

BULLETIN

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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Updates from Rusty Hancock

The theme of the Bible is the Kingdom of God. But what does your Kingdom look like? Yes, I said **YOUR** Kingdom. We have some insight into the characteristics of God's Kingdom. In Seed & Bread No. 70 (*God's Earth*) and Seed & Bread No. 71 (*Earth's Glorious Future*) my grandpa, Otis Q. Sellers, said that "Jesus Christ would immediately be unveiled to the world" and that "the whole earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord." Israel will be restored and become a miraculous reality. The process of death will stop and life will work in men. "Under God's government, the curse that now rests upon the physical earth will be removed." "The earth will become an ideal place for men to live and work. Every acre of it will become habitable and fruitful." "It will be an ideal place for family life. All marital unions will be the result of God joining two people together, an ideal situation for rearing children." And through resurrection, "Old friendships will be renewed, and fellowships that were broken in death can be restored."

The characteristics of God's Kingdom are well established in the Bible. But I sometimes like to fantasize about my vision of the Kingdom. I remember a conversation with my grandpa in which he spoke of having a youthful and healthy body in the Kingdom. A huge baseball fan, my grandpa joked about the two of us playing baseball together and whether he could strike me out. This brings two prospects to light. First, my fond and loving memories of my grandpa are of an elderly, heavy-set bald man. It would be strange to have a "grandpa" who is youthful and physically perfect. And second, will there be baseball in the Kingdom?

And this starts a large inventory of things to dream about for the future. Will there be sports, games, and leisure activities? I often played games with my grandparents, our favorite being Yahtzee. And what of earth being a paradise? I was born and raised in the Mohave Desert of the southwest United States. I adore the desert. I find the red rock canyons, mesas, and arid

life wonderful. But my youngest son lives in Hawaii. Most people would say that Hawaii is paradise. And I know others who prefer a snow-capped mountain or a dense forest.

This discussion is not new to me. I had several conversations with Dave Hetteema (former Director of The Word of Truth Ministry) about the future. He envisioned an agrarian society, fertile farmland and fields, with no modern technology (computers, cars, planes, television, etc.). Whereas my mother revels in technology, current and future. She says that if she is living in Southern California and wants to visit Jerusalem, she doesn't want to take an extended and tiresome trip of walking and sailing there. She wants to get on a plane and be there in a matter of hours.

I also fantasize about what my new occupation will be in the Kingdom. My role as a Police Officer during the Dispensation of Grace will not be required in the Kingdom. In the Kingdom I would like to be a sailor or ship's captain. Will I have a choice, or will God provide me with a purpose? There will be many professions that will not be necessary in the Kingdom.

Resurrection, I believe, will be the most amazing part of the Kingdom. We all have loved ones in the state of death "waiting for the Kingdom." My brother Randy passed away a couple of months ago. I fantasize about us giving each other our "brother" hug. I'm sure you all have the same dream.

However until then, "Thy Kingdom come . . ."

*Let the people praise thee, O
God; let all the people praise thee.
Then shall the earth yield her
increase; and God, even our own
God, shall bless us.
Psalm 67:5-6*

Grace During the Tribulation?

By Nathan C. Johnson

The second coming of Jesus Christ begins with a sweeping purge of those who have turned from God and committed outrageous rebellion against Him in the test that takes place during the tribulation period. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 (*New King James Version* throughout) sets this forth: “. . . and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” The world is in no way ready to be judged on this standard today. Yet after hundreds of years of God’s premillennial kingdom, this is what Christ will do.

This purging shall begin among those who actually joined the army of the beast and fought against the faithful of Jerusalem, as Zechariah 14:12-14 declares: *“This shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet,”* and, *“a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbor, and raise his hand against his neighbor’s hand.”* Finally, *“Judah also will fight at Jerusalem.”* So whether by plague, by cutting each other down, or by the soldiers of the LORD empowered against them, this army will be quickly wiped out by the flaming fire of Christ’s punishment. Only the beast and his false prophet will be left to stand trial before God and then be cast into the lake of fire, as Revelation 19:20 reveals.

The flaming fire of God’s judgment does not stop with those who outrightly joined the beast’s forces, however. In the interpretation of the parable of the tares among the wheat, Christ reveals that this will spread out to the whole earth. *“Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire”* (Matthew 13:40-42). Thus all those who practice lawlessness will be removed from the earth, not just those who actually joined the army of the beast. *“Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matthew 13:43).

This sounds uncompromising, and when it is done surely the wicked will be thoroughly purged. Yet will all at that time be about pure justice, or is there any sign of God’s grace, even during the tribulation period? I find very interesting the words of the owner of the field in the parable of the tares, when his servants asked him, *“Do you*

want us then to go and gather them up?” He replied, *“No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them”* (Matthew 13:28-29). The owner does not want any wheat lost along with the tares.

It is noteworthy that he puts it this way. From the human perspective, we might have expected him to worry more about missing a tare than about destroying a stalk of wheat. E.W. Bullinger in his *Companion Bible*, page 1338, says of tares, *“Each grain of zewan must be removed before grinding wheat, or the bread is bitter and poisonous.”* Yet in spite of the danger posed by the tares, the master is more concerned that not a single grain of wheat be destroyed along with the weeds. What human farmer would be so solicitous of his crop? We see here the kindness of the Lord in not wanting to see a single, as we might say, sickly wheat plant uprooted accidentally with the tares.

In the interpretation of the parable, the good seed are the sons of the kingdom and the bad seed are the sons of the wicked one. Yet does this not imply that some who are sons of the kingdom might, early in the time of testing, display some tare-like characteristics? Perhaps some will listen to Satan’s lies at first or go along with the rebels just to get along, and yet will realize their foolishness and show their true wheat-like character later. Christ seems concerned that none of these be rooted up.

Zechariah also leaves the possibility open for grace to be shown after the destruction of the wicked. Zechariah 14:16-17 tells us, *“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.”* Here we see order being restored after the destruction of the wicked at the second coming of Christ. However, some at this time might remain stubborn and, until forced to, not want to resubmit to the rule of the Lord. Yet why were these not wiped out with those who practiced lawlessness in the purge of Matthew 13? They must have been, unless God was gracious and kept alive some sickly wheat.

David once said regarding the LORD’s announced punishment against him, *“Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me . . . ?”* (2 Samuel 12:22). The same might well apply to some in the tribulation period. God will indeed destroy with flaming fire those who do not know Him and who do not obey His gospel. Yet is it possible, even then, that He might be gracious to certain others?

The Great Rejection

By Andrew Brown

An entire continent of believers turned away from God. That is unexpected in the Bible account and beckons us to search for an explanation. The Bible reveals this turn of events in one of the final epistles, "You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15 NASB throughout unless noted). What Paul wrote to Timothy was shocking. Everybody was abandoning Paul. "All deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me" (2 Tim. 4:16-17).

This was not related to any sin on the part of Paul since the Lord stood by him. There can be no doubt turning away from God's apostle is equal to turning away from God. But what happened? Acts 19 details the events of the transformation of Asia toward the Lord. In a span of two years "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). God was also openly working extraordinary miracles (Acts 19:11-12). Acts records: "The word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing" (Acts 19:20). God's mission in Asia was an absolute success. As magnificent as it was, God knew this would not continue after Acts. Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian leaders foretold "savage wolves" arising and destroying the flock (Acts 20:29-30) and the leaders would "not see his face again" (Acts 20:38). By the time Paul wrote 2 Timothy the "turning away" was complete. Timothy received the letter in Ephesus and would have witnessed this heartbreaking rejection.

This rejection was not just limited to the region of Asia. Those among Paul's own company were subject to the epidemic as well. Demas, who is listed in the same standing as the beloved Luke in Col. 4:4 and Philemon 1:24, is recorded as abandoning God. "For Demas, having loved [Gk.-agape] this present world [Gk.-aion], has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia" (2 Tim. 4:10). Demas abandoned God because he loved the "present world." This *agape* love was self-sacrificing his future position from God which he worked for in the "previous world." Crescens and Titus are included in this very sentence to show that these two individuals had abandoned Paul's cause. Since there is no disclaimer, the departure was not as severe as Demas'. Titus was Paul's "partner and fellow worker" (1 Cor. 8:23) who stayed with Paul after Barnabas' departure. Paul writing to the Corinthians boasted of Titus's excellence (2 Cor. 12:18). He has an epistle with his name attached to it, and he is called "a true son in our common faith" (Titus 1:4). What could cause Demas, Crescens, and even Titus to all abandon Paul?

God's hand was working powerfully and openly during Acts when He gave men great manifestations of gifts as a

demonstration of their intimacy with Him. These gifts were possessed by every believer of Acts in some form or another: "These signs will accompany those who believe" (Mark 16:17). As His apostles worked, "the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20). The closing of that period of God's open gifting was a primary reason for many leaving the faith they had professed. How easy it had been for these believers to feel a sense of entitlement and self-worth from the endowment of these special gifts!

Then God made a great pivot, suspending the obvious Kingdom work when the Apostle Paul heralded that the "salvation-bringing message was commissioned to the nations." Many Kingdom benefits were postponed, vanishing from present reality into fading memory. As God set aside the open work He was doing in Acts, many of His workers decided to step aside as well. Shortly after the proclamation in Acts 28:28, Paul penned Philippians where he told those bewildered believers, ". . . the One having begun a good work in you will be suspending it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6 Resultant Version). God had begun a great work in these believers, but He suspended (Gk.-*epiteleo*) the work and many of the miraculous powers that had been lavishly distributed. These believers felt abandoned as if God had left them. Paul also struggled with the change: "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me" (Phil. 1:29-30). Instead of deserting, Paul's thinking was transformed; he saw an opportunity to know a deeper closeness with Christ.

God still has a promised day in store wherein He will again heap greater gifts on those who follow Him. We wait expectantly for that coming time. Perhaps His hand has never been more obvious than when blessings were poured out in Acts. **Like a genie let out of a bottle, "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7) was being fulfilled in His people, and this was powerful and addictive. Who would follow God when the genie "disappeared"?** Jesus, at times, is a "God who hides Himself" (Isa. 45:15), but always desires people to seek Him and still shows up in less provable ways. Unfortunately, many stepped away without immediate gratification. **Too many seek God's hand and forget about seeking His face.** Let's be like David in his relationship with the Lord: "When you said, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to You, 'Your face, O Lord, I shall seek'" (Psalm 27:8).



Fall Bible Conference

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Bloomington, Minnesota
Crowne Plaza AiRE Hotel

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Lunch will be provided on both
days of the Conference
Saturday and Sunday

Please contact Rusty Hancock
with any questions or
comments.

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Please join us as The Word of Truth Ministry again hosts a weekend Conference to “rightly divide the word of truth.”

It is a wonderful time and opportunity to enjoy fellowship around God's word. Evenings (and other relaxing times) can be filled with discussions on any topic. Share your views or ask specific questions for answers that have evaded or intrigued you for years.