this story continuing. When our 3-year-old twins Caroline and Carter walk (no, run!) through the door of our church, they are met with loving smiles and encouragement. They already know many people in the church by name — beyond their nursery caregivers and their friends. They wake up most mornings asking, “Is this a school day or a church day?”

While loving teachers and playground time with their friends create a safe place to grow at preschool, they smile eagerly on days we can tell them, “Today is a church day.” They know they will be deeply loved and valued, and that people will want to be with them as they grow from squirmy, sometimes-irreverent kids into, well ... squirmy, sometimes irreverent adults.

Recently, when mega-church pastor Andy Stanley spoke critically of families who take their children to smaller churches lacking what he considers a vibrant

community of faith for their young people, I cringed. (And he soon apologized.)

The churches that helped raise me, and the church that is helping guide my own children, are one body: young and old, together. Sometimes it is awkward and messy. Sometimes your kid will cry or speak out at an inopportune time. But most often it is beautiful and holy. Where else in society will you find non-related people of all generations together like this?

For many years our church has sent intergenerational mission teams to serve God together. Watching those relationships blossom through shared ministry and then continue as we returned home is a great blessing.

There are times and places for age-appropriate study and activities. However, there are immense opportunities and beautiful joy that come from all ages being together. Investment in these relationships lies with all parties:

Church leaders must encourage and model it. Adults must recognize the power and beauty in knowing and being known. Parents must relinquish some of their anxiety about their child’s behavior. And churches must be diligent about being safe places for everyone, especially our children.

While not always easy, it is beautiful, lasting and reflective of God’s kingdom. Let’s each of us be “Mrs. Mildred” or “Mrs. Grace” or “Mr. Jim” to someone. Let’s continue to raise “church kids.” **NFJ**

—Tony Vincent is associate minister of Trinity Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C.





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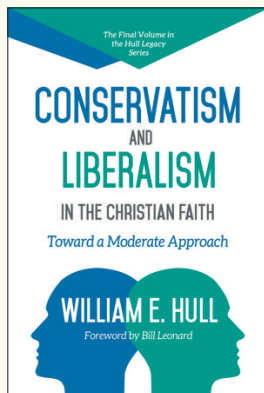
—William E. Hull in his final book,
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—Novelist
WENDELL BERRY,
in a letter to David Hull

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—From Foreword
by **BILL J. LEONARD**

Publication of this book and guide made possible by the generosity of David Hull, Susan Hull Walker and the Hull Legacy Series Committee of Mountain Brook Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.

Where humor grows

By John D. Pierce

Kathryn Hamrick, who wrote columns for several years for this news journal and for three decades in local newspapers, has compiled nearly 100 of her approximately 1,250 columns into a book titled *The Farmer's Wife*.

During about half the span of her professional writing career her husband Cline and other family members ran a dairy farm in Cleveland County, N.C. The rural setting provided much fodder for Kathryn's funny and insightful observations on life.



Her upbringing also impacted the way the Wake Forest University graduate, who never intended to be “a farmer’s wife,” sees the world.

“Almost everything I know about life came from growing up in a Baptist parsonage,” she writes in one column.

Often she references the influences of Baptist Training Union and other experiences of being immersed in this church tradition with the added identity of being a P.K.

Her move into writing inspiring and funny observations for publication began at “a Rook party” — a beyond-church social gathering many Baptists considered as much a part of their shared culture as potluck dinners and promotion Sunday. (Rook was a Baptist-approved option to a deck of evil playing cards prone to induce gambling.)

Actually, the genesis of her writing career goes back to childhood disobedience — putting her 4-year-old hands on her father’s Royal typewriter that was to be off limits.

She confessed that sin in one column, adding: “Therefore, before I learned phonics, the alphabet, or what it means to be a Baptist, I could type faster than Daddy.”

Kathryn spins tales of her husband taking up frog gigging upon retirement from farming and her son Jason taking up banjo as a teen — influenced by the master picking of Cleveland County legend Earl Scruggs.

Her son’s seismic shift from Prince, Grateful Dead and Led Zeppelin to Scruggs, the Lewis Family and Riverbend Bluegrass she deemed a “modern miracle.”

Shopping, writes Kathryn in another column, is not the best bonding experience for many couples: “For every marriage made in heaven, two are finished off at Kmart.”

In her acknowledgments, Kathryn thanked her husband, children and mother — all who made multiple appearances in her writings. Also she thanked “our cows.”

Retaining a fair dose of Baptist-induced guilt, she once wondered: “Hopefully writing columns about my nutty mother is not a violation of the Ten Commandments.”

Kathryn helps readers to see the humor in daily experiences as well as the value of investing in enduring relationships. Perhaps most importantly, she reminds readers to take faith and family seriously without taking oneself too seriously.

A sample of Kathryn’s writings and other information may be found at kathrynhamrick.com where the book can be ordered. **NFJ**

The advertisement for Faithlab features a background image of a church building with a red roof. The text is arranged in a vertical column on the right side of the image. At the top, it says "Tell Your Church's Story" in white text. Below that, it asks "When looking for a church home, the web is the first place most people now look. What impression does your church website make?" and "Get a beautiful, mobile-friendly church website to tell your church's story." It then lists services: "We also offer logo, newsletter and worship bulletin redesign." and provides contact information: "Contact Faithlab today, faithlab.com". At the bottom, the Faithlab logo is displayed in white text on a dark background, with the tagline "Inspired Creativity" in yellow text below it.

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We also offer logo, newsletter and worship bulletin redesign.

Contact Faithlab today, faithlab.com

faithlab
Inspired Creativity

Worth Repeating

“You’re too smart to be a Baptist.”

—Wayne Flynt, historian and Baptist minister, quoting his friend novelist Harper Lee, whose eulogy he gave at her request at a private funeral in February at First United Methodist Church of Monroeville, Ala. (al.com)

“What if the most significant thing you will ever do is a part of your future and not your history?”

—Barry Howard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Pensacola, Fla.

“Evangelicals are secular now. Over the last several decades they have devolved from theological guardians to political operatives.”

—Randall Balmer, professor of religion at Dartmouth College (*LA Times*)

“There are no distinct second-person plural pronouns in modern standard English. ‘Ye’ once served that purpose; a good look at the King James Version of the Bible can give a sense of the usage.”

—Writer Vann R. Newkirk II making a case for “America Needs Y’all” (*The Atlantic*)

“For nearly 400 years Americans have been conflating the message of the Bible with the fate of the country.”

—Historian John Fea, writing for *Christianity Today*

“For in truth, I never met with any person, of any color, who had more confidence in the voice of God, as spoken direct to her soul.”

—Quaker Thomas Garrett, once writing about abolitionist Harriet Tubman who will replace Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill according to the U.S. Treasury Department (RNS)

“Make sure both boys and girls are taught that consent is never negotiable. Kids often learn about sex from social interactions with peers and from pornography, neither of which is likely to teach about consent, so make sure you teach it.”

—Pastor Kyndall Rae Rothaus of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, urging churches to combat sexual violence and domestic abuse (Baptist News Global)

“We are not going to be running on the field to issue citations. The purpose of this ordinance is to encourage those who are looked up to as role models to be role models.”

—Boston Police Lieut. Detective Michael McCarthy on the banning of all tobacco products at historic Fenway Park (*Boston Globe*)

“It is unconditional love when I care about your happiness without expecting anything in return.”

—Pastor Bob Mulkey of New Covenant Baptist Church in Deland, Fla. (*Daytona Beach News-Journal*)

“Music comes from God’s heart. It is a language of its own.”

—Beth Foster Long, honored for 50 years of service as organist at First Baptist Church of Ringgold, Ga. (*Northwest Georgia News*)

“The stained glass collection is said to be the largest collection of English stained glass in the world, outside of Great Britain.”

—Executive Minister Dan Johnson of Atlanta’s Peachtree Christian Church that is featured in the movie *Captain America: Civil War* (11alive.com)

“I realized that I could use the same technology that was being used to make cell phones and computers, the same devices that are driving people apart these days, to create something that will bring people closer together.”

—Israeli entrepreneur Ami Bentov who is using nanotechnology to put the entire Hebrew Bible on jewelry including lapel pins, necklaces and Stars of David (RNS)

“Accepting excuses inevitably leads to an erosion of the values we aspire to live by. Hold yourself accountable. Hold your congregation to its responsibility to live its faith.”

—Psychologist Daniel Elash, a consultant with the Center for Healthy Churches

When five is less than two

By John D. Pierce

A group of ministers in Birmingham, Ala., has formed to help voters know how political candidates align with “biblical standards.”

These Gatekeepers, as they deemed themselves, take all the worry out of carefully considering the candidates’ various positions (which often come with much elasticity) and then prayerfully and thoughtfully reaching one’s own understanding of the best way to punch the ballot.

The Gatekeepers have devised a way of rating the faithfulness of candidates to so-called biblical ideals — from local officials to those aspiring to live in the White House. The higher a candidate is rated on a five-star scale by these two dozen or so ministers, the more God is apparently pleased.

Each individual minister determines a candidate’s probability of “exemplifying a biblical world view” if elected. Then an average of those scores produces the candidate’s resulting one-to-five-star rating.

So exactly what are the issues that make a political candidate score favorably in exemplifying a “biblical worldview”?

From the online resources they provide, it is not easy to determine the exact measuring sticks of the various ministers that leave many candidates with only a one- or two-star rating. But summaries tied to the ratings are more revealing: favorability is tied primarily to the candidates’ opposition to abortion and equal rights for gay/lesbian persons.

It seems that the things Jesus addressed most clearly and most often have little to no

impact on what American evangelicals have determined to be biblical. Commitments to the poor, the elderly, the imprisoned and the oppressed don’t really count. Fear of the outsider is greater than any call to love and service.

The Gatekeepers Association of Alabama is not the first group of conservative clergy to produce some kind of report card or voter guide that suggests a candidate’s biblical bona fides are tied to a narrow list of conservative political positions.

The Moral Majority, Religious Roundtable and others have done similar things.

And there are always lazy, gullible voters willing to buy some mislabeled packaging called biblical or Christian or faithful.

When discovering this latest version of rating candidates biblically, I kept wondering: How many stars might Jesus rate?

By his words and deeds, Jesus seemed concerned with different matters than those many American Christians use to define biblical faithfulness today. And if Jesus was not a five-star believer, then I’m not sure we should be seeking to be one — or vote for one — ourselves.

Five-star ratings might work for contemporary ministers seeking to be political operatives, but Jesus could muster only two commandments deemed the greatest: simply loving God and others.

How naïve. Jesus probably wouldn’t get one whole star from today’s religious

keepers of the gate. But then, he got a whole lot worse from the ones of his own time.

Today, fundamentalist Christians and their political allies specialize in providing solutions to fear-induced, imaginary problems — from protecting preachers from being forced to perform same-sex marriages (even though no minister has been forced by government to officiate any marriage) to unenforceable bathroom legislation that is nothing more than another discriminatory swat in the lost battle of cultural dominance.

Politicized “biblical fidelity” has little to do with what is actually in the Bible. More often it is oversized, vaguely-masked political activity designed to drive a continuing discriminatory and punitive agenda rooted in a sense of loss.

Let us be wise and warned: More substitution than summary takes place when we seek to reduce the gospel to our political preferences. In doing so, often we replace what Jesus revealed to be ultimate with an ideology foreign to his will and ways.

But then, loving God and neighbor is never enough for those who, like many of the religiously inclined of Jesus’ time, see themselves as upholding the more comfortable and self-serving ways of religious faith.

Publicly, American Christians often come across as spiritual know-it-alls when claiming to stake out God’s clear position on every possible societal/political issue — no matter how disconnected from the biblical revelation.

Perhaps we need more two-star Christians based on the scale Jesus offered. **NFJ**



“Let us be wise and warned: More substitution than summary takes place when we seek to reduce the gospel to our political preferences.”

Isis lures recruits with video game themes

BY LAUREN MARKOE
Religion News Service

The footage, to gamers who like to play “Grand Theft Auto,” looks familiar. From the point of view of a gunman looking for targets through the speeding car’s window, unsuspecting people take bullets in the chest, and crumple to the ground.

But it’s not “Grand Theft Auto.” It’s propaganda created by the group that calls itself the Islamic State, also known as ISIS. And the people lying motionless on the ground are real. Then they die many times over on social media, after the Islamic State posts these executions on Twitter and elsewhere online.

Javier Lesaca, a scholar who has spent hundreds of hours studying ISIS videos, says the terrorist organization has masterfully mimicked not only the look and feel of popular, violent games such as “Grand Theft Auto” and “Call of Duty,” but television shows — *Homeland*, *Saw*, and *Person of Interest*, to name a few — which, like the video games, feature strapping young men in cool sunglasses who kill without mercy.

“This aesthetic is not bin Laden sitting in a cave,” said Lesaca, a visiting scholar at George Washington University, referring to the static video released by al-Qaida after 9/11. “This is not the old, dusty terrorist without teeth. Nobody wants to be that.”

The Islamic State knows that disaffected young people who love playing the gunman in “Grand Theft Auto” may take interest in a real brotherhood that promises to bring the world on the screen to life.

ISIS possesses a level of cinematic sophistication — coined “Hollywood visual style” by communication experts Cori Dauber and Mark Robinson — that simulates the high-quality production values expected by viewers raised on American movies. Its skill, many academics and counterterrorism officials agree, presents a uniquely modern challenge to those trying to combat the terrorist group.

“By producing video products that largely meet industry standards, ISIS is doing something no terrorist group we know of has ever done before,” write Dauber and Robinson, in a piece on ISIS’s videography. Working at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, they have dissected Islamic State videos to understand their use of color, camera angles, special effects, graphics and composition.

ISIS puts cameras on its fighters so that its videos have that first person perspective, making the viewer feel that he experiences the action for himself. It’s the same technique used in popular and often violent video games, but also for televised sport events, says Dauber.

The NFL, for example, attaches small cameras to players’ helmets. The result is a visceral experience of the action that raises heartbeats and draws spectators to the edge of their seats.

From Lesaca’s vast library of videos, he pulls out one on a typical theme: battle. It opens like a television drama, with the camera panning across the group, and then closes in on individuals — attractive, smiling tough guys wearing military garb and brandishing automatic weapons. Each seems to have an identifying characteristic — a bright scarf, a gold tooth.

The viewer follows them through battle as if he or she is one of them. The story ends in victory, set to rousing music.

Within ISIS propaganda, familiar images pop up — a man in handcuffs, for example, that recalls a particularly memorable interrogation scene from the Showtime series *Homeland*.

Sitting with his laptop in a classroom of George Washington University’s School of Media and Public Affairs, Lesaca — who presented his findings to United Nations counterterrorism officials last year — clicks on images of propaganda set alongside visuals from American-made television shows and video games.

“It’s the same! It’s the same!” exclaims the Spanish researcher, who is preparing a thesis on the comparisons for his doctorate from Spain’s University of Navarra. He says he has studied more than 800 Islamic State videos produced between January 2014 and September 2015, and that 15 percent of them are inspired by Western movies, video games or other entertainment.

“No religious imagery,” he adds, still clicking. “Do you see any?”

The images Lesaca studies glorify the Islamic State and its fighters but show no mosques, Qurans, imams or people at prayer. Young men attracted to ISIS often have little knowledge of or interest in Islam, say those who have studied their motivations. These visuals appeal not to piety but



Javier Lesaca



Mark Robinson

to a thirst for adventure, or a longing to identify with something bigger than oneself.

But some scholars question whether such videos have as significant an impact as many suspect.

“The research that I had read on ISIS’s use of social media suggests that the emphasis on slick video production is overemphasized,” says David Schanzer, director of the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, adding that the more crucial element is the intimate relationship that is now possible to cultivate online between a recruiter and a vulnerable young person.

“ISIS’s real power is the ability to make personal connections between Muslims in the diaspora and those in the Middle East through social media,” he said.

And as Dauber notes, no studies have established a causal link between the videos produced by terrorist groups and the radicalization of would-be terrorists. Still, she continues, the potential of these videos cannot be dismissed.

“There is a mountain of social science research on the power of visual images relative to words,” she says. “And in every case I’m aware of where someone was arrested in the West for participation in or conspiracy to commit acts of violence linked to Islamist ideology, these types of videos were in their possession: Clearly they have some impact on people.”

Other experts question whether Lesaca has broken any new ground, and whether

the videos he has studied are actually produced by Islamic State supporters as opposed to the Islamic State. Lesaca says the videos he has studied were all produced by the Islamic State itself.

“Some may be surprised that ISIS is producing propaganda that resembles American-made video games and television programs, but we shouldn’t be at this point in 2016,” said Lt. Col. Bryan Price, who heads the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. “The group has spent a lot of time and effort to tailor its propaganda to a variety of audiences, both internal and external to the caliphate, so it is not necessarily a new threat. To be fair, however, I think directly tying some of these products to specific games or television programs is a bit of a stretch, and not necessarily the work of ISIS’s official propaganda machine.”

Alberto M. Fernandez, the State Department’s coordinator for strategic counterterrorism communications from March 2012 to February 2015, agrees that Lesaca is not the first analyst to seize upon the similarities between Islamic State propaganda and American-made entertainment.

“For those who have the misfortune of having to watch this stuff for a living, that’s not new,” says Fernandez, now vice president of the Middle East Media Research Institute. “But he certainly is presenting it in a very powerful and compelling way.”

Shown side-by-side by Lesaca, the striking likeness of two images — that of a purported Islamic State fighter with his head

bowed and fist upraised and of a warrior from the video game “Call of Duty” — can impress. What a challenge for those who hope to stop the Islamic State, Lesaca says, when such familiar images serve the enemy.

Lesaca says this work of the Islamic State needs to be countered by equally powerful videos exposing the group for its brutality, and exalting the courage of those fighting against it.

Why, Lesaca asks, did no one make a compelling video of the story of the Swedish teenager held by the Islamic State, who was freed in February by Kurdish forces? Or, Fernandez suggests, the October rescue by Kurds and Americans near Hawija, Iraq, of 70 Iraqi soldiers and civilians whose graves had already been dug?

“There was footage!” says Fernandez, referring to video from a camera attached to a soldier’s helmet. “But it was cold,” nothing like the “emotionally, aesthetically and psychologically satisfying” material the Islamic State produces.

The problem, he continues, is that the West hasn’t figured out its own counter-narrative — an Islamic narrative, or a nationalist narrative.

“It could be many things, he says. “But you have to have something against something ... you have to stand for something.” **NFJ**

—*Lauren Markoe is a national reporter for RNS. This story, with support from Google, is part of a series on religious tolerance and combating hate speech online.*

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God's Handiwork

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY BRUCE GOURLEY

For a century, America's national parks have preserved natural wonders

Weary of election-year politics? Dread the daily commute? Is screen time too all-consuming, the job too demanding, the bills too many, the stress too much, your sleep too little? When was the last time you felt truly alive?

While faith offers comfort, meaning and hope in the midst of life's daily toils, spiritual renewal can remain elusive.

Two thousand years ago Jesus often fled the cities and villages of his day for quiet spiritual reflection in the Judean wilderness. But modern escapes trend toward loud restaurants, flashy amusements, noisy stadiums or extravagant entertainments within bustling cities.

In the midst of the frenzied chaos of modern urban living it is all too easy to forget that you as an American citizen own tens of millions of acres of the most spectacular, awe-inspiring, soul-restoring wilderness landscapes on planet earth.

YOUR LAND

Let me say that again: you own tens of millions of acres of spectacular, restorative real estate to which you can go when you



Bison in Yellowstone Park

need to reconnect with yourself and God. It is your land, my land, our land, public land ... land long infused with a sense of the sacred, land now preserved in America's National Park System, land that can rightfully be considered temples of nature.

As long as some 12,000 years ago Native American peoples roamed the landscape of today's United States. Collectively they shared a belief in a creator Great Spirit manifested through nature as a universally encompassing presence.

The late Cherokee Chief Eli Gatoga said of this nature-centric religious faith: "The Indian made an effort to know of

spiritual things from his own observations of nature, because all truth can be found in Nature. There is a spiritual beauty in the realization that the world has been deliberately made or created, and is in perfect balance ecologically."

There is much wisdom in traditional Native American religion. Inherently sacred, land belongs to the Great Spirit, who graciously allows humans to walk thereupon.

Massasoit, leader of the Wampanoag nation when the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth in 1620, expressed disbelief over the strange European concept of land ownership.



Yosemite Falls

“What is this you call property?” he asked incredulously. “It cannot be the earth, for the land is our mother, nourishing all her children, beasts, birds, fish and all men. The woods, the streams, everything on it belongs to everybody and is for the use of all. How can one man say it belongs only to him?”

EXPLOITATION

Early European settlers dismissed Native American spirituality as childish and

heretical. They battled the indigenous peoples for control of the wilderness.

Slaughtering many, they forced Christianity upon survivors. Herded to and constrained upon less desirable lands, natives at the point of extermination signed documents transferring land ownership from the Great Spirit to humans.

American Baptist founder Roger Williams was an exception among early settlers. He befriended Massasoit, accepted

native peoples on their own terms, and became the first European to learn and record the Wampanoag language.

Saved by Massasoit's family when driven out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony by theocratic Christian leaders, Williams thereafter founded the Rhode Island Colony, a haven for freedom of conscience and religion, upon gifted tribal lands.

Apart from a few open-minded persons such as Williams, however, Euro-Americans for hundreds of years in the New England and Middle Colonies pursued the conquering, containment and exploitation of native peoples, often with violent means. From humanity to nature the slaughter extended.

Felling the forests of an ever-expanding frontier, settlers plowed vast swaths of newly exposed earth and forged cities and towns by the hundreds. Game succumbed or fled before the onslaught, factories belched black smoke into the air, and once-clean streams and rivers turned murky and toxic.

Finally, in the early 19th century some Americans reconsidered the utilization of nature as a commodity to be exploited for private gain and corporate profit. Romantic and Transcendentalist writers with New England roots led the way, including William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

Each embraced the “wildness” of nature as scenic and beautiful, finding restorative, healing and spiritual powers within unspoiled woodlands, mountains, valleys and meadows.

PRESERVATION

Although sculpted urban public parks emerged in the Northeast as early as the 1830s, the Transcendentalists pined for the raw beauty of nature. So did others.

Against the backdrop of an urban and industrialized Europe, by the mid-19th century America's remaining wilderness became a symbol of American identity. Celebrated in writing, art and early photography, a dawning recovery of nature's exceptionalism fostered a nascent conservation movement.

In 1864, Vermont native George Perkins Marsh published *Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, an analysis of problems associated with deforestation, including over-grazing, soil erosion, enhanced flooding and droughts, and wildlife degradation. Marsh recognized the interconnected nature of species. His formative work represented an early example of ecological thinking, influencing forest conservation of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The same year as the publication of Marsh's volume, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation deeding the Yosemite Valley and the nearby Mariposa Big Tree Grove of giant sequoias to the state of California "upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort and recreation."

Yosemite thus became the first tract of American wilderness set aside by federal law for preservation and public use.

Among the last regions of the American West to be mapped and conquered stood the interior Yellowstone Plateau, a vast and largely inaccessible wilderness ringed by high mountains at the juncture of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho territories.

Officially "discovered" by organized expeditions in 1869 and 1870, the spouting geysers, towering waterfalls, teeming wildlife and vast chasm of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone River captivated the public's imagination.

Fearful that commercial interests would destroy "Wonderland," the U.S. Congress passed and Pres. Ulysses S. Grant signed legislation designating Yellowstone as the world's first national park.

HOLY WILDERNESS

Setting aside more than two million wilderness acres "as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people," the 1872 Yellowstone Act prohibited private settlement and occupancy. In designating Yellowstone as the nation's park, the government paid homage, whether explicitly or not, to the traditional Native American concept of sacred, communal land.

As the Yellowstone saga unfolded, Scottish-born immigrant John Muir left a factory job in the upper Midwest in the 1860s, wandered about for several years, and eventually landed in California. There he visited, fell in love with, and built a cabin in Yosemite.

Emerson, while visiting the park, spent time with Muir. As later summarized by naturalist author John Tallmadge, "Emerson was delighted to find at the end of his career the prophet-naturalist he had called for so long ago.... And for Muir, Emerson's visit came like a laying on of hands."

Muir soon set about studying geology and biology in order to better understand nature. Traveling throughout the West and Alaska as America's frontier closed, he wrote

extensively and otherwise used his growing influence to advocate for the national preservation of wilderness lands.

In 1890 his advocacy helped establish Yosemite National Park in the area adjacent to Yosemite Valley and the giant sequoia grove.

Later serving as the first president of the Sierra Club, an organization for mountain lovers, Muir helped bring about the 1906 transfer of the state-owned valley and grove into Yosemite National Park during the presidential administration of Theodore Roosevelt, an avid outdoorsman, enthusiastic naturalist and passionate conservationist.

A mountain mystic and devoutly religious, Muir, raised in a Christian home, often spoke and wrote of the relationship between God and nature.

"God's love is manifest in the landscape as in a face," he noted in 1909. "The good Lord put [wilderness] here as a free gift that he who chooses may take with joy, and he who will not walk out of the smoke of the cities to see them has no right to them."

Late in life while reflecting upon his first summer in the Sierra Mountains, Muir wrote: "As far as I can, I must drift about these love-monument mountains, glad to be a servant of servants in so holy a wilderness."

Muir spoke of his beloved Yosemite Valley as "a temple far finer than any made by human hands."

"Oh, these vast, calm, measureless mountain days, inciting at once to work and rest!" he wrote. "Days in whose light everything seems equally divine, opening a thousand windows to show us God. Nevertheless, however weary, should one faint by the way who gains the blessings of one mountain day; whatever his fate, long life, short life, stormy or calm, he is rich forever."

'FRESH LIFE'

Muir wanted all Americans to experience the wilderness.

"Go now and then for fresh life. Go whether or not you have faith. Go up and away for life; be fleet!" he urged. "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike."



Bryce Canyon

Roosevelt shared with Muir a belief in the transcendence of wilderness. As president, he signed legislation establishing 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, 18 national monuments, and five national parks, including Crater Lake National Park in Oregon. Altogether, Roosevelt protected some 230,000,000 acres of public land, a remarkable presidential legacy.

Against the backdrop of growing national awareness and appreciation of national parks and monuments, Pres. Woodrow Wilson on Aug. 25, 1916 signed the National Park Service Organic Act. The legislation created a new government agency, the National Park Service (NPS).

Charged with oversight of the then-35 western national parks and monuments, as well as future designated lands, the NPS was charged with protecting “the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Infused with the spirituality of indigenous peoples, Emerson, Muir and other wilderness advocates, the NPS stewarded lands considered sacred by many Americans. From the beginning, Park Service interpreters recognized a relationship between wilderness and spirituality.

In Freeman Tilden’s *Interpreting our Heritage*, considered the most widely read book among contemporary NPS interpreters and revised multiple times since its original publication date of 1957, the author states:

“Thousands of naturalists, historians, archaeologists and other specialists are engaged in the work of revealing, to such visitors as desire the service, something of the beauty and wonder, the inspiration and spiritual meaning that lie behind what the visitor with his senses perceives.”

The Park Service interpreter, Tilden notes, is someone who facilitates the “enrichment of the human spirit and mind.”

Numerous other scholarly books and articles addressing the spiritual dimensions of national parks have been published in recent decades.



WONDER, AWE

For many Christians, however, spirituality remains a vague and suspicious concept. A basic understanding of spirituality is that of the self encountering and experiencing divine or higher realities that in turn evoke emotional, intuitive or sense-based responses, beyond rational thought, that produce feelings of mystical union.

Many studies of national parks have observed that visitors frequently report one or more of the following experiences: wonder, awe, joy, peacefulness, stillness, calm, tranquility, therapeutic benefits, and connection with God or a higher power.

All can, and often are, construed as spiritual in nature. More than any other, visitors report having experienced the Creator God associated with Christianity.

Engaging wilderness while away from one’s daily routine is, for many persons, a spiritual experience. Nature-based activities such as hiking, camping and canoeing often embody spiritual dimensions.

One study of national parks found that nearly three out of four visitors perceived spiritual well-being benefits from connecting with nature. By facilitating visitors’ spiritual encounters, the National Park Service fosters a type of inclusive, nature-centric civil religion transcendent of sectarian doctrine, dogma, ritual and human-made structures.

Four years before the creation of the National Park Service, from an allegedly cold, dreary, leaky and windowless basement in the heart of the manufacturing Northeast, the American songwriter C. Austin Miles wrote the longing words of what would become a classic hymn:

“I come to the garden alone / While the dew is still on the roses / And the voice I hear falling on my ear / The Son of God discloses.”

On this centennial of the National Park Service, venture from the daily confines of your life into the wilderness of one of your national parks. Bring a friend or two, or your family.

Leave behind city noises and smells. Turn off your cell phones. Come with receptive senses.

Shoulder a backpack and take a hike. Stand on sacred ground. Run your fingertips over boulders hundreds of millions of years old.

Smell the clean, clear mountain air. Hear the snort of a bison, the howl of a wolf, the rhythm of ancient waters, the rustle of wind in the treetops.

Gaze at the star-filled heavens. Listen to the Spirit speak.

Come and connect with creation and the Creator in ways that restore your humanity and renew your soul.

Return home more alive than ever. **NFJ**

Life AND WORDS

BY JOHN D. PIERCE



Vice Chair Cathy Turner presents the Judson-Rice Award to Fisher Humphreys on behalf of the Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith Board of Directors and the Judson Rice Society. Photo by Bruce Gourley

Theologian Fisher Humphreys honored; offers challenge

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Church historian Walter B. Shurden offered two reasons for theologian Fisher Humphreys being honored with the annual Judson-Rice Award: “his life and his words.”

In a tribute, Shurden described Humphreys as “a quiet, contemplative, serious scholar” — widely known to be polite, kind, caring, humble, cautious, irenic and careful — who “never struts his stuff, though he has much to strut.”

“Excruciatingly, irritatingly kind,” Shurden added, “Fisher has led by how he lives.”

He quoted Dean Timothy George of Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School, from which Humphreys retired and was named professor of divinity emeritus, who called Fisher “one of the finest Christians I’ve ever known.”

While Humphreys has never turned over tables or stormed the microphone in a meeting, Shurden warned of seeing him as timid or fainthearted.

Rather, Humphreys — while leading with consistency and civility — has made a major impact through his many years of

shaping theology students, preaching and teaching in churches (Baptist, Episcopalian and other), and writing numerous articles and books, added Shurden.

“Fisher has taught us about our theological traditions and called us to biblical faithfulness,” said Shurden.

“We need leaders and institutions and publications that nurture our non-fundamentalist, non-secular faith. You are doing that at Nurturing Faith.”

However, he added, “theology for Fisher has never been a theological playpen; ... it’s been ministry.”

Shurden noted that a book of essays published at the time of Humphreys’ retirement was aptly named *Theology in the Service of the Church*.

Also he commended Fisher for writing and speaking with more clarity than any theologian he has ever read.

“He dealt in profound subjects with the clearest of words,” said Shurden of Humphreys. “But simplicity never meant simplistic.”

“Fisher has led with his heart and head, but also with his hands,” added Shurden, noting the theologian’s willingness to tackle hot-button ethical issues as part of what Christian theology is all about.

The Judson-Rice award was presented April 21 by Nurturing Faith, the publishing arm of Baptists Today, Inc., during a well-attended dinner event at Birmingham’s Mountain Brook Baptist Church.

After receiving the award Humphreys thanked Shurden for the tribute, noting the retired Mercer University professor once unintentionally gave the best understanding of the objective of Christian higher education.

He recalled asking Shurden casually about his teaching of university students and hearing him say: “I’m trying to get my students to take seriously the things Jesus took seriously.”

Humphreys offered encouragement to those who take that challenge as well.

“Millions of us who have faith in Jesus try to walk a path between two opposite problems,” he said. “On our left there is secularism, and on our right there is fundamentalism.”

While these two perspective are different, Humphreys said they have this in common: “Neither one has a gospel; neither one gives us much reason to hope for our troubled world or for our mortal selves.”

Fundamentalism, he said, presents us with a legalistic God who, a little bit like Noah, is rescuing a few chosen people from a coming destruction. And secularism tells us we are all alone in the universe; we are on our own.

“Many of us cannot believe either one of those messages,” said Humphreys. “We are with St. Paul who wrote: ‘We have our hope set on the living God who is the savior of all people and especially of those who believe’” (1 Tim. 4:10).

Not everything is wrong with fundamentalism and secularism, said Humphreys.

He noted that fundamentalism is right in wanting to identify the fundamentals of Christianity — what is most important in the Christian faith.

“But I think [fundamentalists] are wrong about what the fundamentals are,” said Humphreys, “and I don’t share their attitudes toward other people who are not fundamentalists.”

Secularists are right about wanting government to be secular, Humphreys affirmed.

“The way to provide maximal freedom for citizens of a religiously diverse society is for government to remain neutral toward religion — neither promoting religion nor interfering with it except in the interest of some compelling public interest,” he said. “... The American experience continues to prove that it can work.”

However, Humphreys believes the secular vision of reality is mistaken. He urged faithfulness to a middle path.

“Hundreds of millions of Christians of a lot of churches and denominations are walking in the middle way between funda-

mentalism and secularism,” he said. “But the way is still not marked out very clearly.”

Those seeking to walk such a path need guides, he added.

“We need leaders and institutions and publications that nurture our non-fundamentalist, non-secular faith,” said Humphreys. “You are doing that at Nurturing Faith.”

He commended the non-profit publishing ministry for its newly named and redesigned *Nurturing Faith Journal*.

“With the human interest stories you tell, the news you report and interpret, the interviews you conduct, the Bible studies you publish, the opinion pieces you provide,” he said, “you are nurturing your readers’ faith in Jesus and faith in his way of life.”

Humphreys said he welcomes the new columns on missions, science, theology and history in the journal — as well as the Bible study curriculum and books published by Nurturing Faith.

“You are showing what it means in our world to pray and work that God’s kingdom may come and that God’s will may be done on earth as it is in heaven,” he said. “You’re helping us to take seriously the things Jesus took seriously.”

Humphreys thanked his family and the many representatives of Baptist and Episcopal congregations where he has preached and taught for their presence at the award dinner.

As part of his earlier tribute, Shurden noted that through his longtime friendship with Humphreys he has never heard Fisher criticize another person in a nasty fashion — smilingly wondering if perhaps he ever had.

Shurden then added: “We all know that the reputation of many a saint depends on the silence of his family.”

The Judson-Rice Award was created in 2001 to commemorate the contributions of early Baptist leaders Adoniram and Ann Hasseltine Judson and Luther Rice, and to recognize a current leader who has demonstrated significant leadership while maintaining the highest integrity. This was the 16th annual presentation. **NFJ**

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Mission and Theology

By John R. Franke

It is often said that mission is the mother of theology. In the history of the church it is the missionary attempt to bear faithful witness to the gospel in the midst of surrounding cultures that provides the context for all theological reflection.

In fact, the New Testament may be best understood as a collection of writings focused on challenges of missionary witness and practice. For instance, the letters of Paul are written in connection with his missionary activity, particularly in relationship with the gentiles. They focus on questions of faith and practice that arise from his engagement with both newly formed Christian communities and the worlds around them.

The Gospels are missional reflections on the life and ministry of Jesus that arise in the context of particular cultural settings and concerns. Indeed, the origins of all the New Testament documents are found in the witness of the earliest Christians who were telling the story of Jesus and reflecting on the implications of that story for themselves and the world around them in the common idioms of their day.

From this perspective, the use of the adjective “missional” to describe theology would seem redundant since theology sprang from mission. However, with the advent of Christendom, a system of church-state partnership in which the Christian religion maintains a unique, privileged and protected place in society, the missionary

impulse for theology was minimized.

The substance of the Western Christian tradition took its distinctive shape during the long period in which the missionary impulse of the church was largely dormant. The intuitions and assumptions that governed the practice of theology were those of an assumed Christian culture rather than a missionary encounter. This situation had a profound effect on the discipline of theology and led to its virtual separation from the missionary witness of the church.

These patterns are so ingrained that even as our context changes and we enter an increasingly post-Christian environment, theology is still generally viewed as a specialized academic discipline focused on the debates and concerns that arose from its formation in Christendom rather than a church-based discipline focused on the mission.

The effort to repair this divide and restore the inherent relationship between mission and theology evidenced in the New Testament and the early Christian community has resulted in the emergence of missional theology as an alternative model for theological thinking. It arises from the conviction that God is missional and therefore the church of this God must also be missional.

Mission is at the heart of the biblical narratives concerning the work of God in human history. It begins with the call to Israel to be God’s covenant people and the recipient of God’s covenant blessings for the

purpose of blessing the nations, and reaches its revelatory climax in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It continues through the sending of the Spirit as the one who calls, guides and empowers the church for mission. This missional calling is captured in the words of Jesus: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21).

Hence, the outworking of God’s mission in the world looks like this: God the Father sends the Son; Father and Son send the Spirit; and Father, Son and Spirit send the church into the world.

Viewed in this way, mission defines the church as God’s sent people and is therefore at the very core of the church’s reason and purpose for being. Mission is not simply one of the many programs of the church; it should shape all that the church is and does.

The challenge is to move from being a community with a mission program to becoming a truly missional community. To fund this missional re-imagining of the church, the relationship between mission and theology must be restored.

In other words, the discipline of theology, if it is to serve the witness of the church, must move from theology with a mission component to a truly missional conception of theology in which mission is at the center of its methods and concerns. This restoration is vital to the future of the church in North America if it is to navigate the opportunities and challenges of its post-Christian future. **NFJ**

—John R. Franke is theologian in residence at Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, and general coordinator for the Gospel and Our Culture Network.



Barbie Savior

By Colleen Walker Burroughs

Many of us with ministry jobs keep a folder of sermon ideas, current event stories or market trends. Thanks to the Internet, my paper files are thinning out in lieu of digital ones.

My job as vice president of communications at Passport, Inc. requires keeping close tabs on our organization's voice and making sure our teams of leaders are in harmony with that voice. Every organization seeks to clarify how its mission is communicated — and how it should not be communicated.

Tagged in my digital file for the latter is an Instagram account named “barbie-savior.” It is a satirical example of what our organization consciously avoids.

Satire can help reveal blind spots. For example, we who are Baptists pride ourselves on our missional DNA, but are we paying attention to our own selfies?

The Southern Baptist mission narrative was informed by a sending board in Virginia and circulated by a media house in Nashville. Cooperative Baptists picked up the global mission baton with a strong story of “Doing Missions in a World Without Borders.”

At some point our new network outpaced the old model, or maybe the new system struggled to keep up with an inspired stride of desired hands-on engagement. Whatever the cause, the local church (Baptist or otherwise) began to create its own avenues for doing global mission. Some congregations have had success, though objective evaluation of the “success” of independent ventures is hard to track or quantify — which raises some questions:

- How effectively can the local church navigate the changing landscape of cross-cultural ministry on its own?
- Can individuals, congregations or partner organizations (such as Passport) thought-



WRONG MESSAGE: From the satirical “barbie-savior” with the caption: “Orphans take the BEST pictures! So. Cute. #whatsyournameagain”

fully strike out on their own mission adventures independent of collaboration?

The answer is yes, of course we can. But should we?

Following our hearts to the ends of the earth because someone in our congregation has a connection to that area can feel like an obvious open door for a church.

A group of volunteers travels abroad and comes home ready to raise the support needed to build a house, school, clinic or orphanage. Eventually church leadership moves on to a new congregation or another door opens, and the long-range plan for the prior missional engagement loses traction.

What is the testimony of the body of Christ when hopeful communities and empty buildings fade from the church's vision?

I fear the orchestration of long-term, large-scale collaborative mission is at risk of extinction when individual churches decide they are autonomously capable of large-scale mission. Perhaps this is a blind spot.

What happens when a large church sends a couple to another part of the world

but hasn't considered emergency evacuation, member care and other important factors?

What happens when a church with multiple denominational affiliations sends its mission teams to work with missionary field personnel, but doesn't support the mission offering on a regular basis that provides such full-time personnel?

What happens when a church eager to keep peace between those affiliations waters down the global mission message and leaves its congregation unaware that there is a difference between the missional voices of the sending agencies?

Passport has a long history of supporting Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Missions because we trust the coordination and long-term viability of its field personnel. We trust that the voice of CBF is in line with Passport's thoughtful theology of mission, justice and grace. Therefore, a portion of our summer offerings is designated not only to a specific project, but also for overall support the field personnel.

Steven Porter and Sam Harrell, coordinator and associate coordinator for CBF Global Missions, are seasoned mission professionals. They think about the long view and orchestrate a vision that we can participate in at every level. They lead a team devoted to thinking systematically and creatively about how we can best invest in the lives of people participating in meaningful work around the world.

Likewise, Passport seeks to communicate a mission that involves fewer Barbie selfies and more family portraits of people collaboratively working to build a broader, more beautiful fellowship of Christians. **NFJ**

—Colleen Walker Burroughs is vice president of Passport, Inc., and founder of Watering Malawi.

Don't cover that gray

By Brett Younger

When I go to Cracker Barrel, water aerobics or a Baptist meeting, I look fairly young. But at church, people my age are considered past their prime. The older we get, the less credit we get.

When thirtysomethings join the church, members rush to say, “It’s so encouraging when young families join the church.”

They are right. It is encouraging.

When seventysomethings join, we do not usually hear these same members say, “It’s so encouraging when old families join the church.”

That would be right, too, but the applause is never quite so loud — except in the hearts of thoughtful pastors.

Ministers are delighted when anyone chooses to be part of the congregation, but in general, ministers have a minority opinion on which age group makes a greater contribution to church life.

Seventysomethings — and this is a huge generalization — work harder, give more money, complain less and are more likely to still be around in five years.

(If you are a young person who wishes you were reading another column, feel free to walk away. Don’t send email. I know that many people in their twenties are wonderful. My children are in their twenties, but they are not going to read this, and you might enjoy reading something by someone closer to your own age.)

The ageism of our culture can work to a church’s advantage. Some churches are more attractive to people after their faith matures. When the median age of a church rises, it might mean that the church is growing stronger in its understanding of faith and thus attracting more experienced Christians. Some churches tend to be wonderful church homes for beginners in the faith,

and others are especially good congregations for those who are more mature.

A common lament in church circles has to do with the number of “gray hairs” who show up for church events. A room full of old Christians is often understood to be a bad thing, while a room full of young people would, presumably, be interpreted as a godsend. The common assumption is that youth equals growth, while old age means decline.

Yet when you look at the demographic situation in the United States, in many ways the opposite is the case. Senior citizens represent the fastest growing segment of the population. The current total of 40 million Americans who are 65 or older will grow to more than 71 million by 2030. To put it in crassly commercial terms, older adults represent the most promising “growth market” for the church.

The “graying” of the population — far from being something to lament — represents a potential benefit for congregations that use the gifts and talents of older adults.

Churches with older populations can embrace their strengths and be one of the minority churches that pays attention to older families, welcomes baby boomers, and celebrates gray hair.

Why do churches across the street

from retirement centers hire youth ministers instead of senior adult ministers? Why do more churches build gyms than gardens? Why are there more church softball teams than church bridge teams? Some of our churches need to cater to the fastest growing portion of the population.

At some churches, all of the bulletins should be large print. Wednesday night suppers could start at 4:30. The volume on the organ could be turned down and the volume on the pulpit mic turned up. Committees could meet in the afternoon. Congratulations could be offered in the church newsletter when members get their AARP card.

While our culture idolizes youth, we recognize that the Bible is a fan of old age: “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life” (Prov. 16:31). When we look around the sanctuary and see gray we should give thanks, because, “Gray hair is the splendor of the old” (Prov. 20:29).

We need to recognize the gifts that come with age. Old age offers perspective. When we move slower, we see more. For many senior adults, forgiveness comes easier. Prayer seems more natural. Recognizing that we do not have forever helps us appreciate each day.

We should be encouraged that the future of the church is gray. We can continue to adore young adults, but it should never be at the expense of anyone who has used a rotary phone. **NFJ**

—Brett Younger is pastor of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, N.Y.



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Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

July 3, 2016

Galatians 6:1-16

Living Like You Mean It

Few things are more appealing than the sight of pantry shelves stocked with canned tomatoes, squash, green beans, and other colorful produce. Such bounty represents a labor of love – and a productive garden. Successful gardeners know that a fruitful garden requires serious preparation, planting, and cultivation before one ever gets around to the harvest.

The Apostle Paul understood the principle. In drawing his fervid letter to the Galatians to a close, he spoke of the personal responsibility that goes with planting, cultivating, and growing a healthy church.


In chapters 1-5, Paul had warned his readers against a legalistic gospel that ties salvation to law keeping, as well as a libertine approach that promotes loose living. He summarized the ideal Christian life this way: “the only thing that matters is faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). That is a powerful phrase. We are saved by faith, and we do God’s good works through love for the one who has saved us. The theme of “faith working through love” carries over into today’s text.

Bearing and sharing (vv. 1-6)


Turning his letter toward a conclusion, Paul urged the believers in Galatia to

Galatians 6:10 –


“So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.”

demonstrate Christ-like love by bearing one another’s burdens, looking out for the spiritual health of others as well as their own. “My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted” (v. 1). 

Transgressions can be doctrinal as well as moral or ethical. Whether brothers and sisters fall to the temptation of misguided beliefs or misdirected behavior, fellow believers have a responsibility to gently coax them back into the fold of faithful followers acting in love.

To “bear one another’s burdens” in this sense can be risky and hard, but Paul said “in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (v. 2).  As Jesus had instructed his followers to show love and kindness, even to those who oppressed them (Luke 6:27-31), so Paul urged his readers to “fulfill the law of Christ” by helping each other carry their respective loads. Remember his mantra: “the only thing that matters is faith working through love.”

Those who seek to help others aren’t “holier than thou,” but seek to be self-aware and “test their own work,” not thinking of themselves as superior to weaker members but offering their help in a spirit of humility (vv. 2-4).

Paul’s conclusion, “For all must carry their own loads” (v. 5), may seem to contradict his admonition to bear one another’s burdens, but Paul is not disputing himself. There are burdens we can carry on our own, and we should: we cannot expect others to meet our every need. On the other hand, there are burdens of grief or temptation or severe trial that we cannot bear alone, and we need faithful friends to help us in those times. 

Paul’s assertion that “those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher” (v. 6) may appear to be a change of course, but it is a natural outgrowth of the earlier instruction to live in love and bear one another’s burdens. Paul was not appealing for personal support, but probably had in mind other ministers or teachers who devoted themselves to building up the church.

Sowing and reaping (vv. 7-10)

Paul deepened his appeal to loving behavior with an agricultural illustration: “God is not mocked,” he said, “for you reap whatever you sow” (v. 7). Those who put their trust in selfish interests (who “sow to your own flesh”) would reap only death, while those who “sow to the Spirit” would “reap eternal life from the Spirit” (v. 8).

Life can be unpredictable, the road can be hard, and results are not immediate. Nevertheless, believers should “not grow weary in doing what is right,” Paul said, believing that “we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up” (v. 9). Thus, “whenever we have an opportunity,” the apostle

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insisted, “let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (v. 10).

Opportunities abound for positive living that works for the good of all – and if believers aren’t kind and helpful to each other, how could their witness ever extend beyond the church?

Paul’s illustration has obvious implications. First, we reap *what* we sow. If a farmer sows silver-queen corn, he doesn’t expect to harvest watermelons. Any gardener with the brains of a mustard seed expects to reap the same sort of thing that he or she sows. If we plant the seeds of faith in God and love for others, we can expect a harvest of personal joy, a better world, glory for God, and everlasting life. On the other hand, if we sow sin and reject God’s way, we can expect to reap unhappiness, emptiness, and death.

Perhaps Paul knew that some of the libertines in Galatia had been “sowing to the flesh” for some time, with no apparent consequences. That might breed confidence to continue in sin, or engender doubt as to whether God really cared. ⚡

Paul insisted that the lack of immediate retribution does not mean sin has no consequences. “Do not be deceived,” Paul said. “God cannot be mocked. A person reaps what he sows.” To mock God is to thumb one’s nose at God without concern – but Paul was convinced there would be repercussions, and they would not be pleasant. Sadly, innocent people often get caught up in someone else’s harvest of trouble. That makes it even more imperative for us to sow what is good. ⚡

We reap *what* we sow, but also *more* than we sow. We expect one black-eyed pea to become dozens, and one grain of corn to become hundreds. Jesus spoke of farmers whose crops

brought forth 30-, 50-, even 100-fold. If we didn’t expect to reap more than we sowed, there would be no point in planting. Those who sow to the sinful nature reap a death that lasts far longer than the time enjoyed sowing wild oats. In contrast, the eternal glories and joys of heaven far surpass even the best seeds we plant on earth.

The principle also works in this present life. The prophet Hosea once got so worked up over Israel’s sin that he said “You sow the wind, but you will reap the whirlwind!” (Hos. 8:7). Harmful deeds sown in the passion of a moment can bring a harvest of much pain and difficulty.

On the other hand, Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 9:6 that “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, but whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” A few seeds of love sown along life’s way can result in great blessedness later in life. Those who spread generosity are not promised great financial rewards, but other benefits can be more important than mere money. We may reap personal peace and satisfaction from knowing we did the right thing, or find joy in the gratitude shown by those we help.

Here is a third corollary: we not only reap *what* we sow and *more* than we sow, but as a rule, we reap *later* than we sow. The vegetables we eat, freeze, or can in the summer were planted in the spring. No one but the youngest child can plant a seed one day and look for cucumbers on the next. Perhaps this is why Paul added “let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap, if we do not give up.”

A major obstacle to faithful living is despair. When we don’t see immediate results of our labor, we are often tempted to give up. Sometimes, Christian people get tired of doing good

more quickly than sinful people grow weary of doing evil. It is not uncommon for an individual or a church to begin a project with blazing zeal, but then let it fizzle out when the harvest is slow in coming. Our temptation is to give up: to stop reaching out to others, to stop giving, to stop attending church – but that is exactly what Paul warns us against. “At the proper time we *will* reap,” he said.

The truth is, we are all sowing seeds every day, whether we fancy ourselves to be farmers or not. What kind of seeds are we planting, and what kind of harvest will they bring?

Boasting and following (vv. 11-18)

To this point, Paul had apparently been dictating his letter to a scribe, or “amenuensis.” Beginning in v. 11, however, Paul took the pen and inscribed the closing words in his own hand, showing the depth of his feeling on the issue: “See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!” (v. 11). ⚡ ⚡

With his own distinctive handwriting, then, Paul closed with a final warning against the danger of following the legalistic preachers who insisted that Gentile Christians must accept circumcision and follow the Jewish law (vv. 12-13). “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul said, “by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (v. 14).

It’s not circumcision that matters, Paul said, but the crucifixion, through which believers can experience God’s mercy and become a “new creation” (v. 15) in Christ, led by the Spirit. Those “who follow this rule,” Paul said – who remember the bottom line – are those who find peace and mercy as “the Israel of God.” ⚡ NFJ

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

July 10, 2016

Amos 7:7-17

The Leaning Tower of Israel

The “Leaning Tower of Pisa” gained fame, not because of its architectural genius, but because the 186-foot-tall bell tower is noticeably off kilter. Built on a faulty foundation of soft soil, the tower began to lean even while under construction, which stretched over two centuries.

To compensate for the lean, builders added extra blocks to the lower side of some upper floors, giving the structure a slight curve. Modern efforts to shore up the foundation have reduced the slant, but the tower’s tilt is as obvious as its fame.

Today’s text deals with a leaning nation that also suffered from a flawed foundation – and a lonesome prophet’s unappreciated attempts to straighten it out.

A visionary prophet (vv. 7-9)

The prophet’s name was Amos, a man who hailed from the land of Judah but went north to proclaim God’s message in Israel. Amos planted his pulpit in Bethel, one of Israel’s two sanctuary cities. There, he faced a social and religious climate that contemporary readers may find familiar.

Both Israel and Judah had prospered during the mid-eighth

Amos 7:8 –

“And the LORD said to me, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A plumb line.’ Then the Lord said, ‘See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by.’”

century, when Amos was active. They were able to collect tolls on caravans using the highways that ran through Palestine, and some smaller nations nearby paid tribute as the price for peace. Export industries such as wine making sprang up to complement the traditional reliance on agriculture, bringing much wealth into the kingdom (2 Kings 15:20).

The wealthy could afford elaborately built vacation homes (3:15, 4:11), where they could eat and drink like royalty (6:4-6) while reclining on couches inlaid with ivory and covered with silk (3:12, 5:11).

But not all shared in the wealth. Daily life in Israel was a far cry from what was prescribed in the law. The egalitarian ideal in Israel was that every family should have land to call its own, but that system had seriously eroded. Over time, the rich bought up the lands of the poor, and the disparity between classes became increasingly obvious. Some Jews were forced to sell themselves as slaves to fellow Jews in order to pay their debts.

Amos preached to a people who were sharply divided. Wars and periods of drought and famine affected those in poverty disproportionately, producing a bumper crop of widows and orphans. Amos accused the rich of overcharging the poor and selling

them inferior products (8:5-6). People of means could take the poor to court and bribe the judges in order to take their land (8:12).

The concept of a covenant community of equals had fallen prey to a new economy, even though the upper classes of Samaria – like adherents of modern prosperity theology – thought of themselves as quite religious. They offered regular sacrifices and convinced themselves that they were especially favored by God, but Amos told a different story.

Chapter 7 begins with an account of three consecutive visions God showed to the prophet. First, Amos saw a plague of locusts devouring the crops, leaving the land without grain. The prickly prophet took no joy in judgment, but pleaded with God to forgive: “How can Jacob stand?” he asked. “He is so small!” His prayer was effective, and Yahweh relented (vv. 1-3).

Amos next saw “a shower of fire” that vaporized the oceans and advanced on the land. Again Amos begged God to relent. “This also shall not be,” Yahweh replied (vv. 4-6). But there was a third vision yet to come.


This time, Amos saw a vision of the Lord “standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand” (v. 7). The plumb line – basically a pointed weight tied to a string – has been used for as long as humans have been building walls. The weight hangs straight and tells the builder if the wall is vertically “plumb” or if it’s leaning.

God was standing beside a wall that had been built with a plumb line – presumably an indication that God

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had built Israel true to plumb from the beginning, calling the people into a clearly defined covenant designed to keep them straight. Now, God had returned with a plumb line to test whether they had remained true.

Surprisingly, Amos does not follow through with the obvious conclusion that the nation had developed a dangerous lean. The simple presence of the plumb line was evidence enough, so that God declared “I will never again pass them by; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword” (vv. 8b-9). 

A sharp confrontation (vv. 10-15)

Amos’ visions and the concluding words of judgment found their way into his preaching, which caused considerable consternation to the religious leaders in the temple. They had a good thing going under Jeroboam. Professional temple prophets predicted the prosperous future they were paid to foresee, and Amos’ ruinous visions were not welcome.

Amaziah, the leading priest in Bethel, reported Amos’ negativity to the king (vv. 10-11) and attempted to quiet his troublesome voice by ordering Amos to flee back to Judah. “Earn your bread there and prophesy there,” he said, “but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom” (vv. 12-13).

Note that Amaziah said nothing about the temple’s purpose as a place to worship. Rather it was a royal sanctuary and “a temple of the kingdom” – more emblematic of government than of God. By describing it this way, Amaziah was claiming royal authority to banish Amos while also letting his

own spiritual blindness show.

Amaziah’s order that Amos return to Judah and “earn your bread there” was probably intended to be derogatory. Itinerant prophets typically lived on the donations and good will of others. Perhaps Amaziah was insinuating that Amos had come to Bethel in hopes of accessing deeper pockets than he could find in Judah.

Amos’ response moved from humility to audacity. He first denied that he ever wanted to be a prophet, and had no wish to claim the title. He described himself as a farmer and a shepherd, one who tended figs and flocks. Though neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, Yahweh had called him from the flocks to go and “prophesy to my people Israel” (vv. 14-15). Amos did not speak with the authority of the king, as Amaziah did, but with the power of God.

A painful prognosis (vv. 16-17)

Amos’ self-effacement did not prevent him from proclaiming the word God had given him, including a specific message for Amaziah. Amos pronounced a series of stereotypical curses: the priest would live to see his wife forced into prostitution, his children cruelly slain, and his land given to others – then he himself would die “in an unclean land” as the people of Israel were forced into exile (vv. 16-17).

Prophetic words are needed, but not always welcome. This remains true in our own world.

Harry Golden, a Jewish-American immigrant who published a journal called *The Carolina Israelite* from 1944-1968, promoted equality during the hottest days of the Civil Rights era. Speaking of how many Southerners sought to silence those who called for racial justice, he once wrote, “No

state can long progress that exiles its prophets and exalts its fools.” 

And yet, too often, prophets are still without honor in their own country. Voices that call for fairness fall on deaf ears when the ears belong to those who profit from injustice. Few people would oppress others directly, but when the system is rigged so that minimum wage laborers cannot work their way out of poverty, prophetic voices are needed, if not wanted.

It is helpful to remember that Amos was a layperson. He was not trained to be a pastor or priest, and did not make his living as a religious professional. That gave him the ability to say things that the religious establishment found it hard to say. It also gave added weight to his words, because anyone could see there was nothing in it for him. He didn’t get paid for prophesying, but caught a lot of grief for doing what he felt God leading him to do. Nobody in their right mind would do that unless they really did believe that God was leading them. All of those things gave extra power to what Amos had to say.

Amaziah, defending his government-sponsored sanctuary, so much as said to Amos: “If you’ve got to preach, don’t do it in church!” That’s actually not bad advice, at least to the extent that prophetic voices should not be limited to church: we must also call for justice in the secular arenas of work and politics. We must live just lives in our homes and communities.

Laypeople have an especially powerful witness, because Christian living is not what they do for a living. We all deal with the question of whether we will live as the world lives, or live as God has called us to live. As we get up each morning to face that world, we can know that God is with us, and our lives carry more influence than we will ever see.

Where is our prophetic voice? 

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

July 17, 2016

Amos 8:1-12

Full Pockets and Empty Hearts

When considering the wonder of the world and the bounty of nature, we can all be grateful for fruit. We love familiar fruits such as strawberries and pears, blueberries and grapes, apples and bananas, oranges and raspberries, cherries and figs. We enjoy tropical fruits such as mangos, papayas, and pineapples. Given the chance, we might learn as well to appreciate more exotic fruits such as the rambutan, mangosteen, and dragonfruit of Southeast Asia.

Fruits come in a wide variety of sizes and shapes, colors and tastes. We enjoy fruit most when it is perfectly ripe, but we also know that even the most delicious fruit can quickly go from ripe to rotten. Limp bananas, moldy strawberries, and mushy apples are more likely to be candidates for the mulch pile or garbage bin than the snack bowl or dinner table.

In a prophet's eyes, ripe fruit can be more than a tasty treat. For Amos, a basket of fruit became a powerful metaphor.

Ripe fruit (vv. 1-3)

Amos was a visionary – not in the manner favored by leadership gurus

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Amos 8:11 –

“The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD.”

– but in the sense of one who sees divinely inspired visions. The previous chapter described visions of locusts, fire, and a plumb line that marked Israel's failure to remain true. Chapter 8 describes yet another vision: a basket of summer fruit.

The book of Amos was not written with great artistry, but its straightforward nature has a power of its own. “This is what the Lord GOD showed me,” Amos said, “a basket of summer fruit.” When God asked Amos what he saw, he replied “a basket of summer fruit” (vv. 1-2a).

The repetitive dialogue may not be scintillating, but it does include an intriguing play on words. God pronounced: “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by” (v. 2b). The word translated as “summer fruit” is *qāyits*, which basically means “summer,” and by extension crops that ripen in the summer. In Amos' day, those would have included grapes, figs, and olives. The word that describes Israel's coming “end” is the similar-sounding *qēts* (pronounced *qayts*). Israel had produced its fruit (*qāyits*), and would soon meet its end (*qēts*). The fruit was *ripe*, so the time was *ripe* for judgment.

Note the similarity to the previous vision, in which Amos had seen a vision of God holding a plumb line against the people, declaring “I will

never again pass them by ...” (7:8). In today's text, God showed Amos a basket of ripe fruit and proclaimed “the end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by.”

The image recalls the Passover story from the Exodus, when God instructed the Israelites to slaughter a lamb at twilight on a certain day, daubing blood from the lamb on the doorposts of their homes before eating the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. When God struck down the firstborn throughout the land that night, Hebrew homes bearing the mark of blood were passed over (Exodus 11-12). Now, however, God declared “I will never again pass them by.”

Instead of redemption, the people would face judgment, beginning at their places of worship: “the songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” God said: “the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place.” The sentence concludes with a single, surprising word: “Hush!” (v. 3).

Judgment was coming, but why?

Rotten people (vv. 4-6)

Having revealed four devastating visions, Amos paused to explain God's motivation. The people were ripe for judgment because their lives had become rotten, with the nation's greed-enhanced economic disparity standing at the top of the list. As one example, the prophet pointed to conniving merchants who “trample on the needy and bring to ruin the poor of the land” (v. 4). They scrupulously observed religious festivals and Sabbath days, but saw them less as opportunities for worship than as obstacles delaying

their ability to open their shops and take advantage of the poor. 📌

Unethical merchants could use various stratagems for cheating their customers (vv. 5-6). They could “make the ephah small” by using containers that held less than the standard measurement of about three-fifths of a bushel. They could also “make the shekel great” by using weights that were heavier than they appeared as a way of overcharging customers when weighing their payment. 📌

A third strategy for cheating customers was to simply rig the scales so that they weighed in the merchant’s favor, and a fourth method was to mix low quality grain or trash (“the sweepings of the wheat”) with what the customer received. 📌

When impoverished people ran out of money and credit, they could be forced to surrender their land, or even sell themselves or their children into slavery to ward off starvation. Amos spoke of merchants who brokered such arrangements, “buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals.”

Israel’s covenant called for the Hebrews to extend special care to widows, orphans, and immigrants. They were to leave grain in the fields for them to glean (Lev. 19:10). If neighbors or relatives ran into financial difficulty, the Hebrews were to come to their aid and prevent their land from being lost (Lev. 25:25-53). They were not to be “hard-hearted or tight-fisted” with their neighbors, but open-handed and generous (Deut. 15:7-11).

But was this happening? No. Can you conceive of people so crooked that they would cheat their own neighbors into the depths of poverty, take their land in lieu of debts, and then sell them as indentured servants or slaves? Is it any wonder that judgment was due?

Coming judgment (vv. 7-14)

With v. 7, Amos launched into a litany of woes that God had sworn to bring against such disappointing people. The list begins with upheavals on a cosmic scale, eschatological judgments reminiscent of other prophetic works.

A day would come, Amos said, when the land would “tremble on this account,” suggesting an earthquake that would cause the land to heave up and down like the waters of the Nile, which famously rose and fell with the seasons (vv. 7-8).

On that day, Amos declared in God’s behalf, “I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight” (v. 9). A total eclipse would not damage the land, but could cause considerable fear among people who believed the world had come to an end – and for many, their world *would* end when judgment came. 📌 Feasts normally given to celebration would be turned into mourning as bitter as that for the loss of an only child.

As troublesome as those woes may sound, Amos saw an even worse thing coming. There would be a famine, he said, not caused by the lack of food or water, “but of hearing the words of the LORD” (v. 11). This suggests that God would abandon the people in such a way that they would feel God’s absence viscerally and wander the world over in search of the prophetic word that indicated God’s presence, but would not find it (v. 12). 📌

Why would God turn away from the very people chosen to live in covenant relationship? Because they had already abandoned God. We gather this from Amos’ charge in v. 13 that even beautiful young women and young men – those who were most physically fit – would faint from thirst. Like other Israelites, they were among those “who

swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say ‘As your god lives, O Dan,’ and ‘As the way of Beer-sheba lives.’” Here Amos probably has in mind a literal as well as a figurative famine. Such people would faint and fall, never to rise again (v. 14).

The problem reflected in v. 14 is that the people were swearing oaths by deities other than Yahweh. Ancient oaths typically consisted of a promise reinforced by an appeal to a god who might punish one’s failure to keep the oath. Swearing by Yahweh was acceptable, but the Hebrews had begun swearing by entities associated with Samaria, Dan, and Beer-sheba that they presumed to be divine. 📌

Though we are guided by many of the same principles and worship the same God, followers of Christ do not live under the same covenant as did the Israelites of old. The church exists in a new covenant through Christ, a body of believers scattered throughout the world rather than identified with a single nation. We do have modern doomsday prophets who think of America as a new Israel and claim to connect every natural disaster with national sin, but we have no reason to expect the same sort of judgment that Amos predicted.

What, then, might the passage say to us? Even more so than Israel, Christian believers are called to practice justice, to care for their neighbors, to love others as Christ loved us. Yet, we live in a nation as economically divided as ancient Israel. We may not have the wherewithal to change the system, but Amos would challenge us to practice justice in our own business dealings and personal relationships. We can work to see that all people are treated fairly rather than being shut out of an economic system that is rigged against them.

Each of us must answer for our own actions. What will the answer be? **NFJ**

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

July 24, 2016

Hosea 1:1-2:1

A Seriously Broken Home

Hosea the son of Beeri was a crazy man – or so people said. You might have thought so, too. Imagine that a young non-denominational preacher of our own day went down to an established brothel and picked out a prostitute to marry. Imagine that when his first child is born, he names him “Manhattan,” and drives around in an old bus with big signs painted on it saying “My son’s name is *Manhattan*: the church is about to fall like the Twin Towers on 9/11.”

Later, when his wife gives birth to a daughter, he names her “Ugly,” and changes his bus signs to say “My daughter’s name is *Ugly* – even God can’t love somebody like this.” When a second son is born, the irascible preacher calls him “Illegitimate” and changes his signs to say “This isn’t my son, and you are no longer God’s people.”


You would probably judge a man like that to be several fries short of a Happy Meal, and the original Hosea faced a similar reaction. His contemporaries, according to 9:7, called him a “fool” (*’awil*, common in wisdom literature for an empty-headed person) and a “crazy man” (*meshugga*, still used in Yiddish).

Would Hosea get a hearing today? 

Hosea 1:9 –

“Then the LORD said, ‘Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God.’”


Hosea’s world

Hosea was probably active during the third quarter of the eighth century BCE.  At the time, Israel was a large and fertile country, home to some of the best farmland and pasturage in all of Palestine. The land was so extensive that Jeroboam I, the first of the northern kings, established two sanctuaries as worship centers, hoping to keep his subjects from traveling south to the temple in Jerusalem.

In these sanctuaries, at Dan and Bethel, Jeroboam placed golden calves as symbols of Yahweh’s presence. As time passed, however, the Canaanite gods Baal and Asherah were also worshipped, and other sanctuaries, such as Beth-aven and Gilgal, became popular (4:15, 9:15, 12:11).

Hosea’s preaching reportedly began during the rule of another Jeroboam, whose long and stable tenure (786-746) was marked by relative peace and prosperity. Hosea accused the people of becoming so confident in themselves that they turned their backs on God (4:1-6), trusting in their own military might or political alliances (8:14, 10:13-14).


The people’s practice of religion had confused Yahweh with other gods: Hosea accused them of ignorantly consulting wooden idols, offering sacrifices, and participating in cultic prostitution in hilltop groves (4:11-5:7). Like Amos, he also charged them with ignoring covenant commands to

care for others and exploiting the poor in unjust ways (12:7-8). 

Hosea’s prophecy consistently reminded the people of how God had delivered Israel from Egypt and called them into a committed covenant relationship, which the people had not kept. Even so, Hosea held to a belief in the steadfast love of God that won’t let go. That central theme comes to the fore in the marriage metaphor that begins the book.

Hosea’s marriage (vv. 1:2-3)

According to the text, God instructed Hosea to take a “wife of harlotry.” Can you imagine that God would instruct Hosea to do such a thing?

Some commentators don’t think so, and assume that the first three chapters reflect more metaphor than history. Others accept the marriage as real, but debate whether Gomer was already a prostitute when Hosea married her, or whether she was initially chaste but later gave in to a promiscuous spirit. Those who believe she was a prostitute to begin with question whether she was a cultic prostitute or a common harlot. 

The text contains few details. Hosea described his wife only as an *’eshet zenûnîm*, which means “woman of harlotry” or “adulterous woman.” Hosea knew the more specific word used for cultic prostitutes (*qadeshôt*: literally, “holy women”) and used it in 4:14, but did not apply it to his wife. Even so, it is possible that Gomer was among the women who served in Israel’s syncretistic worship.

However we choose to understand Gomer’s background, the symbolism

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of their marriage soon becomes clear: Hosea represents God who is loving and faithful, while Gomer and her children personify a people who are selfish and fickle.

Whether Hosea's marriage was real or parabolic, it serves as a powerful metaphor for Israel's relationship with God. Give this some thought. What are some possible meanings inherent in that marital metaphor?


Hosea's children (1:4-9)

In due time after their marriage, Gomer gave birth to a boy. Following God's instruction, Hosea gave to him the prophetic name "Jezreel," saying "for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel" (v. 4).

The fertile valley of Jezreel was the breadbasket of Israel. A city of the same name nestled at the foot of Mount Gilboa, about 20 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. Jezreel's significance for Hosea was two-fold.

First, the city was the site of a bloody slaughter during the northern king Jehu's revolution and rise to power, according to 2 Kings 9-10. (See "The Hardest Question" online for more.) Secondly, the name "Jezreel" means "God sows." Originally a reference to the region's fertility, in Hosea's prophecy it became a prediction that God would sow judgment. Hosea's prophecy predicted the end of Jehu's dynasty.

The text pointedly identifies Jezreel as the son of Hosea, saying that Gomer "conceived and bore him a son," but the issue is more ambiguous for the next two children. When the second child was born, a daughter, Hosea named her "Lo-Ruhammah," which means "not pitied," or in this context, "not spared (from judgment)." *Raham* means "to have compassion" or "to show mercy,"


while *lō'* means "not." In the face of Israel's persistent sin, Lo-Ruhammah's name suggested that there was a limit to divine compassion for Israel, though God had not yet given up on Judah (vv. 6-7). 

After Lo-Ruhammah was weaned – a reminder that these events would have taken place over some time in a land where children were typically breast-fed for two or three years – Gomer gave birth to a second son.

Again claiming to follow God's instruction, Hosea named the child "Lo-Ammi," a name that plainly raised a question about patrimony, as it means "not my people" (vv. 8-9). The name not only suggested that Gomer had been unfaithful to Hosea, but also symbolized Israel's abandonment of God. This effectively reversed the covenant terminology by which God had consistently referred to Israel as "my people" (Exod. 6:7, Jer. 7:23, Ezek. 36:28, and others). No more.

Sometime after this, Gomer and Hosea were separated. The text provides no details about Gomer's departure, but Lo-Ammi's name and what follows in chapter 2 leads one to assume that Gomer became unfaithful to Hosea and either left on her own, or was cast out for adultery.

Hosea's hope (1:10-21)

Verse 10 brings a shift that may surprise and puzzle the reader, but is characteristic of Hosea.  While the children's names in 1:4-9 declare unadulterated judgment on Israel, 1:10-11 offers hope. Lo-Ammi's name means "Not My People," but v. 10 declares the Israelites would become like the sand of the sea, and could once again be called "Children of the Living God." Although Jezreel's name had provoked the bloody memory of a treacherous event that brought

division between north and south, v. 11 predicts that the peoples of Judah and Israel would be reunited under one leader, "for great shall be the day of Jezreel."

Some scholars believe 2:1 belongs with 1:10-11. In it, the latter two children's names are reversed, as the negative prefix "Lo-" is dropped. "Say to your brother: "Ammi!" (that is, "My People!"). And say to your sister "Ruhammah!" ("Loved!"). The Hebrew text has the plural form for both "brother" and "sister," perhaps indicating the plurality of Israelites who were represented by the symbolic siblings, or the inclusion of both Israel and Judah.

Because of the quick and unexpected shift in tone, many scholars believe the promise of 1:10-2:1 is the work of a later editor. Whether the words originated with Hosea or a later disciple, they attest to the inspired hope and belief that God had not given up on Israel. The people had broken their covenant with God, so that God was no longer bound to bless them. Still, Israel held to an abiding hope that God would find a way to redeem his faithless people.

What can modern believers make of a text like this? History reveals that people bearing the name "Christian" have been guilty of their own Jezreels: the Crusades, the Inquisition, and other bloody plays of power have been carried out in the name of Christ. We have also dallied with the gods of wealth, pleasure, and power. We have failed in multiple ways to live up to Jesus' command that we love others and live by the values he taught.

We have not always been faithful, yet we can also believe that God has not given up on us. Mercy abounds and hope endures. We may trust that God isn't finished with us yet, and be thankful. **NFJ**

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

July 31, 2106

Hosea 11:1-11

A Love That Won't Let Go

Many people enjoyed *The Lion King*, a Disney movie that became even more popular as a musical production on Broadway and world tours. Integral to the imaginative story is the lion king Mufasa, who died while saving his son Simba from a stampede of wildebeests engineered by his jealous brother Scar.

Overcome with fear and shame, Simba ran away and chose a life of escapism rather than returning to face down his usurping uncle and live up to his potential. After being challenged by the spirit of his father Mufasa, Simba returned to his rightful place – and learned to roar.

Today's text offers a stirring promise of hope in the midst of a gloomy prophetic cloud, and concludes with an image of the eternal Lion King who roars for God's lost children to return from across the earth.

Before we get to God as the Lion King, however, we must first ponder another picture – an image of God as the weeping parent, torn between love and justice, determined to do what is best for children gone astray.

Images of God's love for the lost are common in the Bible, but nowhere is this deep truth expressed


Hosea 11:8a –


“How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, O Israel?”

more beautifully or poignantly than in Hosea 11.

Looking back (vv. 1-4)

You may know how it feels to raise your children with all the love and ability you have, only to see them turn away from you or your chosen way of life. You may know how it feels to be the child who walked away. All of us, at some point, have gone our own way. In vv. 1-4, Hosea imagines what our rejection must feel like to God.

Hosea testified that God loved Israel as a parent loves a child. “When Israel was a child” refers to the nation's early history. Though Israel's name goes back to Jacob and its calling to Abraham, there is a real sense in which the nation of Israel was conceived in Egypt and born at Sinai: “Out of Egypt I called my son” (v. 1). 


But Israel was a rebellious child: “the more I called them, the more they went from me” (v. 2a). As an example, Hosea points to the way Israel so facily adopted the idolatrous religion practiced by the indigenous peoples of Canaan: “they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols” (v. 2b). 

Why might that have happened? When the Israelites moved into the land of promise and adopted a more agrarian lifestyle, they naturally would have inquired about local farming methods from their Canaanite neighbors, who explained how they

offered sacrifices to the weather god Baal to ensure the annual rains. New-comers could have accepted that as “local wisdom” and begun to participate in worshipping the fertility gods.

As Hosea saw it, the people had forgotten how Yahweh delivered them from Egypt and taught them to walk in a covenant relationship (vv. 3-4). The wilderness experience was a time of both discipline and grace. The Israelites stumbled, but God picked them up and set them on their feet time and time again.

When they complained of hunger, God provided manna from heaven and quail on the wind. When they turned against Moses because of thirst, God brought them water from a rock. When enemies threatened, God gave them victory. Surely the same God could have blessed their crops with no assistance from Baal – but Israel seemed afflicted by short memories.

There is deep beauty in this picture of God as parent. Sometimes it is most appropriate to think of God as high and mighty and lifted up, but the Bible insists that God is also personally, lovingly involved with people. God deigns to come to where we are and lift us to a higher plane. “I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks,” Hosea said of Yahweh. “I bent down to them, and fed them” (v. 4). 

This image of God reminds us of Jesus sitting with children on his knee, scolding the disciples who sought to keep them away (Matt. 19:13-15). Despite God's deep and abiding love, the children of Israel lost faith and turned away. That problem was not limited to the ancient Israelites.

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We who follow Christ are also subject to putting our trust in self or in other gods.

Think about your own position as a child of God. In what ways have you turned your back on God as a child might do to a parent?


Looking forward (vv. 5-9)

This is where we learn the true depth of God's love – and the extent of God's pain. Hosea's message suggests that Yahweh believed discipline was necessary and that Israel should learn for itself the tragic consequences of sin. Discipline is difficult for any parent, and in that sense, God is no exception.

In vv. 5-7, Hosea describes the natural consequences of Israel's sin and the pathos God felt in allowing them to learn their lessons. Because the people had turned from God, their nation had grown weak and become easy prey. They might call to the "Most High" (a reference to El, the high god of the Canaanites), but he would do nothing for them (v. 7). Armies would soon ravage their cities and they would be back in bondage – not in Egypt, but in Assyria.

Hosea believed God loved Israel enough to let them go and let them learn. Mature parental love is strong enough to know when it is better to allow children to learn the hard lessons of life without rushing to rescue them from their own foolishness. To show that kind of love may be the hardest thing a parent can do.

Allowing Israel to experience punishment does not mean that God gave up on them. He would not allow them to be wiped out like Admah and Zeboim, smaller "cities of the plain" that had fallen along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-28, Deut. 29:23). The just consequences of the

people's sin were looming, but God would not, *could not* forget them. Hear Hosea's testimony of divine love: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... "My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender" (v. 8). 

God chose to hold back the full extent of what Israel deserved. God would not destroy the people, despite their rebellion, measuring discipline by the need of the child rather than the wrath of the parent. "I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim," Hosea said in God's behalf: "... for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath" (v. 9).

Child abuse is a perpetual problem in our society and others. Unable to control their inner rage, stressed-out parents sometimes overreact to their children's faults and punish them without mercy. Often, they learned this behavior from their own parents. What can we learn from our heavenly parent?

Looking way ahead (vv. 10-11)

In even the bleakest of days, when God is involved, there is hope. Exile does not last forever. Hosea saw a day when God would shout for his children to come to his arms, to come home.


Now we meet the cosmic Lion King. Hosea declared: "They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord" (vv. 10-11). The lion's roar might cause them to come fearfully, trembling, but God's desire would be to bring them home.

In the context of Hosea's

prophecy, this promise applied to Israel, who would be scattered east and west by the Assyrians, but not forever. God would call the people home. In one sense, this has not happened: the northern kingdom was not restored, and its people became known as the "ten lost tribes." Later, the people of Judah would be exiled to Babylon but allowed to return about 50 years later. Exactly where the northern Israelites went after the kingdom fell in 722, and how many of them may have returned later, is a mystery.

But, Hosea's prophecy extends beyond Ephraim. This text holds words of hope for every child of God who knows what it is like to sin and suffer. Because of God's stubborn love, we can know that our exile is not forever. Our suffering on this earth will end. In the person of Jesus Christ – called the "Lion of Judah" in Rev. 5:5 – the Lord God has roared a call for all to come home.

Hosea's prophecy suggests that the punishment we deserve is more than God is willing for us to bear, and so in Christ God has come down to where we are. In some way beyond our understanding, Jesus took upon himself the ultimate and terrible punishment that our sin deserves. He has given us new birth so that he can lift us up and hold us close. No matter where we go, no matter what evil comes into our lives, we can know that God is near, God's love never fails, and God's mercy overflows.


Hosea's prophecy and the gospel message together lead us to imagine a day when God will stand upon the stars and give voice to a great roar of eternal victory. We who believe may come with quivering expectation to follow God's voice. Our time of exile will be over, and our God will lead us home, for the Father's love will reign triumphant. 

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

August 7, 2016

Hebrews 11:1-16

You're Not the First

What does the word “faith” mean to you? Do you think of it as a set of beliefs? As the inner assurance of some truth? As a step beyond hope? As belief put into action? Today’s lesson begins a month-long series of studies from the book of Hebrews, and all of them relate to the role of faith in the life of the believer. 

Clarence Jordan was a man of faith who grew up in South Georgia and earned a degree in agriculture as well as a Ph.D. in New Testament Greek. Jordan believed that true faith was an active faith, and he put his faith to work by founding the Koinonia farm deep in the southern part of Georgia. He dreamed of blacks and whites living and working and worshiping side by side. Despite threats and acts of violence, despite legal and economic reprisals directed against him, he and his partners in community living had faith and made the dream live.

Unseen realities (vv. 1-3)

Jordan also wanted people to understand the scripture, and translated what he called the “Cotton Patch” version of the New Testament. When


Hebrews 11:1 –

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

translating Heb. 11:1-3, Jordan faced a statement that may seem obscure to contemporary readers: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (KJV), or “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (NRSV). When Jordan translated the truism, he gave it wings: “Now faith is the turning of dreams into deeds; it is betting your life on the unseen realities.”

Faith is the substance, the fleshing out, of things hoped for – the turning of dreams into deeds. Faith is trusting the evidence of things not seen – betting one’s life on the deep unseen realities of God that govern the universe.

True faith, by its nature, exhibits its faithfulness. As “the assurance of things hoped for” and “the conviction of things not seen,” faith is essentially hope in action, a hope so strong that it leads us to bet our lives on it and to behave in such a way that we live into it, rather than giving up on it.

The author’s elaboration on faith is a natural carryover from his strong exhortation toward the end of the previous chapter, where he charged readers not to abandon their faith, but to endure and remain “among those who have been saved” (Heb. 10:35-39). 

In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince*, a fox tells the lost prince that “What is essential is invisible to the eye.” The most important

things in life may be the things we can’t see. Our faith in an unseen reality compels us to live in such a way that we make it present and discernible.

This is how God worked in creation, the author suggests: “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible” (v. 3). The act of creation was unseen, but the results are apparent. Those who have faith can see the visible evidence of God’s unseen work in making the worlds.

Faith in action (vv. 4-16)

Beginning with v. 4, the writer takes us through a literary “Hall of Faith” that features people who put their hope into action – even when they died before receiving the anticipated reward. The ancestors who received approval did so through their faith, the author said (v. 2). Their actions demonstrated an understanding that “Life is lived by faith, by recognition of what constitutes the really real” (Edgar V. McKnight, *Hebrews and James*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [2004], 263).

Let’s start the tour: Faith is a young man named Abel (v. 4, cf. Gen. 4:3-5a), who “by faith” offered a prime lamb as a sacrifice to God, while his brother offered grain. The Genesis story gives few clues as to why Abel’s sacrifice was more acceptable than Cain’s, or even how the brothers knew that Yahweh accepted one and not the other. For the writer of Hebrews, it appears to be a matter of faith alone: “By faith Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain’s,” he said, and “Through this he

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received approval as righteous.” Cain, implicitly, did not exhibit the same kind of faith.

Moved by jealousy, Cain murdered his brother, after which Yahweh confronted him, saying “your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground” (Gen. 4:10). Abel’s witness did not end there. Through his faith, the author said, “he still speaks.”

Faith is an old man named Enoch (vv. 5-6) who lived a life of such faith that it was thought that he “walked with God” straight from this world into the next without having to bother with dying. The Hebrew text of Gen. 5:24 says only that the father of Methuselah “walked with God; and then he was no more, because God took him.”


The writer of Hebrews quoted from the Greek Septuagint, which could be translated “Enoch pleased God, and He was not found, because God transformed him.” The Greek word describing Enoch’s experience means “to change from one state into another.” The writer of Hebrews subscribed to the traditional interpretation that God converted Enoch’s earthly existence into a heavenly one.

Citing the Septuagint’s comment that Enoch pleased God, the writer of Hebrews assumed Enoch knew that “without faith it is impossible to please him.” Such faith begins with believing that God truly is, and that God rewards faithful followers. 

Faith can be seen in a man named Noah (v. 7, cf. Gen. 6:8-9:17), building an ark in the middle of the desert because God said so. He also believed God about “events as yet unseen,” and acted in the hope of saving his family. Noah believed God, and turned his faith into the life-saving substance of the ark. His example served to “condemn the world” while making him “an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.”

Abraham and Sarah have prime positions in the “Hall of Faith.” Abraham had come of age in a land that worshiped other gods, but when God called him to leave his family and travel to a land he did not know, he pulled up stakes in Haran and set them down in the land of promise. Abraham remained there, living as an alien in the land “by faith,” as did his descendants, “Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise” (vv. 8-9, cf. Genesis 12-20).

For the writer of Hebrews, Abraham’s sojourn in Canaan was a prelude to the greater inheritance of a “city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (v. 10). Whether Abraham ever envisioned a heavenly Jerusalem, the author of Hebrews saw that as his reward and ultimate destination.

Abraham was not alone in demonstrating faith. He and his wife Sarah, so old she was “as good as dead,” put their faith in God and were rewarded with a child who would open the door to countless descendants (vv. 9-11, cf. Gen. 15:1-6, 17:15-22, 18:9-15). 

These and other illustrious ancestors “died in faith without having received the promises,” the author wrote, “but from a distance they saw and greeted them” (v. 13). Abraham and the other faithful forbears did not look back, but always forward, desiring “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” where God has “prepared a city for them” (vv. 14-16).

The writer, of course, was applying a New Testament hope to Old Testament people who had no concept of heaven similar to that which developed in later periods. They would not have used the same terminology or anticipated the same end, but they lived in the constant hope of God’s good future. The writer of

Hebrews apparently believed that God had credited their faith to them as righteousness. As Abraham had followed God, not knowing where the road would lead, so the author of Hebrews insisted that trustful patriarchs had inherited a “better country, that is, a heavenly one,” a future even better than they could have imagined.

Faith in your life

Where is faith in your life? Faith is the person sitting in your chair, thinking your thoughts, dreaming your dreams, making the choice to act on faith, to turn your dreams into deeds, to bet your life on the unseen promises of God.

Faith is a young man standing up to the pressure of peers who would lead him to behave in ways that are dangerous to himself and to others, because he knows that God has called him to a life that is better than that.

Faith is a young woman refusing to surrender her virtue in exchange for popularity or acceptance because she understands that God has a better plan for her life, for her present and for her future.

Faith is a businessperson who insists on dealing with honesty and integrity and fairness because he knows that is the Christian way.

Faith is any person who goes out of his or her way to share another’s pain and selflessly offer comfort because that is what following Jesus is all about.

Faith is a church made up of ministers to each other who are not afraid to cry, not afraid to love, not afraid to sacrifice their time and talent and worldly goods for the sake of others who need them, for the sake of living out a dream that we are truly called to love as Jesus loved and make our world a better place.

Faith is the turning of dreams into deeds. **NFJ**

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

August 14, 2016

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

You're Not Alone

Has anyone ever cheered for you? It makes a difference, doesn't it?

My life was strongly shaped by the experience of playing high school football: I learned a great deal about discipline and teamwork – as well as about having dreams and dealing with reality.

In practice, we spent a lot of time running wind sprints and other drills. To this day, I can hear the coaches shouting “Run hard! Run hard!” When we grew tired or weary, they would yell “Suck it up and go!”

On Friday nights, we learned the value of our hard work as we competed before a great crowd of witnesses – including many former players who understood the game – giving our best efforts to win each game.

I recall those sweaty days and sometimes painful nights when I read this exhortation from the author of Hebrews:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

To whom was the author writing? Why were they running, and how?

Hebrews 12:1 –


“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

A race of faith (11:29-40)

The book of Hebrews can be read as a lengthy sermon. It was written for the benefit of a Christian community, most of whose members were probably born Jewish. Some believers were growing in their faith, while others were struggling. Living as a Christian under first-century Roman rule was not a piece of cake, and some were tempted to turn back from the faith.


The author of Hebrews urged his readers to never give up, never stop growing, never stop struggling to become all that God wanted them to be. Like my high school coaches, he exhorted them to “Run hard!”


The writer offered encouragement by recalling a string of Hebrew heroes who had demonstrated faith. He began with Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah (11:4-19), arguing that they all lived in faith while looking forward to a future inheritance.

He continued with further stories of the patriarchs. It was by faith that Isaac invoked future blessings on his sons Jacob and Esau, he said (v. 20); by faith that Jacob blessed his 12 sons from his deathbed (v. 21); and by faith that Joseph saw the end of the exile and asked to be buried in the land of promise (v. 22). 

Moses' parents showed faith in preserving his life, while Moses himself demonstrated faith as he chose to align himself with God's oppressed people rather than to live in luxury as an Egyptian (vv. 23-28).

Today's text begins with v. 29, which recalls how Moses and the people of Israel showed faith in crossing the sea on dry land as they escaped from Egypt (v. 29). Later, the people saw Jericho fall after obeying God's surprising command to march around the city for seven days (v. 30).

The first solo woman to make the list was Rahab, a native of Jericho who chose to put her faith in the God of Israel, hiding spies sent by Joshua and allying with the Hebrews rather than her Canaanite compatriots (v. 31). 


With v. 32, the writer shifted from individuals to groups. “Time would fail me,” he said, “to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign enemies to flight” (vv. 32-34).  In addition to the named characters, the references to escaping lions and fire recall stories of Daniel and his three faithful colleagues (Daniel 3, 6).

Nameless but faithful women came to the author's mind with the mention of women who “received their dead back by resurrection” (v. 35a), a probable reference to the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17:17-24) and the woman of Shunem (2 Kgs. 4:18-37).

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Both saw their dead sons raised to life after the intercessions of Elijah and Elisha, respectively.

The persons mentioned to this point gained victories or deliverance, but with vv. 35a-38, the author turns to praise others who suffered without victory, but did not lose faith. Those who “were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to gain a better reward” probably refers to a story from the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees, which tells of an aged priest named Eleazar who willingly died on the rack rather than eat meat from a sow sacrificed before an idol during the cruel reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (2 Macc. 6:18-31). A mother and her seven sons also refused to eat the sacrificial pork, according to the story, suffering barbarous torture before death (2 Macc. 7:1-42). 

The reference to persons being mocked, flogged, or faced with imprisonment could apply to many situations, including prophets such as Jeremiah (Jer. 20:2, 7; 29:26; 37:15). Jewish traditions accorded other prophets the fate of having been stoned to death, sawn in two, or forced to live in poverty in desolate places.

Though “commended for their faith,” the author said, these “did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect” (vv. 39-40). The implication is that heroes of the past died in faith, looking toward a future resurrection that would not be fulfilled until the coming of Christ, a better hope than even they imagined. In this way, God’s saving work would bring the faithful people of the past, present, and future together.

A cloud of witnesses (12:1-3)

The extended catalog of the faithful in Hebrews 11 serves as a rhetorical


prelude to the next chapter, for the writer wanted his struggling readers to know that they were not alone: the saints of the past and the saints of the present were watching. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us ...” (12:1).

As athletes who play popular sports may compete before a host of fans, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that our daily walk takes place before a cloud of witnesses. As we take courage from saints past and present, we are challenged to do two things. The first thing is to lighten the load. When we have to run a long distance, we don’t carry a backpack, dress in bulky clothes, or wear heavy shoes.

The weight we are to discard for the Christian race is “the sin that so easily besets us.” We don’t need a theologian to tell us what that means. Pride. Selfishness. Discord. Self-destructive behavior. Hurtful words. Exploitation of others. Apathy. Meanness. Gossip. Anything that causes harm to another. “Everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles,” as the NIV11 puts it.


We cannot hold on to our selfish behavior and run this race any more than we could win a marathon with a sack of potatoes on our back. The first thing is to throw off what slows us down.

The second thing is to run persistently. The course ahead is beset with obstacles, problems, and distractions that make progress difficult. So, we must “run with perseverance the race that is set before us,” willing to continue steadfast even in the face of metaphorical mud holes that set us back or tempt us to leave the path. It is the willingness to keep running even when we know the path ahead is uphill.

It is a willingness to keep on running even when it hurts – as my coach used to say, to “suck it up and go.” 

The race we run in Christ’s name can be a joyful race, but not always an easy one. Times of temptation and trial will come, but because God’s faithful saints through the ages are cheering us on, we do our best. Because we are surrounded by a world that is desperate for God’s love, we run with determination, and we run hard.

We cannot see the whole course or know every place the track will lead, but we run while “looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2).

The author carefully refers to “Jesus” rather than “Christ” because he wants us to recall Jesus’ earthly life, the trials he faced, and his willingness to suffer the cross “for the sake of the joy that was set before him,” that is, the prospect of sitting at the right hand of God. 

Rather than dwelling on our trials and hardships, we look to the example of Jesus, who pioneered and perfected the kind of persevering faith we are called to emulate. Jesus endured not only the ordinary struggles of life, but also hostility from a sinful world. As we consider Jesus and the road he traveled, we are less likely to “grow weary or lose heart” (12:3).

When we run faithfully, not entangled by sin but encouraged by Jesus and a great cloud of witnesses who know what faith means, we can run hard, and run with perseverance, and be assured that we will stay on track until we take our place among those who will cheer on future generations of believers.

Isn’t that worth running for? **NFJ**

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

August 21, 2016

Hebrews 12:18-29

All Shook Up

Elvis Presley topped the music charts in 1957 with a song called “All Shook Up,” and rockabilly artist Jerry Lee Lewis reigned with “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On” in 1963. The two songs were popular, not just because of their frenetic, driving beats, but because we all know what it is like to be shaken by surprising news, by grief, by fear, or by heartache. Even so, none of our experiences could hold a candle to the shaking that goes on in today’s text, where the author of Hebrews recalls past prophecy and speaks of a coming day when both the earth and the heavens will be “all shook up.”

The earthly Sinai (vv. 18-21)

Following his reflection on past heroes of the faith (ch. 11) and an exhortation for believers to remain faithful and guard against apostasy (12:1-17), the author of Hebrews reinforces his appeal with a tale of two mountains and a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

The first mountain is clearly Sinai, though the writer does not name it. He recalls Israel’s frightening encounter with a fearsome God through seven descriptive words or phrases. Mount Sinai was “something that can be

Hebrews 11:28 –

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.”

touched,” though no one was allowed to at the time, for it was marked by “a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest (or whirlwind), and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them” (vv. 18-19).

The vivid, hair-raising description is drawn from accounts in Exodus (19:16-22, 20:18-21) and Deuteronomy (4:11-12, 5:22-27), in which God descended on the mountain in fire, accompanied by thick black smoke, thunder and lightning, and the blast of a trumpet growing louder and louder. While the mountain shook, God called Moses to come up, speaking in thunder while the panicky people shrank back. ⚡

As if the menacing theophany was not enough to keep people away from the mountain, any who dared to touch the holy site were promised death by stoning (v. 21). ⚡ In the Exodus account, Moses appeared confident and encouraged the people not to be afraid (Exod. 20:20), but the author wanted to draw a picture of wholesale alarm, so he quoted loosely from a different occasion when Moses expressed fear (Deut. 9:19), adding the word “trembling” to suggest that Moses was as terrified as the people.

Israel had come to a touchable mountain that they weren’t allowed

to touch in order to meet a God who was present but inaccessible. The dread of God’s palpable but menacing presence led the people to draw back rather than come forward. But that was the old covenant, which the author intentionally painted in such stark terms so he could contrast it with the new covenant in Christ. ⚡

The heavenly Zion (vv. 22-24)

“You have not come to something that can be touched,” the writer said (v. 18a), “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (v. 22a). The part of Jerusalem called Mount Zion, generally thought of as the location of the temple, was a tangible place, but the writer transposed it to a place that could not yet be perceived, a heavenly Jerusalem as the “city of the living God.” ⚡


The seven descriptive terms for Mount Sinai are matched by seven depictions of what believers would find in the heavenly Mount Zion. After introducing Mount Zion as the “city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” the writer adds six further features: “and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (vv. 22b-24).

The “innumerable angels in festal gathering” offers an inviting contrast to the dark clouds of Sinai, where


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angels were also thought to be present (Deut. 33:2). Here the angels are not threatening but joyful, perhaps extolling the victory of Christ. Believers are invited to join angels clad in party clothes for a heavenly celebration.

With the angels are “the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,” an apparent description of all the saints through all the ages. The word translated as “assembly” is *ekklesia*, the same word that can be translated as “church,” but here it has a broader meaning. While people and angels were separated at Mount Sinai, on the heavenly Mount Zion they worship happily together. 

The fourth encounter for believers is with “God the judge of all,” the one who has exonerated the “assembly of the firstborn” as well as “the spirits of the righteous made perfect,” who are mentioned next. That these are “spirits” who have been “perfected” suggests that the author has in mind faithful persons who have already died and been judged righteous, made perfect through the saving work of Christ (compare 10:14). While the “firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” could comprise saints past, present, and future, “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” probably refers only to those who had already died and been judged righteous.

The sixth meeting is with “Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant,” whose saving work has instigated the heavenly celebration.  The author intentionally uses the name “Jesus” to stress Christ’s humanity, which made God more approachable than at Sinai. This reflects his earlier declaration: “but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. It was fitting that

God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (2:9-10).

The believers’ final encounter is with “the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” Why bring up Abel? In the writer’s earlier paean to heroes of the faith, Abel was the first person on the list (11:4). Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than his brother Cain, who responded with violence. Though Abel died, the author said, “through his faith he still speaks.”


The testimony of Abel’s faith was powerful, but paled in comparison to the blood of Christ. Moses had sealed the covenant between God and Israel by taking sacrificial blood from the altar and sprinkling it over the people (Exod. 24:8). The author now applies that metaphor to Christ, whose “sprinkled blood” was far more effective than any animal sacrifice at mediating between God and people (see 9:13-15).

The unshakeable kingdom (vv. 25-29)


Having contrasted the earthly Mount Sinai of the old covenant and the spiritual Mount Zion of the new covenant, the author concludes by urging readers to “See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking” (v. 25a), by which he means one who is speaking from heaven. If those who ignored God’s warning from Sinai did not escape judgment, he asks, “how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven?” (v. 25b, compare 2:2-3a).

The image of heavenly speaking comes from the closing words of v. 24, which referred to “the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” It isn’t just the

blood of Jesus that speaks, however, but God the creator and judge who is at the heart of the passage.

Verse 26 takes the reader from Sinai to the present and on to eternity. “At that time” (back at Sinai) God’s “voice shook the earth.”  Now, however, readers hear a present promise of a future event. “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven” is a reworked quotation of the postexilic prophet Haggai’s promise that, despite the diminished state of the rebuilt temple, God would shake the earth, the heavens, and the nations in order to fill the temple with riches and splendor (Hag. 2:6-7).

The shaking to come would remove all that is transitory, leaving only the eternal kingdom of God and its inhabitants (v. 27). The kingdom has present and future aspects: the continuing sense of “we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (v. 28a) suggests that we enter the kingdom when we trust in Christ and are called to live as kingdom people, spreading Christ’s love wherever we go. At the same time, we look forward to the full revelation of the kingdom at the end of the age, when we need no longer fear, but will see God face to face.

In the meantime, we are called to be thankful while offering to God “an acceptable worship of reverence and awe,” holding firm to our faith and avoiding apostasy as we remember that “indeed our God is a consuming fire.” 

Where do you find yourself in the author’s challenge? Are you fearful, concerned about whether you might be slipping away from God – or confidently growing in your faith? Either could lead you closer to God: the author believed the greater danger was apathy: God has spoken, and we are called to take God’s challenge seriously. **NFJ**

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

August 28, 2016

Hebrews 13:1-17


Remember — and Do

Do you like learning new words? Not long ago, a youngish writer for our local newspaper used the expression “totes fleek.” After scratching my head, I Googled the expression and learned that it’s urban slang, meaning “totally on point,” or “looking really good.” A variation is “totes on fleek.”

Today’s lesson offers the opportunity to learn an old word that may seem new. “Parenesis” is a relatively technical term used by students of literature and rhetoric. It derives from a Greek verb meaning “to exhort,” and refers to instructions that encourage people to do good. It can include various types of advice, proverbs, exhortations, comparisons, and commands, all employed for the purpose of inspiring positive behaviors. The adjective form is “parenetic.”

The Bible has many examples of parenesis. If we pay attention to today’s parenetic passage, our lives might be a bit more totes on fleek.

What we should love (vv. 1-6)

Our text addresses issues of what we should (or shouldn’t) love (vv. 1-6) and who we should (or shouldn’t) follow (vv. 7-17).  The passage is linked


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Hebrews 13:8 –

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”


to the previous chapter’s insistence that God has granted us “a kingdom that cannot be shaken,” for which we should be thankful and “offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe” (11:28). The word translated as “worship” also means “service.” The following verses explain what constitutes acceptable service to God.

The writer begins with the bottom line: “Let mutual love continue” (v. 1). “Mutual love” translates the Greek term *philadelphia*, or “brotherly love.” It was not common in the Greek and Roman world to describe anyone other than biological siblings as “brother” or “sister,” or to assume obligations to people beyond the family. Secular writers sometimes commented on the Christians’ odd penchant for calling each other “brother.” 


True love is not transitory or inspired by occasional feelings. The verb in the sentence means “to remain” or “to abide.” Love for one another should be a constant in the lives of believers. It should also stretch beyond our homes or our church. The author insists that we not fail “to show hospitality to strangers” (v. 2a). While the *philadelphia* of v. 1 speaks of family love, the *philaxenia* of v. 2 calls us to love people we don’t know. 

The immediate context may have concerned itinerant evangelists or other believers unknown to the

community. Roads could be treacherous during the first century, and travelers frequently depended on the hospitality of others for lodging. Nothing about the verse, however, limits the call for hospitality to Christians (witness Jesus’ story of the “good Samaritan,” Luke 10:30-37).

As added motivation for entertaining strangers, the writer added “for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (v. 2b). This does not suggest that we should anticipate visits from angels in disguise, but recalls stories in which both Abraham and Lot showed hospitality to visitors who turned out to be angels (Genesis 18-19). 

We see this also in the writer’s call to “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured” (v. 3). The primary reference probably concerns ministry to fellow Christians who had been imprisoned or persecuted for their faith, but such ministry can extend beyond fellow Christians.

Prisoners in the first century were often dependent on visitors or family members for food, clothing, blankets, or other needs. Caring for a Christian prisoner could be dangerous, for it could raise suspicions about the visitor. Still, the demands of love required that fellow Christians take the risk of showing love to those who were in need. 

Believers should know who to love, and what (or who) not to love. Married people should avoid falling in love with someone other than their

spouses, for example. The author warned believers to remain true to their marriage partners, lest they fall under judgment (v. 4).

The writer also understood the dangers of materialism: “Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have” (v. 5a).

The Bible often connects sexual immorality with covetousness. In the Ten Commandments, the prohibition of adultery is followed closely by warnings against stealing and covetousness. Contemporary Jewish, Greek, and Roman writings also frequently connected the two. They understood that both immorality and greed are grounded in the kind of selfishness that can lead one away from God.

The writer of Hebrews reflected confidence that believers could trust in the care of a God who had promised: “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Likewise, Christians could confess with the psalmist, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” (Ps. 118:6).

Who we should follow (vv. 7-17)

With v. 7 the writer urges readers to pattern their lives after faithful church leaders. He begins with past leaders, “those who spoke the word of God to you.” He challenges believers to consider their example and to “imitate their faith” (v. 7). Later (v. 17), he challenges believers to trust their current leaders as well, using words as strong as “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account” (v. 17a). Note that believers are not to follow their leaders blindly but to “consider the outcome of their lives” before imitating them,

and to remember that leaders are also accountable to God.

Words about leaders in vv. 7 and 17 provide a frame for a consideration of what leaders teach. The much loved v. 8 (“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”) may appear to have no particular relation to what comes before or after, but it serves as an effective bridge between v. 7 and vv. 9-17. The writer uses the familiar confession to remind his readers that Jesus has not changed, thus setting the stage to warn them against getting carried away by “all kinds of strange teachings” (v. 9a).

The “strange teachings” appear similar to the legalistic dogma that plagued the churches of Galatia and prompted a fiery letter from Paul. Some early Jewish Christians believed that Christians must continue (or begin) following Jewish customs, including kosher foods.

Believers should seek strength of heart through grace, not through eating certain foods, the writer argued (v. 9b). True religion is an inner experience with the God of grace that works itself out in a life of goodness, not a relationship based on external criteria such as food or rituals.

Contrasting the Christian faith to sacrifices presided over by priests, the writer argued that Christians “have an altar from which those in the tent have no right to eat” (v. 10). In Hebrew rituals, some sacrifices were eaten, while others were not. The sacrifice offered on the Day of Atonement was taken outside the camp and burned: only the blood was sprinkled on the altar. The writer compared the burning of the sacrifice “outside the camp” to Jesus’ crucifixion “outside the city gate” of Jerusalem, where his death served to “sanctify the people by his own blood” (vv. 11-12).

Believers are to leave the old camp behind, venturing outside the gate to join Christ and face the possibility of suffering abuse with him (v. 13). We can face such trials because “here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (v. 14).

Some first-century Christians may have sought to hide behind the façade of Judaism, which was an accepted religion in the Roman Empire, rather than claim Jesus alone and face the risk of persecution, but the writer would brook no such compromise. Perhaps he recalled Jesus’ instruction to would-be disciples that they should deny themselves, take up their own crosses, and follow him (Mark 8:34).

As Christian believers, we do not offer to God sacrifices of animal blood or fruit from the fields, but “a sacrifice of praise,” which the writer described as “the fruit of lips that confess his name” (v. 15). With this thought, the writer returned to his earlier instructions for lives that offer acceptable worship and service to God. “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,” he said, “for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (v. 16). Such behavior recalls the earlier exhortations to love the right things and to turn away from the wrong things.

We serve a Lord who went outside the camp to reach a lost world and even die for the sake of others. To follow Christ faithfully, our religious experience should not be limited to stained glass and cushioned pews, but must reach into the world of people outside the camp – the world for which Christ died.

How did those first-century Christians who first received this letter respond? Did they heed the call? We have no way of knowing. How will we respond? That is the question that matters. **NFJ**

Celebration and reflection

Navigating the intersection of faith and freedom

By J. Colin Harris

Independence Day, like all birthdays, is a time of appropriate celebration — and needed reflection. As we celebrate the birth of our nation, let us give careful thought to the meaning of this intersection of our faith and our freedom.

GUIDING VOICES

There is an interesting relationship in our lives as a people of faith — that transcends national, political, geographical and social boundaries — and as citizens of a nation to which we pledge allegiance. It isn't always easy to maintain that delicate balance.

So it is good to reflect on the relation of our faith and our freedom. Since we are committed to them both, and we don't have to choose between them, maybe the best question to guide us is: What does our freedom do for our faith, and what does our faith do for our freedom?

We have guidance in thinking about this question from those who have traveled this journey before us. Their voices offer counsel as we embrace our roles as followers of Christ and as citizens of our nation.

BIBLICAL WITNESS

A few voices from the Bible speak directly to the relation of covenant faith and national life. The Ten Commandments begin: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:2-3).



When the covenant community of Israel occupied the Promised Land, they asked Samuel to appoint a king. When Samuel warned them that a king would change them from being a people of God to being a people of the king, forcing their young people into service and taking their property to enrich the few and to reduce the many to poverty, still they insisted on a king, so they could be "like the other nations" (1 Sam. 8:20).

Three generations later, when this prediction had come to pass, the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant ..., I will surely tear the kingdom from you" (1 Kgs. 11:11).

A century later, when the alliance between Israel's religion and its government had become so entwined that it was sanctioning all manner of injustice, the prophet

Amos spoke forcefully the word of the Lord: "Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream" (Amos 5:23-24).

The rest of the prophetic tradition, for the next 200 years (especially Isaiah, Micah, Hosea and Jeremiah), speaks forcefully against the corrupting influence of a too close alliance of religion and political power.

In a later and very different political context, someone asked Jesus: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" He replied: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:17, 21).

Paul offers counsel on living responsibly in the world, without letting the values of the world shape who we are: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).

And further: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ... For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are the ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (Rom. 13: 1, 6-7)

As helpful as these texts are in pointing to the delicate relationship of religious faith and the political/governmental dimension

of life, they do not speak as directly to some of our contemporary concerns as we might wish.

BROADER MESSAGE

Sometimes we need to look beyond specific “proof texts” to get a sense of the larger message of the biblical testimony. The faith journeys of the mothers and fathers of our part of God’s family offer some interesting features:

First, the people of the covenant have a citizenship in a community that transcends all earthly kingdoms. God’s covenant people have been wandering nomads, slaves in Egypt, a wilderness people, illegal aliens in the land of Canaan, a prosperous kingdom, a defeated and exiled people, frightened discoverers of a new sense of who God is, subjects of the Roman Empire, and citizens of just about every nation of the world. Yet, God has said, “I am with you,” and that commitment has never been limited to a particular context.

Second, covenant community is at greatest risk of being unfaithful when it is closely identified with any kingdom. Three examples illustrate this point:

1. The kingdoms of David and Solomon were the high point of ancient Israel’s political power and economic prosperity. Foreign rulers came from all over to Jerusalem to see the magnificence of the capital city, its palace and its temple. But the historians and the prophets of a later period evaluated this golden age as the low point of Israel’s covenant faithfulness, because they had

exchanged the God whose presence had sustained them in the wilderness for a god of success, power and prosperity.

2. The early Christian movement was a barely recognized fledgling group of renegade Jews and alien Gentiles for its first few generations. Churches were planted, many in secret, throughout the dominant empire of Rome. Letters and gospels were written that have become our scriptures, all in relative obscurity in the shadow of the mighty Roman Empire. Things changed in the fourth century when the emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the empire and the church became an arm of the empire rather than a covenant community that defined itself by the teachings of Christ. When the community of faith became synonymous with the nation, they both lost the core of their identity.

3. A more contemporary example of what happens when a biblical faith gets too closely identified with a national agenda is the Holocaust. “Christian” Germany lost its moorings and justified the murder of millions of people who were identified by manipulators of fear and ignorance as the “Jewish problem.” It is a sobering reminder of what can happen when a concern for national purity wraps itself in the cloak of religious righteousness and identifies the “others” as worthy of removal.

Voices of our faith heritage are clear: the covenant community is always in a world and part of a world, but it loses itself when it is defined by any of the world’s national

agendas. “You shall have no other gods before me” seems to include the god of nationalism as well as the fertility gods of Canaan.


BAPTIST CONTRIBUTIONS

The Baptist movement was birthed in 17th-century England in a commitment to religious liberty and the need for separation of religion from the constraints or support of the state. Thomas Helwys spoke directly to King James I that the king is not God and has no authority over the consciences and souls of his subjects.

Roger Williams, also in the 17th century, was banished from Massachusetts by the Puritan authorities for his commitment to religious liberty. He founded Rhode Island, and the first Baptist church on American soil, as a haven of freedom from the tyranny of state-sponsored religion. Williams affirmed in 1640: “An enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and the religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”


John Leland, a Baptist from Virginia, influenced James Madison to push for a constitutional amendment to protect religious liberty. We know the result of that influence as the first amendment to the Constitution.

In 1773 Isaac Backus, another colonial Baptist, offered: “Religious matters are to be separated from the jurisdiction of the state, not because they are beneath the interests of the state, but quite the contrary, because they are too high and holy and thus are



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beyond the competence of the state.”

The commitment to religious liberty of these early Baptists was not just for themselves, but for everyone.

FOUNDING VOICES

The earliest English settlers and colonists wanted to establish a Christian commonwealth. The Puritans had their issues with the Church of England, but their desires to control the religious dimension of life in North America were no less rigid.

Literature from the time speaks not only of the desire for a kind of Christian utopia, but also of stern discipline (remember the Salem witch trials) of those who did not conform. By the late 18th century, when the revolutionary spirit was leading toward the Declaration of Independence and the formulation of the Constitution, colonial leaders had benefitted from a century of philosophical and political thought, as well as a century of experience with the tensions of religion and governance.

They were quite clear in their concerns for the proper role of religion in American public life. The clearest expression is in the first amendment to the Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The principle of the separation of church and state was clearly in the minds of the founders as the way to protect both the integrity of religious faith and the liberty that was so dear to them.

For example, George Washington affirmed: “We have abundant reason to

rejoice that in this land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition and that every person may here worship God according to the dictates of his own heart.” The 1796 Treaty between the United State and Tripoli stated: “The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

James Madison noted in 1822: “We are teaching the world the great truth that Governments do better without kings and nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of government.”

Later, in 1947, Hugo Black, the only Baptist to serve as a Supreme Court Justice, affirmed that neither state nor federal government may pass laws that aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another.

These testimonies and others respected the sacredness of the religious dimension of life too much to institutionalize it in the frameworks of the government of this nation. However, the experiment in liberty was not without its flaws. The freedom some early advocates affirmed left out the half of the population that happened to be female and the significant percentage that were slaves.

But they laid the foundation for later refinements that would expand liberty beyond the limits of their time. Part of that foundation was the realization that religion and government (faith and freedom) will flourish better toward their respective

destinies if each is allowed to develop and refine itself without the controlling influence of the other.

THE QUESTION

Now back to the question: What does our freedom do for our faith, and what does our faith do for our freedom?

Freedom allows for faith to grow without constraint of external coercion. It encourages an open and honest search for truth and a context for shared discovery.

It enables free expression without fear of judgment, punishment or rejection. It promotes an atmosphere of appreciation and respect for all faiths, while encouraging the deepest levels of commitment to our own.

On the other hand, faith gives character and substance to our freedom, helping it move beyond selfish and superficial expressions (concern for one’s own “rights” or thinking of freedom as being able to do whatever one wants) — moving beyond the seasonal fireworks and flag waving of a Fourth of July celebration to a deeper-seated commitment to the principles of opportunity, justice and compassion.

That is something to celebrate on this Independence Day — along with committing ourselves to protecting against both direct and subtle distortions. **NFJ**

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RECOGNITION & REMEMBRANCE

Editor's note: For a more timely delivery of information about people and places, along with breaking news, visit the expanded nurturingfaith.net.

International missions leader chosen

Sharon T. Koh is the new executive director of American Baptist International Ministries. She comes from Evergreen Baptist Church in Los Angeles, where she has served as senior associate pastor of mission and community life. She succeeds Reid S. Trulson, who retires the end of August.

CBF endorses 1,000th chaplain

Erin Walker Lysse, a chaplaincy resident at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem, N.C., is the 1,000th chaplain endorsed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Roebuck to Belmont University post

Jon Roebuck, pastor of Nashville's Woodmont Baptist Church for 17 years, became the first executive director of the newly-formed Belmont Institute for Church Leadership at Belmont University June 1. The institute will "equip church leaders with progressive resources gleaned from business, music, law and theological leadership," said university president Bob Fisher.

Boswell assumes Charlotte pastorate

Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C., installed Benjamin Boswell as its sixth pastor on May 1.

Thorne sets retirement from ABC

Leo Thorne will retire Aug. 31 from American Baptist Churches USA, where he has served as associate general secretary for mission resource development for 10 years. He previously served on the board of directors for Nurturing Faith Publishing.

Brian Foreman has been named as founding director of Campbell University's new youth theology institute *Fides: Exploring Faith & Vocation*.

Brett Younger is pastor of historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., coming from Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology where he taught preaching. He is a columnist for *Nurturing Faith Journal* and the author of *Lighter Side: Serving Up Life Lessons with a Smile* (Nurturing Faith)

L. Gregory Jones is executive vice president and provost at Baylor University, coming from Duke University where he was a professor of theology and ministry and senior strategist for leadership education at Duke Divinity School.

Margaret Brooks is recipient of the Addie Davis Award for Outstanding Leadership in Pastoral Ministry from Baptist Women in Ministry. She is a student at Baptist Seminary of Kentucky.

Elizabeth Coates is the Addie Davis Award winner for excellence in preaching from Baptist Women in Ministry. She is a student at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology and associate pastor for discipleship and spiritual formation at First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Ga.

Joel Snider retired in May after 21 years as pastor of First Baptist Church of Rome, Ga. In tribute, local newspaper publisher Otis Raybon wrote that Snider "has been a shepherd to every member of this church in more ways than I have space to write."

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Millard Fillmore (1850-1853)

By Bruce Gourley

Humble beginnings marked the life of the 13th president of the United States. Born in 1800 in a log cabin in the wilderness of Cayuga County, N.Y., Millard Fillmore's nearest neighbor lived four miles distant.

Books in the Fillmore household consisted of an almanac, Bible and hymnal — the lot representative of many poor, rural families of the era. Religion, however, played no discernible role in the Fillmore family.

The son of a hardscrabble farmer, a young Millard sought a better life. Lacking education, at the age of 17 he obtained a dictionary, reading it eagerly. In 1819 he attended a nearby academy, where he fell in love with his teacher, Abigail Powers, two years his elder.

Ambitious and determined, Fillmore soon apprenticed as a lawyer. Admitted to the bar in 1823, he set up practice in East Aurora. Millard and Abigail married in 1826, followed by Fillmore's election as an attorney for the state's supreme court and his entry into local politics.

An elected member of the New York State Assembly from 1828 to 1831, Fillmore wrote and secured passage of a state law abolishing imprisonment for debt.

He also sought to repeal a colonial-era law requiring state court witnesses to swear belief in God and the afterlife. Proclaiming the law "absurd" and based upon "the narrow feeling of prejudice and bigotry," Fillmore nonetheless failed in his quest to separate religion from state in the court system.

Moving to Buffalo in 1830, he became a charter member of the city's new First Unitarian Society, evidencing his religiously



liberal and tolerant bent. Abigail, raised a Baptist, declined to join the Society.

A rising political star, Fillmore won election to and served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1833 to 1835 as a National Republican. Declining to run for re-election, he switched loyalties to the Whig Party, the short-lived National Republican Party having dissolved. New Yorkers returned Fillmore to the House from 1837 to 1843 as a northern, moderately anti-slavery Whig.

During his six-year stint as a Whig congressman, Fillmore supported Morse's telegraph, cutting-edge technology of the day. Slavery, a centuries-old practice from colonial days, he opposed.

Fillmore opposed efforts to annex Texas as a slave territory, allied with John Quincy Adams (then a congressman) in an unsuccessful attempt to allow congressional

anti-slavery petitions, opposed slave trade between states, and sought the eradication of slavery in the nation's capital.

Although supported by many northern abolitionists, Fillmore failed to secure the Whig nomination for the presidency in 1844, the party's southern wing being pro-slavery. Returning to New York, he served as the first chancellor of Buffalo University and comptroller of New York.

National affairs turned his way in 1848 as Whigs, nominating the southern slaveholder and war hero Zachary Taylor as president, selected Fillmore as their vice-presidential candidate to placate anti-slavery northerners. The Taylor-Fillmore ticket won the 1848 election.

Upon the sudden death of Taylor on July 9, 1850, Fillmore ascended to the presidency, the second from New York to attain the office.

Hoping to position the Whig Party in the political center of the national slavery controversy, President Fillmore backed a series of proposals, known as the Compromise of 1850, designed to reduce friction between northern and southern states.

The five parts of the Compromise consisted of: 1) admission of California into the Union as a free (non-slave) state; 2) abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia; 3) organization of Utah Territory under popular sovereignty, thus allowing citizens to vote on slavery within the territory; 4) an expanded Fugitive Slave Act requiring federal officials to arrest escaped slaves and return them to their owners; and 5) the selling of some Texas lands in order to pay off the state's debts.

*These are the 13th and 14th in a series of articles by historian Bruce Gourley on the religious faith of U.S. presidents. Gourley is online editor and contributing writer for Nurturing Faith Journal and executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society. His latest book, *Baptists and the American Civil War: Crucible of Faith and Freedom*, a compilation of articles from the recent series on Baptists and the American Civil War, is available from Nurturing Faith.*

Of the Compromise, Fillmore said: “God knows that I detest slavery, but it is an existing evil, for which we are not responsible, and we must endure it, and give it such protection as is guaranteed by the Constitution, till we can get rid of it without destroying the last hope of free government in the world.”

Yet, rather than ushering in a truce regarding slavery, the Compromise angered both North and South. During the 1852 presidential campaign, Fillmore’s unpopularity with northern Whigs for having signed the Fugitive Slave Act prevented his nomination as the party’s candidate.

The Whigs subsequently lost the election to Democrat Franklin Pierce. In addition, Fillmore suffered personal loss in the death of his wife Abigail in late 1852 and his daughter Mary Abigail shortly thereafter.

Following defeat in 1852, the Whig Party, unable to project a coherent position on slavery, dissolved. Nominated for the presidency in 1856 by the American Party, Fillmore ran a passive campaign. Ignoring

the party’s Nativist platform, he nonetheless lost in resounding fashion.

The last Whig president and the only American Party presidential candidate, Fillmore retired from national politics. Returning to Buffalo, he expressed relief to be “no more harassed with the cares of state.”

Religiously, Fillmore remained an enigma. In an 1849 letter declining an invitation to speak at a Boston Unitarian church meeting, he declared: “I sympathize with those who enhance liberal Christianity. But yet I am not a member of the Unitarian church.”

Nonetheless, as president he sometimes attended Washington’s Unitarian Society. During an 1855-56 tour of Europe, the former president allegedly told an Englishwoman, “The more we forget station in religion, the nearer we are to Christianity.”

In 1861 Fillmore accompanied president-elect Abraham Lincoln for a visit to Buffalo’s Unitarian church. Yet in his extensive writings Fillmore rarely referred to God, and never in a personal manner.

Regardless of his personal religious

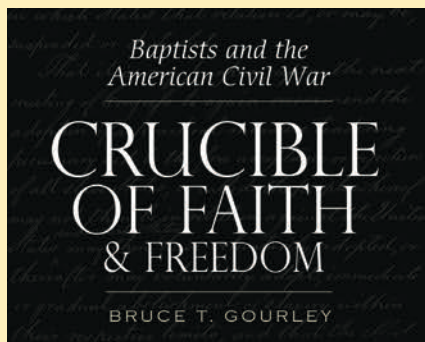
views or lack thereof, during the 1856 presidential campaign Millard Fillmore expressed unequivocal support for America’s heritage of church-state separation, repeatedly declaring, “In my opinion, Church and State should be separate, not only in form, but fact — religion and politics should not be mingled.”

On the political front, a post-presidential Fillmore opposed Lincoln’s anti-slavery Republican Party and the Emancipation Proclamation. After the war he supported Andrew Jackson’s conservative Reconstruction policies. Moderately anti-slavery as president, in later life he could not accept racial equality.

No final religious words attended Fillmore’s deathbed. But upon his passing on March 8, 1874, Buffalo’s Unitarian minister claimed that in a letter the newly-elected president had indicated “how deep he felt his dependence on God, and with all his heart sought his guidance.”

Future generations were left to struggle with the religious enigma of Millard Fillmore. *NFJ*

Good reading *for summer*



The 150th anniversary of the American Civil War provides a grand opportunity to consider precisely what Baptists — North and South — were saying from their pulpits, in the press, and through official resolutions from that time. Bruce Gourley brings such perspectives to life by making good use of careful and significant research, creatively taking a chronological approach using primary sources.

He highlights the role of various kinds of Baptists, for example: Robert Smalls, Thomas Hill Watts, Basil Manly Sr., Gov. Joseph Brown, Gov. Sam Houston, Isaac Taylor Tichenor, Crawford H. Toy, and Frank and Jesse James — most of whom went on to great prominence in politics, religion or education.

Gourley’s firsthand accounts of how Baptists on both sides sought and claimed divine favor and righteousness provide lessons as plentiful as the statues and markers that dot the many battlefields where the devastation has given way to peaceful fields and quiet woodlands.

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Franklin Pierce (1853-1857)

By Bruce Gourley

Franklin Pierce, the nation's 14th president, began life as had his predecessor — in a log cabin in the North. There the similarities ended.

Born in New Hampshire in 1804, Pierce in his childhood and youth enjoyed privileges unknown to a young and impoverished Millard Fillmore of New York. Father Benjamin, having distinguished himself as a military officer in the Revolutionary War, afterward moved from Massachusetts to Hillsborough, N.H. There he commanded the state militia and served in the state House of Representatives.

A prosperous Benjamin purchased a tract of land in 1804 and built a family estate. Son Franklin's birth took place in a temporary log cabin during the construction of the large family home.

Two of Franklin's older brothers followed their father's military footsteps, fighting in the War of 1812. Benjamin served as New Hampshire's 11th governor from 1827-1830.

Educated in a town school, Franklin then enrolled in and graduated from Bowdoin College in Maine. Law studies followed, then admission to the New Hampshire bar. A photographic memory paired with a charming personality and a deep voice served Pierce well, leading to his election as Hillsborough's town moderator in 1828 and to the state's House of Representatives.

Chosen as speaker of the state House in 1831, the young and rising Democratic star won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives the following year.

Marriage to Jane Means Appleton in 1834, however, led to personal and political challenges. Her religious devotion contrasted with her husband's irreligiosity.

The Congregationalist, pro-temperance Jane tried to convince Franklin to abstain from alcohol. Her abhorrence of politics, and especially Washington, D.C., hung like a dark cloud over the household. The childhood deaths of their first two sons brought great suffering.

With little support from his wife, Pierce served in the House for five years, his tenure entangled in the most pressing issue of the era: slavery. Although morally opposed to the practice, he took offense at the "religious bigotry" of abolitionists who labeled their opponents as sinners.

"I consider slavery a social and political evil," Pierce declared during this time, "and most sincerely wish that it had no existence upon the face of the earth." And yet, "One thing must be perfectly apparent to every intelligent man. This abolition movement must be crushed or there is an end to the Union."

Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1837 at the age of 32, Pierce proved a capable senator who took an interest in the nation's military affairs. Facing an ascendant Whig Party, however, Pierce resigned from the Senate in 1842. Moving to Concord and returning to law, he often represented poor citizens for free.

Remaining prominent within the struggling Democratic Party, Pierce advocated for the westward expansion of slavery. In addition, the Mexican-American War afforded the former senator an opportunity to serve in active military duty, as had his father and brothers.

Appointed a brigadier general, he



fought in the war with mixed results. Battle-hungry and longing to be a hero, ill-timed injuries and sickness unfortunately sidelined him from most of the action, leading to lingering charges of cowardice.

Even so, in 1847 New Hampshire welcomed Pierce's return with a hero's reception.

Resigning from the military and resuming his law practice in Concord, Franklin Pierce defended, among other cases, the religious liberty of the Shaker sect, a small religious group accused of child abuse.

Retaining his voice in national politics from afar, Pierce supported the slavery Compromise of 1850 as the key to preserving the Union. Although abolishing the slave trade in the nation's capital, the Compromise allowed for the possibility of slavery in the Southwest and provided greater legal enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, legislation mandating that slaves escaping to the North be returned to their owners upon capture.

A discordant Democratic Party, fractured North and South over the issue of

slavery, sought a return to power in 1852. Deadlocked over who to nominate for the presidency, on the 49th ballot Democratic National Convention delegates chose Franklin Pierce as a dark horse candidate.

The nomination stunned Pierce. His wife Jane fainted. Son Benjamin, their only surviving child, siding with his mother, hoped his father would not win the election.

Unfortunately for Pierce's family, the Whig Party, also divided over slavery, ascended into greater turmoil than the Democrats. Although his opponents cast Pierce as a coward and alcoholic, he won the election of 1852. From that point, things only grew worse.

Traveling from Boston by train on Jan. 6, 1853, the president-elect's family encountered tragedy when their car derailed and rolled down a steep embankment. Franklin and Jane survived, only to watch 11-year-old Benjamin be crushed to death.

Both parents suffered prolonged depression. Jane believed the accident to be God's punishment upon the family for her husband's pursuit of high political office.

She remained in mourning, refusing

to attend her husband's inauguration and making no public appearances during her initial two years as First Lady.

For his part, Pierce became only the second president to refuse an inaugural swearing upon a Bible, instead affirming the presidential oath on a law book. (The first to dispense with a Bible had been John Quincy Adams.) Pierce also distinguished himself by becoming the first president to deliver an inaugural address from memory.

A period of financial prosperity marked Pierce's ascension to the presidency. Despite his hope that the slavery question had been put to rest in the Compromise of 1850, Pierce's pro-slavery, westward expansion agenda plunged the nation into further discord. Even as the president voiced affirmation of America's commitment to "universal religious toleration," a vast and irreconcilable theological chasm stood between abolitionist northern Christians and pro-slavery southern Christians.

Passage of the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act opened both territories to the possibility of slavery through local balloting, resulting in political manipulation and widespread

bloodshed and violence between pro- and anti-slavery factions.

"Bleeding Kansas" overshadowed the national political landscape, spilling over into the U.S. Senate when South Carolina Representative and planter Preston Brooks viciously assaulted Massachusetts Senator and abolitionist Charles Sumner, a beating from which it took Sumner three years to recover.

Amid the slavery-driven violence and rancor that characterized Pierce's presidency, the Democratic Party in 1856 declined to re-nominate him. Returning to New Hampshire an embittered man, he witnessed the arrival of a civil war that he had helped bring about.

Upon Jane's death in 1863, Pierce retreated into a private life. In mourning and hoping to appease a distant God as his life drew to a close, on the second anniversary of his wife's death the former president was baptized in Concord's St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Four years later in 1869, Franklin Pierce, a broken, lonely and irreligious man, passed away. **NFJ**

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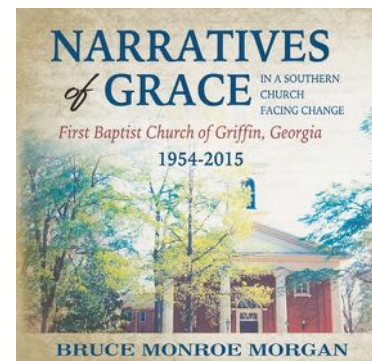
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—Dr. William L. Hardee, Pastor
First Baptist Church, Griffin, Ga.

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Of mountains and molehills

By Tony W. Cartledge

An eclectic team of scholars from Tel Aviv University recently published research indicating that some Israelite military personnel serving around 600 BCE knew how to read and write.

Two Southern Baptist seminary professors, contacted by Baptist Press, seized on the findings as evidence that most of the Hebrew Bible was written hundreds of years before. Go figure.

Authors of the study analyzed 16 letters among the hundred or so notes scribbled on broken pieces of pottery (called “ostraca”) that archaeologists led by Yohanon Aharoni found in the southern Judahite fortress of Arad some 50 years ago. Those short letters (rarely more than a paragraph), along with similar ostraca from the same time period found in the fortified city of Lachish, have been known to the scholarly community for decades.

Having these handwritten letters — mostly military orders and lists of provisions to be supplied — is exciting, but not earth shaking. The letters are clearly written by several different people of varying skill. Some may be from as early as the 8th century, while most come from around 600 BCE and represent correspondence between an official named Elyashib and his superior officer.

Members of the Tel Aviv team, who published their findings in the *Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, said they used “novel image processing and machine learning algorithms,” along with techniques from handwriting analysis, to determine that the

16 letters studied were written by at least six different persons.

That’s interesting, but not surprising. Even in a land where most people were illiterate, one would expect military officials — who can’t operate if they can’t communicate — to be trained in the art of reading and writing.

Both authors of the original article and the seminary professors sought to apply the findings to the longstanding debate over how the Hebrew Bible came to be written. More conservative scholars tend to take literally internal claims that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, that Joshua wrote the book of Joshua, and so forth.

Scholars taking a more analytical approach point to a broad spectrum of evidence indicating that, while oral traditions and possibly some written documents may well go back as far as Moses (when the Hebrew language was just developing), much of the Old Testament was put together in its final form just before, during and in the years following the exile (roughly 597-538 BCE).

Nothing in the Tel Aviv team’s findings calls this view into question, though Daniel Warner of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary told Baptist Press that the research “really puts a damper into the liberals who have hounded us that most of [the Old Testament] was developed during the intertestamental period or the Babylonian captivity. That’s just one more nail slammed in the coffin.”

It is no such thing. Analytical studies

that dig beneath the surface of the Bible are completely unfazed by the unspectacular announcement that some of Judah’s military officials could read and write. And no reputable scholar I know claims that any of the Old Testament was developed during the intertestamental period (between the writing of the Old and New Testaments), which would be a contradiction in terms.

Warner fails to note that even those who believe multiple authors contributed to the Pentateuch over a long period of time suggest that the earliest strata may go back to the 10th century, hundreds of years before the Arad Letters were written, even though we have only the sketchiest of very primitive Hebrew inscriptions from that period.

If anything, the team’s findings support the idea that the years leading up to the exile, when literacy was becoming more widespread, would have been a fruitful time for literary enterprises.

Those taken into exile and exposed to the highly developed corpus of Babylonian literature could have been even more capable — as well as theologically motivated — to take the various sources they had and compose lengthy biblical texts, such as what critical scholars refer to as the Deuteronomistic History, a thematically united series of narratives stretching from Joshua through 2 Kings.

It’s good to know that Israeli mathematicians and handwriting experts think findings such as the Arad Letters are worthy of additional study. Even so, it’s a long stretch from an order that Elyashib should “Issue Shemaryahu one *lethek* ration of flour” to an extended theological history of Israel’s fortunes stretching from their deliverance from Egypt to their exile in Babylon.

Molehills do not mountains make. **NFJ**



BEING CHURCH IN CHANGING TIMES

A column provided in collaboration with the Center for Healthy Churches (chchurches.org)

Faith communities as first responders

By Will Barnes

We stand at the door of one of the most tremendous opportunities in the life of the church since post 9/11: to have a thriving, effective ministry for our veterans and current military members and their families.

According to research, from Sept. 11, 2001 until 2016 we had in the combined wars of Iraq and Afghanistan 3,185,000 persons serving in the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines including active duty, reservists and the National Guard. If we include all veterans and active members who served in the first Gulf War to now, it would exceed 6.5 million service members.

This long-term conflict has been waged for the first time by an all-volunteer force, and the reserve component has been deployed at its highest level in 50 years.

Due to force reduction by the downsizing of active and reserve components and the return of reservists from recent mobilizations, military persons and their families are flooding back into our communities. One of the places veterans and their families are seeking out is the church.

However, less than one percent of our society is directly impacted by those with military service. This small population percentage leaves our understanding, knowledge and empathy limited to a very small number of citizens.

According to the Pew Research Center, which studied war and sacrifice, the understanding of civilians is broken down into three mindsets:

- 91 percent felt proud of soldiers serving our country.

- 76 percent of citizens thanked soldiers for their service to our country.
- 58 percent did something to help soldiers and veterans and their families.

On any given Sunday morning, we would likely find more persons in the pews without knowledge of military culture than persons who are aware. Yet the Pew Research Center indicates that military culture members seek community involvement, a sense of belonging, volunteerism and spiritual renewal.

The church is a quiet giant that needs to be aroused and educated on how it can forge a meaningful and significant ongoing ministry to military members and their families.

We have a moral obligation to help churches become the “best lifesaving stations” for our warriors who have served during the longest continued wars in modern history. One writer suggests the church can be the “best preventive medicine” for wellness and healing for our 6.5 million veterans and their families.

National surveys indicate that persons in crises, civilian or military, are more comfortable talking with clergy or chaplains than with mental health professionals. Therefore, churches and clergy need to be better equipped to meet the needs of our military members.

The four most common injuries of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), injuries

from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), Mild-Traumatic Brain Disorder (m-BTI) and Military Sexual Trauma (MST).

However, there is another injury related to these wars that is not clinical or medical in nature. It is called “Moral Injury,” defined as:

- Psychological damage service members face when their actions in battle contradict their moral beliefs
- Violation of individuals’ moral beliefs that has their actions deemed as unfit
- When your brain tells you to do what your heart tells you is wrong.

Moral injury is a spiritual injury or trauma. The church can provide the following for our military service people:

- A safe haven — a place of acceptance and support
- Listening — a place for telling their stories
- Community — a place of tolerance, forgiveness and compassion
- Acceptance — a place where healing takes place and spirits are renewed

Churches must be trained, kept informed and equipped for this unique ministry because the church is often the “first responders.” **NFJ**

—Will G. Barnes of Clemmons, N.C., is a retired Army chaplain and a marriage and family therapist who taught at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. For information on training your congregation to be first responders, contact him at drwillgbarnes1@gmail.com or (336) 970-0509.



Questions Christians ask scientists

How do you explain the Old Testament story of creation with your scientific methods?

— Adam Elkin, Edina, Minn.

In one sense I don't. The Genesis accounts of creation (there are two) were not written with modern science in mind, and scientific accounts of origins cannot be made to match up in any specific, chronological ways with biblical stories.

Not that people don't try: Some look to 2 Peter 3:8 that says "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" to warrant their claim that the six days of creation match up with six particular periods of cosmic history.

In this view, God's words "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3) correspond to the flood of photons that emanated from the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago, the separation of the earth from the waters (Gen 1:9) corresponds to the formation of the planet 4.5 billion years ago, and so on.

Others go further. They appeal to Einstein's theory of relativity, which tells us that time is relative. This means, for example, that six days from one perspective — or "frame of reference" — is equivalent to billions of years in another.

This is true. Time *is* relative and does not flow at the same pace for all people at all times.

This effect is not obvious to us in our daily lives, but if we routinely zipped around at speeds close to that of light — or if the speed of light were much less than it is — this strange flexibility of time would seem commonplace to us. And it is in fact possible to find two frames of reference such that a certain set of events lasts six days in one and 13.8 billion years in another.

But just because it's possible to look at the Bible through the lens of relativity doesn't mean it's a good idea. This kind of thinking places a strange and uniquely



Paul Wallace is a Baptist minister with a doctorate in experimental nuclear physics from Duke University and post-doctoral work in gamma ray astronomy, along with a theology degree from Emory University. He teaches at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Ga. Faith-science questions for consideration may be submitted to editor@nurturingfaith.net.

modern strain on scripture.

By forcing ancient texts to fit into the categories of contemporary science, it distorts them beyond their breaking point. The text becomes a code to be cracked rather than a reality to be lived.

The real point of the Genesis stories is theological and relational: they tell us how God, human beings, and the cosmos are interrelated. They tell us who we are and what the cosmos is in the context of divine creativity and love. And it does so using the primary medium of the age: prose and poetry, not the abstractions of modern physical science.

It is unwise to apply specific scientific theories to the interpretation of scripture, yet I find deep and broad resonances between the Old Testament and scientific accounts of creation. For starters, Genesis actually

encourages the practice of science.

Ancient Israel, unlike other ancient civilizations, considered the world to be neither divine nor corrupt. To the west, the Egyptians thought the sun and the moon and the soil and the Nile River — among other parts of the natural world — manifested aspects of gods and goddesses; these parts of creation were themselves sacred.

To the east, the Babylonians viewed the material world as essentially corrupt; their creation account said that the earth and sky were constructed from two halves of a goddess's ruptured corpse and that human beings were made to be slaves of the gods.

Israel took a middle way. This is evident in Genesis, which describes the cosmos as a thing of great goodness and integrity but not sacred of itself: the sun and

moon are lights, not gods. Also creation is not intrinsically debased: the heavens and earth were produced not through violence but through a series of ordered and deliberate divine words.

Also, for ancient Israel as for us, human beings were viewed as free and worthy creations, not slaves of God or gods.

According to Genesis, matter is valuable and worth studying in its own right because it's pronounced good by God. And because it is not divine, we are free to study it on its own terms. We who have inherited Israel's creation story are free to do science!

There's more. The Bible describes the cosmos itself as having the capacity to generate life. It is integrated and robust, just as biology tells us.

I cannot help but hear overtones of evolution in God's command for the sea to "bring forth swarms of living creatures" and for the earth to "bring forth living things of every kind" (Gen 1:20, 24).

I don't mean that the authors of Genesis foresaw evolution in any meaningful way. But the writer(s) must have observed just how vigorous and sturdy and life-producing the world is, and how creation itself holds the potential — drawn out and realized through the divine word — to create.

But Genesis is not the only book in the Old Testament that addresses creation. This is a point often missed in discussions of science and scripture. Distinct perspectives on the cosmos may be found in Psalms, Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, Job and others.

Perhaps the strangest such perspective is found in the book of Job. When

the character Job is beaten down by a series of terrible losses despite his morally unimpeachable life, he pleads to God for justice, and God eventually responds with the longest divine speech in the Bible.

In this speech God does not explain or defend Job's suffering, nor does the Lord offer an apology. Instead, God takes Job on a most unexpected tour of the cosmos, a hard ride through the cosmic outlands.

In one of the most unusual passages in the Bible, God sweeps Job up off the ash heap upon which he mourns, draws him down to the roots of the earth, shows him the expanse of the sea and the fountains of the deep, and catapults him through the constellations. But this is just the beginning.

Job is treated next to a series of close looks at individual wild animals. Almost without exception these creatures inhabit the barren and dangerous wilderness at the periphery of Job's world — the mountain goat, the wild ass, the ostrich, and the vulture are central exhibits. Finally, God brings Job face-to-face with Behemoth and Leviathan, mythic and terrifying creatures that represent cosmic chaos.

Goats and ostriches do not seem cosmic to us. Here in Atlanta we have these animals in the zoo, some in the petting zoo even, along with vultures and other creatures mentioned in Job. But for Job these beasts were marginal, never thought about, gamey and embarrassing and bloody dots on the outer fringe of his consciousness.

But in the light of God's tour they are seen to be beautiful and free creatures living in their own communities, commu-

nities from which human civilization itself appears peripheral and unimportant. God, it turns out, loves more than us human beings.

In Job's cosmos *we* are the marginal ones. Job therefore has much in common with contemporary scientific views of the universe in which we seem to be an afterthought at best: we are recent additions to a vast and ancient and evolving cosmos that has no center and no edges, that favors no planet and no star and no galaxy, that has a remote and violent past and is expanding ever-more-rapidly into an uncertain future. If the book of Job were written today, God would show Job all of this: evolution both cosmic and biological, the disorienting scale of things, and maybe even extraterrestrial life.

Again, there are other Old Testament takes on creation. Psalm 104 celebrates the same cosmos as Job but from the perspective of joy and not loss.

The author of Ecclesiastes, ever the cynic, casts the cosmos as cyclical and pointless. Isaiah 40-45 imagines a new creation to accompany the end of exile and the return of Israel to their homeland.

(For more on the varied perspectives on creation in the Old Testament, see William Brown's outstanding book *The Seven Pillars of Creation* [Oxford, 2010].)

The relation between biblical creation and the cosmos as we know it today is not simply a matter of finding scientific concepts buried like so many secrets in the text of the Bible. It is much deeper and broader — and much more interesting — than that! **NFJ**

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'Feels like missions'

Historic churches find new life beyond glory years

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

ATLANTA — A century ago Druid Hills grew into prominence as a desirable Atlanta neighborhood. Designed with a series of parks by noted landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, the community held stately homes surrounded by treetop canopies.

Nearby Druid Hills Baptist Church took its prominent place along Ponce de Leon Avenue. In its glory years, throngs of well-appointed worshipers flocked to the stately Beaux-Arts sanctuary with massive columns to hear the preaching of denominational statesman Louis D. Newton.

Were Louis D. to drop into that setting today, he likely wouldn't believe his eyes.

MANY CHANGES

Decades of changes — from suburban flight to gentrification with new Sunday options — have impacted the community along with the much-smaller and more diverse congregation that now goes by the name The Church at Ponce & Highland.

And more change is underway. Two buildings erected behind the sanctuary in the 1950s were sold to a developer who is replacing them with apartments, townhomes, restaurants, shops and a parking deck.

Funds from the sale have allowed the church to restore the 1920s sanctuary and other spaces for current ministry needs said pastor Mimi Walker. And it all meets one of the congregation's top priorities: "We want to stay here," said Walker who shepherds the faithful longtime members who have witnessed great change as well as newcomers.

"The elderly people here are onboard with change," said Walker, appreciatively.



Pastor Mimi Walker, in the sanctuary of Atlanta's Druid Hills Baptist Church, says the newly named Church at Ponce & Highland congregation offers "a progressive faith in a traditional style of worship."

"They want the church to be here for years to come."

On the other hand, she noted that younger members are the ones creating a history room at the church to preserve archives and to honor the heritage of Druid Hills Baptist Church, which remains the legal name of the congregation.

OLD WAYS, NEW WAYS

The sanctuary — which now draws about 70 worshipers each Sunday — has refinished hardwood floors, wider spacing between pews and the all-important center aisle for weddings.

The westward view continues to show the close proximity to the city center, but behind the sanctuary is something new to behold. The new development rises with the final stages of construction and lots of promise for new ministry opportunities — along with much-needed parking.

"It's been a fascinating process," said Mimi, who first served as co-pastor for three years, beginning in 2008, with her husband Graham Walker who teaches at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology.

The mix of old and new continues for the congregation, she noted. The choir pulled out a cantata from the 1930s last year and, according to Mimi, everyone loved it.

"We're offering a progressive faith in a traditional style of worship," she explained. The name change was an intentional effort to identify more closely with the surrounding neighborhoods.

"We put a lot of energy into being a community church," she said.

While the church retains its Baptist ties (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Alliance of Baptists) and identity, removing the B-word from the sign was a strategic move, said Mimi. "People think, 'I could visit that church but I didn't grow up Baptist.'"



A mixed-used development rises behind a historic Atlanta church seeking new ministry opportunities in a changing community.

COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

The congregation participates in collaborative ministries with other neighborhood churches and provides opportunities for members to engage in service — which appeals to many younger residents moving into the area.

“They are looking for a place to give back,” she said.

The church takes a wide embrace in welcoming members and others who might wish to share in worship or various activities of the congregation. Varied gifts are needed and put to use, said Mimi.

“It feels like missions,” she said of the unique pastorate.

Mimi would know; she was a missionary for many years, teaching at the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary before coming to Atlanta where she taught spiritual formation and served as pastor to the community at McAfee School of Theology.

Like many churches, Druid Hills Baptist was struggling to maintain its massive and aging facilities. The air conditioning crashed just before the big 100th anniversary celebration.

So the new mixed-use development behind the church represents both an opportunity for the congregation to restore and reconfigure its facilities for its current ministries and also to welcome those who will be their new close-up neighbors.

Times have changed — and are changing.

TEXAS-STYLE

In Dallas, “change” seems too small of a word to describe the various transitions that

have taken place for Gaston Oaks Baptist Church — earlier known as Gaston Avenue.

Two decades ago the historic and declining congregation that once boasted a membership of 7,000 relocated from downtown to the northeast side of the city in an effort to reach new families. Yet the desired results were not met.

In an act of courage and stewardship, the congregation re-envisioned its mission — opening its facilities to multiple congregations of varied ethnicities and forming new community ministries under the name Gaston Christian Center.

Gary Cook, who came out of retirement to lead the new ministry efforts, first served as interim pastor beginning in 2009. His enthusiasm for the ministries that continue to arise is contagious.

In May of last year, the church voted unanimously to deed its facilities and property to the Gaston Christian Center as the new vehicle for an expanded ministry.

“I am often asked how I was able to lead a congregation whose average age was 83 to make this kind of radical change,” said Cook. “The question implies way too much credit for me. The answer is: it was not that difficult, and the vast share of the credit goes to the present membership of Gaston Oaks.”

The English-speaking congregation, he noted, even agreed to change its long-held worship schedule to allow the fast-growing Chen congregation to meet at a desirable time.

Cook said proudly: “These amazing people were true to their more than 100-year mission’s legacy ... The Gaston Christian Center gives them hope!”

DIVERSITY

While many churches talk about diversity, the varied ministries at Gaston exemplify it.

“Today there are seven congregations located at Gaston Christian Center,” said Cook. “This includes the original Gaston Oaks congregation, three congregations from Myanmar/Burma (Karen, Chen and Zomi), and three other congregations made up of people from Bhutan, Central Africa, and various Latin American countries.”

Each congregation has its own pastor, said Cook, with the ministers meeting monthly for coordination and encouragement.

“The bond that has developed among these six men and one woman has been one of the greatest blessings of my life,” said Cook. “The pastors and congregations support each other in ministry and mission efforts in their native countries.”

On occasion each year, he added, the seven congregations share in worship as one church.

A former office building acquired by the church allows for a variety of ministries by offering space to non-profit groups that provide medical and dental care to the working poor, refugee support and training, food for the hungry, tutorials for at-risk children, and more.

“Today, young families with many children fill the halls,” said Cook. “The ‘old folks’ of Gaston Oaks are like proud grandparents, and they are thrilled at how the building they provided is now being used for Kingdom purposes.”

For some historic churches, the glory years continue to fade into memories. For others, they are looking in new places for different kinds of glory yet to come. **NFJ**



Karen congregation baptism

THREE VIEWS

Discerning the different ways believers look at the Bible

BY BEN SELF

There are many questions concerning the Bible. What is in the Bible? What is not in the Bible that people often think is in the Bible? How much should the Bible be followed? How much is the Bible followed?

Among the many inquiries is the question of how the Bible itself should be viewed, I think there are three major views of the Bible.

FIRST VIEW

According to one view, the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible (or inerrant) Word of God, even when taken completely literally. This opinion represents an exalted view of the Bible.

Those who hold this view think the Bible is absolutely perfect in every way whether dealing with religion, history, science or anything else.

Advocates of this view sometimes call themselves “Bible-believing” Christians. Some qualify the view by saying that this conviction applies strictly to the original manuscripts of the books of the Bible.

Followers of this view think that Christians should believe such claims as: the world was created in six days, humans first existed as adults, the sun once “stood still” for several hours, and Jonah survived after being in the belly of a big fish for three days. All biblical events are thought to have happened exactly as reported.

Everything said in the Bible is regarded as completely true. Anyone who does not have such beliefs might be considered an unbeliever or, at best, not a true believer. There may be some doubt about the

heavenly prospects of such a dissenter.

The rationale for this view is simple. God is believed to be perfect. The Bible is thought to have come from God, so it must be perfect. Any human element that could have led to error would supposedly have been overcome by God’s power.

This basic view is not exclusive to Christians. Others have had similar high ideas regarding their sources of authority.

According to Plato’s dialogue “The Apology,” Socrates shared with many ancient Greeks the view that the oracle of Apollo at Delphi was never wrong (sounds like inerrancy). What startled Socrates was hearing that the oracle had said there was no one wiser than Socrates. But Socrates did not consider himself to be wise. Socrates decided to prove that the oracle was wrong in this case.

*Many find great hope
in the Bible along with
serious warnings.*

When Socrates used questioning to find someone wiser than he, there was an unexpected result. He could not find any such person. Socrates had claimed that he knew nothing.

He encountered others who boasted that they knew something but really did not. Socrates concluded that he truly was wiser than they, because he admitted his ignorance while they claimed to know something but did not. Socrates thought that the oracle was correct after all.

In this case, as in some others, the oracle of Apollo at Delphi had the benefit of ambiguity. There is ambiguity in the meaning of wisdom.

Not everyone would define wisdom the same way. The oracle was correct according to Socrates’ interpretation of wisdom as

being willing to admit ignorance. Whatever may have been Plato’s full intentions, his story about Socrates added to the reputation of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi as free of error.

Muslims are another example of people who have extremely high regard for their special source of authority, the Qur’an. While there is no official statement regarding inerrancy, various references have circulated that indicate the great respect most Muslims have for their honored book.

One claim is that the Qur’an was let down from heaven by a golden thread. Another idea is that all earthly copies of the Qur’an are reflections of the perfect Qur’an in heaven.

Not all Muslims would express their views in these ways, but Muslims in general are very distressed when others burn copies of the Qur’an. I saw a televised report on a Muslim who could not read the Qur’an because he was illiterate, but he was willing to die for it. Devotion can be intense.

Whatever may be the exact content for various sources of authority, there does seem to be in many people a desire to believe in something that is completely trustworthy. The wish is there even when specific religious beliefs differ.

Thus I think people with this view are not necessarily lacking in cognitive skills. They are heavily motivated to seek assistance for life’s questions and difficulties. People with an exalted view of a source of authority may be impatient and even angry when they perceive a threat to their sense of security, but their wanting special help is understandable.

SECOND VIEW

A second view of the Bible is that not only is it not infallible or inerrant but is instead largely unreliable. This view is basically skeptical. There is the general idea that

many historical claims in the Bible are suspicious at best and that accounts of miracles are scientifically absurd.

They resonate with the character “Sportin’ Life” in the musical *Porgy and Bess*, who sings “The things that you’re liable to read in the Bible — they ain’t necessarily so.”

People with this second view of the Bible do not think of the book as a reliable source of information for the nature of the universe or for help with life’s great difficulties.

Many advocates of this view have been strongly influenced by advances in science. A few have a confidence that borders on arrogance. Those with a condescending attitude can be very irritating to those with a high view of the Bible.

It is the completely literal interpretation of the Bible that is especially objectionable in this second view. For example, I have heard a comedian/talk show host speak in a ridiculing way about the “talking snake” of the first part of Genesis. It seemed that he finally became aware that he could not believe a detail of the story.

There are indeed people who insist on taking the Bible literally everywhere, but they have no objection to such literary devices as personification outside of the Bible. In the story of the three little pigs, is there anyone over the age of three or four who thinks that pigs can use a hammer and a saw and other tools?

Yet people get the idea from the story that pigs who “built” houses of straw and wood were poorly prepared for the wolf. The pig who “built” his house of brick was well prepared. The story is about proper preparation, not about construction capabilities of swine.

Perhaps the writer of Genesis was not asking for belief in a serpent with vocal ability. Perhaps he was using a colorful (and memorable) way to portray the power of temptation.

Saying that Eve had a bad thought would have been more realistic but much less effective. Critics of the Bible should realize that not everyone takes all details literally but can still derive meaning.

Because of objections to completely literal interpretations of the Bible along

with some other problems, holders of this second view tend to reject the Bible altogether. They make little allowance for anything worthwhile in the Bible. Their skeptical view of the Bible often involves disillusionment.

THIRD VIEW

Those who hold to a third view of the Bible regard it as less than infallible but still as valuable and helpful. They consider both literalism and symbolism. They are open to inquiry and new knowledge. There is a willingness to make adjustments.

There is some skepticism in this view but also an appreciation for deeper meanings. While opponents may think of less charitable names, advocates of this view probably would consider it to be realistic.

As to problems with interpreting the Bible as inerrant, more than 100 examples of what could be considered inconsistencies have been noted. There are variations in numbers of concerns with different interpreters as well as defensive replies, but consider the first two chapters of Genesis.

There are different statements regarding the number of days of creation, whether animals came before or after human life, and the time between male and female human life. In the New Testament there are differences in the various accounts of the resurrection of Jesus, including the number of women involved and where and when appearances took place.

Not all of the alleged inconsistencies are genuine or significant, but there are enough to show that the idea of the infallibility of the Bible is not beyond question.

Holders of this third view also have reservations about considering the Bible as the Word of God. According to the first chapter of John, the Word was in the beginning, was with God, and was God and then became flesh.

None of those statements apply to the Bible. They apply instead to the second person of the Trinity, who became flesh in Jesus Christ.

Not everyone accepts those beliefs, but the statements in John’s account do end with a somewhat veiled reference to Jesus Christ rather than to the Bible. From the perspective of John’s gospel, applying references about the Word to the Bible appears to be misguided and even to verge on idolatry.

But should not the Bible still be considered the Word of God because of the belief that it is a message from God? The difficulty here, in accord with the principle that assertion is not proof, is the idea that something claimed to be from God is not necessarily from God.

In spite of the sincere beliefs of Muslims, not everyone thinks that the Qur’an was given by God. Its followers have a high reputation for morality, but many are not convinced that God is behind *The Book of Mormon*. Why should we be surprised or offended if there are doubts about the Bible?

Depending on one’s conception of God, not everything in the Bible sounds as though it came from a divine source. Was the creator of this immense universe really obsessed with minute details of Noah’s ark and of the tabernacle? Were commands to kill vast numbers of people, who thought they were defending their land from invaders, really from God?

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Most Christians allow for not always taking the Bible literally, but do not completely agree on when that should be done.

Questions such as these are not questioning God but are questioning those who claim to speak for God.

Those with this third view tend to think of the Bible not so much as the Word of God but as words of men of faith about God. Those words, however, may not always accurately reflect God.

Advocates of this third view may note that Christians are not entirely consistent about whether or not to interpret the Bible literally. Most Christians allow for not always taking the Bible literally, but do not completely agree on when that should be done.

Catholics take literally the words of Jesus when he referred to bread and wine as being his body and blood. Baptists do not have a literal but a symbolic interpretation of the biblical words of Jesus in this matter.

Baptists do take literally the biblical word for baptism as meaning immersion, and allow nothing else. Catholics also think the biblical word for baptism literally referred to immersion.

Yet they believe the meaning of baptism somehow extends to a rite of initiation and spiritual cleansing that can be symbolized in ways in addition to immersion. Would it be good to recognize, without hateful arguing, that there may be reasonable differences over how much many parts of the Bible should or should not be interpreted literally?

In spite of various questions and problems concerning the Bible, those with this third view still have high regard for the Bible. There is much in the Bible about God, thoughts that should be considered very carefully.

There is much about mercy and love and forgiveness. The Bible presents a strikingly accurate picture of humans at both their worst and their best. There are important beliefs about origins, present circumstances and future possibilities.

Many find great hope in the Bible along with serious warnings. Perhaps God did not create the world in six days, but may well



be the power behind the Big Bang, which started the entire universe. Perhaps God did not create humans as adults, but may be ultimately responsible for life, consciousness and intelligence.

MUCH TO CONSIDER

The Bible may not have all the answers that some claim for it, but it has much to consider.

How many people hold each view? It is hard to tell, partly because there are variations of the views.

For example, some people may view the Bible as inerrant but also accept

some symbolic interpretation as appropriate. Others may deem the Bible as not completely infallible while affirming that the major teachings of the Bible are absolutely reliable. And many people may not be well informed about the issues and may not be clear about their views.

But perhaps a consideration of these three ways of viewing the Bible will be helpful to those seeking to better discover its truth. **NFJ**

—E. B. (Ben) Self of Hopkinsville, Ky., is the author of *Ways of Thinking About God: The Bible, Philosophy, and Science* (*Nurturing Faith*, 2013).

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Fellowship

Aaron D. Weaver, Editor

LAST WORDS

Eulogy allows for memories, grief, celebration

EDITOR'S NOTE: Micah Spicer graduated in May from Baptist Seminary of Kentucky. This article is adapted from his academic writing on funerals.

Early in his ministry, Micah Spicer, pastor of First Baptist Church of Fort Thomas, Ky., confesses to trembling when fulfilling one of his pastoral duties.

“In my five years of pastoral ministry, I have found nothing more intimidating than standing beside a casket while addressing a mourning family,” he said.

Yet, responses from those receiving such pastoral comfort reinforced the importance of this ministry task.

“While feelings of inadequacy still surface, I can honestly say that more people approach me concerning the content of the eulogy than they do following my best Sunday morning sermon,” said Spicer. “This confirms that people are more receptive to God’s words in days of despair than they are in ordinary circumstances.”

As a result, Spicer considers the eulogy to be one of his most important tasks — as he seeks to “honor God, as well as the deceased person.” In doing so, his focus is on leading worshipers in “remembering, grieving and celebrating.”

REMEMBERING

“The importance of remembering was emphasized by Jesus during the Last Supper,” said Spicer. “As Jesus shared the Passover with his disciples, he informed them of his imminent death ... [and] initiated a new ritual for his disciples.”

Jesus’ instructions called for disciples to gather to eat bread and drink wine in his memory.

“Jesus understood that there is power

in remembering: power to convict us, power to shape us, and ultimately power to change us,” said Spicer. “Remembering the deceased is a vital part of the eulogy.”

While there are various ways of remembering someone at the end of their earthly life, Spicer said, “storytelling is a great place to start.” Personal memories connect the worshiper to the loved one, he added.

GRIEVING

“Dealing with grief is vital as we plan the eulogy. The faces that we look over are often hearts in turmoil,” said Spicer.

Eulogies are for the living, he noted. Therefore, the minister’s goal is to connect the worshipers to their inner feelings. The eulogy, he added, helps mourners acknowledge their feelings so that they can work through them.

“Although this is a difficult task — one I have struggled with mightily — ministers must enter into the depths of emotions,” said Spicer, admitting that he finds it difficult to share his own emotions with others.

Ministers, however, said Spicer, represent their congregations in shared burdens.

“My awareness of the mourners’ needs for grieving has led me to express my feelings not as ‘I’ but as ‘we.’”

He credits the late preacher, Fred Craddock, for teaching that ministers “speak for the audience, not to the audience.”

“By expressing my own feelings, I am actually giving others permission to acknowledge their feelings ...,” said Spicer. “Acknowledging emotions, naming those

feelings, and speaking for the audience help us to grieve together.”

CELEBRATING

Though difficult, celebration is essential for believers, said Spicer.

“We celebrate the loved one by remembering, by reading scriptures, and by revealing God’s truths,” said Spicer. “Celebration connects the worshiper to God.”

Spicer suggests using scripture in one or more of these four ways: a familiar text such as Psalm 23, a text requested by the family, one known as a favorite of the deceased or one descriptive of that person.

For example, said Spicer, the deceased person’s kindness might be compared to the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable. But he warns of being sure that a comparison is appropriate for the situation.

“Comparing the deceased to Judas Iscariot, for instance, would never be appropriate.”

OFFERING HOPE

Spicer said the eulogy should end with the minister offering hope to the family.

“I speak plainly: ‘Your loved one is in good hands. Your loved one is in nail-scarred hands. Your loved one is now with God, and will be forever. And now, through Christ, they are just waiting for you and me to join them when our life is done.’”

It is a time to be straightforward, Spicer reaffirmed.

“Do not take for granted our core belief that Christ has defeated death and given us new life,” he said. “We will honor our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the deceased person, as we say goodbye by committing them to their eternal home with God.” **NFJ**



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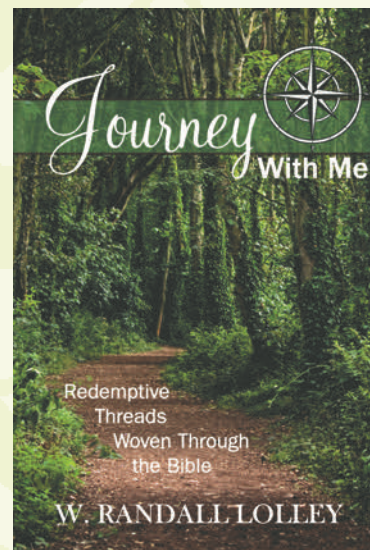
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New discoveries

Chang Yin finds success, hope and generosity

STORY AND PHOTO
BY JOHN D. PIERCE

DALTON, Ga. — Christianity is for women and poor people.

That's what Chang Yim learned growing up in his native Korea where his prominent family — like almost everyone else of privilege at the time — was Buddhist. But the now highly successful businessman and community supporter has experienced a lifetime of new discoveries.

LESSONS LEARNED

In 1957 Chang — an admitted “troublemaker” in school — came to the U.S. to study at Central Missouri University. The English he had learned in Korea was insufficient for such a setting.

“I couldn't understand one word they were saying,” he said of his professors. But rather than give up, Chang bore down.

“I never slept more than four hours a night,” he said. “I was studying.”

Math and science classes were much easier than the history course that required hearing, reading and writing in an unfamiliar language. By the end of the term, however, Chang had managed a grade of “C” in his history class.

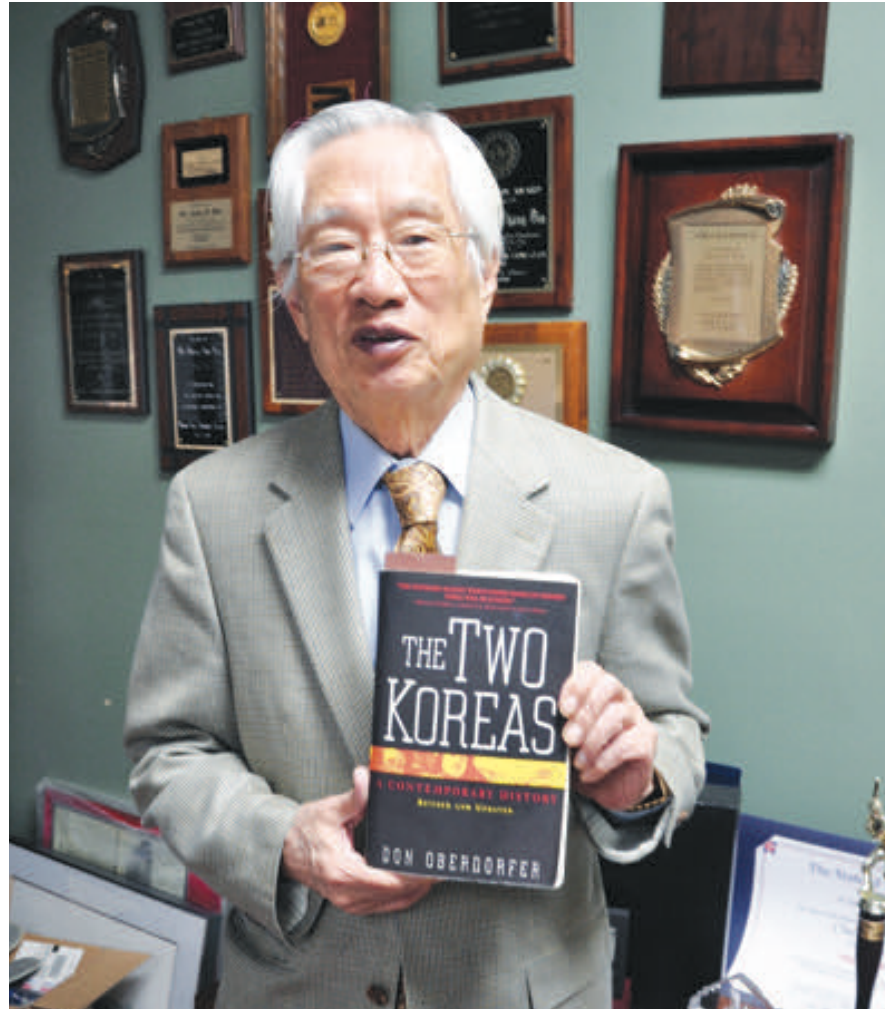
That grade along with grades of “A” in math, physics and chemistry made him an honor student — something that seemed impossible upon arrival.

“When you set your mind to it, you can do it,” said Chang.

NEW CHALLENGE

Language was not the only challenge faced by the young Korean student who had always been financially secure. It was an act of generosity that led to a new hill to climb.

His father sent a \$150 gift that the



Georgia businessman Chang Yim often references the book *The Two Koreas* by Dan Oberdorfer when sharing about the history of his homeland which he believes will one day be reunited.

government allowed, but Chang didn't really need the additional funds. So he suggested that his father use such money to help poor people in Korea.

The result, however, was that his father stopped sending money altogether, including funds for tuition.

“I took a job at the school cleaning trash cans,” said Chang, a lowly position for someone from a family of such prominence. And, for the summer, he worked at a hotel in upstate New York and put away every

dollar possible.

Soon he had amassed \$3,000 in savings — a significant amount for a student in the 1950s. “I was so happy,” said Chang.

After graduation he attended the University of Missouri where he received a master's degree in chemistry — and traveled to various U.S. cities including Los Angeles. There he was offered a job where his chemistry expertise could be used in the making of rubber backing for carpet.

But the job was not in L.A., he was told,

but in the “Carpet Capital of the World,” Dalton, Ga. To which Chang responded: “Where in the ... is Dalton, Georgia?”

CROSS COUNTRY

In 1964 Chang moved to the small north-west Georgia town that was vastly different from Los Angeles, most notably in the absence of Asians.

Walking down the streets of Dalton, he noticed being watched by those who were not used to seeing an Asian around. He felt a sense of responsibility for how Koreans and other Asian people would be perceived.

“I represented all Asians — for good or bad,” he said with a smile. “So I had to be very careful.”

Chang’s exceptional abilities led to his becoming vice president of the chemical company — which provided opportunities for international travel including Asia.

His curiosity and business sense were always in play. He would see a product and get an idea that would lead to an opportunity for a new enterprise. Then he would find a partner and start a business.

“I’ve started 29 companies and six were successful,” he said. But some of those were very successful.

“Business is hard,” Chang confessed. “If your mentality is negative, there is not much success.”

A three-fold philosophy emerged that has guided Chang in his endeavors: Find an honest person for a business partner; keep a positive mentality; hope that the timing is right.

Of the latter, he now says: “Try your best and leave it up to God.”

His businesses have ranged widely from selling rubber doormats in Japan to manufacturing in Dalton the popular hand warmers sold widely to outdoor enthusiasts. At age 78, Chang is still on the hunt for new ideas that lead to business opportunities.

INVESTMENTS

Chang considers his family to be his greatest asset. He and his wife Alice — “the most important in my life” — have been married for 53 years.

Together they have three sons and nine

grandchildren — whose pictures Chang is always eager to show.

Their sons are highly educated and successful as well. And in recent years Alice began investing in real estate with good success.

Together Chang and Alice formed a foundation called RAHYE — which represents “Respect and honor your elderly.” That is something Asians do well, he noted.

The couple had noticed that many elderly people in their area lived in nursing homes that were often very depressed places. They grew to have great respect for nurses and others who served these communities.

So they created an award that is given along with a cash gift to nurses who show exceptional service to persons living in nursing homes. They began with the nursing homes in their own area but “my wife and I dream of expanding widely,” said Chang.

PASS IT ON

“I came to this country empty-handed; I achieved with family and business,” he added. “For the rest of my life I want to give back.”

Chang is often invited to speak to school groups and community organizations. He speaks not only of his business ventures, but also his roots.

He tells of the Yalta Conference in 1945 and the resulting impact on his now-4,349-year-old homeland. Like Germany, he says, Japan was to be divided at the end of World War II, “but they cut the wrong country.”

He recalls the start of the Korean War during his youth and expresses hope and belief that his country will one day be reunited.

Chang has been honored in both the U.S. and his native Korea. His work as president of the Korean American Chamber of Commerce led to the prestigious Ellis Island Medal of Honor in 1997. Other recipients that year included actress Jane Seymour and baseball hall of famer Mike Piazza.

LIFE CHANGE

The greatest experience in Chang’s remarkable life, he said, came unexpectedly and with resistance. His sister — who had

converted to Christianity after marriage — came to Atlanta for a missionary conference. Chang was delighted to be her host in Georgia — picking her up at the airport, sharing meals and taking her to her hotel. But she had other ideas.

“She started trying to make me a Christian,” said Chang, who expressed no interest.

She insisted that he attend one of the meetings and when he refused, she refused to eat. So he placated her by attending one of the Korean worship services.

He described the preaching, singing and crying as “all crazy people.” And the notion that someone who was hit would turn the other cheek to be hit again made no sense to Chang.

“I could not understand,” he confessed, and made no plans to return. But his sister persisted.

On the second day, Chang said he listened more carefully and began to understand that the most important things in life are “love, forgiveness and hope.” On the third day, he professed his faith in Christ.

Putting his life into perspective, he said: “The Korean War created a sense of no hope, but Christianity brought hope.”

ON COURSE

Returning to Dalton, Chang made his way to the First Baptist Church where he was baptized by then-pastor Billy Nimmons. The then 60-year-old successful businessman was resurrected to new life.

An avid golfer, Chang tells of taking Nimmons to The Farm, a prestigious golf club near Dalton. On a par-3 hole, Chang hit his tee shot to the green — closer to the pin than his pastor.

So, as customary, Chang marked the placement of his ball to allow Billy to play up, and then put the ball back in place.

However, Chang set his ball several feet further from the hole than where it had landed. Billy told him of his mistake.

But it was no mistake, said Chang.

He confessed: “No, before I was a Christian I cheated about 1 inch each time. Now I’m making up for it.”

Then his face lit up and he added: “But I made the birdie.” **NFJ**



PHOTOS BY
BRUCE GOURLEY

STORY BY
JOHN D. PIERCE

Messin' with Music

"Music has always been an important part of my life," says Bobby Horton, whose musical roots run deep and mix with a love of American history.

Historic tunes mark the work of Bobby Horton

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Multi-instrumentalist and composer Bobby Horton has provided the musical scores for many Ken Burns documentaries including *Baseball*, *The Civil War* and *The National Parks*. He has also worked with the National Park Service on 16 films.

Since 1985, Bobby has performed "Songs and Stories from the Civil War" from coast to coast, using period instruments while exploring the stories of both sides in the conflict. He has been deemed "the premier artist of Civil War music."

In addition to solo (and duo with his friend Bill Bugg) performances, Bobby has toured long and far with the musical comedy group "Three On A String." More on his works may be found at bobbyhorton.com.

EARLY INFLUENCES

Bobby's musical influences were many and varied — with one limitation. He never heard his father play the trumpet "because he lost his bottom front teeth sometime during World War II."

But his father enjoyed big band music, so Bobby grew up hearing the likes of Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman and Louis Armstrong. His father also loved Alabama's own Hank Williams.

Bobby said his mother preferred

classical music and his maternal grandfather, John Camp, played banjo and listened to old-time string music, Southern gospel and Sacred Harp.

His paternal grandmother, Leta Horton, who loved classical music and played piano, would often play the organ at a Methodist church in Birmingham.

"Then the Beatles came to America when I was 11 or 12, and I discovered Otis Redding in high school," Bobby recalled. "Music has always been an important part of my life."

So his musical roots run deep.

"I can't remember when I began to mess around with trumpet and banjo, but I was fairly young," he said. "In my mind, you played baseball, football, basketball and music; that was considered normal when

Faith is often highly present in the countless songs and stories that Bobby has preserved from American history. In fact it is often faith expressed through music, he noted, that has sustained people through troubling times.

and where I grew up in the western part of Birmingham.”

REAL HISTORY

Many of the male influences in Bobby’s life — relatives, Sunday school teachers, coaches, band director — were World War II veterans whom he “learned to fear, revere and love.”

“So history became real to me early on,” he said. “... Through their stories I knew they made history when they were young men.”

His first connection between music and history was quite personal for Bobby — growing out of his father’s own story.

“My dad found himself in North Africa in 1943, not really knowing where he was,” he said. “He was homesick and sad” — fearing he would never go home again.

However, his father’s best Army buddy found a “busted radio” that with a little tinkering came to life and was tuned to the BBC.

“Glenn Miller’s ‘In The Mood’ was playing and my dad had an emotional turnaround,” said Bobby. “That incident literally changed everything for him.”

COMMEMORATION

As a boy in the ’60s, Bobby was intrigued by the U.S. commemoration of the centennial of the American Civil War.

“There were many articles and TV programs about the war that fascinated me,” he said.

So his interest broadened to an earlier conflict in American history than the stories of those he knew personally.

“I instinctively understood that history is made by common folks,” he said.

Digging into Civil War history, he came across a photograph of a young soldier from Georgia who seemed to be looking directly at him. The young man reminded

Bobby of one of his school buddies.

The young soldier, Bobby learned, was killed in the Battle of Malvern Hill in 1862. Bobby recalled being “deeply moved.”

MOVIE MUSIC

Producing and performing music for the film series by Ken Burns began with an introduction in 1991.

Burns was discussing his Civil War project with the editor of *American Heritage Magazine* who told him: “There’s a fellow in Alabama you need to listen to.”

Soon Bobby received a call from Ken’s brother about using some of Bobby’s music in the series.

“I have been working for Ken ever since,” said Bobby, gratefully.

Bobby said Ken’s team at Florentine Films now feels like family to him.

“Ken is such a joy to work for,” said Bobby. “He is a wonderful fellow who does business on a handshake. He and all the folks I deal with are incredibly talented, and very smart.”

Bobby said that Ken takes an unusual approach in film production by laying down the music track first and building the

scenes on top of it.

“This adds a layer of emotion that you feel but may or may not consciously notice,” said Bobby. “Most films come to you ‘locked,’ so you lay down the tracks to fit what is there.”

With a long list of completed projects, Bobby said he is in conversation now about the next one.

FAITH STORIES

Whether in his own family or the various persons he admires from history, Bobby said there is a common trait of a firm faith.

“They were very strong people who were all tested in their lives,” he said. “Their faith was consistent throughout, and it truly is at the core of who they were and are.”

Faith is often highly present in the countless songs and stories that Bobby has preserved from American history. In fact it is often faith expressed through music, he noted, that has sustained people through troubling times.

And in a uniquely talented way, Bobby Horton is passing along those stories and songs from generation to generation. **NFJ**



Bobby Horton (left) and Bill Bugg, retired from the music faculty of Samford University, share stories and songs during a spring Nurturing Faith event at Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham.



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We accidentally omitted David and Ann Wilson of Maryville, Tenn., from the recently published Judson-Rice Society list. We are grateful for their faithful and generous support as well as the gifts from many others. Annual gifts totaling \$1,000 or more are recognized each year as part of the Judson-Rice Society.

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