

March - April 2021

BA
BIBLE ADVOCATE®

A person wearing a white hat, a dark long-sleeved shirt, and blue jeans is walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the tall trees, creating a dappled light effect on the path and foliage. The path leads into the distance, flanked by lush green ferns and other forest plants.

Faithful Followers



2021: Faithful



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A publication of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 155 • Number 2

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

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Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
e-mail: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
orders: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

The Bible Advocate Online appears at baonline.org.

Lovely Lists

Are you a list maker? I'm not, but my wife, Steph, and kids are. I asked my daughter why she likes lists, and her instant answer was "They help me plan, organize, and recall my goals." Wow! That's a good list right there.

God's is a list maker too. The Bible is packed full of lists. The most common are for ethical instruction — vice and virtue lists that condemn or commend certain behavior. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and seven deadly sins (Proverbs 6) are famous Old Testament examples, as is the lovely list of three from Micah: Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God (6:8).

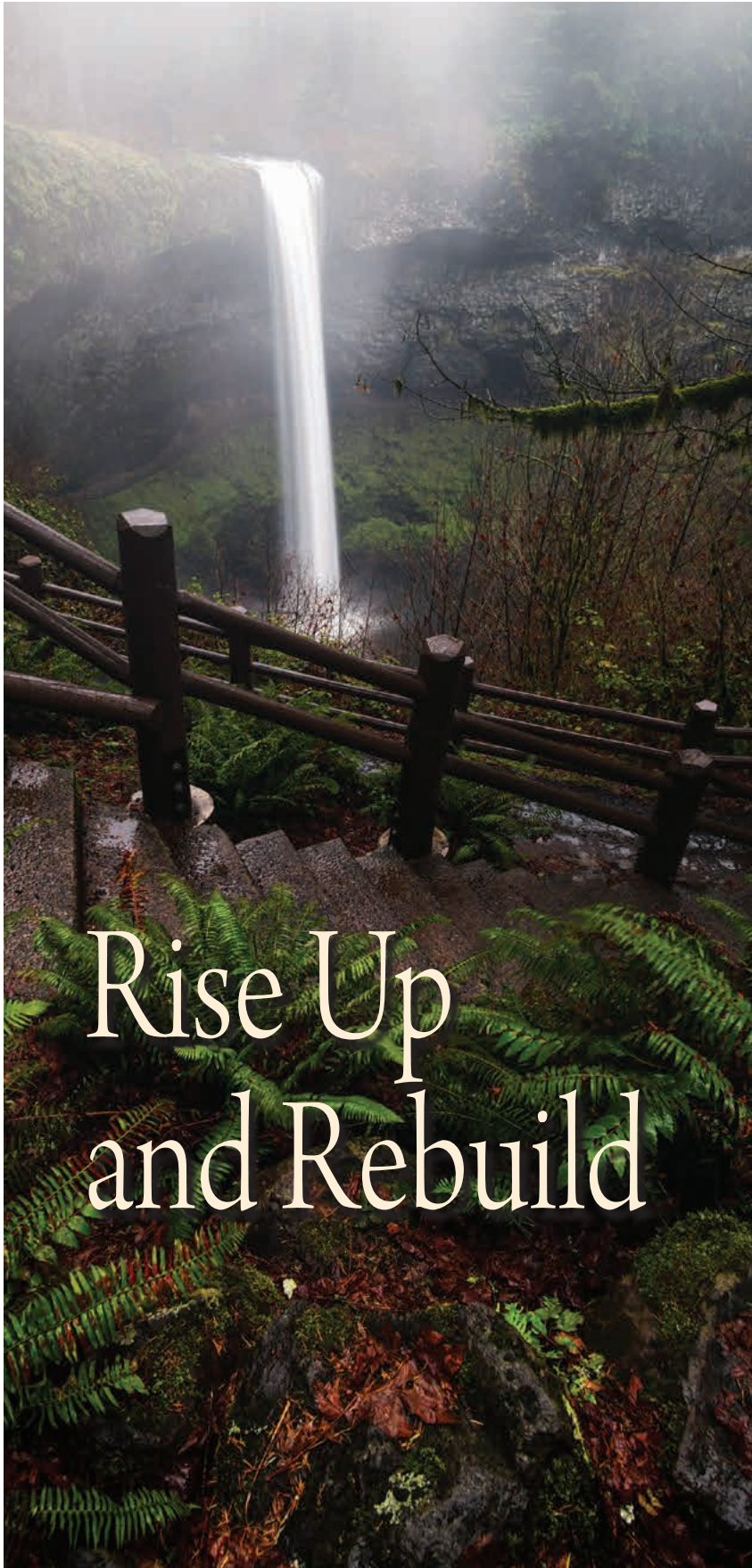
I counted forty lists in the New Testament, without looking hard. Jesus' Beatitudes and Paul's fruit of the Spirit (both numbering nine, Matthew 5 and Galatians 5) sprung first to mind. Jesus and Paul taught that love is the organizing plan and goal of God's lists; all hang on it. These simple catalogs spring from the Father's will to teach us what His love looks like, and doesn't. In describing this love, Paul made a lovely list of his own: Love is patient and kind, it doesn't rejoice in iniquity but in the truth — just four traits on his list of sixteen (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

No list can replace a relationship with God, but lists are divinely given signposts of what is pleasing to Him. That's why Paul magnifies God-breathed Scripture with a list of four as "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). He also praises Timothy's faithfulness to his teaching: "But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance" (v. 10). The context is perilous times when men will no longer endure sound teaching, but will turn from the truth (3:1-4:5).

The same Spirit who empowers us to live the lists also inspired their writing. A faithful follower carefully follows good doctrine, in accordance with godliness, nourished in the words of our Lord (1 Timothy 4:6; 6:3). Recall the plan and goal again in a last lovely list: Love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith (1:5).

— Jason Overman





Rise Up and Rebuild

Taking responsibility
for restoring the waste
places of earth.

by Calvin Burrell

In the Bible, there's a whole lot of building going on.

Noah built an ark for animals and humans to escape the Flood. People in Babylon built a tower toward heaven. Well, they tried. Moses supervised construction of a portable tabernacle in the desert, using skilled, Spirit-filled craftsmen named Bezalel and Aholiab. Some of you may never give a speech or write a book for Jesus, but you are gifted for other kingdom work with your hands — like those two builders.

King David dreamed of building a house for God on Mount Zion. The Lord said, "No, David. I'll build you a house instead, a spiritual house for the Messiah to inhabit forever." Then Solomon built the temple of his dad's dreams in Jerusalem, a wonder of the ancient world until King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 586 BC.

Seventy years later, Nehemiah and the Jews returning from captivity in Babylon set to work rebuilding the fallen walls of Jerusalem, just as they had the ruined temple earlier. The words "Jerusalem lies waste . . . Let us rise up and build" sets the stage for Nehemiah's book (2:17, 18). His determined leadership was vital in restoring a waste place to a livable city. Because "the people had a mind to work" (4:6), its walls were finished in

Photo by Marcus Delamarters

record time, under hostile circumstances.

Repairers and restorers

The word *waste* (i.e., *desolate, defiled*) that described old Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time also appears in other Hebrew texts. Isaiah 24 says, "Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste . . . The world languishes and fades away . . . The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws . . . Broken the everlasting covenant" (vv. 1, 4, 5).

Isaiah 58:12 is more optimistic: "Those from among you shall build the old waste places . . . And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell in." In Ezekiel 36:33, 35, 36, the Lord God says, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. . . . So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden' . . . I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it."

These latter verses can be linked to the return of the Jews and rebirth of national Israel in the twentieth century. Let's expand this prophetic application to include God's people of all nations working to rebuild — not just Jerusalem and the Holy Land, but all the waste places of our planet. God's new covenant people — the meek — will inherit the earth, according to Christ (Matthew 5:5), but hopefully not in its current semi-wasted condition. In Acts 3:21, Apostle Peter speaks of the "times of restoration of all things, which God has

spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." Compare this with the Isaiah 58 and Ezekiel 36 verses mentioned earlier.

Waste places

Restoring the earth is not just the job to be done when Christ comes to lead in this millennial work and assure its success. It's also work for this present age. There's a lot of earthly restoration to be done here and now. Here are a few of 2020's waste places where, as Paul says in Romans 8:19-23, the whole cre-

2) but have also been abused and overused, with little thought for future generations. Forests that purify our polluted air are fast disappearing. Rivers and oceans collect millions of tons of plastic waste each year. And polar bears, elephants, and other iconic wildlife are nearing extinction from their loss of habitat or by being slaughtered for their ivory.

- Millions of people in Africa and Latin America press northward in hopes of finding freedom and jobs, their hope mixed with fear of the danger en route, of

“Restoring the earth is not just the job to be done when Christ come.”

ation groans together until now, awaiting redemption of all things — like our earth and our COVID-threatened bodies:

- Poverty and hunger plague many, while others live in luxury and build bigger houses and bigger barns with little concern for the less blessed.
- Adultery, pornography, sex slavery, and the choice to conceive children without a marriage partner are common. But faithful, lifelong marriages are increasingly rare.
- Earth's beauty and natural resources have not only been used as God allows (Genesis 1,

the danger upon arrival, and of their families' bleak future if they stay where they are.

- Multitudes of African descent in this country were once slaves, and playing fields and workplaces of their descendants are still not level.

Labor and prayer

Hear the word of the Lord through His prophet: "Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien [i.e., stranger, refugee] or the poor" (Zechariah 7:9, 10).

Let us labor and pray that the blessings of Abraham may come to all peoples, tribes, tongues, races, and nations — that the glory of the Lord will be seen in all the earth. This is the full-time business of all God’s people.

It is 100 percent correct and right to affirm that our best efforts now can never fully rebuild waste places and restore the earth — until Christ returns. On the other hand, to speak and live as if we need not support and join the work of earthly re-

building until Jesus comes is 100 percent wrong. This earth is our present Jerusalem, the only home for us and our grandchildren for the time being. Too much of it lies in waste: Let us rise up and rebuild! Not because we worship nature or the environment, but because we worship the Creator and want His glory to be seen in all the earth.

Present preparation

through formal training, such as that available through Artios Christian College. The Greek root word *artios* (i.e., “equipping” or “prepared”) occurs in 2 Timothy 3:17 and Ephesians 4:12, which ends by summarizing the goal of *artios*: “for the building up of the body of Christ” (NASB).

On the other hand, don’t wait until you are fully equipped and prepared to start building. Ask God to give you a mind to work now, then set your hands to it. Find out what needs to be done for the church and Christ’s kingdom. Rise up and rebuild! Your skills will improve as you labor.

If your local church suffers loss or lies near waste, rise up in harmony and rebuild! Join hands

with others in your congregation or community to address common concerns: clean air, pure water, hunger, homelessness, racial and economic justice, right-to-life issues, and more. If those you work with don’t look like you, talk like you, vote like you, or worship like you, that means more opportunity for growth — including yours!

Savior and the saved

There’s a lot of building and rebuilding to do in God’s church and in His world. None of us can do everything, but each of us can do something. What we can do, we ought to do. And what we ought to do, I believe we will do — if the Spirit of Christ is in us all.

We’re not building for salvation; our Savior has done the saving work at the cross. He did the heavy lifting for us, and it is finished!

So what shall we do while we wait for Christ’s return?

Ask God to give us a mind to work in salvation, like the Jews who were saved from their captivity and rebuilt Jerusalem in record time. Let the redeemed of the Lord rise up and rebuild! Let’s work together till Jesus comes. Then we’ll be gathered home to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. **BA**

Calvin Burrell is former editor of the *Bible Advocate* and former director of G. C. Missions. He retired in 2015 and lives with his wife, Barb, in Stayton, OR. They attend the Marion, OR church.



“Ask God to give you a mind to work now, then set your hands to it.”



Divine Interruption

by Allison Wilson Lee

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:2, NIV).

After dropping off my family at a lake near our home, I shifted our minivan into gear and headed to the library. While my husband and sons fished, I intended to get down to homeschool planning for the new school year.

I anticipated starting second grade with my son and had in mind some topics I wanted to cover. Now I needed resources. I would search for poetry and titles on science subjects, as well as jot down lesson plans. I wanted to faithfully steward this special season in my children's lives. With just one vehicle in our family, I had limited time before needing to retrieve them from their fishing spot.

Summer afternoons in Florida swelter with unbearable heat and bring an almost daily rainstorm. So, books and papers in tow, I headed for an empty table in the air-conditioned library. That's when I noticed a man wearing women's boots and a long, red Little Mermaid-style wig. He wandered around the bookshelves until he caught my eye, then pointed to the dark clouds forming outside the windows. I smiled and responded to his comment about the weather. Then he shifted his attention back to the books, and I returned my focus to homeschool planning.

Moments later, the man began talking about hurricanes he'd lived through, something we had in common. He seemed nervous yet interested in having a conversation. Standing above me at my table, he then volunteered (without any questions from me) that he didn't always dress in women's clothes and that he didn't fully consider himself

a woman. He shared details about his young son too. I listened intently, surprised he would share with me — a stranger — so vulnerably.

I flipped my notebook closed. *I guess You had a different plan for my afternoon, huh, Lord?* In that moment, I decided to follow the opportunity the Lord had presented instead of following my own plans. I recognized that this chance might never show up in my life again. God also gave me the grace to understand that if He'd called me to teach and train my children through homeschooling, I could trust Him to provide time for me to accomplish necessary planning.

After I moved my books, the man sat down with me. He mentioned his ex-girlfriend, some mental health struggles, and difficulties with family members. Then spiritual matters entered our conversation. He shared about his faith background. Sensing this interaction to be a divine appointment, I asked the man if I could pray with him in Jesus' name. He agreed. Laying my hand atop his, I prayed he would know God and understand God's plans for his life.

Once our conversation finished, I hurried to retrieve my family. Packing up my barely used supplies, I recognized something much more vital than homeschool planning had taken place that day. By clearing my agenda (and my table), I'd accepted God's invitation to offer hospitality to this stranger in a crimson wig. I thank God for entrusting me with a divinely orchestrated opportunity and equipping me to be faithful with it. **BA**

Allison Wilson Lee writes from Belle Isle, FL.





Fireflies

Being ministers of light in a dark world.
by Lynn Briscoe

Before His crucifixion and death, Jesus prayed to His Father for His people:

“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (John 17:11).

Last year, we awakened to a strange new normal. We went from having plans, going places without thinking, and smiling at people, to avoiding people and eye contact, unable to read the expressions on their faces.

When I tell my children to remain six feet away from oncoming strangers on sidewalks, they make an obvious wide circle and shuffle around them. I can’t help but feel sadness when I see my children avoiding human contact as though it is normal.

Even before the advent of COVID, many were dealing with terrible loneliness, a loss of community and purpose. A July 2020 *National Geographic* article is titled “We are not made for this new normal” and states, “In perilous times, our deepest human impulse is to draw closer to each other — the very thing we’ve been told not to do.”

The Bible bears this out. God said in the Garden of Eden that it is not good for man to be alone. The same holds true in churches. Despite distance restrictions, are we united in purpose as a church community during this difficult time? There are many beliefs, identities, and ways of viewing this world. However, as a community of faith, our identity is in Christ and nothing else, and we must reflect that message to others.

Lights in darkness

We are called to be lights in a dark place. Light is the opposite of dark — a city on a hill, shining children of light, not unlike fireflies roaming in the night. Sometimes in the quiet whispers of night in a city full of lights, fireflies are hard to see because there is too much light. Nonetheless, if you watch carefully, you can see them shining in the bushes, reminding us of God's light.

Spiritual fireflies shine God's light, and they do more: They resist their enemies peacefully, fighting for true light, though all you can see is darkness engulfing their lovely illumination.

There is so much information today. Much of it is good, but plenty is not. This is a caution to us. As Christians, we are in the world but not of it (John 17:14-16). We are called to be separate, which includes properly analyzing the vast information and politics, and not contributing to violence as the world battles with itself. Can we be like fireflies in this dark place? Sometimes fireflies lose their way, yet somehow they manage to return to their original purpose and find other lights true to their peaceful cause. So must we.

The world is a scary and volatile environment. Fear and anger bring out the worst in us. Though God made us in His image, I wonder how far we — including God's people — have fallen from that image. We also get caught up in the intensity of choosing sides and causing division. Our minds veer from Christ. But the truth is, our citizenship is in heaven, and we must bear witness to the world of that citizenship.

Peace and love

As representatives of Christ, we are called to be that city on a hill, blameless. When Paul writes that "we give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed" (2 Corinthians 6:3), he's saying there is another way other than hate and anger. Peace and non-judgmental love toward others is possible, but sadly, our own carnal desires unknowingly feed the god of this world (4:1-4). He would rather keep us in bondage than allow us to

renounce our worldly desires. Our hope is in a new heaven and new earth, free of suffering and death. But as Christians, we too often get caught up in the world's politics, hoping that it holds the solution to all our suffering.

One thing that will help our focus is Philippians 2:3. Paul says to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but rather esteem others more than ourselves, in lowliness of mind. We must therefore pursue humility in our actions and speech, and search out the true meaning of empathy.

A sign of genuine Christian humanity is truly feeling the pain

of another member in the community. But if empathy and humility are not evidenced among believers, we ruin our witness to those outside the church.

Humility begins with self, so we must never forget to keep our eyes on Christ's example. In a society of constant disinformation, twisting of words, and tarnishing of Christ's image, we must look to how Christ lived in order to filter, analyze, and ultimately forgive those who hurt us. This will help our light shine.

“Our identity is in Christ and nothing else, and we must reflect that message to others.”

Safe place

The world enjoys shaming for past sins. Too often, those of malicious character abuse the Christian ideal of love and forgiveness — even those who call themselves brethren. Can we therefore call the church a safe place? Can we voice our struggles openly without fear of judgment from others in our Christian community? Not having this freedom affects our impact as fireflies.

In the world, the church should be that safe place — a hiding place (Psalm 32:7). And still, I have yet to find a truly safe church, free of judgment and anger. Instead, I have often found fear and paranoia of the

unknown. A sense of critical thinking and honest discussion seems next to impossible within many church circles. Sadly, I have often found more openness and greater love and empathy for fellow human beings in secular circles. How is this possible?

As the Western world becomes increasingly secular, the innate desire in all of us is for community. When the church

fruits you will know them (Matthew 7:16).

Changed lives

Actions speak louder than words. Good doctrine doesn't lead people to Christ (although it is helpful), but rather how we live toward others as shining lights. Changed individuals lead to a changed community. We are all capable of making bad choices.

“When we react to others’ criticisms of Christians in a peaceful and loving way, we stand as Christ’s ministers of light.”

fails to be that “hiding place” of safety, humility, and love, people will search for belonging and purpose elsewhere.

Obviously, some lines must not be crossed morally and doctrinally. This may require a person to leave traditions and communities, because Christ’s ways are not the ways of the world. And yet, when we react to others’ criticisms of Christians in a peaceful and loving way, we stand as Christ’s ministers of light, proclaiming another way.

There is no perfect Christian community, and there are many who make wrong choices, which sadly affects everyone who says they belong to Christ. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge the sins made by others in Christ’s name, but never be humiliated by them. As Christ said, by their

In such cases, it is more heroic to say, “I’m sorry” than to appear as though we have everything under control.

Can we live every day embracing the unknown, confident that we have Jesus, who knew no sin but was tempted in every way as we are? We are not defined by our past. However, we must learn from it so it can positively influence the present and future. We will become unequally yoked with the world if we live as if the solutions to our past problems can be found somewhere other than in the reconciling forgiveness of self and others, found in Christ (2 Corinthians 6:14).


The world under Satan’s darkness resists forgiveness and wants to smear our past sins endlessly. This is detrimental to ev-

eryone. Victimization leaves people in endless stagnation, with no hope in sight. The solution to our problems must be future focused, as Paul says, “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13, 14).

Therefore, our identity and citizenship are in Christ. Regardless of our past, our bad choices, or even the choices of others that tarnish our image, can we honestly say that we follow Christ’s example of humility, love, and peace?

The world will not change; it will remain in darkness even after COVID is gone. But Jesus never told us to change the world. He did say we must change ourselves, by God’s grace and the Holy Spirit’s help. Doing this will help us shine like fireflies in the dark! **BA**

Lynn Briscoe is a pen name. She writes from Canada.



How do we endure suffering? This issue's Online Extra offers three keys to surviving tough times, found in 1 Peter.

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Questions & Answers



What happens during the millennium?
I'm confused. Please help.

Your clearly stated question is one that might be asked by many earnest Bible students. Our shorthand reply aims to anchor the one thousand-year reign of Christ — the millennium — in several Bible texts that offer broad answers. Our first and last texts are book-ends that tie the other five or more together.

Revelation 20 says that Jesus' return (pictured in chapter 19) begins a one thousand-year period when Satan will be bound while the immortalized saints rule and reign with Christ. Few millennial details are given here, but the chapter ends with a last great resurrection and judgment scene. Some understand this as offering salvation to the resurrected dead who never heard or knew of God's grace in Jesus. If this understanding turns out to be accurate, it would be their first opportunity for salvation, not a second chance.

More than one Old Testament prophet foretells a time in the last days — the day of the Lord — when Yahweh will appear on earth as a Davidic King to rule and reign over the nations. From Mount Zion and Jerusalem, the word, the law, and the light (gospel) of the Lord God will be preached to all the earth, until peace prevails at last (Isaiah 2:1-5; 65:17-25; Zechariah 14, especially vv. 1-11).

In the New Testament Gospels, this future age of peace is confirmed (Luke 1:69-79). Our Lord Jesus apparently refers to the same era of judgment and rebirth in Matthew 19:28, using the word translated "regeneration" in many English versions. And in Acts 3:20-23, we read of the promised time of restitution-restoration of all things, to be completed when Christ returns from His ascension into the heavens.

First Corinthians 15 is our last text — and maybe the strongest — to support and explain a millennial-like era in the world's future. Verses 20-28 of this resurrection chapter affirm that Jesus was the firstfruits from among the dead, and that we who belong to Christ will be next to rise to immortality — "at His coming" again to earth (v. 23). What happens next?

Paul resumes with "Then . . ." (v. 25). The content that follows strongly implies that the word *then* cannot, in this case, refer to the next hour or day, but covers an unspecified period of time between verses 24 and 25. How so? Follow this reasoning closely, please.

Verses 25-27 go on to tell what happens during the *Then* right after Christ returns, and here it is: Christ reigns; He puts an end to all other authority and rule; He reigns until all enemies are put "under His feet" (v. 25). The last enemy He will destroy is death. *Then* when all things are under His authority and Christ rules supreme, Jesus the Son will deliver up the kingdom to the Father so that God will be recognized as all in all (v. 28).

How long will be needed to accomplish all of this — restoring the created order to a pure and flawless kingdom of God, and reconciling the human family to their intended immortal perfection, spoken of by the prophets, by Paul, and by the Lord? The most obvious biblical answer is a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6).

So what happens during the millennium? The answer is in all the verses above: Resurrection, redemption, restoration, restitution, regeneration, and renewal will happen, ending in a new heavens and a new earth, new bodies, and a new world wherein dwells righteousness. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, come!

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Defining Moment



A meditation to prepare
for the Lord's Supper.
by Dorothy Nimchuk

Pen in hand and a fresh scroll in front of him, Luke assayed to address his longtime acquaintance, Theophilus, concerning the strange happenings in the last while. Where to begin?

Though not an eyewitness, Luke had numerous contacts with those who were, along with an accurate knowledge of historical events that reinforced the veracity of his words. This beloved physician was equally at ease with people in all levels of society.

A Greek from Syrian Antioch, Luke felt it important to vindicate his fellow Christians and to convince their Roman rulers that they had no evil intent toward them. He determined to accurately report events as a permanent record for Theophilus and future readers, events that tied Jesus to history: His miracles, mission, and message. Luke wished to set the record straight, and, as details of past events paraded the strand of his mind, he bent to the task at hand.

Son and King

Luke faithfully recorded important events in Jesus' life: from the angel's news to Mary before His birth ("that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God") to Jesus' trial before the elders of the people: "Then they all said, 'Are You then the Son of God?' So He said to them, 'You rightly say that I am'" (Luke 1:35; 22:70).

Jesus was indeed the Son of God!

Luke documented Pilate's willingness to release Jesus as the Passover custom dictated. However, incited by Jewish leaders, the people demanded that Jesus be crucified. Three single poles were outlined against the skyline. At the third hour, the crosspieces, with the prisoners nailed or roped thereto, were raised and attached to the poles. A placard, inscribed with the words of Pilate and affixed to the center cross, declared: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (23:38).

The crowd went wild. Some cheered; others wept! Many mocked. Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (v. 34). Throughout the ensuing hours, a volley of taunts were thrown at Jesus.

The rulers: "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God" (v. 35).

The soldiers: "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself" (v. 36).

One of the criminals: "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us" (v. 39).

Jesus did not come to save Himself but to give Himself.

From the sixth to the ninth hour, darkness — so dense one could feel it — covered all the earth. An eerie silence pervaded the scene for three long hours. Then Jesus cried out to heaven, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (v. 46).

It is finished! And He breathed His last. The temple curtain dividing the Holy and Holy of Holies was torn asunder by invisible

hands, thus removing the barrier between man and God and announcing Jesus' loving act of redemption.

New covenant

This event is significant. The glory of the old covenant reflected so brightly on Moses' face that the Jews were afraid to go near him. Hence, he wore a veil except when communing with God. With the veil of the temple ripped in two, the law as written on stone was figuratively shattered (2 Corinthians 3).

The old covenant, now new, had been revitalized from a ministry of death to a ministry of righteousness written on our hearts and minds. Motivated by the light of the gospel and the presence of the Spirit, we come to Christ in faith and receive salvation by grace. We are now endowed with the righteousness of Christ, even as Abraham "believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). Thus, reconciliation was effected between man and God through the atoning blood of Christ.

On Preparation Day for the Passover Sabbath, Jesus made the supreme sacrifice for us all. That precious Lamb of God, figuratively slain from the foundation of the world, had now been literally slain for the sins of the world — the defining moment in history that affects us all.

However, the Jews as a whole still labor under the shadow of the old covenant of condemnation, unaware that "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"

(2 Corinthians 5:21). The veil is yet to be lifted from their eyes (3:15; cf. Romans 10:1-4).

Remember and reflect

Luke concluded his Gospel by reporting the Resurrection and Ascension. The Comforter would come and write the laws of God on their hearts and plant them in their minds. For now, they had to await the Spirit's coming, then go out to share the gospel message. They had to carry the good news to their own people, then on to the ends of the earth. And the disciples headed back to Jerusalem, content in the knowledge that they would see Jesus again.

Remember and reflect on Jesus and this defining moment for history. **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk and her husband, Nick (retired pastor), are isolated CoG7 members in Medicine Hat, Alberta.



Lord's Supper
is Friday,
March 26



Godliness in Action

A letter to Timothy on the importance of Christlike character.

by **Marcellus George**

As our church leaders sat discussing whether we should appoint more elders, we were left with the question “What is the principal criterion for a man to be an elder?” Several qualified men hesitated because they did not think they met the criteria, but Paul was not afraid to appoint elders in every church he planted (Acts 14:23). Having sent Timothy to pastor the church in Ephesus, he instructed Timothy on the primary quality of an elder: godliness, which means conforming to the laws and instruction of God and imitating His character.

Paul uses *godliness* (synonyms include *holiness* and *Christlikeness*) ten times in 1 Timothy to describe the Christian life (2:2, 10; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 5:4; 6:3, 5, 6, 11). He describes godliness as necessary for true believers, and especially for those who lead them. In this letter he mentions three groups of people who need to seek godliness: growing Christians, church leaders, and those called by God to vocational service.

Growing Christians

Growing in godliness, or sanctification, should be natural for the maturing Christian. We typically mention three kinds of sanctification: *positional* (declared justified at conversion), *ultimate* (standing blameless before God at Christ’s return), and *progressive*. The latter type of sanctification should be ongoing in the lives of Jesus Christ’s fol-

lowers, as God’s children grow in Christlikeness and work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). So how do we become godly?

If we are planning a trip, we need to know where we are going and how to get there. In the same way, Paul clarifies that attaining godliness is not achieving perfection in our day-to-day lives, but demonstrating love that results from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5). God and His Word become the GPS guiding us. Other interests become distractions and detours.

The principal signposts that lead to our growth in godliness should be the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (6:3). His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension are the constant reminders of God being with man (3:16). Non-Christians during Paul’s time worshipped gods that were already like human beings in their

thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Jesus contrasted these pagan gods by His righteous teachings and acts. Roman gods had relative power (over each other), but Jesus claimed absolute power and demanded complete submission with a whole new set of values.

When Jesus returned to heaven, His disciples were instructed to live by these values. Paul had this in mind when he talked about godliness in the growing Christian's life (2:2).

Church leaders

Paul turns next to the requirement for godliness in church leaders. In 1 Timothy 3, he describes two types of people who provide special service to the church: elders and deacons. Lists of qualifications for them feature character qualities essential to godliness, including being above reproach, sober-minded, self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach, gentle, and not quarrelsome. It is similar to a recipe for cooking one's favorite dish. By following these instructions, we get the sought-after flavor of our special food item.

The lists in 1 Timothy 3 are not designed as performance measures to eliminate potential leaders from service in the church. Since the believer's goal is progressive sanctification, these qualities serve as goals for those in leadership. But neither are they optional. Both elders (vv. 1-7) and deacons (vv. 8-12) are held to stricter standards than others in the church, because they have responsibilities for teaching and modeling the obedient Christian life (5:17).

Paul especially warns Timothy

about not selecting elders who are addicted to material wealth (6:3-10). Our culture is characterized by consumerism, status symbols, and a desire to get rich quick. The body of Christ is not immune to this; many succumb to this temptation. God's antidotes to lust for money are contentment, security in God's provision for the believer, and generosity (vv. 6, 17-19).

Paul teaches that godliness is the objective of a holy life. Christian leadership needs to always be on the lookout for worldly

He instructs Timothy to counter temptation with a passion for godliness.

Once again, Paul notes what godliness looks like: righteousness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness. Timothy serves as an example in ministry in his speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (4:12), and he needs to take pains to maintain a clear conscience and live above reproach. Paul mentions his concern that Timothy is conspicuous in his actions, whether good or bad, and will serve as either a

“Growing in godliness, or sanctification, should be natural for the maturing Christian.”

values that seek to ruin it, even as Satan attempts to destroy the Christian church.

Those called to vocational service

Paul's last appeal for godliness is for Timothy himself to be godly (vv. 11-16). We live in a day when pastors and others in full-time Christian service are being increasingly disgraced for moral lapses. Usually the decision leading to the fall of such a worker is a slow slide into sin. Paul is personally concerned for his disciple Timothy and wants him to know his own vulnerability as leader of the church of Ephesus.

good or bad example (5:24, 25).

Paul accepts no compromises; Timothy is to run from the love of money. Instead, he urges Timothy to cling to his confession of Jesus Christ's deity, which he made publicly when he entered vocational Christian service. Paul mentions that Jesus made the same confession of His deity before Pilate. By doing these two things, Paul reminds Timothy of Jesus Christ's godliness as his model, and encourages him to remain faithful until the return of Jesus.

It follows that, in this day of scandals, the body of Christ

continued on page 24

■ [Focus on the Faithful]



by Jason Overman

We continue our Focus on the Faithful series with one of the New Testament's most beloved figures, Simon Peter. We know this lowly fisherman-turned-mighty apostle well. After Jesus, his name is mentioned more times than any other, including Paul's. Few Bible characters are more exposed before us than Peter is. We see all his flaws and failures, along with his strengths and successes. For this reason, he is not just the preeminent disciple, always listed and standing first among the Twelve; he is the archetypal disciple. He is a pattern of discipleship to follow.

From a fishing boat to the upper room, from casting nets in Galilee to preaching to the Gentiles, Peter's walk of faith, like Abraham's, was a road of transformation. It's seen from the moment he first met Jesus, an introduction like no other. His brother, Andrew, was the one who took Peter to meet Jesus. But when Jesus saw the rugged fisherman, the first thing He did

was rename him: "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas' (which is translated, A Stone)" (John 1:42).

The Jews would call Peter Cephas, the Greeks, Petros. In whatever language, Peter was *the rock*, signifying the new identity and purpose Jesus had for this special disciple. We cannot possibly cover every episode in Peter's life with Jesus, but let's highlight a few and the chief characteristics that defined *the rock*. As we follow the Master with His most passionate and outspoken student, we see what a faithful follower of Jesus looks like.

Jumping in

Peter's most memorable attribute may have been his fervent zealotry for Jesus. It was not always rightly directed (he cut off an ear defending Jesus!), but no one doubted his passion. He was *all in*. In calling disciples, Jesus made the cost of discipleship clear: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). And Peter did. When he heard the call that day as Jesus passed his boat on the banks of Galilee, he "forsook all and followed Him" (Luke 5:11). This disciple was destined

to catch and make more disciples.

Peter was always jumping in to be near Jesus. This is vividly illustrated in some of our favorite Gospel stories. Caught in a storm on the lake, it was Peter who was out of the boat and walking on the water to Jesus at His command (Matthew 14:22-33). After the Crucifixion, a dejected Peter went back to fishing. But when the resurrected Lord showed Himself to His disciples, it was Peter who jumped out of the boat and into the sea to get to his Master (John 21:1-14).

Peter's bold and decisive actions explain better than words that a faithful follower is eager to leave the familiar to be where Jesus is and where He is going.

Speaking up

Peter is as famous for his candid statements as for his daring deeds. This outspoken disposition was sometimes misguided, too (he argued with Christ about dying *and* about washing his feet!), but no one doubted his sincerity. A calling comes with confession, and Peter was not afraid to speak up, about himself or His Lord. Faced with Jesus' authority when he was first called in the boat, Peter immediately

Peter

fell at His feet: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8). That honest, humble cry is seen during the storm on Galilee too. At the sight of the winds and waves, Peter began to sink in fear, but cried out, “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30). This tough fisherman was brave enough to confess his need.

Peter’s desire to jump in testifies to a courageous passion for Jesus, but in speaking up, his unreserved vulnerability before Jesus was plain to all. Peter could declare the truth about who he was and cry out for help because he knew who Jesus is. Later, when the Lord asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” it was Peter, again, who spoke up. His confession is *the rock* upon which the church is built: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:15, 16).

Peter’s clear and direct words explain that faithful followers know themselves and their Lord, and are eager to openly confess both before God and the world.

Following on

We love Peter because we identify with him. He is *the rock*, a faithful follower, not because he was faultless but because, despite his fears and failures, he

was ready to jump in and speak up for the Lord. Peter was a faithful follower because he did not give up, though his focus sometimes strayed from his Lord and onto himself. Peter, *the rock*, is the prototypical faithful follower because over the long haul, he trusted and obeyed his Lord above all, thus fulfilling the mission contained in his name.

At the end of his life, after following, denying, and preaching Jesus to the ends of the earth, Peter wrote that we are all “living

stones,” building up the church of God in Christ (1 Peter 2:5). He was just the first. May we all be transformed rocks, like Simon Peter — faithful followers jumping in and speaking up for the Master, Jesus Christ. **BA**

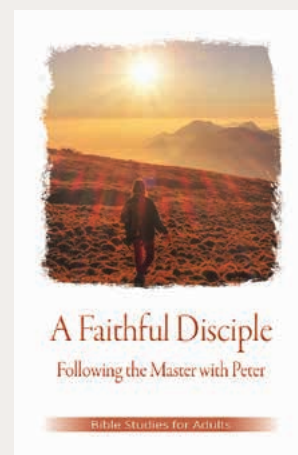
This article was adapted from the adult Bible study A Faithful Disciple: Following the Master with Peter, now available in English and Spanish by the Bible Advocate Press.

Faithful: Simon Peter

In the second quarter of Bible Studies for Adults, we look at Simon Peter and how faithfulness relates to following. We see what a faithful disciple looks like as we observe the Master with the man He described as *the rock*.

Peter’s journey is the way of transformation, the way of the Master. In Peter is someone we all relate to. And despite his failures, he points us to Jesus — *the Way, the Truth, and the Life!*

To order copies of *A Faithful Disciple*, visit the online store at cog7.org.



Hope for Weary

by Whaid Rose

We love the Psalms because they reflect the full gamut of our emotions. They enhance our worship and settle our hearts in God's presence.

That happened for me in a fresh way while reading this familiar verse in Psalm 42:

These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng (v. 4).

Said in a different way, the psalmist laments the fact that he can't go to church the way he used to. Sound familiar?

But more than mere fodder for COVID conversation, the psalmist's lament is a reminder that the Bible speaks to all our circumstances and gives us permission to grieve our losses — even the loss of regular church attendance. For those who do, and for those who lead them, this psalm offers hope.

Song of lament

The hope of this psalm is often obscured by our treatment of the first two verses:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

These verses are often read (and sung) as an expression of unwavering intent to follow hard after God, but the psalm's context suggests otherwise. So let's take a look, beginning with the superscription.

For the director of music indicates that it was written for special use. *Maskil* is a musical term indicating a complicated piece. *Sons of Korah* tells us the author is from an elite group of tabernacle worship leaders.

But he's obviously not leading anything right now. In fact, he is in exile, as G. Campbell Morgan writes in *Notes on the Psalms*: "This is the song of an exile, and moreover, of an exile among enemies who have no sympathy for his religious convictions."

This explains the demand "Where is your God?" (v. 3), why the author's soul is cast down (v. 5), and why "deep calls to deep," likely a figurative reference to the torrents of emotions that overwhelm him (v. 7).

Thus, Psalm 42 is rightly placed in the lament category,

those psalms given to expressing deep sorrow, loss, and grief. The lament theme looms large in Scripture, reflecting its relevance to the human experience and giving us permission to grieve in healthy ways.

From this perspective, the opening verses of Psalm 42 are more a cry of desperation than a bold declaration of anything. Perhaps the deer has no idea where the brook is, and the question "When can I go and meet with God?" is a way of asking, "Will I ever get back to church? Will my world ever return to normal?"

Song of hope

Yet the beauty of this psalm is seen in what its author does in the midst of his misery. He not only talks to God but also talks to himself, twice asking, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?" (vv. 5, 11).

The psalmist doesn't minimize or explain away his grief. Rather, he reminds himself of the things God showed him in the light. Still in exile and surrounded by his enemies, he turns to the one thing he has left: hope in God.

When hope is all we have, we discover that hope is all we need. It is our best strategy for surviv-

Leaders



ing the present crisis. For as COVID-19 so painfully reminds us, there are things even the most powerful governments have no control over. The best they can do is hope for a better tomorrow.

Thus, this comingling of hope and lament in the same soul speaks directly to our COVID circumstances. It encourages us — leaders in particular — to embrace uncertainty rather than pretend to have answers. It frees us from the need to hunt down Bible references to COVID-19, and makes it OK to end the worship service with a question mark instead of an exclamation point.

N. T. Wright captures this at the conclusion of his article (written just after the coronavirus outbreak) on the way Christians should respond:

It is no part of the Christian vocation, then, to be able to explain what's happening and why. In fact, it is part of the Christian vocation not to be able to explain—and to lament instead. As the Spirit laments within us, so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell. And out of that there can emerge new possibilities, new acts

of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope.

Community of compassion

So, are you feeling emotionally spent and afraid? Take heart; you're not alone. A Barna report detailing the impact of COVID-19 on leaders found that many are "tired, overwhelmed, and lonely."

But the Christian community is rallying to this need with compassion and helpful resources. Many are finding hope and encouragement through meaningful conversations about the leader's mental and emotional health.

So in a world besieged by a virus invisible to the naked eye, where worry over catching it has reordered our lives and made isolation and loneliness the new normal, and where fear of an unknown future lurks within the heart, through this mysterious blending of hope and lament we become both prisoners of hope and dealers in hope. As prisoners, we're hemmed in; as dealers, we dispense it joyfully!

So when experiencing COVID-19 fatigue, don't sit around and sing the blues. If nothing else, reread Psalm 42 through this new lens. Acknowledge the grim reality of your present circumstance, while

remaining confident in hope of your coming deliverance. Regularly meditate on this line: "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." **BA**

Adapted from "When Hope is All We Have," by Whaid Rose (May-June 2020 BA Online Extra).

Whaid Rose, former president of the General Conference, is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



In partnership with the Center for Vibrant Leadership, Artios Christian College is pleased to offer a new workshop titled Getting a Handle on Mental Health. This is a stand-alone experience in which you view the videos at your leisure. Click here to register: <https://my.artioscollege.org/en/workshops>.



Damon and Pythias

A young man whose name was Pythias had done something which the tyrant Dionysius did not like. For this offense he was dragged to prison, and a day was set when he should be put to death. His home was far away, and he wanted very much to see his father and mother and friends before he died.

"Only give me leave to go home and say goodbye to those whom I love," he said, "and then I will come back and give up my life."

The tyrant laughed at him.

"How can I know that you will keep your promise?" he said. "You only want to cheat me, and save yourself."

Then a young man whose name was Damon spoke and said, "O king! put me in prison in place of my friend Pythias, and let him go to his own country to put his affairs in order, and to bid his friends farewell. I know that he will come back as he promised, for he is a man who has never broken his word. But if he is not here on the day which you have set, then I will die in his stead."

The tyrant was surprised that anybody should make such an offer. He at last agreed to let Pythias go, and gave orders that the young man Damon should be shut up in prison.

Time passed, and by and by the day drew

near which had been set for Pythias to die; and he had not come back. The tyrant ordered the jailer to keep close watch upon Damon, and not let him escape. But Damon did not try to escape. He still had faith in the truth and honor of his friend. He said, "If Pythias does not come back in time, it will not be his fault. It will be because he is hindered against his will."

At last the day came, and then the very hour. Damon was ready to die. His trust in his friend was as firm as ever; and he said that he did not grieve at having to suffer for one whom he loved so much.

Then the jailer came to lead him to his death; but at the same moment Pythias stood in the door. He had been delayed by storms and shipwreck, and he had feared that he was too late. He greeted Damon kindly, and then gave himself into the hands of the jailer. He was happy because he thought that he had come in time, even though it was at the last moment.

The tyrant was not so bad but that he could see good in others. He felt that men who loved and trusted each other, as did Damon and Pythias, ought not to suffer unjustly. And so he set them both free.

"I would give all my wealth to have one such friend," he said.

From Fifty Famous Stories Retold by James Baldwin <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18442>



Jonathan and David (copyright MMBX PRODUCTION 2014)

Cooking Fun: Friendship Donuts

Make these donuts as a reminder that friends stick together and are faithful. You will need refrigerated canned biscuits, oil, sugar, and cinnamon.

Directions

Poke a hole in the middle of a biscuit, then make the hole bigger by squeezing the dough all around the hole, forming a ring. Do the same thing with another biscuit. Finally, break one ring and insert one end of the broken ring into the whole ring. Reconnect the ends of the broken ring. Now you should have two rings that are joined together. Fry the dough in hot oil and remove when lightly browned. Place the hot donuts onto paper towels, which will absorb the excess oil. Then, quickly dip the donuts in sugar or a mixture of cinnamon and sugar.

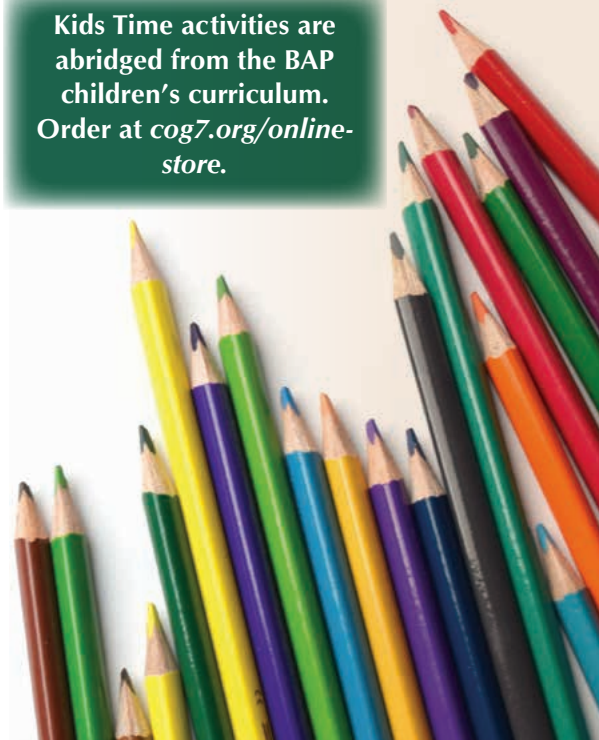
Cross-Out Letter Puzzle

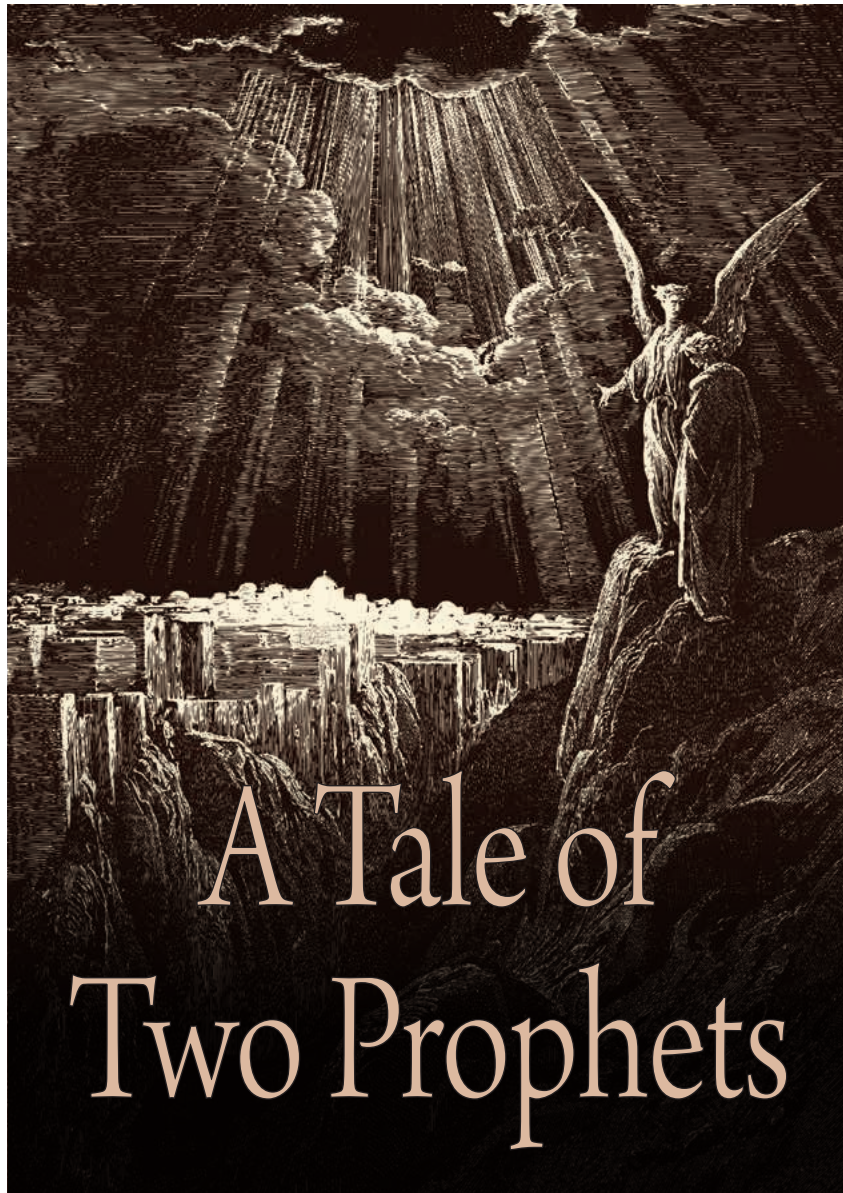
Cross out every third letter in the grid below. Then write the remaining letters on the lines, adding spaces as needed to form a Bible verse that describes a faithful friend.

T	H	X	E	R	X	E	I	X	S
A	X	F	R	P	I	E	W	N	D
Q	W	H	N	O	S	L	T	I	M
C	K	U	S	C	D	L	O	G	S
E	Z	R	T	P	H	A	V	N	A
L	B	R	H	O	T	Y	H	E	O
R	P	B	R	O	Z	V	E	M	R
B	I	S	1	X	8	:	T	2	4

Solution can be found on page 26.

Kids Time activities are abridged from the BAP children's curriculum. Order at cog7.org/online-store.





A Tale of Two Prophets

What the Bible teaches us about the mercy and judgment of God.

by R. Herbert

Two prophets – Jonah and Nahum. Both messengers of God prophesied against the great Assyrian capital of Nineveh, the largest city in the world at that time. It was also

the very heart of the empire that took ancient Israel captive and threatened the kingdom of Judah. However, the two prophetic books have vastly different tones and outcomes.

Although God allowed Assyria to punish sinful Israel, Jonah and Nahum show that God also intended to punish the Assyrians for their own evil. Yet just as He had repeatedly warned ancient Israel through His prophets, so God spoke to the Assyrians by means of these two messengers.

In this way, Israel's captors would themselves have the opportunity to repent, and God's judgment would be clear.

Jonah: option of mercy

Jonah prophesied around 750 BC, a few years before Assyria's final captivity of Israel but well before the downfall of Nineveh in 612 BC. The story of Jonah is one we all know. Only after his attempt to flee from God's commission, and being swallowed by a great fish, did Jonah finally obey God's command to preach to Nineveh. The people of the city actually repented and were, at least for a time, spared punishment.

Jonah found that being a servant of God is not like *Mission Impossible*. There was no "Your prophecy, if you accept it . . .," though his mission may have seemed impossible. In the fish, however, Jonah may have reflected on the fact that the ancient name Nineveh was written with the sign for a fish inside a city and literally meant "fish city." Once this prophet realized his options were either Jonah inside fish city or Jonah inside the fish, he accepted God's assignment for him.

But it is clear that Jonah also did not want to preach to the Assyrians because he did not want the Ninevites to repent and avoid punishment. As he himself said, "That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:2). Jonah found it hard to want repentance for the enemy.

By the end of the story, God

made it clear to him: “Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?” (v. 11).

The question in Jonah’s mind exists in the minds of many today: Should we try to save our enemies, especially if we know they are planning to destroy us?

Nahum: reality of judgment

The prophecy of Nahum was recorded at least a century after Jonah’s – sometime between 663 BC, when the Egyptian city of Thebes was captured by the Assyrians (see 3:8-10), and the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. Nahum’s prophecy provides a sequel to Jonah’s, but God’s punishment was now inevitable after Nineveh’s return to sinfulness. “The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished,” Nahum wrote (1:3). “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh” (vv. 7, 8).

It seems clear that Nahum (whose name means “compassion”) understood God’s compassion and willingness to extend mercy, just as Jonah did. But Nahum spelled out the punishment that was now certain. Assyria, whose symbol was the lion, was feared throughout the ancient Near East, and its messengers carried threats and terror to cities far and wide. Now, Nahum said, “the sword will devour your young lions. . . . The voices of your messengers will no longer be heard” (2:13). The prophet

also made it perfectly clear how Assyria’s downfall would be received: “All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?” (3:19).

Two lessons

These two books provide a dual lesson in mercy and judgment. Jonah shows that no matter how severe the warning God gives, individually or nationally, He does allow for repentance. Nahum shows the other side of that coin – that God’s mercy is not endless and that if we do not turn from evil, individually or

shackles away. . . . No more will the wicked invade you” (1:12, 13, 15).

This is the answer to the problem implied in Jonah. While God offered Assyria the opportunity of repentance, He also had a plan for protecting His people if they would obey Him. It is as though Nahum understood what Jonah did not, that God’s will takes everything into account. It is as though Jonah could not see beyond the problem, but Nahum saw the answer.

Perhaps Nahum would have better understood the New Testament command to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44).



nationally, He will eventually enforce His judgment.

But Nahum’s message also includes an important additional truth that Jonah’s did not. While Jonah knew that God was willing to extend mercy to the Assyrians if they repented, his prophecy carried no mention of hope for Israel beyond that time. In Nahum, God stated: “Although I have afflicted you, Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their [the Assyrians’] yoke from your neck and tear your

He might well have realized that praying for them does not mean that their benefit will somehow harm us. May we remember these truths as we seek to live by the Word of God toward others.

BA

R. Herbert (a pen name), Ph.D., was trained in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. He writes for a number of Christian venues. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



Godliness in Action

continued from page 15

should not accept excuses from those in vocational service, including pastors and missionaries, for ungodly behavior. These people serve as the cutting edge for the spread of the gospel. When the world attacks believers in Jesus, their defense should be their godliness (1 Peter 2:19-25).

Studying the Word of God at Home

Acts 5:42 tells us that after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the apostles never stopped teaching and preaching Christ in the temple and in every house. Because of changes in our world today, many believers are meeting in both homes and churches. Groups of saints gather on Sabbath for celebration and edification in area churches, building each other up. Our homes also are places to proclaim the love and salvation that the Lord has already given us.

We encourage you to make your home a sanctuary for worship and preaching the Word of God in 2021. Refer to *A Faithful Family* and *A Faithful Disciple* for specific suggestions on leading your family in worship and study.

Go in godliness

Paul writes Timothy out of a deep concern for his personal godliness, as well as for those he ministers to. He warns Timothy to "guard the deposit entrusted to you" (1 Timothy 6:20). That deposit was the knowledge that Timothy was called to a lifetime of godliness. Just as a slow leak in a tire may not cause it to go flat immediately, over time, if not detected and repaired, a leak can weaken or destroy the tire. Paul wants Timothy to know that every lifestyle choice he makes is significant.

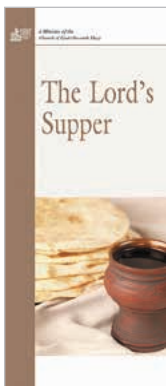
Our church leaders realized that godliness is an important quality not only in elders but also in all of us as growing believers. So let's pursue holiness, "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). May we reflect on our own lives and ask God to show us where we need to make any adjustments. **BA**

Updated Tracts

Christian Baptism. The Christian ordinance of baptism is based on Jesus' explicit instructions to His disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them" (Matthew 28:19). He intended it to be practiced until "the very end of the age" (v. 20).

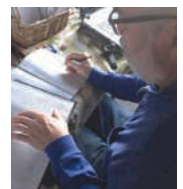


The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper service is a solemn Christian memorial of Jesus' crucifixion. Introduced by our Savior himself on the night He was betrayed, it commemorates His death on Calvary's cross as a sacrifice for our sins so that we might live!



Visit publications.cog7.org/ to read these tracts, and order copies from the online store at cog7.org.

Marcellus George writes from Fort Wayne, IN. Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.



Heavenly

'Tis lovely when they sing from bough to
bough,
the time is here . . . the time is now
when Spring
arrives upon wind's tail. The world is
welcomed in
and without fail
bares witness; miracles abound.
Each blossom seen, each petal found,
re-heralding God's Word —
a breezing up and out of sighs
to solitudes of skies.

Lucia Haase



Readers Write



Peace and goodwill?

Editor's note: The following letters were received in response to Jonathon Hicks' article in the November-December 2020 BA (p. 12). They have been abridged for the sake of space.

I read [Pastor Jonathon Hicks'] article in the *Bible Advocate* and was troubled by the tone of ecumenical compromise for a false peace, a false unity. While it is important for God's people to "be at peace with all men as far as possible," there are certain beliefs that we must not allow ourselves to support or take part in. . . . How can I be reconciled with anyone who has not been reconciled to God regarding sinful practices? . . .

What fellowship is there between truth and error or between light and darkness? To be sure, we have to use the right spirit when we confront someone who claims Christ as their Savior. Some who claim the mantle of Christ will recognize cultural or traditional errors and discard them. Others will hold on to the traditions of men and make void the commandments of God. . . . Sentimental attach-

ments can blind the heart and lead believers off course in their walk of faith in God's truth. . . .

If what you really want is earthly consensus in order to "get along" or experience fleshly unity, then you have chosen the world over God. That may be popular for a while, but that kind of "unity" is perishable, culturally bound to "evolve" and shift and change. *Unity* with the unchanging "ROCK" of our salvation and solid truth of God's ten moral commandments will be tested in the *fire* of adversity and be found pure, even when the adversity comes wrapped up in enticingly pretty ribbons and bows.

S. J.
Email

Response from Jonathon Hicks: It is true that our unity is founded upon the "unchanging Rock of our salvation," Jesus Christ. It is also true that "there are certain beliefs that we must not allow ourselves to support or take part in" — beliefs that we are willing to break the bonds of unity over. These two truths can be taken as contradicting one another unless you recognize that those "certain beliefs" that are disuniting must always be contradicting the central elements of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must be careful in ever saying that a certain belief or practice is central and salvific, because if it is not, then we are transgressing the fundamental truth that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone. If we hail a certain doctrine or practice as anathema that is actually a difference of conscience, then we are fighting Jesus' prayer that His disciples all be one (John 17:11).

Although Christmas is a dubious practice, I find it far from being antithetical to our Lord's good news, at least as is modernly practiced among our Christian sisters and brothers, which is the context I am writing into.

A good methodology for dealing with Christmas [is] how Paul dealt with meats that had been sacrificed to false gods in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Paul encouraged the Corinthians, many of them converts from pagan worship, to be willing to eat meat that had the hints of idolatry, but to not eat at the temple itself (10:27; 8:10). He warned [them] not to be too sure of themselves but to view pagan practices as enticing and destructive (vv. 14-21). But Paul also agreed that [in other contexts] you can eat meat offered to idols, "for the earth and its fullness are the Lord's" (v. 26, NRSV) and "We are no worse off if we do not eat" (8:8, NRSV).

[In] Paul's conclusion (10:27-29) [we] can make a similar distinction with Christmas. If an unbeliever invites you to a Christmas celebration and you are disposed to go, participate in whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This is an ancient pagan practice," then do not participate in it, out of consideration for the one who informed you and for the sake of conscience.

Puzzle Solution

"There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24, NIV).



Faithful

GC Convention 2021

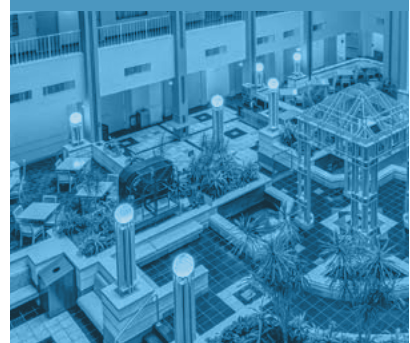
News has likely found its way to you regarding Convention '21, but confirmation is given here. Unfortunately, due to COVID-related restrictions, the decision has been made to reschedule our Biennial Convention.

While we had hoped restrictions surrounding COVID would be reduced by July, there was no guarantee that the needed meeting space would be available to allow a robust convention program. Therefore, in January, the decision was made to reschedule convention.

Through it all, God remains **faithful**. Let us also hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess. Plans and an alternate date will be announced as soon as they are available. We certainly hope to be with you all soon! Keep an eye out for updates at <http://cog7.org/convention>, in Church publications, and on the General Conference Facebook page.

— Convention Planning Committee

ANNOUNCEMENT!
GC Convention
2021 is being
RESCHEDULED





On Mission ... in Chile

by Enrique Vega Rojas

Chile is a Spanish-speaking country in South America. It is 4,329 km (2,690 miles) from north to south, which crowns it the longest country in the world. In addition, the narrowest part of the country measures only 90 km (56 miles) in width, making it the narrowest country in the world. In terms of religion, the majority of the population claims to be materialistic and agnostic.

Testimony and history

With digital development in its early years, in a world different from today, we who keep the Sabbath and practice the principle of Sola Scriptura felt alone and isolated for twelve years. Consequently, a strong spiritual depression fell over us and completely overwhelmed us. Feeling powerless, one Sabbath we kneeled and prayed to the Lord with tears in our eyes and a lump in our throat. Five of us brethren agreed to pray, all of us asking our God the same

question: “Where are those who believe as we do?” We give glory to God because in less than 48 hours from that moment, we were in contact with the International Ministerial Congress (IMC) family. We are members of the IMC today.

A web connection was established with the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Italy. Without a doubt, this was a starting point of communion and brotherhood that led us to study and correct erroneous points in doctrine, such as the Trinity and the celebration of Christmas. Because of

this meeting, the need to request membership to IMC was established eight years ago.

The Sabbath following our fervent prayer, we cried again, but this time with joy. We had found a family united by the blood of Christ.

Evangelism in Chile and Bolivia

By the grace of God, we currently have small but active congregations throughout Chile. Furthermore, God has allowed us to begin work in our neighboring country, Bolivia.

Once we became members of the International Ministerial Congress, we planned alongside the representative for Zone 3, Jorge Gillig, to take the gospel to Bolivia. We were focused on the administrative capital of that country, the city called La Paz.

During this time, one of our sisters (now deceased) found herself selling products on the beach during the summer and distributing tracts about the good news of salvation. She met a woman of Bolivian nationality who was worried and in great distress. Our sister did not hesitate to extend to her a cordial invitation to the prayer service.

This woman's worry was profound. Her little grandson, Miguel, who was only five years old, was undergoing a harsh cancer treatment. The disease had already cost him his right eye, on top of receiving a terrible diagnosis: The tumor was still growing and urgently needed to be removed. However, this meant that the little boy would probably lose his left eye. If they didn't remove the tumor, an important part of his brain would be damaged. At

Chile

Population: 17,967,000

Capital: Santiago

Land area: 291,930 sq mi /
756,096 sq km

Official language: Spanish

Religion: Catholic (66 percent),
Protestant (16 percent), non-
religious (12 percent)

CoG7 congregations: 4

Membership: 51

President: Pastor Enrique Vega
Rojas



best, this woman's little grandson would be brain dead and in a vegetative state.

Soon, the congregation sent me to Bolivia to find this little boy and anoint him. In the name of our Lord, by land we traveled the 1,159 km (720 miles) that separate us from Santa Cruz, the city in Bolivia where little Miguel lives. Finally, we managed to find the boy. After a grand greeting, we proceeded with the anointing, according to biblical instruction. By faith, we never gave up, and we continued praying in the church so that the power of Christ would manifest itself

in Miguelito and in his terrible cancer.

Treatment went ahead with the removal process, and the little boy was referred to Argentina to undergo surgery. The Church in Argentina took the best care of Miguel and his mother. When it was time for the surgery, the attending doctor told his mother and some church brethren to be patient as they waited for news in the waiting room.

At one point, Miguel's mother heard her name being called to a specific place where the medical staff was. To her amazement, they asked her, "Why did you





bring this child?" Trembling and choked up, she responded, "Because of the cancerous tumor that keeps growing."

Nobody was expecting this response from the doctors: "There is no active cancerous tumor. Everything is fine. Take your little boy home."

The power of Jesus had been manifest! All glory to God, the Church of God (Seventh Day) was established in Bolivia. Much to our surprise, it happened in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the land of our little brother, Miguel — not in La Paz, as we had predicted.

Proposals and improvements

In Chile, we feel pain for every human being who has passed away from, or has been impoverished by, this pandemic, but they are living under this biblical conviction: "They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust the LORD to care for them" (Psalm 112:7). We feel that we have to enjoy this new way of doing things, and we have decided to start a digital evangelistic rebirth that will reach the entire country. Also, we are making practical adjustments in order to establish family groups throughout Chile.

Our most important goal is to spread the good news that Christ



died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. From there, we want to connect the converts to assemble in groups united in doctrine and mission.

Being a small mission, our resources are extremely limited. The support of Cristo Viene has been vital in establishing ourselves throughout the territory and in supporting the recently formed Bolivian congregation.

Working for the gospel in a country full of materialists and agnostics is complicated, exhausting, and challenging. But we are happy to know that the Lord has been with us. For this, we love to proclaim, "The LORD lives! Praise to my Rock! May the God of my salvation be exalted!" (18:46).

The Lord lives!

Pastor Enrique Vega Rojas lives in Iquique, Chile, with his wife of 26 years, Alejandra de las Muñecas Ardiles. They have three children.



Scripture quotations are from the *New Living Translation*.





Love as Jesus Loves

In many Christian circles, being a faithful follower of Jesus has come to mean obeying the Ten Commandments and certain other rules and regulations, and doing so in certain ways: “Do you want to be a faithful follower of Jesus? Here’s our rule book. Do these things and don’t do these other things. This will prove your faithfulness.” Sadly, Christ’s command that we love one another as He loves us is rarely given priority, if it makes the rule book at all. (Have you ever seen Christ’s “new commandment” posted on a sanctuary wall?)

On the contrary, too many Christians treat each other most unlovingly as they go to war over various personal interpretations of God’s will and way. The apostle Paul, however, reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13 that without Christlike love, we are nothing. Without Christlike love, our strict adherence to our various understandings of God’s other commandments is worse than worthless. We begin looking much more like first century Jewish Pharisees than twenty-first century Christian disciples.

Does making Christlike love our priority lead us to disobey God, to violate Christ’s will for His faithful followers? Absolutely not! On the contrary, a “heart and soul and mind” love for God and our neighbors is the greatest motivator there is to do what pleases God. Christlike love is much more powerful than fear of future judgment.

Someone has written that each of our sins is an indicator that we failed to love. If we love God wholeheartedly, we will always do our best to please Him. We sin whenever we put our own desire before God and His desire. If we love our

fellow believer as Christ loves, we will always treat the person as well as we possibly can, with the help of the Holy Spirit. We sin whenever we put our own desire before whatever may be God’s best for our neighbor. The key to being a faithful follower of Jesus, therefore, may be expressed like this: Whatever transpires, do what love requires.

An old story about the apostle John’s last days says that the leaders of his congregation called upon him during worship each Sabbath to share whatever was on his heart. Week after week, Sabbath after Sabbath, the elderly apostle would struggle to his feet, steady himself on his walking stick, and tell the congregation, “Love one another.” Then, John would sit down.

After months of this, the leaders of John’s congregation could take it no longer. “John!” they exclaimed. “You were hand-picked by Jesus himself to be one of His first disciples. You lived with Him day and night for years! You were part of the Master’s inner circle. You saw Him die on the cross, and you spent important time with Him after His resurrection. You saw Jesus ascend into heaven! Isn’t there something that you can share with us more than ‘Love one another?’”

The disciple Jesus loved smiled. Looking fondly upon the members of his congregation, he replied, “No. There is nothing more important to share with any body of believers. Love one another. Love as Jesus loves. By this all men will know that you are His disciples.”

— Loren Stacy



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