

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

*"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you."—
Exodus 20:12*

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Reflections on Loneliness

By Robert Berendt

You can be lonely even in a crowd, but God offers hope for the lonely—now and for eternity.



LONELINESS—that uncomfortable feeling of being alone, often when you are in the company of others—brings with it a dark sadness that can become profound and deeply disturbing.

God's people not immune

Far from being immune to loneliness, the Bible shows that many of God's people have struggled with this negative emotion. For instance, having lost all but his own life, Job expresses his sense of loneliness when he is accosted by his friends whom he calls "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2).



After God gave Elijah a miraculous victory over the 450 prophets of Baal, the wicked queen swore he would be killed. He journeyed 40 days and nights to Horeb where he succumbed to his discouragement and loneliness. Hiding in a cave in the desert, he told God he felt as if he were all alone in the world, the last surviving servant of God (1 Kings 19:9-15).

Both Elijah and Job expressed the feeling that they did not want to live any longer (1 Kings 19:4; Job 3:11; 10:18; 14:13). Elijah and Job were both fueled by fear and uncertainty. They may not have doubted God, but the loss of human support brought strong feelings of despair.

It is helpful to remember that Jesus Christ Himself knew true loneliness when His followers forsook Him at His arrest and crucifixion.

My bout of profound loneliness

In the past, I experienced my own bout of profound loneliness in spite of the great support of loved ones surrounding me. I have many relatives, including four children and 13 grandchildren. I have many friends. But after my wife Joan's death, one day epitomizing my loneliness stands out.

It was Sept. 28, 1984. I was in Vienna that night on the first anniversary of Joan's death. I had been coping quite well and enjoying my first trip to Europe, but on that night I was in a small wine-tasting room in a small pub, and though there were people there, I felt very much alone. I could not share my thoughts with anyone else. I felt isolated in the midst of others. It was not a nice feeling, I must admit. Thankfully, I had the reserves and support to bounce back quickly—but that experience gave me a glimpse into that forlorn state of mind and how to counteract it.

Counteracting that dark cloud

What can we do when we feel that dark cloud of loneliness overhead? God created us to need one another. In Genesis 2:18, God states that "it is not good that the man should be alone." There are many scriptures showing God's instructions to prevent loneliness. The whole book of Ruth and other stories and regulations God gave deal with the situation of widows and orphans. James 1:27 was written many years ago to address the interaction of people in God's Church. God tells us that "pure religion" means visiting the fatherless and widows in their distress. This group can be some of the loneliest among God's people.



Of course, a visit will uplift them. But reaching out to help others in need can also help dispel the loneliness we all feel from time to time. All Christians have the responsibility to aid and support one another. We can choose to act for the sake of others and ourselves.

Everyone will feel the cloud of loneliness from time to time.

Since loneliness is a state of mind that develops under various circumstances, we can and should control those circumstances to our own benefit. Self-control is vital to ongoing good health. Inaction is a fuel to the flames of loneliness. Combating the negative is good for us. Taking control of our lives is the essence of living. For instance, people have formed clubs for the lonely. Lonely people are reaching out. That can be healthy and positive.

Combating loneliness may not be easy. Social graces may be lacking, but they can be learned. Self-improvement courses can really work. There are countless others who are just as lonely—looking for relief. Going to places (such as church social activities) where we can get to know people is a conscious act of taking control.

Too often, we follow the "natural" path that Elijah took—walking alone in the desert, kicking rocks and looking for a cave. Everyone will feel the cloud of loneliness from time to time. Those who set out to do something about it may be learning far more than they realize.

John 15:12-15 reveals the exciting words Jesus spoke when He stated that He would call His followers "friends." Not only that, the Bible tells us that humans were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). We have the potential to be His children and inheritors of all He has created (Romans 8:17)! The result for God and Jesus will be a large, happy family and countless friends! Loneliness will never exist in His family. What a wonderful gift He offers to mankind! It is worth every effort and all our energy to attain.

Too often, we follow the "natural" path that Elijah took—walking alone in the desert, kicking rocks and looking for a cave.

Recommended Reading: Life has its challenges and ups and downs, but there are tried and tested principles that can make it work. Our booklet *Making Life Work* discusses ways to improve your relationships and lead a more meaningful and happier life. Read or download a copy of [Making Life Work](#), or request a free copy through the mail.

My Service Was a Waste!

By Janet Treadway

Have you ever felt that what you tried to do to serve others turned out to be a waste? It's easy to get weary doing good. Is it really worth it?



HAVE YOU EVER FELT that your service to someone was a waste? Or that you were not appreciated? Or that everything you did to serve someone or help in a service project was totally forgotten? Or worse yet, that people found fault with everything you did when you were trying to do good? You ended up feeling like you were kicked in the teeth.

If I could ask for a show of hands of how many of you felt your service was unappreciated at some point, I would imagine most of you would be raising your hands and raising them high. Does that mean we should throw up our hands and say, "No more"? I have felt that way many times. But is that the solution—to just stop serving and getting involved?

I was once involved with a project that required staying up all night for several nights, only to go to work the next day totally exhausted. The next year someone else had been given part of my responsibilities without anyone ever talking to me about it. What had I done wrong? It made me feel so unappreciated for the hours that I had put into that project, and I became very discouraged. (Somehow it doesn't occur to you at a time like this to be thankful for the reduced workload.) I wondered why I even wasted my time when I was so easily replaced. In the depths of my struggles I made a promise to myself that I would never get involved again with anything. I never wanted to hurt like this again. The hurt was too high of a price.

Where were the other nine?

Christ was faced with the same problem—lack of appreciation from those He reached out to help. He did much good, He served many people, fed thousands, blessed children, healed the lame, gave sight to the blind and healed many of their sicknesses. But how many came back to express appreciation? How many actually turned on Him instead? In Romans 1:21 it says, "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

The story of the 10 lepers that Jesus healed helps to illustrate the point of ingratitude. "Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood far off. And they lifted up their voices and said, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!'" (Luke 17:11-13). In their deepest need they cried out to Him for help.



"So when He saw them, He said to them, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?' Then He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well'" (Luke 17:14-19).

Jesus healed 10 and only one came back to express thanks. The others forgot or did not have the time to express their gratitude. It's a reminder to us to show appreciation for those who serve us.

How many of the people Jesus healed and helped were there to support Him when He faced His greatest trial, that of dying on the cross?

What should we do?

But what should we do when we feel our service has been wasted?

How many of the people Jesus healed and helped were there to support Him when He faced His greatest trial, that of dying on the cross?

Part of the answer is that we sometimes have to examine our own reasons for serving. Naturally we want to receive recognition and appreciation, but that's not the purpose of serving that Christ taught. Christ taught a standard of service that seeks no recognition from men (Matthew 6:1-4). This Christ-centered service helps us become more like our Heavenly Father, and is focused on really helping others.

We should keep giving and hoping that our lives will touch others and make a difference in their lives, even in the face of rejection and even if our good deeds are forgotten. Although men will forget our service, it will never be forgotten and unappreciated by God!

Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love, which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

In a recent country hit song by the group Alabama, "Angels Among Us," you will find these words of encouragement for those who give hope: "When life dealt troubled times and had me down on my knees, there's always been someone there to come along and comfort me, a kind word from a stranger to lend a helping hand. A phone call from a friend just to say I understand. Ain't it kind of funny at the dark end of the road, someone lights the way with just a single ray of hope."

Just like those mentioned in the song who do good, we too can be instruments of God for good. We continue to offer a ray of hope in people's lives even though it may not be appreciated and may even be forgotten. We become very thankful to those who offer us a ray of hope when we are down and discouraged. We do not forget the good that has been done for us! Most of all, we express that gratitude to them and to God.

Although men will forget our service, it will never be forgotten and unappreciated by God!

Keep on doing—anyway

While going through my own discouragement, I heard a message about the Paradoxical Commandments that turned my broken heart around and helped my attitude change to a more positive approach of service. The Paradoxical Commandments by Kent M. Keith show the importance of doing the right thing, no matter how others react. Here are a few of them:

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.

You may find more information at www.paradoxicalcommandments.com.

We may feel unappreciated or at times thrown away, attacked or kicked in the teeth, but we should do good anyway. We practice the example of Jesus Christ. Even though His good deeds were forgotten by many, He died for all of us *anyway!*

Recommended Reading: Life is not always fair, and too often we experience pain and suffering, whether physical or mental. The booklet *Why Does God Allow Suffering?* examines the causes of suffering and takes a realistic and encouraging look at the ultimate solution. Read or download a copy of [Why Does God Allow Suffering?](#) or request a free copy through the mail.

"This Is the Will of God"

By Robert Curry

The Bible lists three specific actions we can do that fulfill the "will of God."



“**T**HEREFORE DO NOT BE UNWISE, but understand what the will of the Lord is,” the apostle Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 5:17. It should encourage us that Paul said we can know the will of God!

Of course, God gave us the entire Bible as a written expression of His will. Just as an individual prepares his "last will and testament" to dictate to any beneficiaries what their inheritance will be, so God bequeathed us His Old and New Testaments explaining how we can inherit His Kingdom.

An old joke goes, "Where there's a will, there's a relative." With God's will, the result will be glorified sons and daughters in His family! "The reading of the will"—rather than taking place at a special meeting where potential inheritors find out from a lawyer whether they received anything—needs to be something we do daily. In fact, more than just reading the Old and New Testaments, the Bible makes clear we need to study them thoroughly and live them.

For example, let's focus now on three verses in the New Testament that contain the words, "this is the will of God." It's as if God was thinking, "How can I make this so plain they can't possibly miss it!"

All three verses express powerful concepts about God's mind-set, purposes and desires that are vital for a son or daughter of God to practice at all times. All three require diligent and zealous action.

Give thanks

"In everything give thanks; for *this is the will of God* in Christ Jesus for you," instructed Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

The lifelong challenge here is to give thanks in all circumstances. Are we really ready for that?

I thought I was prepared when my family returned from enjoying a week of sermons and fellowship celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in late September, basking in a soaring attitude of gratitude, pumped from the messages and full of optimism.



But arriving home, we learned that one of our renters had moved out while we were away, still owing us rent. That hurt, but we dutifully went about the business of looking for a new renter, which usually took one to two weeks. Since it was at the prime rental time of the end of the month, we confidently expected a new and better renter soon.

But quickly September breezed by and then October slipped away with nobody closing a deal. In fact, we only received about three calls the entire month. Nothing like that had ever happened before.

November started off the same numbing way, and we could only joke about how we shouldn't have asked specifically for a "good" renter!

Since I was already preparing this article, I began to surmise that one of the reasons for the trial might be to learn something worth sharing with the entire readership. You'll have to judge but I think it's a doozy.

One day Isaiah 58:11 jumped out at me with a comforting promise: "The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought."

Wait a minute! Fire up the flagging faith! This promise was for God's beloved children *in drought*. And God wasn't frantic to get them out of it! After all, He inspired Peter to state that the "genuineness of your faith," though "tested by fire," is more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:7)—in this case, rental income!

While I had slipped into thinking God wasn't close and involved because there was no renter in sight, actually God was intimately near all along. Can He get any closer than living in us?

And just as Isaiah promised, God was guiding us continually while the house remained unoccupied. When the three had applied, I had seen His hand in circumstances and discernment, leading us to turn them away. Somehow we were still paying our bills. In sum, we were still living a very abundantly blessed life! Now, though still no renter in sight, my soul felt the satisfaction God always has available for us whether unemployed, unable to find a mate, battling a disease or whatever might threaten to "separate us from the love of Christ" (Romans 8:35-39).

After learning this important perspective, I "knew" the trial was soon to end, and sure enough, on the night before Thanksgiving we were blessed with some renters. They appear to be good ones!

Actually it's in the good times that we are paradoxically most likely to neglect giving thanks. God warns in Deuteronomy 8:12-17 that when we have "eaten and are full," we are more likely to "say in [our] heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'"

In the model prayer Christ gave, we are taught to start our prayers by hallowing God's name (Matthew 6:9). The next big section asks for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done, on earth as in heaven (verse 10). If we have started our prayers with praising God's name, we have made a good start at being in harmony with God's will.

If we have started our prayers with praising God's name, we have made a good start at being in harmony with God's will.

Men especially should note that the instruction here is more than just being thankful but actually progressing to the point of vocalizing it. We believe we are thankful for our wives and other women in our life and think, since they are noted for their powers of observation, surely they see how thankful we are without us saying anything syrupy, sloppy or downright mushy! Thankfully we know from helpful lectures, sermons and our women telling us that they need to hear our words of thankfulness. Truly, when thanks are spoken, they are experienced more fully by both recipient and giver.

When I asked my daughter, Heather, age 11, what she thought of fulfilling God's will by giving thanks, she bubbled, "I always start out my prayers with thanks to God!" That gives a grateful dad something else to be thankful for!

Abstain from sexual immorality

"For *this is the will of God*, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality," Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

Self-control also comes through spiritual action—choosing to deny the selfish urges.

Why abstain? Sexual immorality leaves physical, mental, emotional and spiritual stains that we want to avoid. Even though the carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:7) and especially doesn't want anybody telling it what to do regarding sex (Romans 1:28), it still strives to avoid the bad effects that naturally follow from wrong choices.

Even more than being sexually moral to enjoy good results, Paul says we should do it for the privilege of being sanctified—set apart—as a son or daughter of God with a breathtaking future in the family and Kingdom of God.

He adds that we must know how to possess our own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust (1 Thessalonians 4:4-5). How do we acquire this know-how? Godly educational materials motivate us to rededicate ourselves to the highest standards of God which bring fulfilling results.

Self-control also comes through spiritual action—choosing to deny the selfish urges. Though we get tired of hearing it, we must choose daily to avoid TV and movies that promote sexual immorality. And now, the powerful evils on the Internet, no longer content just to lurk in the shadows, invade our inbox and sometimes jump right into our faces. Inheriting God's Kingdom is serious business, not to be toyed with or compromised.



As Glen White, United Church of God pastor of Calgary, Alberta, put it so well during a recent sermon in Denver, Colorado, "What a waste of time sin is!"

Doing good

"For *this is the will of God*, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," says 1 Peter 2:15. In verse 12 Peter explains that we must conduct ourselves honorably among unbelievers, despite knowing they are prone to speak against us as evildoers. Why bother? Peter says because of our good works they observe, they will "glorify God in the day of visitation." If we fulfill God's will now by doing good, many will make up the "great multitude which no one could number" (Revelation 7:9) and fulfill His will by giving thanks!

The great worldwide work God has called His Church to do is really done one person at a time. You, helping someone else. Are we waiting for big deeds when many just need a cup of water (Mark 9:41)? Are we really doing anything to help the hungry, thirsty, naked and those in prison (Matthew 25:35)?

Stop reading right now and ask God to help you do something good for somebody. Because somebody you know needs your help now.

Stop reading right now and ask God to help you do something good for somebody.

In 2 Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul stirred up the members in Corinth by spotlighting the tremendous example of the Macedonians in supplying relief for those in famine in Jerusalem. He pinpoints some key components of the doing-good process. We flesh them out by applying them:

Despite "great trial of affliction" and "deep poverty," the Macedonians "abounded in the riches of their liberality" (verse 2). Do we have it that tough? Do we go above and beyond?

The Macedonians did! "Beyond their ability, they were freely willing" (verse 3). "With much urgency" (verse 4).

What was the foundation of their generosity? "They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us *by the will of God*" (verse 5).

Just as we must actually progress from being thankful to actually giving thanks, so we must proceed from wanting to do good to actually doing it. "But now you also must complete the doing of it: that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have" (verse 11).

For the privilege of being called now and set apart as God's children, we rededicate ourselves to choose each day to fulfill God's will by giving thanks, abstaining from sexual immorality and doing good. Freely willing and urgent about it, we appreciate the blessings that come now but especially later when we inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

Recommended Reading: God gave us the entire Bible as a written expression of His will. The booklet *How to Understand the Bible* looks at keys to learning about and applying this precious gift. Read or download a copy of [How to Understand the Bible](#) or request a free copy through the mail.

The Jealousy of Reuben

By Don Hooser

Knowing history helps us understand the present and future. Reading biographies helps us understand people in general, and especially the people who are similar in some ways to the people we read about. The experiences and attitudes of Reuben are certainly relevant to today.



REUBEN WAS THE ELDEST SON of the biblical patriarch Jacob, born to him by Leah (Genesis 35:23). What the Bible tells us about him is interesting and thought-provoking.

When something is mentioned in the Bible, it is because God has a good reason for it to be included. God would not include mere trivia—past actions that were mere aberrations or anomalies—that had no significance or relevance for future understanding.

Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, had 12 sons who became the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob ended up married to two women, Leah and Rachel, each of whom had a handmaiden, and Jacob fathered children by all four women. This polygamy was bound to cause major family troubles.

Jacob made no effort to hide the fact that he loved Rachel more than his other wife, Leah (Genesis 29:30). Although Leah had the honor of being the first to bear children for Jacob, Jacob continued to show his preference for Rachel. After all the children were born, family jealousies were intensified when Jacob gave preferential treatment to Rachel's two sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

Reuben's actions

Of Reuben's boyhood, only one incident is mentioned. Reuben "found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah" (Genesis 30:14). "Mandrakes are a special type of herb that the peoples of the Middle East regarded as an aid to conception. Their aroma was associated with lovemaking. See Song 7:13" (*Nelson's Study Bible*, note on Genesis 30:14).



A boy would be better off not having the knowledge of or the interest in a supposed love potion. The motivation for Reuben's gift? Apparently it was sympathy and jealousy on behalf of his mother who had been slighted all along by his father, and then, on top of that, Leah "stopped bearing" children (29:35). It seems Reuben wanted his mother to maintain fertility to gain increasing honor in comparison to Rachel. If this was the case, it seems he was overly concerned about the prestige of his immediate family even as a boy.

The boyhood incident perhaps relates to his next recorded action. Not long after Rachel's death, when Reuben apparently was a young man, he "went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel [his father] heard about it" (Genesis 35:22). This despicable act was similar to what the apostle Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:1 as "sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!"

What was Reuben's motivation? Bilhah had been Rachel's maid. Perhaps Reuben's act was spurred by his jealous resentment of Rachel because his father had loved her more than Leah, Reuben's mother. If that was the case, he was taking his anger out on Bilhah by humiliating her when Rachel was no longer around as a protector or witness. Of course Reuben's blatant disregard for morality is also significant.

"Israel heard about it," the Bible says. What emotions must Israel have felt? Israel was probably devastated with grief, anger and deep disappointment in his son. Reuben's father did not disown him as a son, but 1 Chronicles 5:1 tells us that Reuben "was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph." For the remainder of his life, Reuben bore the shame and regret of having lost the prestige and power of being the firstborn

son. One can only imagine how greatly Reuben's jealousy toward his brother Joseph increased after the rights of the firstborn were passed to Joseph.

Joseph and his brothers

All of Joseph's older brothers had jealousy and resentment toward him—for more than one reason. His father made the mistake of showing more love for Joseph than for his older brothers (Genesis 37:3-4). Joseph had better character than his brothers, which made them look bad by comparison, and Joseph fueled the fire of resentment by reporting their bad conduct (verse 2).

Then when God gave Joseph dreams that portrayed Joseph as ruling over his brothers, Joseph made the mistake, whether out of naiveté or vanity, of telling his brothers about the dreams (verses 5-11). Joseph obviously was intelligent, so it would seem he would have understood enough basic psychology to know that telling those dreams to his brothers would irritate them. It seems more logical that this very capable young man was somewhat cocky and didn't hesitate to humiliate his brothers. If that was the case, it is more clear as to why God allowed Joseph to be sold to slave traders and to suffer for many years. He needed to be humbled before God could use him in a mighty way. Since Joseph and Reuben were both self-willed, strong-willed and cocky, one would expect their descendants to be competitive with each other as well.

Pride ruined Reuben. "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Proverbs 29:23).

However, the next mention of Reuben shows him exercising leadership and apparently some compassion toward Joseph. Out of jealousy and hatred, the brothers decided to kill Joseph (verses 18-20). Thankfully, Reuben intervened. "But Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, 'Let us not kill him'" (Genesis 37:21).

Reuben's motivation may have been at least partly self-serving, as he may have been hoping to regain favor with his father by saving Joseph's life. Over 20 years later, when Joseph, now second in command of all Egypt, detained and threatened his brothers, their consciences started to hurt (Genesis 42:21). Reuben's reply sounds perhaps a little self-righteous as he more or less told his brothers, "You should have listened to me" (verse 22). But verse 37 indicates that Reuben had grown significantly in character. He showed leadership, commitment and a willingness to sacrifice as he pledged to protect Benjamin.

Jacob's prophecy of Reuben

Just before Jacob died, he "called his sons and said, 'Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you [your descendants] in the last days'" (Genesis 49:1). When Jacob speaks of Reuben in verses 3 and 4, he seems to have strong and mixed feelings—feelings of admiration for good qualities, as well as feelings of shame for Reuben's failings that disgraced his father. Translations of verse 3 vary. In the last phrase of verse 3, the NKJV says, "the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power." The NIV says, "excelling in honor, excelling in power." The RSV says, "pre-eminent in pride and pre-eminent in power." The TEV says, "the proudest and strongest of all my sons."

But the first part of verse 4 says, "Unstable as water, you shall not excel." Note that the Bible mentions no Reubenite excelling—no judge, prophet or ruler is listed from tribe of Reuben.

Reubenites' grab for power

After the Exodus from Egypt, the pride and presumptuousness of two Reubenites brought death to themselves and their families. The story of these two Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, following Korah, a Levite, in challenging the authority of Moses is recorded in Numbers 16. In spite of Jacob's demotion of Reuben, the Reubenites may have been motivated by a jealous feeling that they should have more authority because Reuben had been the firstborn son of Jacob.



Moses, just before his death, pronounced blessings on each of the tribes of Israel. He had relatively little to say about Reuben. "Let Reuben live, and not die, nor let his men be few" (Deuteronomy 33:6). Most translations give this sense—that Reuben's descendants would be many. However, the new Jewish Publication Society translation says, "May Reuben live and not die, though few be his numbers." The New Berkeley Version similarly indicates declining descendants.

When the Israelites were taking over the Promised Land, the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh requested land on the east side of the Jordan River. This may have reflected attitudes of "me first" and "I'd rather be off by myself." Staying on the other side of the Jordan River was always a psychological as well as physical divide between them and their brother tribes.

After the time of King David, the once powerful tribe of Reuben sank into comparative insignificance. The three tribes on the east side of the Jordan were the first to be taken into captivity by Assyria (1 Chronicles 5:26). The Bible and history indicate that those taken captive by Assyria eventually gained their freedom and migrated mostly to the continent of Europe.

No doubt the Reubenites continued to dream of the power and glory that could have been theirs—if only Reuben had not lost the rights of the firstborn son.

Jealousy and pride are powerful forces. "For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge" (Proverbs 6:34, RSV).

"Jealousy [is] as cruel as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6). Pride ruined Reuben. "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor" (Proverbs 29:23). And often attitudes are passed down from generation to generation even after the reason for the attitudes has been forgotten.

No doubt the Reubenites continued to dream of the power and glory that could have been theirs—if only Reuben had not lost the rights of the firstborn son. Reuben and his immediate descendants had leadership abilities, creativity, strength, compassion and perhaps other strong character traits, but those traits were often undermined by Reuben's instability, willful self-seeking, pride and jealousy.

Recommended Reading: Many have wondered about what happened to the "lost ten tribes" of Israel. The tribe of Judah is readily recognizable today, but what of the 10 tribes taken captive more than a hundred years earlier? The booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* examines the biblical and historical evidence to identify the modern descendants of two leading tribes. Read or download a copy of [The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy](#) or request a free copy through the mail.

Lessons From Babylon: God's Still in Charge

By Jay Turner

The ancient city of Babylon provides a reminder that men's flawed systems and governments will give way to God's mastery of world events.



THE RUINS OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF BABYLON are located inside the borders of the modern nation of Iraq. They are an enduring testament to God's ultimate mastery of world events, and of the inexorable unfolding of His plan for mankind. And it was in Babylon that God revealed Himself to the ancient world as the Most High God.

More than 500 years before the birth of Christ, God sent the armies of Babylon to punish the nation of Judah. Daniel and his three friends were taken as captives to serve in the royal court of Babylon. God was at work in all of this. He orchestrated events to reveal Himself and show how He works in history.

An impressive dream

God gave King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon an impressive dream, and imbued him with a deep suspicion of his advisors; such that the king demanded that his advisors tell him both what he had dreamed and what it meant. King Nebuchadnezzar knew that anyone could spin a pretty story out of a dream—but only someone in touch with genuine supernatural power could reveal *what* he had dreamed and its true meaning.



God used this challenge to expose the astrologers and soothsayers of Babylon as frauds, and to reveal Himself and to show who His true servants were. God gave Daniel the knowledge both of the dream and what it meant. Daniel told the king that it was the God of heaven who had given the king rulership over the great realm of Babylon, and that God was revealing an outline of history through the dream. God predicted a series of world-ruling kingdoms of progressively baser character, which would all in the end be swept away and replaced by a divinely established kingdom that would rule the world forever (Daniel 2:28-45).

King Nebuchadnezzar quickly forgot this object lesson, and continued on his path of turning into an egotistical tyrant (Daniel 5:18-21). God gave him another vision to urge him to repentance (Daniel 4:27) and to drive home the point that it is the Most High God who rules over the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:17). Nebuchadnezzar's successor held the God of Abraham in contempt, and so God handed down judgment and overthrew the kingdom of Babylon (Daniel 5:22-31).

God gave Daniel a vision (Daniel 7) in which Daniel was shown the same sequence of world-ruling kingdoms, and was shown that in the end God will once again sit in judgment of these great governments. God will sweep them away and turn over rulership of the world to His servants (Daniel 7:13-14, 18, 27). We can see that not only is God in charge of world events, He is working to a specific *plan*.

God predicted a series of world-ruling kingdoms... replaced by a divinely-established kingdom that would rule the world forever.

In this present evil age (Galatians 1:4), "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). Satan sways almost everyone in this age by virtue of having deceived the whole world into following him. Thankfully, God is in charge and limits what Satan can do (Job chapters 1 and 2).

Peace will fill the world

We live in a world of satanically deceived nations. It simply isn't in our power to establish lasting peace and justice. God promises that He will take care of it—and only He can do it.

The day is coming when God will send an angel to drag Satan off to prison and turn rulership of the world over to Christ and the saints (Revelation 20:1-6). That is when the kingdoms of this world will come under the rule of the Kingdom of God (Revelation 11:15), and justice and peace will fill the world. For now, it is our part to prepare to be part of God's government, and to

comfort the victims of the injustice in this world. And we ought to be praying, "Thy kingdom come!"

Recommended Reading: The book of Revelation expands on some of the themes introduced in Daniel, and describes an end-time Babylon to be replaced by the returning Jesus Christ. The booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* explores the symbolism and meaning of this fascinating book. Read or download a copy of [The Book of Revelation Unveiled](#) or request a free copy through the mail.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Real Peace Is More Than the Absence of War

By Larry J. Walker

War and peace both begin in the heart. The Creator of the human heart has much to say about how real peace will be achieved.



PEACE AND SAFETY ARE VERY HIGH on the list of priorities for many people. Even before the U.S.-led war against Saddam Hussein began, many people in the United States and around the world began staging "peace rallies" advocating peace instead of war. Many eschew violence and insist that peace could be preserved by negotiation. Feelings run strong on both sides of the issue.

Peace is a major topic addressed in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah decried violence, lying and injustice in the nation of Judah and boldly proclaimed, "The way of peace they have not known" (Isaiah 59:1-8).

The apostle Paul applied this passage to all mankind (Romans 3:9-18). Indeed, the fact that man does not know the way to peace is tragically documented by man's entire history, from the time that Cain killed Abel to the wars and conflicts of the present day.

The causes of war are deeply rooted in the self-centered, carnal nature of unregenerate man. Violent, aggressive behavior that leads to war begins with someone wanting something someone else has and setting out to get it forcibly (James 4:1-2). This hostile approach begins in childhood, when one child wants a toy another child is playing with.



Most people live in some degree of peace with their neighbors. But what about those who willfully remain violent and persist in lies, and whose decisions and actions result in suffering of innocent victims? History, as well as Scripture, teaches us that some people are simply unwilling to depart from their violent, rebellious and destructive ways. No amount of education, negotiation or concessions will sway them from their evil plans.

There is a widespread mentality in the Western world that considers physical punishment as an antithesis to peace, and something to be avoided at all costs. This philosophy pervades many human institutions in our culture, from child rearing to international politics. Many years ago Bertrand Russell, in the face of threatened war with the Soviet Union, coined the slogan, "Better Red than dead." This is the ultimate expression of "peace" at all costs and a stark contrast to patriot Patrick Henry's famous words, "Give me liberty or give me death." Peace without freedom is really not peace.

Violence and war result in widespread suffering, often resulting in deaths and injuries of civilians and other innocent victims. However, other alternatives often perpetuate the same problems when a violent, evil leader is allowed to remain in power.

Ultimately, all of mankind will learn the way of peace based on the laws of God under the righteous rule of Christ.

Jesus tells Christians to "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). However, God does not intend for evil to go unpunished. The apostle Paul explains in Romans 13:1-7 that God, the source of all authority, has made provisions for civil authorities to "execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Romans 13:4).

Jesus Christ will bring about permanent world peace as a conquering King, who "in righteousness ... judges and makes war" (Revelation 19:11). Some would consider righteousness and making war as contradictory terms. But the love of God includes punishing evildoers as a prerequisite to lasting peace.

Human nature must be replaced by the motivation of the love of God. This requires repentance and a spiritual transformation initiated by God (Romans 12:1-2).

Ultimately, all of mankind will learn the way of peace based on the laws of God under the righteous rule of Christ. Universal disarmament will be achieved, and weapons of death and destruction will be converted to agricultural implements, and everyone will dwell safely (Micah 4:1-4).

Today we live in a dangerous world, fraught with wars and conflicts. We should pray for our national and international leaders with the comforting assurance that ultimately God desires for all to "come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Jesus promises us true peace that far exceeds the mere absence of war (John 14:27; Philippians 4:6-7). We can look forward to the time when war and suffering will finally be no more. Meanwhile we should do our best to be examples of the peace of God in our own lives. Our motto ought to be, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

Recommended Reading: The Bible promises that a time of peace is coming. But when? What must happen before that time comes? The booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* gives an overview of the prophetic themes of the Bible leading up to the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. Read or download a copy of [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy](#) or request a free copy through the mail.

Letters to the Editor

[Will God Continue to Bless America? If Not, Why Not?](#)



I read Don Hooser's article with great interest. I remember seeing signs up all over the place that read, "God Bless America" just as he said. I also remember telling my husband that I would like to counter with signs that said, "Make America Worth Blessing!" I also didn't tell anyone else, I was afraid I might be lynched—ha ha!

Good article by Don Hooser as always!

— Marilyn Braley

[The Windmill Mystery](#)



Your article was funny and endearing. I appreciate the encouragement. Keep up the good work! I also appreciated the laugh.

— Pamela J. Bartholomew

[When Life Knocks You Down...Get Up!](#)



I was thrilled when I read this article. I realized that nothing in life comes easy. We have to struggle and we grow in the process! Thanks for an encouraging article.

— E.D. Gajali

[Take Responsibility for Your Own Health and The Diets of the Millennium](#)



I just wanted to say thank you to Tom Damour for the two interesting and comprehensive articles about health...taking responsibility and making the Millennium diets the diets for us today.

Two years ago I read a book entitled *Diet For a New America* by John Robbins. I was amazed to learn of the ongoing poisoning being done in this country by the meat, dairy and egg industries...all, of course, designed to make money. We in God's Church should especially understand that Satan is very much involved in the food industry. (And when we become sick, he's very much involved in the health care industry, which is another subject.) Sadly, many of God's people refuse to acknowledge this very real fact.

Anyway, I just wanted to say thank you, and I hope there will be more on this subject in the coming months and years ahead for God's people. We simply cannot be a very effective people if we're sickly and not functioning at the optimum level where God wants us.

— Marilyn Friend



What a GREAT article! I am so glad that VCM is accessible on your Web site! Keep up the good work, and God bless!

— Carol Mackey

[Would You Believe...?](#)



"Rumors" is a very good article and I notice you quoted correctly that "many are called" and also indicated that the individual has a responsibility to answer and seek God. Way to go! I thoroughly enjoyed reading this article and found it very encouraging.

— Pamela J. Bartholomew

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.