

GRACE (in) FOCUS

THE ROCKY SOIL



HAPPY HANUKKAH? | IS FAITH A QUANTITY OR A STATE? | GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON
CHRISTMAS FACT OR FICTION | BELIEVING IN SANTA | MILLENNIALS LEAVING THE CHURCH
OUT-SINNING GOD? | PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN

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Letter from the Editor

We don't space out our holidays very well. Most businesses have eleven or twelve paid holidays. That should mean one per month. But five of those are between the fourth Thursday in November and January 1st. Nearly half of the holidays occur in one five-week period.

Our office building has about a hundred cars in the parking lot on normal business days. But from December 23 to January 1, there are less than five cars in the lot. Lots of time is taken off.

Thanksgiving and Christmas both have special significance for believers. We are thankful for the many ways God has blessed us, starting with giving us the gift of everlasting life that cannot be lost. If we can get past all the distractions, December 25th is a reminder that God became a Man (the incarnation), lived a perfect life, and died on the cross for our sins. Christmas is a reminder of the beautiful truth of John 3:16.

I hope you are not a C & E Christian. That's a person who only goes to church twice a year, on Christmas and Easter. But I also hope that you remember the real meaning of Christmas. It is about Christ. It is not only a reminder of His First Coming.

It is also a reminder of His soon Second Coming and the Judgment Seat of Christ.

There is a song about Santa Claus that conveys some good theology if we realize that Jesus is coming soon, and He will reward the good deeds of believers. I've modified the song, Santa Claus Is Coming to Town: "You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why,



Jesus Christ is coming to town (1 John 2:28). He sees you when you're sleeping, He knows when you're awake, He knows if you've been bad or good (2 Cor 5:9-10), so be good, for goodness' sake (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:6-8)." God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The Free Grace message is more than the promise of everlasting life to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for that life. It is also the promise of eternal rewards for believers who deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow Him.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Wilkin". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

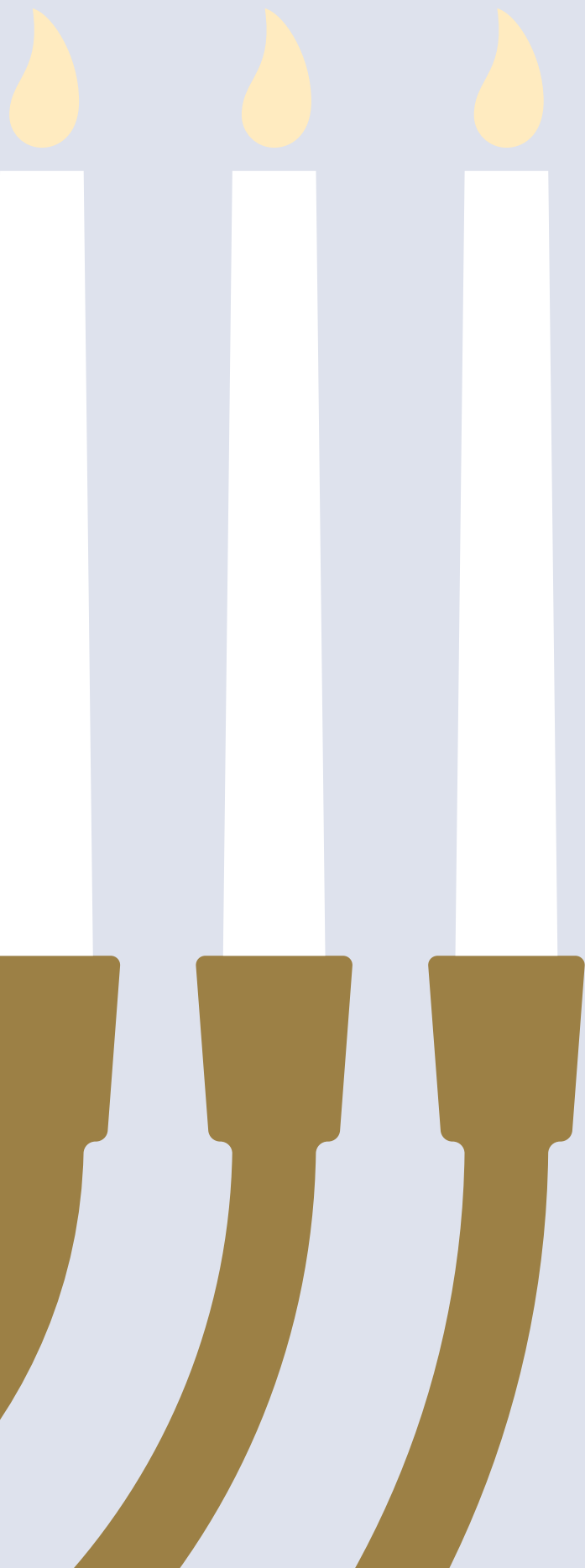
Robert N. Wilkin



Happy Hanukkah?

**SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE
HAPPY ABOUT HANUKKAH?**

BY DIX WINSTON



Hanukkah, also called the Festival of Lights, is an eight-day Jewish festival celebrating the time when Israel gained independence from Greece and, beginning on the 25th of Chislev, the subsequent rededication of the temple. This year, Hanukkah will be celebrated December 7-15.

The temple had to be rededicated because Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated it in 168 BC. He was a Seleucid king who ruled the eastern part of Alexander the Great's former empire, including the city of Jerusalem. He wanted to Hellenize the Jews, making them like the Greeks in character and religion. In order to accomplish this, he believed that he could persuade the Jews to worship Zeus instead of Yahweh. The Jews resisted, rebelling against this coercion. So Antiochus invaded the city in 168 BC, killing thousands. He erected a statue of Zeus on the site of the Holy of Holies and sacrificed a pig on the altar.

This led to a guerrilla rebellion under the leadership of the Jewish priest Mattathias and his five sons. After the death of Mattathias in 166 BC, his son Judah Maccabee took up the fight. Within two years the Jews retook the city and rededicated the temple, restoring worship of Yahweh. When it came time to light the lampstand in the temple's holy place, there was enough oil for only one day. However, according to the Talmud, the oil lasted eight days. This has been called the "miracle of Hanukkah."¹

There are good reasons why we should be happy about Hanukkah.

DANIEL PREDICTED IT

While Hanukkah did not begin during the time of the OT, the OT twice predicts events leading up to it.

First, the prophet Daniel speaks of a “little horn” emerging from the divided Greek Empire (Dan 8:9-12). (This should not be confused with the little horn from Rome described in Dan 7:8.) The little horn of Dan 8:9-12 is Antiochus Epiphanes, a ruler of the Seleucid Empire, which included the “Beautiful Land” or Israel. He trampled and killed the Jews in Jerusalem, and he desecrated the temple (Dan 8:6-12).

Second, Daniel predicts the defeat of Antiochus and the rededication of the temple, which took place in 164 BC (Dan 8:13-14). Rydellnik points out why Antiochus is mentioned: “He is emphasized in this section for two reasons: First, he would have a terrible and oppressive effect on the Jewish people. Second, his reign is designed as a pattern of the future world ruler who would also oppress the Jewish people, namely, the antichrist.”² Antiochus Epiphanes was controlled by the spirit of the Antichrist (1 John 4:3).

Daniel predicted the rise and fall of Antiochus Epiphanes centuries before it occurred. Did Judah Maccabee read Daniel? Good chance. If so, he knew how it would end for the little antichrist, and how it would end for the Jewish people. Knowing this must surely have instilled courage and boldness in the Jewish leader.

Prophecy demonstrates that God is in control of this world. Nothing surprises Him because He already knows what will take place. And if we simply study the prophetic Word, we, too, can know some things about the future and can prepare accordingly. We know that our Lord will reign on our planet for 1000 years and that if we remain faithful, we will reign with Him. “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Tim 2:12). That is something to be happy about.

JESUS OBSERVED IT

As John points out, Jesus observed Hanukkah: “Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch” (John 10:22-23).

Hanukkah follows the Feast of Tabernacles on the Jewish calendar. This year Tabernacles began on September 29th and ended on October 6th. It is the Mosaic feast commanded to commemorate the time when the Israelites lived in tents in the wilderness following the Lord’s delivering them from slavery in Egypt. It was at this feast that Jesus proclaimed Himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12). About two months later, as He was teaching in the temple, the Judean leadership demanded that He tell them who He was. Of course, He had on multiple occasions demonstrated exactly who He is through His words and works. But the Judeans did not believe.

Hanukkah celebrated the time when the oil that lit the holy place miraculously lasted eight days (Heb 9:2). Though non-Mosaic, it was the perfect feast for Jesus to continue proclaiming Himself as Messiah. He is “the true Light which gives light” to the world (John 1:9). He is the “light [which] shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend [or overcome] it” (John 1:5).

Hanukkah reminds us that all people are born in darkness and need the Light of the world. Christ called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). And that is something to be very happy about.

GOD PROMISED IT

While the Feast of Hanukkah is non-Mosaic, it demonstrates that God promised to preserve the Jewish nation. Judah Maccabee would not have been successful unless God had empowered him. Without the blessing of God, his best efforts would have failed.

...if He doesn't keep His promises to Israel, why should we believe that He will keep His promises to us,...

Without God's assisting Judah Maccabee, Antiochus would have destroyed the Jewish nation. This would have been a disaster. If the Jews—and more specifically, the line of David—had been destroyed, from where would Messiah come? It would have been time to cancel Christmas.

Paul Glasser, head of Chosen People Ministries, puts it this way:

The Feast of Dedication is when we as Jews celebrate the fact that we were delivered or saved from extinction. This was Antiochus' goal: He tried to destroy the Jewish people and eradicate the uniqueness of our identity.

He failed, and the Jewish people—our culture, hopes and dreams, and faith—were not destroyed. If we had been, then what would have happened to Mary and Joseph? Would they have known they were Jewish? Would they have married one another? If the Jewish people and Jewish identity had been destroyed, then there would have not been any Jewish people and no Jewish family to receive the Messiah! ³

Hanukkah is a reminder that God will never abandon His people. Through Abraham, God made a unilateral, unconditional promise to bless the world through the Jewish nation (Gen 12:1-3). In the new covenant He reaffirms this promise to the Jews (Jer 31:31-37).

As believers, we need to recognize Hanukkah because Daniel predicted it, Jesus observed it, and God promised it.

I am grateful that Hanukkah underscores the fact that God keeps His promises. Sadly, many Christians do not think God will keep His promises to the Jews. They teach that God abandoned the Jews and replaced Israel with the Church. But if He doesn't keep His promises to Israel, why should we believe that He will keep His promises to us, especially the promise of everlasting life: "And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life" (1 John 2:25)?

Hanukkah confirms that God is all-powerful and that He keeps His promises, and that is something to be very happy about! ■■



Dix and his wife, Cynthia, live in Colorado and have been married for nearly five decades. Dix and Bob Wilkin have been friends since their seminary days, having graduated from DTS in 1982.

- 1 This "miracle" is not found in the Bible. It is not even found in the Apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. It is from the Talmud and should be considered a legend (i.e., non-historical).
- 2 Michael Rydelnik, "Daniel" in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, pp. 1311-12.
- 3 Chosenpeople.com. This quote is from the eBook, *Christmas through Jewish Eyes*.

ARE ROCKY-SOIL BELIEVERS SAVED?



LUKE 8:13

BY BOB WILKIN

*"But the ones on the
rock are those who,
when they hear, receive
the word with joy; and
these have no root, who
believe for a while and
in time of temptation
fall away."*

The Lord often taught by parables. He did so to conceal truth from those who rejected Him and to reveal it to those who diligently sought Him.

The “Parable of the Four Soils” tells the story of four different responses to God’s Word. The first soil does not believe and is not saved. There is unanimous agreement among commentators and theologians on this point.

The fourth soil believes and is saved. Again, everyone agrees.

But what about the second soil, the rocky soil? Does it represent people who are saved or unsaved?

Most commentators say the rocky-soil believer is not saved. Here are representative statements from commentaries:

The fact that they believe for a while but ... fall away means that they only accept the facts of the Word mentally and then reject it when “the going gets rough.” It does not mean they lose their salvation, for they had none to lose (John Martin, “Luke,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 225).

He [Luke] thus shows that he has little tolerance for enthusiasts or fadists who espouse a cause as long as it suits their pleasure (Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, p. 714).

Criticism is not directed to the quality or kind of faith these hearers possess. The problem is rather that they only hold this faith “for a while”; but as the rest of this text and the full canonical message suggest, this faith is not saving faith (Robert Stein, *Luke*, p. 246).

The seed on the rock represents a message that falls into a person’s heart but penetrates only shallowly. There is initial response, but eventually temptation causes the person to abandon that initial response. Initial receptivity and short-lived belief are followed eventually by a falling away. The engagement the word produced at the start does not last. Both Old and New Testaments issue dire warnings about the consequences of falling away or departing from faith (Jer 3:13–14; Dan 9:9; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12). Jesus offers no comfort for the person represented here; he merely notes significantly that the seed

never bears fruit (Darrell Bock, *Luke*, s.v., Luke 8:4-21).

I believe that there are three good reasons to conclude that the rocky-soil believers represent born-again people.

...this soil is said by the Lord to believe.

First, only this soil is said by the Lord to believe. Not even the good soil is specifically said to believe. However, the parable implies that soils two, three, and four all believe. According to Jesus’ words in Luke 8:12, whoever believes is saved.

...the moment a person believes in Christ, he is guaranteed that he will never perish and that he already has everlasting life (cf. John 5:24).

Second, according to John 3:16 and scores of other verses in John and the rest of the NT, the moment a person believes in Christ, he is guaranteed that he will never perish and that he already has everlasting life (cf. John 5:24). The second-soil

...the reason Satan
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seed is “lest they
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(Luke 8:12).

people believe. Whether for a day or a decade, once a person is saved, he will always remain saved. There is no time requirement indicating how long one must believe before he has everlasting life.

Third, the reason Satan snatches away the seed is “lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). Satan believes in eternal security. He knows that once a person believes, he will never die spiritually (John 11:26a). We should know that as well.

Why do most commentators and theologians miss the obvious in this parable? It is because they are convinced that only those who persevere in faith and good works will make it into Christ’s kingdom. Therefore, since the second-soil believer failed to persevere, he must either not be saved, or he must have lost his salvation.

The problem with that thinking is that it contradicts the Lord Jesus Christ. We should under-

stand from John 3:16 that the sole condition of everlasting life is faith in Christ. The moment one believes, he is saved forever. Salvation is final at the moment of faith in Christ. Perseverance is commanded, but one’s eternal destiny is not forfeited by failure to endure.

Do you go to John 3:16 to determine your view of what one must do to have everlasting life? Or do you go to Col 1:21-23, Jas 2:14, or 2 Tim 2:12? If you go to sanctification verses to develop your view of justification and regeneration and then impose that understanding upon justification and regeneration verses, you have inadvertently rejected God’s Word.

All who believe in the Lord Jesus for everlasting life are saved.¹ That is gospel truth. Whether you believe it or not, it is true. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and Sharon live in Highland Village, TX. He has racewalked ten marathons.

1 Al Valdes writes, “The fact that these ‘fall away’ indicates previous participation in the discipleship and growth process. God guarantees a believer’s eternal salvation as a gift by faith alone, but the process of discipleship, although rooted in God’s grace, demands faith and works—effort and cooperation in obedience to Him” (“Luke” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, p. 264).



The GES Board fellowshiping at Saltgrass



Pretty sure Bob has a great looking class, but it's so hard to see with that blinding shirt



Kathryn and Katie Walker discussed starting a book club that would use Ken's book, Elisabeth

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Ken met up with Jon Matlack and some other Army chaplains



Ken and Kathryn's Zoom class



The beautiful congregation of Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship



Is Faith a

Quantity

or a State?

By Ken Yates

Recently, I had lunch with some friends at a restaurant. It was a Sunday afternoon and we had just left church, so we were in the mood to discuss a little theology. One of them asked me a question about faith. He asked, “Is it a quantity or a state?”

I think it took all of us at the table a couple of seconds to realize what he was asking. That was certainly the case with me. But I quickly realized that I had been involved in this discussion before, just worded differently. After giving it some thought, I see that my friend’s idea is a clever way of phrasing the concept.

Quantity, of course, refers to the amount of something. We might say that I have twelve ounces of water in a cup. After drinking some of it, I might say that I now have eight ounces. In this example, I am talking about the quantity of water in the cup. The quantity changes. I can have more or less of something, in this case water. When I have twelve ounces in a cup, I can say I have a greater quantity of water than when I have eight ounces.

The *state* of something is different. It is what it is. Water is water. In this illustration, whether I have twelve ounces or eight ounces, I still say that I have water in my cup.

WHICH ONE DESCRIBES FAITH?

When it comes to faith, many people say we should see it as a quantity. We hear many phrases that express this idea. Some of these include: “You don’t have *enough* faith”; “You need to *grow* in your faith”; “Do you *really* believe that?”; or “Your faith is *weak*.”

All of these sentiments are saying that faith—believing something—is on a spectrum. The issue is how much, or the quantity of, faith. The person in question has faith, but they need more of it.

One of the most obvious ways we encounter this occurs when people pray. A Christian might pray for something. If the prayer is not answered in the expected way, someone will say, “Well, you didn’t

have *enough* faith.” It is like saying you have eight ounces of faith, but you need twelve ounces. This is a common refrain with so-called faith healers. They deceive people with their supposed ability to heal the sick. When their methods don’t work, they simply point out that the person was not healed because of their quantity of faith. If they had had more faith, the healer’s method would have been successful.

But faith is not a quantity. It is a state. We could say it is the state of being convinced that something is true. When it comes to believing something, you are either convinced it is true or you are not. If I am not convinced that something is true, it is not because I have weak faith that needs to grow. I do not have faith at all.

For example, I believe that George Washington was our first president. I cannot grow in that faith. If I study history more, I will not have a stronger faith. I believe it. It is what it is.

In the case of a person who believes that they will be healed by a faith healer, they have faith. Their faith was wrong, but it was faith. It is improper to say they didn’t have enough faith.

But there are some places in the NT that seem to describe faith as a quantity. There are two examples in Matthew of people who have “great” faith. This seems to support the idea that one can have a greater amount of faith. A closer look at these two people will show that this is not the case. After studying them, we can draw some conclusions.

A ROMAN CENTURION (MATT 8:10)

One day, a Roman centurion comes to Jesus because he has a problem. He has a dear friend who works for him and who is deathly ill. The centurion has heard that Jesus is able to heal the sick. Perhaps he has even seen Jesus perform some of these miracles. In any event, it is clear from the account that he believes that Jesus has this power. He is

convinced it is true. For this reason, he comes to the Lord and asks him to heal his friend.

The Lord agrees to do so, and tells the centurion that He will go to his house and heal the man (8:7). But the centurion does not want the Lord to come to his home. He feels he is unworthy of having Someone with this power to enter his home. The centurion says he is not worthy of such an honor. He says that if Jesus simply says the word, he knows that his friend will be well.

When Jesus hears this, he comments that this centurion has “great” faith. In fact, He has not seen such great faith anywhere in Israel. Many take this to mean that the man had a large quantity of faith. He *really* believed that Jesus could heal. His cup of faith was overflowing.

But that is not what is happening. Many people in Israel believed that Jesus could heal the sick. In that regard, the centurion had a faith that many others possessed. What was different about him? He believed something more.

For the first time in Matthew, a person believes that Jesus can heal over a distance. This centurion believed that Jesus’ power was so great that He only had to say the word. Jesus did not have to come to his home and touch his friend. Jesus had never seen anybody who believed that.

The faith of this man was not “great” because he believed more than others in the fact that Jesus could heal. He believed something nobody else believed. He believed more things about the Lord than others. But whether we talk about this man’s faith in Jesus’ power to heal, or about his faith that the Lord could heal over a distance, in each case he was convinced it was true. Faith is faith.

ANOTHER PERSON WITH GREAT FAITH (MATT 15:28)

In Matt 15:28, Jesus refers to another Gentile as having great faith. She is like the centurion in that she, too, wants Jesus to heal somebody. In her case, it is her daughter, who is possessed by a demon. She clearly believes—is convinced it is true—that

He can do it. She comes to the Lord and repeatedly asks Him to heal the girl.

Jesus responds to her request by telling her that He has come to minister to the Jews, especially His disciples. They are His children. They take priority over the Gentiles, just as the children in a home take priority over the needs of a family pet. Therefore, He will devote His time and healing ministry to the Jews.

The woman gives an amazing response. She acknowledges that she is the family pet in the Lord’s illustration. However, she points out that the pet in that family receives the crumbs that fall from the children’s table. What she is saying is that His food—His power—is so great that even those who are not His priority can benefit from it. He is so majestic that He is able to feed His disciples and her daughter at the same time. She can be healed without His taking any time away from the disciples. Even Gentiles can be healed by His word while He is feeding His children.

The Lord is impressed with this woman’s faith. He calls it “great.” Was it great because she believed Jesus could heal more than other people believed He could heal? No. She believed that. But she believed something else. She believed that even though He was the Jewish Messiah, His mercy and power were so great that they were available to all, not just the Jews. Gentiles could be blessed by the crumbs that fell from His table. Others did not believe that. She did.

CONCLUSION

Faith is not a quantity. It is a state. You are either convinced that something is true, or you are not. If you are convinced it is true, it is improper to then say you need to grow in that faith.

“Great faith” means you believe more things. In the case of the centurion, he believed that Jesus could heal. His faith was “great” because he also believed He could heal over a distance. In the case of the Gentile woman, she, too, believed Jesus could heal. Her faith was “great” because she

The more things we believe, the greater our faith. But faith in whatever we believe is still simply faith.

also believed that His power was available to all, including Gentiles.

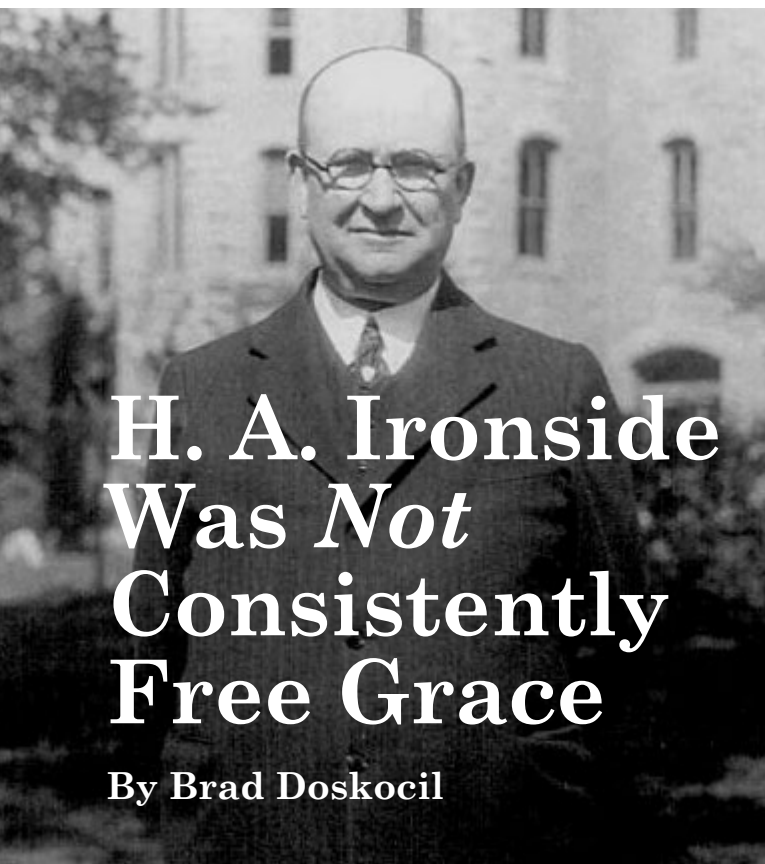
For the unbeliever, the Bible invites you to have faith. You are called to be convinced that Jesus promises to give you eternal life when you simply believe in Him for that promise. When you are convinced that is true, you have believed. That is faith.

After we have believed, the Scriptures tell us to believe many other things. For example, they speak of rewards, of suffering for Christ, and of the need to serve others, to name a few. The more things we

believe, the greater our faith. But faith in whatever we believe is still simply faith. ■■



Ken Yates is a retired Army chaplain (Lt. Col). He has many theological degrees, including a Ph.D. from D.T.S. in New Testament. He leads the GES international ministry, cohosts the daily podcast, and assists Bob in all aspects of the GES ministry. His new book, *Elisabeth*, is a powerful testimony to the power of God manifested in a Christ-centered family. He and his wife, Pam, live in Columbia, SC.



H. A. Ironside Was Not Consistently Free Grace

By Brad Doscocil

Bob Wilkin recently wrote an article suggesting that H. A. Ironside held to Free Grace Theology (FGT). I emailed him, suggesting that in some of his commentaries, Ironside made statements that are inconsistent with FGT. Bob asked me to send him some quotes; this article is the result. The following observations are based on Ironside's commentaries on Acts and the Gospel of John.

Ironside's Commentary on Acts

In his commentary on Acts, Ironside is strongly Free Grace in his comments on Acts 2:37: "Having accepted the message, we can be very sure of this—they were already born of God" (p. 42).

However, his comments on Acts 2:38 are inconsistent with FGT. He says that the believers of 2:37 needed "complete moral reformation" (p. 43).

His comments on Acts 3:14-16 and 3:18-19 also discuss turning from sins as being necessary for

justification and everlasting life (pp. 55-57). Those comments are inconsistent with FGT.

Inconsistent with FGT, he understands Simon Magus in Acts 8 as "a baptized man, a religious professor, who had not been regenerated" (p. 107). His comment on Luke's statement that "Simon himself believed" is that Simon gave "intellectual assent to the truths of God's Word but...never faced [his] sins before God" (p. 106).

His comments on Acts 13:48 are excellent in part. Note that had he stopped after the first two sentences, his comments would have been consistent with FGT. It is the third sentence that introduces the problem: "Wherever you get a man determined to have eternal life, he can have it through believing on Jesus Christ. He does not have to stop and ask if he is elect or not. If he is willing to repent of his sin and come to Christ, he may have eternal life" (p. 178, emphasis added).

Commenting on the belief of those in Iconium (Acts 14:1), Ironside writes, "They so spake, that a great multitude...believed"¹ (p. 179). Here, belief alone is sufficient for Ironside. While consistent with FGT, it is inconsistent with many of his other comments.

His comments on Acts 16:31 are consistent with FGT (unless by *trust* he implies something other than belief, which seems unlikely): "Their answer came back quick and clear: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' No beating about the bush. No going into labored explanation of Christian doctrine, or the nature of the church, or of sacraments. Clear and incisive was their message, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (*put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ*) and thou shalt be saved, and thy house'" (p. 205, emphasis his).

Ironside's Commentary on John

His comments on *believing in Him* in John 3:16 are confusing. He writes, "'Whosoever believeth?' What is it to believe? It is to trust in Him; to con-

fide in Him; to commit yourself and your affairs to Him” (p. 109). He then describes a woman reading a Greek NT and pondering the meaning of *belief*:

She went back in the chapter and then back into the last verse of chapter two, and she read, “Many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men.” “Oh,” she said, “there it is!” “Jesus did not commit Himself unto them,” and she stopped and thought a moment, and light from heaven flashed into her soul. She saw that to believe in Jesus was to commit herself unto Jesus. Have you done that? (pp. 109-110).

If this is Ironside’s view of what it is to believe, then he falls into the camp of confusion. How much commitment is enough? How can anyone be sure? Has he redefined the meaning of belief? This is disappointing!

However, his comments on John 4:10-11 are excellent:

Note the answer of our blessed Lord: “If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.” What a wonderful revelation concerning the gift of God! Do you know the gift of God? Do you know that salvation is the gift of God? Do you know that eternal life is a gift? Do you know that God is not a merchantman seeking to bargain with people, but God is a Giver, offering everything freely? (p. 140).

Ironside drives home the point that everlasting life is a gift from God, and that we cannot earn it in any way. There is much here that is consistent with FGT.

His comments on John 6:47 are consistent with FGT as well (pp. 259-60).

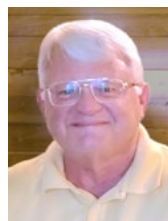
However, his comments on John 11:25-27 are puzzling:

What is He telling her? Oh, He is telling her, “You don’t have to wait till the resurrection on the last day. I Myself am the Resurrection and the Life, and when I come into the scene death is at an end.” And He adds, “He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”... Then he looks on to the time when those who have never died at all, but will be living on the earth when He returns, will be changed without dying and says, “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” What a wonderful revelation! And then He puts the question, “Believest thou this?”

I think she was a bit puzzled. She said, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” And therefore, of course, she implies, “Whatever You say must be true.” Whether she could understand it or not, it must be true, for it came from the One she recognized as the Son of God (pp. 461-62).

Ironside has an interesting and different view of this passage than the one generally held in FG circles. What is disappointing is that he calls into question whether Martha believed what Jesus had just told her. That contradicts the plain statement of the text.

Ironside did make many comments that solidly reflect FGT. However, he also made many comments that are inconsistent with FGT. It is best to say that Ironside was Free Grace-friendly, but that he was inconsistent in his writings. ■



Brad Duskocil is a CPA in Long Beach, CA, and the Chairman of the GES Board.

1 Ironside always used the KJV when quoting Scripture.

Gulnaz Comes to Faith in Christ*

BY NANCY REMPEL

**All names in this story are pseudonyms except for Billy Graham and the apostle Paul.*



Maybe it's all up to us to be persuasive and winsome enough. To be clever super-saints—Billy Graham and the apostle Paul all rolled into one—before we can lead someone to Christ. Maybe God waits for us to get the evangelistic ball rolling before blessing our sacrificial efforts. I hope not.

A shock of long, curly black hair framed Gulnaz's face as we sat in a busy coffee shop. Amidst customers chattering and

baristas hollering out orders, Gulnaz shared her spiritual journey.

Born into a prosperous Kurdish Muslim family in Iran, she married her university sweetheart—fellow-Kurd Afran—and gave birth to a son. They lived with her parents while completing their university degrees.

In contrast to the happiness inside their home, Iran was in tumult outside. An ancient Persian people rich in literature, art, and history, Iranians bristled under the

version of Islam imposed on them by Arabs. Burdened under a strict interpretation of the Koran, every appeal for leniency was met with violent repression, imprisonment, or death.

The Kurdish minority had it worse. Members of an opposing sect of Islam and constantly fighting for a separate homeland, the Kurds are outcasts.

“On top of all that,” Gulnaz said, “you are an educated woman. Everything was wrong with you in Iran!” We laughed at the absurdity of it all.

Gulnaz leaned forward, a burning intensity in her eyes. “You know, I read a copy of the Koran in my language, Farsi. From cover to cover. When I finished, I closed it and decided there was nothing in this book for me. It damns me to hell and consigns women to be the possessions of men. There is no hope and no love in this book.”

I leaned back in my chair and pondered this unusual honesty and the path that led her there—the Koran itself.

Three weeks later, we sat in the same coffee shop. I told Gulnaz to close her eyes, then slid a Farsi-language Bible across the table. She gasped and snatched up the Bible, looking back and forth between me and the book, running her fingers over the gold-embossed Farsi title. She navigated to the table of contents and divided the books into sections with her pen as I dictated. I thought about the Persian Bible characters she would soon read about.

Because we never know whether we’ll get another chance with a person or even if we have another day to live, I shared the way of salvation with Gulnaz. I guided her to the Gospel of John and led her through Jesus’ promises to give eternal life to everyone who believes Him for it.

With native ease, John 3:16 flowed off her tongue in Farsi.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

As she read, it was like she was coming home, parking her heart. And the universe suddenly made sense to her.

Then I asked Gulnaz, “What condition does Jesus give for gaining eternal life?”

She took her time, sliding her finger under the verse as she re-read it. She looked up at me, “Believe in Jesus.”

“Do you have eternal life?” I wanted to know if Jesus’ promise had persuaded her. To hear her conclusion and not tell her what to believe. I wanted her to hear herself say it.

“Yes!” she said.

We gathered our things, left the coffee shop, and found a vacant picnic table on the street. “We should pray,” I said.

As cars and pedestrians passed in front of us, I explained that prayer is talking to God about our lives in the same way that we would talk to our earthly Father. We sat beside each other with the palms of our hands upraised toward God, encased in a miraculous, protected moment.

I went first, praying out loud, thanking God for my new sister in Christ. Tears bubbled up and spilled down Gulnaz’s cheeks. She brushed them away, apologizing.

I waited.

Like a child murmuring unpolished words, she started talking to her heavenly Father. For the first time.

I walked home, relieved. Relieved for Gulnaz that she was out of the darkness and home safe.

Relieved to know God was clearly on the move and that I had kept up with Him. ■■■



Nancy and her husband, Don, served as missionaries in Pakistan and India for many years before relocating to Canada in 2017. They continue to share Christ with Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in Kelowna, B.C.



GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON

By Philippe R. Sterling



During the Christmas season, we mostly reflect on the announcements of Jesus' birth recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. However, we may also reflect on the wonderful aspects of the birth of Jesus described in Galatians 4:4-5. In that passage, the Apostle Paul stated:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

There are six key questions a journalist tries to answer to make sure a news article has covered the whole story:

1. Who? (Agent) Who was involved?
2. What? (Act) What was done?
3. When? (Timing) When did this occur?
4. Where? (Scene) Where did this occur?
5. Why? (Purpose) Why was this done?
6. How? (Means) How was it done?

Rudyard Kipling memorialized these six questions in the opening of his poem “The Elephant’s Child”:

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.

Let’s ask these six journalistic questions of our text in order to more fully understand the coming of Christ into our world.

First, let’s take note of *WHEN*. Paul wrote, “But when the fullness of the time had come...” More than 2,000 years had passed since God gave Abraham the promise of a Seed that would bring blessing to the world. Israel had been struggling for over 1,400 years to try to live in accordance with the Law given through Moses. Finally, the time was right, and God sent the Messiah into the world.

Several factors may have marked *the fullness of the time*. First, because of their exilic and post-exilic experiences, the Jews had forsaken idolatry and were focusing on the study of the Scriptures. The Scriptures had prepared many of them for their Messiah. They had established a synagogue system that would provide a model for churches and a springboard for proclaiming Christ. Second, Alexander the Great and his successors brought about a common language (*koine* Greek) and a common culture across the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world. The good news of Christ could spread easily, and the NT could be written in a commonly-understood language. Third, the Romans had brought about a period of peace and stability, the *pax Romana*. They had also built an extensive system of

roads that would facilitate the spread of the good news of Christ. God’s timing was perfect!

Second, let us take note of *WHO*. Paul stated, “*God sent forth His Son...*” The main Personages are God the Father and God the Son.

Third, let us take note of *WHAT*. Paul indicated, “*God sent forth His Son...*” God the Father commissioned God the Son to go forth. We call Christ’s commission to believers in Matt 28:18-20 the Great Commission. We might call the commission of the Father to the Son the Greatest Commission.

Fourth, let us take note of *WHERE*. Paul did not specify where God sent forth His Son, but we know from other texts that God sent forth His Son *into the world*. Hebrews 10:5-7 testifies of Christ:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:
“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
You had no pleasure.
Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.’”

Fifth, let us take note of *HOW*. Paul stipulated that Christ was “born of a woman, born under the law...” The statement *born of a woman* indicates the virgin birth (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:18-25). It also recalls the messianic promise in Gen 3:15 regarding the Seed of the woman. Jesus is both divine and human. He is the God-Man.

Jesus was also *born under the law*. He was born to Mary, a Jewish mother. He was circumcised on the eighth day. And, after Mary’s forty days of purification, He was presented to the Lord in Jerusalem with the appropriate sacrifices (Luke 2:21-24). He kept the Law perfectly all His life (Matt 5:17).

Sixth, let us take note of *WHY*. Paul stated that Jesus came “to redeem those who were under the law...” *Redeem* means “to buy out” or “to buy back.” It was a term used for purchasing a slave from the slave market in order to free him. Jesus’ death on the cross paid the price to redeem us from our sins.

Furthermore, it was Christ’s purpose to *redeem* us “that we might receive the adoption as sons.” *Adoption* meant granting sonship to someone who

was not a natural son. In the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day, a wealthy man with no natural children might have freed a young slave, then adopted him as a son. The novel by Lew Wallace, *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, which was adapted into a movie, relates such a story. We were slaves to sin. Christ paid the price for our freedom. God adopted us into His family when we believed in Christ for eternal life (John 1:11-13). Our adoption as sons made us heirs of God and makes it possible for us to become fellow-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:15-17).

A final question is, SO WHAT? This is not a journalistic question. It is a personal question. What is your response?

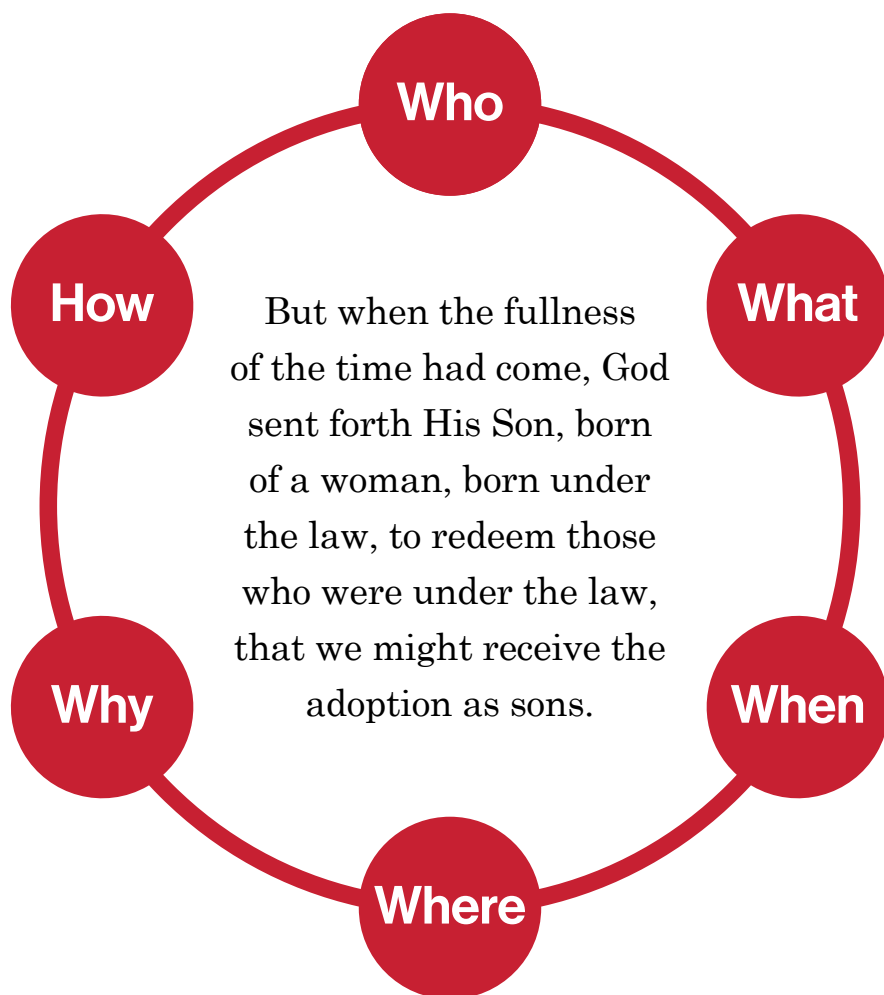
God sent forth His Son to make us His children. All that we need to do to become children of God

and have eternal life is to believe the Son's promise: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). Have you believed in Him for everlasting life? It really is that simple.

If you have believed in Him for the gift of everlasting life, are you living for Him so that you might be one of Christ's coheirs in the life to come (Rom 8:17b)?



Philippe Sterling is the pastor of Vista Ridge Bible Fellowship in Lewisville, TX. He and his wife of 45 years, Brenda, live in Denton, TX, near their daughter, Sarah, son-in-law, Ben, and grandkids.



Christmas

☒ *Facts or*

☒ *Fictions?*

BY MARCIA HORNOK



DID MARY RIDE A DONKEY TO BETHLEHEM? DID AN INN-KEEPER REJECT MARY AND JOSEPH? WAS JESUS BORN THE NIGHT THEY ARRIVED? DID A MULTITUDE OF ANGELS SING? DID A SPECIAL STAR GUIDE THE WISE MEN ALL THE WAY FROM THE ORIENT TO ISRAEL? DID ANYONE KNEEL AT THE MANGER? DOES SANTA CLAUS KNOW IF YOU'VE BEEN GOOD OR BAD?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may have believed traditions and Christmas carol lyrics instead of Scripture. Several of our ideas about Jesus' birth have been influenced by pageants, crèches, and religious art rather than by our letting the text speak for itself. Nowhere in Matthew 1-2 or Luke 2 do we read of a donkey, an innkeeper, angels singing, shepherds or wise men kneeling at a manger, a star shining over a stable, or a little drummer boy.

Mary may have ridden on a donkey or a cart, but the Bible doesn't say. Having experienced the third trimester of pregnancy six times, I'm sure I would prefer to walk rather than have a bumpy ride for 90 miles. Since everyone was required to show up and be registered, Mary and Joseph probably caravanned with relatives on the journey to Bethlehem.¹ This also makes me speculate that Mary may have had the assistance of other women (not just Joseph and the barn animals!) during her labor and delivery.

When was Jesus born? Luke 2:6 suggests a time gap between His parents' arrival in Bethlehem and His birth: "So it was, that *while they were there, the days were completed* for her to be delivered" (italics added). Perhaps Joseph thought that reg-

istering for the census wouldn't take long and that they could return home before Mary was full term. The vast number of people in Bethlehem precluded that.

Did the angels sing? Possibly, but verbs associated with angelic communication in Scripture mean shouting or saying rather than a musical connotation. The significance was that they praised² and gave glory to God.³

How old was Jesus when His parents took Him to the Temple? At eight days old He was circumcised, but that was not done at the Temple. Leviticus 12 specified that a woman who gave birth to a male child was to bring an offering to the priest forty days after the birth. That was Jesus' age when Simeon grabbed Him up in his arms (Luke 2:22). Mary and Joseph presented their son to God at the Temple. God led Simeon to present to them Jesus, His Son, as "salvation," a light to Gentiles and the Glory of Israel (Matt 1:21; Luke 2:22-32).

Most people know that Jesus was laid in a manger, not born in one, and that the Magi found Him in a house, not the manger. We speculate that there were three wise men because of the three different gifts they gave, but the Bible doesn't say how many people made the 800-or-so-mile journey to visit the

King of the Jews. We have been led to think they followed the star, but if they did, it led them to the wrong city—Jerusalem, not Bethlehem.

When they learned from Herod where the Christ was to be born, “They departed; and behold, the star which they had seen [when they were] in the East *went before them, till it came and stood over* where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy” (Matt 2:9-10, italics added).

Why such great joy? Because the supernatural star had shown up again. Yes, they followed it, but only for five miles, from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Since stars don’t move southward, we don’t know what celestial manifestation of glory moved with them and stood over the house where Jesus was.⁴ The wise men referred to it as “His star.”


God used angels, dreams (four times to Joseph), and a star to announce the Incarnation. Jesus’ birth account includes both Jews (shepherds) and Gentiles (the Magi) making their way to find Jesus, and both a man (Simeon) and a woman (Anna)—senior citizens no less—who recognized Him as Messiah.

When Anna saw Him, she “spoke of Him to all those [in Jerusalem] who looked for redemption” (Luke 2:38). Likewise, shepherds “made widely known” the angel’s statement about the birth of “a Savior who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:17; cf. 2:12). Everyone who heard the shepherds, presumably in Bethlehem, “marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds” (Luke 2:18).

There must have been quite a stir when a great caravan from the East showed up in Jerusalem. Matthew 2:3 states that all of Jerusalem was “troubled.” Shortly afterward, all of Bethlehem and the

surrounding districts were troubled by the senseless killing of their infant boys (Matthew 2:16-18). However, God protected Jesus and His parents by exiling them to Egypt for a few years while things died down in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

In conclusion, God has recorded everything we need to know, not everything we want to know. Adding our traditional ideas to Jesus’ birth account distorts the details somewhat. Even so, this does not detract from our desire to honor Christ and to rejoice in the significant details of His first advent. Shepherds had a sign—a cloth-wrapped baby lying in a manger. Magi had a supernatural star. Herod’s chief priests and scribes had the Hebrew Scriptures. And we have a Savior. We celebrate Christmas by rejoicing that He came “to save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

However, don’t believe every Christmas card picture you see. 



Marcia is Ken’s grateful wife, serving with him in Utah where he pastored for 39 years and they raised six children. Now they enjoy 13 grandkids. Her latest work is a guilt-free Bible study of Proverbs 31.

- 1 Compare Luke 2:44 where “relatives and acquaintances” accompanied the family to and from Jerusalem for Passover.
- 2 We tend to associate praise with singing, which is fine, but the Greek word *aineō*, related to *ainos* in Hebrew, denotes a saying or discourse. Even the Hebrew *halal* means to boast, or to tell what someone has done.
- 3 There is little Scriptural evidence that angels sing. See “Do Angels Sing?” at www.gotquestions.org, accessed June 13, 2023.
- 4 Some speculate that the “star” was actually God’s shekinah glory.

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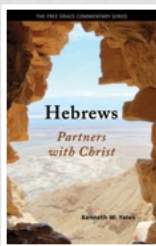


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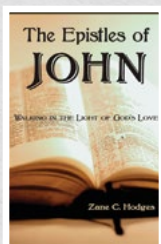


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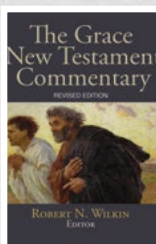


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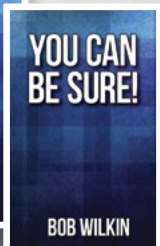
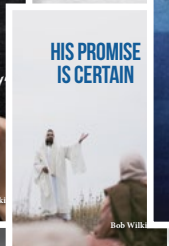
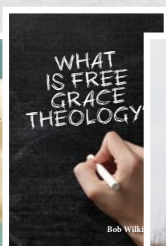
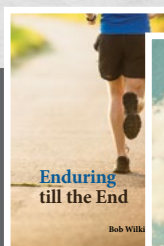


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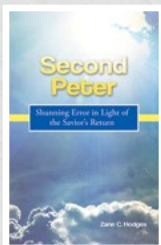
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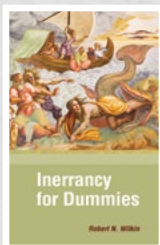


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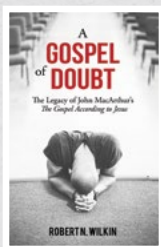


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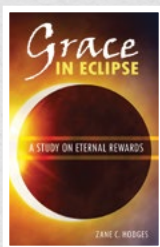


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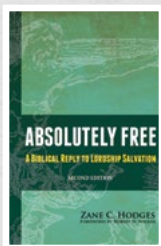


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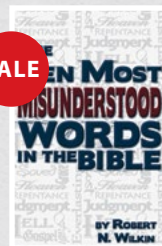
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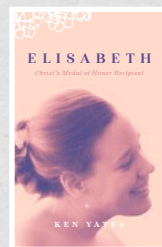
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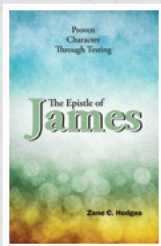
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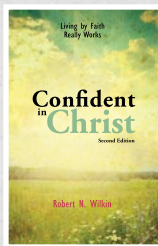
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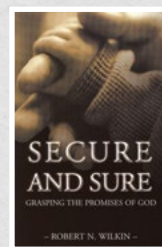
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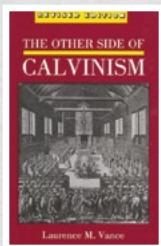
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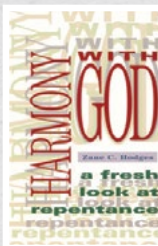
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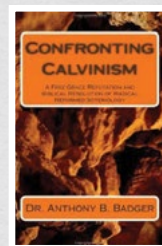
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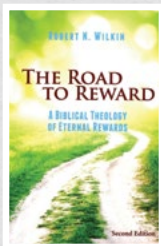
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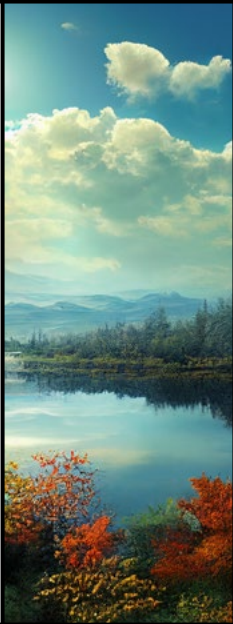
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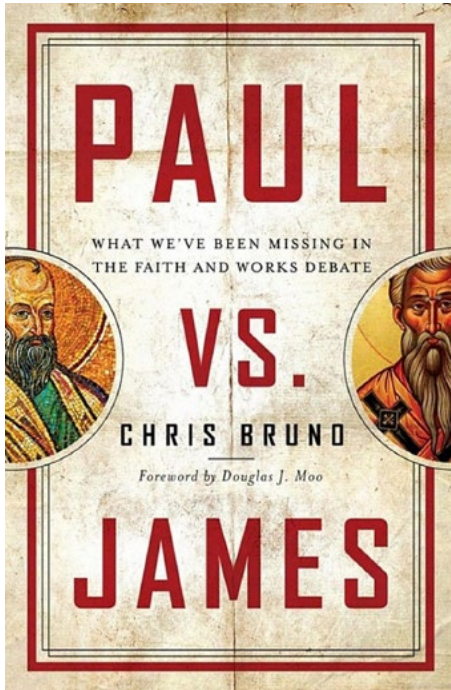
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Review of *Paul vs. James: What We've Been Missing in the Faith and Works Debate,* By Chris Bruno

BY BOB WILKIN

The author is an assistant professor of New Testament and Greek at Bethlehem College and Seminary. John Piper is the chancellor. In the Acknowledgements, Bruno says that John Piper “provided valuable feedback on the manuscript” (p. 149). Piper is also cited in an endnote for Chap. 9 (p. 154).

The theology in this book is consistent with New Calvinism.

You probably will understand Bruno’s viewpoint if you have attended Bible college or seminary in the past thirty years. If not, you will likely be confused. Very confused.

The author suggests that justification and regeneration are by faith alone. He says this repeatedly in this book.

He also says that one must persevere in good works to be justified and born again.

He often says both in the same paragraph.

Bruno rightly says, “Any time someone demands more than faith in Jesus alone in order to be de-

clared right with God or to be a full, equal member of His new-covenant community, justification by faith alone is denied” (p. 130). Without pausing, his next words are, “Yet justifying faith *cannot remain alone. It requires transformation and good works*” (p. 130, emphasis added).

“Faith without works is phony faith” (p. 143).

“The people of God have always been justified by faith alone, *but this faith could never remain alone*” (p. 147, emphasis added).

In his chapter on James 2:14-26, under the heading, “Phony Faith,” Bruno writes, “James emphasiz[es] *the necessary works that flow from faith*” (p. 80, emphasis added).

“Paul [in Romans 4] saw [that Abraham] was counted righteous *because he had true faith, the kind of faith that grows and is demonstrated by good works*” (p. 97, emphasis added).

Those statements are not paradoxes. They are contradictions. Justification can’t be by faith alone and also by faith and works. If justification is by

faith alone, then the moment one believes, he is justified once and for all. If justification is by faith and works, one is not justified until he breathes his last breath, having persevered in good works till death.

The author misrepresents the faith-alone-apart-from-works position: “When you talk to your kids or people in your church about what it means to follow Jesus, you never talk about obedience. Instead, you emphasize making a decision, praying a prayer, or signing a card. Saving faith begins and ends in a single moment” (p. 12). The faith-alone position is not decisionism. And why is Bruno talking about “what it means *to follow Jesus*.” Isn’t *believing in Him* the issue? Where do we find *following Him* in John 3:16? 5:24? 6:35-40? 11:25-27?

His position is that Paul and James are coming at the faith and works issue from different directions, but they agree (see, for example, p. 109). Paul is saying that justification is by faith alone. But he does not deny the necessity of perseverance in good works to be justified by God. James says that the genuinely justified persevere in good works. But he does not deny justification by faith alone.

If he is correct, both Paul and James contradict the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., John 5:39-40; 6:28-29). But Bruno does not discuss how his understanding aligns with the Gospel of John. I found no references to any of the evangelistic texts in the Fourth Gospel. The author only uses John’s Gospel to get a perspective on James before he came to faith (pp. 24, 33).

“In Genesis, Abraham really was justified by his faith alone. It is necessary for us to emphasize this truth as we read Genesis. It is also right and necessary to see that *the nature of this faith also means that it is impossible to be truly justified without works of obedience that flow from this faith*” (p. 74, emphasis added).

Bruno then has a chart in which he says that “faith working through love” is illustrated in the experience of Abraham. He says that in Genesis 15, “Abraham believed,” and in Genesis 22, “Abraham obeyed” (p. 80; cf. pp. 85, 92). This is confusing. Didn’t Abraham obey *before and after Genesis 22*? In Bruno’s view, didn’t Abraham need to persevere

in obedience until death to gain final justification? Don’t we all? No matter how great Abraham’s obedience in Genesis 22, it would do him no good if he later fell away and failed to persevere. If we do some great work for God, does that mean that we no longer need to persevere? Or does that guarantee that we will persevere?

If one is not justified “in a single moment” (p. 12), when can a person be sure that he is justified? Like most holding to Lordship Salvation, the author never explains how many works one must do for how long. He never shows how one can be sure of his eternal destiny.

I only found the word *assurance* once in the book (p. 154, endnote 2). Bruno is there favorably citing the book by Schreiner and Caneday entitled, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance*. Like Bruno, those authors say, “The race track represents salvation. If one abandons the race one will not receive the prize. The prize is salvation, eternal life” (*The Race Set Before Us*, p. 40).

Under this system of thought, assurance of everlasting life is impossible. You can never be sure that you will persevere to the end. If you abandon the race, you will not receive the prize of eternal life.

The author sounds like a nice guy. But his theology is a return to Rome. People who hold to Lordship Salvation should love this book. So should those who believe in works salvation.

I recommend this book to pastors, parachurch workers, and missionaries. I only recommend it for those well-grounded in the faith. If anyone lacks assurance of his eternal destiny, this book will scare them. Anyone who has recently gained assurance could quickly lose assurance by reading this book. ■



Bob Wilkin is Executive Director of Grace Evangelical Society. He and Sharon live in Highland Village, TX. He has racewalked ten marathons.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SANTA? JESUS?

BY MIKE LII



During this time of year, children are often asked, “Do you believe in Santa?” It is interesting to note that when it comes to answering this question, people have nowhere near the level of confusion or over-analysis that they have about answering the question: “Do you believe in Jesus?”

Most interpret the question, “Do you believe in Santa?” to mean, “Do you believe Santa exists?” or, “Do you believe Santa will bring gifts to children who have been good?” Most are simply satisfied that a child’s answer of “Yes” or “No” accurately reflects what the child believes about Santa. There are no follow-up questions, such as:

- » “Do you really believe in Santa?”
- » “Is this a heart-faith in Santa versus a head-faith or mere intellectual-assent to Santa?”
- » “Have you decided for Santa?”
- » “Have you surrendered your life to Santa?”
- » “Have you given your life to Santa?”

It is unfortunate that patently nonsensical questions about a children’s fantasy are thought to reveal theological insight when applied to the question, “Do you believe in Jesus?” The nature of the faith or belief in Santa is the same as the nature of the faith or belief in Jesus. In both instances, the faith or belief is a conviction that some proposition or promise is true. The key difference isn’t in the nature of the faith or belief, but in the person in whom one has faith or belief. One person is pure fiction and fantasy; the other Person is a true historical figure who proved His promises and the truth of His guarantees by dying on the cross and rising from the grave.

Everyone understands that the question, “Do you believe in Santa?” must be a shortened form of a question involving a proposition about Santa. The expression, “I believe in Santa,” makes no sense devoid of something about Santa that is believed. The expression “believe in Santa” must be an abbreviated version of some larger proposition

that is believed about Santa, such as his existence or his promise to bring presents to good children.

Similarly, one cannot believe in Jesus absent a specific proposition to believe about Jesus. A question that clearly addresses this is: "According to the Gospel of John, what is the proposition to be believed concerning Jesus?"

The Apostle John uses the verb *believe* almost 100 times in his Gospel. The most common use (thirty-one times) explicitly references believing in Jesus for eternal life or the concept of everlasting life—a life that can never be lost; a life with Jesus in a wonderful place forever.¹ For example, John 3:16 explicitly references eternal life:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Although the term *everlasting life* is not used in John 14:1-2, the concept of everlasting life is present in the passage:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

Less than ten occurrences of *believe* in John's Gospel explicitly refer to something other than believing in Jesus for eternal life.² For example, the nobleman in John 4:50 believed Jesus' word that his son would recover from his sickness:

Jesus said to him, "Go our way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

Another example is the Jews in John 9:18, who did not believe that Jesus healed a man born blind:

But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight.

Sixty-four uses of the term *believe* in the Gospel of John are not explicit about the content of

the belief. These occurrences are most commonly expressed as "believe in Him,"³ "believe in His name,"⁴ "believe in Me,"⁵ and "believe Me."⁶ It is important to ask, "In these occurrences, what is the content or proposition that is being believed?"

Among those who diminish the stated purpose of John's Gospel—evangelism—these statements about believing in Jesus are frequently taken out of context in order to advance the position that eternal life is the result of believing some truth about Jesus that is not specifically related to eternal life. According to this view, eternal life is not part of the content or focus of belief. However, each use of the word *believe* in John's Gospel, whether specifically related to eternal life or not, must be understood not only in its immediate context but also within the context of the entire Gospel, especially regarding John's stated purpose. If the proposed content does not fit both the immediate context and the overall purpose of the Gospel of John, then such proposed content must be rejected.

The purpose of John's Gospel is stated in 20:30-31:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name.

The purpose of John's book is that the reader or listener "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." What does "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" mean? We are given its meaning in John 11:25-27. Jesus says to Martha:

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. And everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Notice that Jesus tells Martha that He is the Resurrection and the Life, that every believer in Him will live even if he dies, and that every believer who lives will never die spiritually.⁷ In other words, Jesus tells Martha that He guarantees and gives eternal life to everyone who believes in Him for eternal life. Jesus then asks Martha, "Do you

believe this?” He is asking, “Do you believe what I just stated?”

Notice Martha’s response in John 11:27:

“Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Martha responds affirmatively to Jesus’ question and instead of repeating what Jesus has just stated, Martha responds that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God.” Martha has just equated the title “the Christ, the Son of God” with Jesus’ statement about eternal life. Martha’s response can, therefore, be understood to mean:

“Yes, Lord, I believe that You (the Christ, the Son of God) guarantee and give eternal life to everyone who believes in You for eternal life.”

Since the purpose of the Gospel of John is to direct the reader to believe that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of God,” this is the same as directing the reader to believe that Jesus is the One who gives eternal life to everyone who believes in Him for eternal life. Whenever John uses the word *believe* without specifying the content of such belief, it makes no sense to pick something from the immediate context as the content to be believed and then state that eternal life results from believing that content.

For example, one may argue that “His disciples believed in Him” in John 2:11 refers to their belief that Jesus changed water into wine and that anyone who believes Jesus changed water into wine receives eternal life as a byproduct, whether they know it or not. But the only interpretation of 2:11’s “His disciples believed in Him,” which is consistent with John 3:16 and John 20:30-31, is that because they had just seen Jesus change water into wine, His disciples believed that He gives eternal life to everyone who believes in Him.

In the same way, when John’s Gospel does not specifically state the content of belief, we can understand the expressions “believe in Him,” “believe in His name,” “believe in Me,” and “believe Me,” as shorthand for believing that “Jesus is the Christ,

the Son of God,” the One who gives eternal life to every believer in Him.

The nature and quality of *believing in Santa* and *believing in Jesus* are similar. Both terms reflect a belief in some proposition regarding the object of belief. In both instances, *belief* is understood as a persuasion or conviction that some proposition is true. It makes no sense to believe in Santa or to believe in Jesus without specifying the content of what is believed.

However, the difference between believing in Santa versus believing in Jesus is vast—not because of a difference in the level of belief, but because of the difference between the objects of belief. Believing in Santa for gifts at Christmas is futile because Santa is fictitious and therefore powerless.

On the other hand, believing in Jesus for eternal life is believing in the One who created the heavens and the earth, who willingly sacrificed Himself on the cross for every single human being, and who triumphantly rose from the grave.

Faith in Jesus for eternal life never fails because we have Jesus’ own word on it. Jesus has promised:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47). ■



Mike Lii is a finance attorney. He and his wife, Letitia, a member of the GES board, and their son, Payton, live in Dallas and serve at several Free Grace churches. Mike and Letitia also run the Zane Hodges Library online (zanehodges.org).

- 1 See John 3:15-16, 18, 36; 4:42; 5:24, 38-40; 6:35-36, 40, 47, 69; 7:31; 9:35-38; 10:24-28, 36-38; 11:25-27; 12:47; 14:1-2; 20:31.
- 2 See John 2:22, 23; 4:21, 50; 5:46-47; 9:18.
- 3 See John 2:11; 4:39; 6:29; 7:5, 39, 48; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45, 48; 12:37, 42.
- 4 See John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 20:31.
- 5 See John 7:38; 12:44, 46; 14:12; 16:9; 17:20.
- 6 See John 5:46; 8:46; 10:38.
- 7 We know He is not talking about physical death because, in the previous verse, He referred to believers who die physically. In v 25 the Lord explains that at “the resurrection,” He will resurrect believers into His kingdom. In v 26 He explains that as “the life,” He gives everlasting life that cannot be lost to living people who believe in Him for that life.



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Bob and Ken hard at it



Bob, Sharon, David, and Linda Renfro on her 70th birthday

MORE OF WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT GES?



Our translator, Georgie, holding a freshly translated version of Elisabeth



Ah, Bob's Sunday School class from the other side of the room (without Bob's shirt to blind your eyes)

A MAJOR REASON WHY MILLENNIALS ARE LEAVING THE CHURCH

BY KATHRYN WRIGHT



Over the past few decades, there has been an overwhelming exodus of young people from churches in the United States. Many Millennials (and Gen Z) who grew up in the church leave their evangelical roots and turn to post-modernism. These people are often referred to as “deconstructionists.”

Many deconstructionists are leaving the church because of bad teaching. I believe it is a valid complaint. Let me give an example.

A major complaint deconstructionists have with Christianity involves the popular depiction of eternity. I recently watched a video of a young woman who had deconstructed. She grew up in a Baptist church and was so passionate about her faith that she decided to go to seminary. While there, she started to question the Bible. She received her degree but no longer believes in a literal God. God is only a concept. In this video, she argued that if the God of the Bible is real and created this incredibly complex planet and universe, then the Christian depiction of heaven is too limited. She said that the way most Christians see eternity—everyone is the same and floats on clouds—contradicts what we see in the world, which is full of unique and diverse people, nations, and animals.

While this woman was clearly confused and influenced by liberal teachers at her seminary, her complaint about the majority view of heaven is valid. The majority view is wrong. We are told that when the Lord returns, He will make a new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1ff). There will be differences within the kingdom because He will reward people, depending on their faithfulness (Luke 19:12-26; 1 Cor 15:35-41). In addition, there will be

a difference between the Nation of Israel and the Church. There will be different nations (Rev 21:24). Paul says we can’t even imagine the complexity of what the Lord has planned (1 Cor 2:9).

The basis of being in the amazing new world is not commitment, obedience, and perseverance, but faith in Christ for the everlasting life He promises (John 3:16; Rev 22:17). That message is appealing to Millennials.

Many churches have failed to teach these truths, which has led many people who grew up in the church to view eternity as boring and unworthy of their attention. Bad theology failed this young woman.

As a Millennial, I acknowledge that my generation has a lot of issues. It’s easy to be overwhelmed by all the spiritual baggage that many are carrying. However, I think it’s important to keep an eye on the real battle. Some deconstructionists may be delivered from falling away if they are taught sound doctrine. This is where Free Grace people have a unique opportunity. We can step into the divide, responding with grace and sound teaching. The battle for this generation is not done, and we have the privilege of being a beacon in doctrinal darkness. ■



Kathryn Wright and her husband, Dewey, live in Columbia, SC. She is the GES missions coordinator, women's conference speaker, writer, and Zoom teacher.

NOBODY HAS *OUT-SINNED* THE GRACE OF GOD

BY KEN YATES

Manasseh, one of the kings of Judah, was not a good man. He brought a great deal of grief upon his people. He ruled for fifty-five years and is described by the author of 2 Kings as the evilest king in the nation's history (2 Kgs 21:1-16).

When God gave the Jews the Promised Land, He drove out the nations because of their sin. Manasseh did all that those pagan nations had done—and even worse. He rebuilt places for wor-

shipping idols throughout the land of Judah. He promoted the worship of Baal, instituted the worship of the stars and planets, and turned God's temple into a place of idol worship.

Manasseh even sacrificed one of his sons to an idol. He did not rely on the Word of God for guidance but turned to witchcraft and sought the advice of the spirits of dead people. The author of 2 Kings says that Manasseh shed much innocent

blood. We are not given specifics, but this probably means he took advantage of the weak and powerless. He probably persecuted and killed the prophets of God. A Jewish legend says that he was the one who killed Isaiah by sawing him in two.

Israel, Judah's Jewish sister nation to the north, was defeated by its enemies and taken into captivity. Even though Manasseh had the advantage of knowing what happened to the Israelites because of their disobedience, he did not learn from them. When He gave the land to His people, God had removed the nations from Canaan because of their sins; He had removed Israel for the same reason. Manasseh committed worse sins and was deserving of God's wrath. He set a terrible example for his people in his role as the king. He caused the nation to rebel against the Lord and made its people deserving of God's wrath. As a result, God declared that He would drive all of them out of the Promised Land and that they would experience great calamity at the hands of their enemies.

It would be difficult to find a more loathsome individual in the pages of the OT. After fifty years, Manasseh had plunged his people into a pit of destruction. Many men, women, and children would lose their lives due to his actions and the evil example he set.

The author of 2 Kings does not give all the details of Manasseh's life, but 2 Chronicles contains some details. Towards the end of his life, God disciplined him for his many sins, using the king of Assyria. Assyria took Manasseh away as a prisoner, bound with chains. That is to be expected; Manasseh deserved what happened to him because of his sins (2 Chron 33:10-11). The reader would be tempted to say, "I hope he dies in prison." He was an evil, murdering idolater who led many others to destructive behavior and death.

But then something amazing happened. The book of Second Chronicles records how, in his chains, Manasseh called out to God and humbled himself before Him. He prayed to God, and God heard him. The Lord brought him back to Jerusalem and placed him back on the throne. He ended his reign in Jerusalem on a high note. He removed

the idols he had placed in Judah and in the temple of God. He sacrificed to the Lord, thanking Him for His grace and mercy (2 Chron 33:15-16).

Manasseh shows us that anybody, and I mean *anybody*, can be a recipient of the grace of God. No matter what he has done, any unbeliever can believe in Christ and receive eternal life. Any believer—no matter what sins he has committed—can confess his sins, find forgiveness, and have fellowship with the Lord. I had a teacher in seminary who summarized these facts nicely: Nobody has ever out-sinned the grace of God.

But there is another lesson here. The author of 2 Chronicles gives us another piece of information about the life of Manasseh. Even though he called upon the Lord and found forgiveness, his fifty years of evil had devastating consequences for his country. At the end of his life, he served the Lord. But we are told that the people did not follow his example. They would continue in the evil practices that Manasseh modeled for fifty years. This would lead to the whole nation's being taken captive in the near future.

Fifty years of evil also impacted Manasseh's family. His son, Amon, took the throne when he died. For most of his life, Amon had seen his father's depravity. We are told he was an evil king, just like his father had been for fifty years (2 Kgs 21:20).

What is the lesson? Even though anybody can experience the mercy and grace of the Lord, the consequences of our sins still remain. The forgiveness of sins is available to us. But this is not a license to sin. How much better off would the people of Judah and the family of Manasseh have been if he hadn't lived such an evil life for fifty years? ■



Ken Yates is a retired Army chaplain (Lt. Col). He has many theological degrees, including a Ph.D. from D.T.S. in New Testament. He leads the GES international ministry, cohosts the daily podcast, and assists Bob in all aspects of the GES ministry. His new book, *Elisabeth*, is a powerful testimony to the power of God manifested in a Christ-centered family. He and his wife, Pam, live in Columbia, SC.

PEACE
ON EARTH,
GOODWILL
TO MEN.



A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Pax in Terra

By Art Farstad*

*This article first appeared in December 1991 in *Grace in Focus*.

At Christmastide, even the most convinced Protestant should be allowed a little Latin—for example, *gloria in excelsis Deo*! After all, didn't the great Reformers, Luther and Calvin, write chiefly in Latin? And wasn't Calvin's Latin style a great deal more elegant than even the pope's? Yes to both questions! Hence our title: "Peace on Earth" from the Latin Vulgate.

Children (and adults!) who collect stamps don't do it because it's educational, but it *is* all the same. For example, stamp collectors learn what countries use what languages if they're at all observant. (Or, as an old Tennessee matron used to put it, "Anyone with one eye and half sense.")

As a boy I had stamps from a place called "Helvetia," which in those days I mispronounced hel-VEE-sha. No one ever told me of such a country in any class I'd ever sat through. Well, Helvetia (hel-VET-ee-ah) turned out to be—would you believe it?—Switzerland! It's the Latin name for the abode of the Helvetii, ancient tribes who lived there. Because some Swiss people speak German, some French, and some Italian (not to mention their own local dialect, Romansh), the inscriptions on the stamps are often in the (supposedly) "dead" language, Latin!

One Latin text on a Swiss stamp puzzled me:

*"IN TERRA PAX
HOMINIBUS BONAE
VOLUNTATIS."*

Scott's Stamp Catalogue was kind enough to translate it for us Latin-less lads: "Peace on earth to men *of goodwill*."

"Hey, that's *wrong*!" this evangelical Sunday school scholar said, "It should be 'Goodwill to men'!" (Luke 2:14).

Well, live and learn. While the Latin Vulgate is an accurate translation of *some* Greek manuscripts, the King James accurately translates *a much larger number* of Greek manuscripts that read "goodwill to men" (humans, not just males!).

Amazingly, this precious Christmas text differs here in the two traditions by *only one letter* (a *sigma* or "s")! The Catholic version was from a text reading *eudokias* ("of goodwill") and the Protestant version from *eudokia* ("goodwill" as a nominative).

Leaving aside textual criticism (the exacting art and science of reconstructing the

original where there are minor variations in the manuscripts), which text fits the gracious Christmas Evangel better, the traditional KJV/NKJV or the Vulgate?

I don't think there are any people "of goodwill" by God's standards until they're born again. If the minority of manuscripts is right, there's going to be a small portion of humanity (in fact, zero!) receiving peace—either that first Noel or today!¹

The gracious offer of saving peace with God, I believe, is to *all* people, not just to those with whom God is well pleased. (The NIV uses the same type of manuscripts as the Vulgate, but paraphrases: "men on whom his favor rests."²)

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This has been a pretty technical gospel word study for Christmas, but it shows how even one letter can make a big difference in your message. In spite of modern abandonment of it in most versions, I'm convinced that the old, traditional Protestant reading—found in the vast majority of manuscripts—best reflects God's grace:

Peace on earth,
Goodwill to men!

Dear reader, even if we sometimes may feel a lack of goodwill toward God, that Christmas gospel of goodwill toward men is offered freely to you—and to me!³ ■

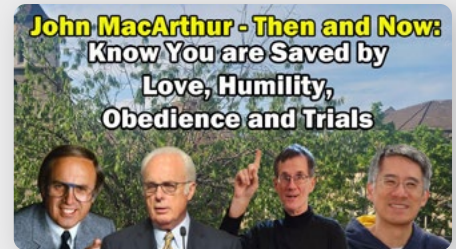


Art Farstad earned a Master of Theology in Old Testament and a Doctor of Theology in New Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary, where he also taught Greek for five years. He was an editor of the *New King James Version*, the *New Scofield Study Bible*, and the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*.

- 1 Editor's note: Art understands Luke 2:14 to be talking about Jesus' coming kingdom. Only then will there be peace on earth and goodwill to men. This note appears at Luke 2:14 in the Hodges-Farstad Majority Text Interlinear: "Here in Luke it [*irēnē*, *peace*] may be even broader, implying the peace associated with the Messianic kingdom of the Christ" (p. 205).
- 2 Editor's note: Most commentators follow the NIV translation of the CT, rejecting the MT reading and modifying the CT reading to fit their theology. It is quite a stretch to translate *eudokias* (CT reading) as *on whom his favor rests*.
- 3 Art went to be with the Lord on September 1, 1998, at sixty-three. A wagon train of good works went with him (Rev 14:13).

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