

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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THE REALITY OF GOD

Part 16

By Rayola Kelley

We are now embarking on another year. Many people try to make resolutions that will result in bettering themselves or changing an undesirable habit. In most cases such resolutions fly high the first week and crash within a couple of weeks only to recede into the abyss of good intentions and wishful thinking.

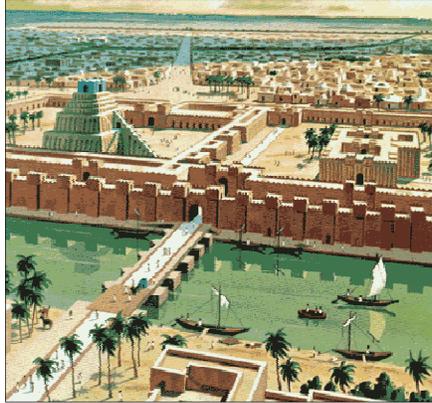
For me, I try to avoid New Year resolutions. The reason for this is because I know even though the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. The truth is, when it comes to resolutions my habit is not to erect one at the beginning of the year, but at the first day of the week, Monday. I know that it will probably flounder a few days later, but I also know if I don't try it will never become a beneficial practice or habit.

It is for this reason I do not really make resolutions at the first of a New Year; rather, I look back to take the opportunity to examine the year that is about to be added to the annals of history. This time of examination is to consider what I have learned, accomplished, or possibly missed. I want to see if I have advanced or whether I have strayed from the center of what is most important to my spiritual growth.

One of the many powerful lessons I have learned in the past has to do with straying from the middle. This lesson is highlighted in the small book of *Haggai*. I often go back to this example to honestly consider if I am missing what is important to God. After all, God's ways and thoughts are much higher than my ways and thoughts (*Isaiah 55:8-9*). I am also aware of how far the heights of my unabated conceit can reach when I actually take stock of what I end up valuing, as well as what I think is correct and believe is right. When I brutally evaluate my motive, I often dis-

cover a wrong agenda which inevitably proves to be a point of great vanity.

In *Haggai 1*, due to the decree of the leaders of the Medo-Persian Empire, some of the children of Israel



ANCIENT CITY OF BABYLON

prophetically returned to Jerusalem after a 70-year absence. When they arrived back to the land, the temple and Jerusalem lay in complete ruin. No doubt it was a despairing environment. However, they began building their houses and planting their crops to establish their presence in the land. The problem is they failed to establish the presence and witness of God in their midst by rebuilding the temple.

God withdrew His blessings from the land, and the children of Israel were not only faced with drought, but with the harsh reality that everything they did was proving to be vain and temporary. It is at this time the prophet Haggai declares the Word of the Lord in *1:7-8*, "*Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.*"

There are three very important lessons in this example. According to the Strong's Concordance, the word "consider" in this text means "center," and it is used twice within the first seven verses as a means to point out

its importance. In other words, the Lord was telling people to come back to center. And, what must be the center of all spiritual, thriving lives? The *Lord* must be the center of all things. He is the One who keeps us going in the right direction and down the right path, but once we stray from the center of who He is, what He says, and what He has instructed, we will get away from experiencing His blessings and become closer to tasting the consequences for such actions. We must keep in mind at such times that whatever the consequences may be, God intends to get our attention so that we will come back to center to once again experience His blessings.

The second lesson has to do with ensuring that we begin with Him in all matters. We must make it a habit to first invest in our relationship with Him, to make sure our life is lining up with His ways and will for our lives. In order to do this we must quit assuming God is in everything we do because we have substituted religion, good works, and misdirected passion in the place of our relationship with Him. However, the best, when it comes to the matters of God, sometimes causes us to miss that which is excellent. We need to make sure that we are not making our plans and simply asking God to bless them. We must first seek Him to see what His plan is so we can be in the center of His will.

The third lesson is simple, if a matter does not ultimately end up glorifying God, we are not only missing the mark, but we are failing to fulfill our greater purpose as believers. God's plan for each of us is to save us, but our main goal should be to glorify the Lord in all we do. It is so simple, yet in the midst of the demands of the world it can be put on the back burner as the demands of this world begin to choke out the Word of God. In fact, we can be buried by the demands of the world. These demands may not be bad, but they can become tyrannical

and idolatrous if they are not kept in the right perspective.

Another detour from the center I have taken is to get caught up with non-essential beliefs and causes. Hebrews 6:1-2 clearly tells us we must go on from the principle doctrines of Christ unto perfection or spiritual maturity. Today there are so many non-essential doctrinal debates going on in the American Church between the different denominations that are causing damaging, unnecessary splits in the Body of Christ.

I understand how passionate we humans can feel about what we scripturally perceive as being correct theology and doctrine. In the past I have certainly stood on my soapbox and defended what I perceived to be correct thinking, doctrine, and theology. Sadly, the resulting fruits of such times showed me that I was in a wrong spirit and missed the whole point of what God clearly defined as being my commission and high calling. Each time I got on my soapbox, people walked away with their same opinion, while no sinner was saved, no saint edified, and above all the Lord was not glorified. I realized my theology controlled my understanding of God, while transforming revelations of God were passing me by. Talk about being miserable and discontent in my small, limited world, and all the time I thought I was one of the enlightened ones who had a corner on a truth while perceiving that others had to see it my way. After all, it was practical knowledge and would be obvious to any intelligent person.

Don't get me wrong, scriptural theology and doctrine are necessary, for they create necessary boundaries against heresy and lift up a standard of right living, but they are not meant to create or determine our reality about God. God is bigger than man's one-dimensional theology and fundamental doctrine, yet man insists on God fitting into his particular theology. How many times have the matters of life slammed against our theology and understanding, causing our spiritual lives to shake, and make it seem as if our foundation would crack and our structure collapse in complete ruin?

It took a few years for the Lord to reveal to me the waste of time that was involved in debating over non-

essential beliefs that have nothing to do with a person's salvation. I had to remember that salvation is not based on theology but on the actual work of God through Jesus Christ. This brought me to some soul-searching questions. Is my understanding of God based on preferred doctrinal perceptions, or are they based on the complete revelation of Him found in the Word of God. Is my doctrine dead-letter because it has not gone any further than my intellectual evaluations and conclusions about spiritual truths, or do I possess the reality of Christ in me, the real hope of the glory that will yet be fully realized in my life in the next world to come?

He also showed me that when I interpreted matters according to my non-essential doctrines, I became self-righteous. In my self-righteous state I unmercifully judged others who did not see it my way, became judgmental towards His truths that did not fit my theology, and was rendered incapable of edifying other saints in a constructive way. It was then that I learned an important practice. I needed to come back to center and ask the Lord, what was important to Him. This is the only way I could get my proper bearings.

When it comes to God, His heart and desire towards us is simple. He wants to see each of us come to the fullness of His redemption, by being saved and becoming a disciple of our Lord and Savior.

What we believe, value, and how we interpret something according to our theology will determine our emphasis. Today there is so much emphasis on non-essential doctrines, causing many to aim their big guns at the wrong targets when it comes to the truths of God. I am sure you might be thinking of some of these non-essential doctrines that have been erected as elaborate soapboxes such as once saved, always saved and the different rapture presentations. These doctrines may not be wrong, but if they become our pet doctrine, they will become a personal cause that is void of eternal substance.

This has been brought out in a book that I am now reading. The book is entitled, "*The 40 Most Influential Christians Who Shaped What We Believe Today*" by Daryl Aaron. It is a

history of theology. I have different books on this subject but this is the most concise one, which keeps the reader from becoming bogged down. The other aspect I admire about the book is the author does not take sides, but simply states the history and facts behind that which presently affects the Church.

This book shows the intense battle over what we now call fundamental beliefs of the Christian Faith. As a Christian, I have taken some of these beliefs for granted, but the book shows that these beliefs had to be scripturally established and reaffirmed with each heretical attack. The first fundamental belief that came under immediate attack was Jesus' deity. Due to Greek philosophies, Docetism (Jesus only appeared to be human), and Gnosticism (saved through spiritual enlightenment), the incarnation of Christ had to be clearly defined according to Scriptures. Hence enter different creeds such as the Creed of Nicaea and the Nicene Creed to establish, define, and establish fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith.

There have been various other attacks against the Trinitarian theology that still resonate throughout Christianity. One such belief is *Modalism* where each Person of the Godhead is simply operating in different roles or modes. When it comes to Jesus being fully God and fully man, there are also different heretical claims and teachings. For example, there is *Arianism* which claims that Christ was not fully God; rather, He is a created being; *Apollinarianism* which believed Jesus had a human body but He was not fully human because other than His body the rest was deity, and there was *Nestorianism* which claimed that Christ was two persons: Jesus was the human person and Christ was the divine person."

The truth is fundamental, established, confirmed beliefs of the Christian faith have been from its inception, and will be, under attack until Jesus returns. As believers, these beliefs are what we stand on, what we use to discern heresy, and fall back on when our faith is being attacked. As the author Daryl Aaron pointed out in his book, "the history of theology reminds us that, for centuries, God's people have not only believed in universal

truth, but also that the most *vital* truth has been recorded and preserved in the Bible. And it is just as relevant today as when it was written.”

This brings me to non-essential doctrines. These doctrines do not take away from the vital truth or message of the Bible; rather, they are often used to interpret certain doctrines and beliefs according to particular perception or understanding. As I have studied these various beliefs, I learned that they were created to correct or bring clarity to grey areas in Scriptural stands. In a way, they were established to close what was considered holes in theology, but the problem is that even a truth taken to the extreme can become a heretical teaching because the Spirit is missing from it. Many of these non-essential doctrines put people in a theological box and unless something Scriptural fits nicely into their perception, it can easily be ignored or justified away.

However, as I studied some of these different beliefs from the past, I realized that those who were on opposite sides, as far as non-essential beliefs, often ended up at the same scriptural place, even though starting from a different emphasis to establish a particular point or attitude. For example, there is the debate between Calvinism and those who hold to the view of Arminius. Calvinists believe in justification through Christ's redemption, but the emphasis is on election due to God's sovereignty. In extreme cases some Calvinists believe that it does not matter how contrary a person lives to the Bible's instruction in righteousness, if he or she is elected, he or she will naturally be saved. Such an attitude makes God's grace out to be cheap to others, especially when Paul clearly admonished the Corinthians that grace may be the avenue in which the gift of eternal life flows, but it does not give man the liberty to sin; rather, this incredible virtue of God affords the person liberty and means to do right, for grace reigns through righteousness (*Romans 5:20-6:5*).

To compensate for any extremes in Calvinism, those of the Arminius persuasion who also believe in justification by faith in Christ, emphasize free will. Man has the free will to believe, thereby, ultimately the liberty to

choose his master and what he receives as truth. This group also strongly maintains that true salvation is accompanied by outwardly pious works (conduct). However, the extreme in Arminius is that pious living can become the main message, causing an outward reformation to take place that lacks any heart of faith or balanced knowledge of grace (*Ephesians 2:8-10*). Who is right and who is wrong? Or, are both correct to a point, but if not careful either side can find itself operating in a wrong prideful spirit and the emphasis will change the intent behind the truth, morphing one's understanding into an idolatrous state as the doctrine becomes the final word and authority in all Spiritual matters.

What is amazing to me is that when fundamental beliefs are undermined or attacked by what is referred to as Protestant Liberalism, the opposing sides of those who hold tightly to non-essential doctrines stand together as one. The reason is because such Liberalism denies the infallibility of God's Word, the incarnation of deity, the existence of sin, the virgin birth, Jesus' work of redemption, resurrection, ascension, and the Blessed Hope (*2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 1:1,14; Colossians 2:9; Romans 6:23; 1 John 1:8,10; Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:68-69; 9:52-56; Romans 10:9,10; 1 Corinthians 15:12-14; Acts 1:1-11; 1 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:10-15*). Liberalism's inspiration is that of enlightenment, where supposedly man and science are capable of solving the problems of the world (*1 Corinthians 1:23-28*). It stands under the umbrella of God's love, while advocating a social gospel of works, ultimately promoting *Universalism*, where everyone will be saved in the end.

The other amazing fact about those on the opposing sides of non-essential doctrines is that I have read books and sermons from individuals who were influenced by these diverse doctrines. I can see the different influences crop up in their thinking and presentation, but ultimately they all land on the same runway, the Word of God. Once established on the runway, it is amazing how much they sound alike and come to the same conclusions about established spiritual truths (*2 Corinthians 13:8*).

Regardless of our emphasis over certain doctrines, the true Church of Jesus Christ is one body. In spite of these side debates, a born again believer has received the gift of salvation by faith through justification by Jesus' blood and is adopted into a heavenly family, sealed by the presence of the Spirit of God, placed in the Body, commissioned to preach one message, and entrusted with a high calling. Each member has been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ as a means to reflect His glory, and can stand in confidence of an election that is made sure when one avoids becoming barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (*Romans 3:24-25; 8:9-17, 29; Ephesians 1:11-14; 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Mark 16:15; Philippians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 2 Peter 1:3-10*).

I have met various people who had a different take on non-essential doctrines, but it did not matter. We found agreement because we were in love with the same Jesus, enthralled with His Word, and loved to partake of His goodness in sweet fellowship. Such people have beautiful souls that shine forth the glory of God.

This year I want to challenge people who have strayed away from center, who are pursuing causes rather than knowing God, and trying to piece-meal the Word of God according to theology, to come back to the person and work of God to get your spiritual bearings. Avoid getting caught up with small insignificant debates, and begin to seek the Lord's face with all your heart in order to ensure you clearly establish in your life and understanding what is important to Him. Allow the Holy Spirit to be the originator and inspiration behind what must be considered vital truths according to the days we live in (*John 16:13; 1 John 2:27*).

The truth is we need each other as darkness envelops the world in order to stand against the various attacks against truth. The Bible is clear we need to know God, not know



about Him through theology or of Him through pet doctrines, but we need to know Him if we are going to be strong and do exploits (*Daniel 11:32*).

We need to remember as individuals that there will be different preferences among the many-membered Body of Christ, but we are all of the same Body and will inevitably move according to the Head (Jesus), and not according to our personal understanding. We have the same foundation and cornerstone; therefore, the one source that will always bring true unity to the Body is the Spirit of God. The one place we as believers can come into agreement is on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The one thing that can silence debates is landing on fundamental truths of Scriptures, and the one source that puts all matters in the right perspective is a sincere love for God, His Word, and others.

Next month I will address the sovereignty of God, but for this month I want to remind each believer that God is the center of all matters. He is the way to truth, and the truth about life. He is the real portion we will inherit in the end. He is our all in all and we need to let Him be God, trust Him to be God, and know without a doubt that He is GOD! †

QUOTABLES

“The Word talks about being presented without spot and blemish. There is power before the throne in prayer when you stand righteous before God. There is power in your testimony when you are upright in your conduct. There is power in your walk when you are walking in the ways of righteousness. As you can see, it is not a matter of being perfect, it is a matter of being righteous so that perfection or maturity is established in your life by the power of the Spirit. It is at this place that believers will find rest from their labors.” - Rayola Kelley

“God is looking for those with whom He can do the impossible— what a pity that we plan only the things that we can do by ourselves.” A. W. Tozer

“God never gives us discernment in order that we may criticize, but that we may intercede.” - Oswald Chambers

RAYOLA'S QUESTION & ANSWER CORNER

Q: *The question and answer last month reminded me of a question I have had for some time about the book of Daniel. The vision that King Nebuchadnezzar had in Daniel 2 about the image, and the visions Daniel had in chapters seven and eight about the beasts were about four Gentile empires that would hit the scene before the coming of Jesus. My question is why were there more than one vision about the same subject? Is there a reason or significance for it to be presented in these different ways?*

A: That is a good question. The Lord has a purpose for everything being recorded in His Word. The first thing that comes to my mind is that God always confirms a matter with two or three witnesses (*Deuteronomy 17:6; Matthew 18:16*).

My studies have also shown me that the visions in *Daniel* were different because of the perspective in which they were being presented. For example in the first vision in *Daniel 2*, it was from the perspective of the forms of autonomy that would be in operation in each empire. For example, the head of gold pointed to the autonomy resting solely with the king of Babylon, such as Nebuchadnezzar. What the king said was law and had to be obeyed or it meant death as in the case of Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego in *Daniel 3*.

The second metal of silver implies that the balance of authority had changed. For the Medo-Persian Empire, it was a Monarchical oligarchy in which nobles were equal to the King in all but office, and a system in which the King could by no means do as he willed. This is one of the reasons the autonomy of the empire rested with the decrees that were made by the kings. Once a decree was declared by a king, it could not be changed as in the case of Darius' decree that gave Daniel's enemies the authority to cast him into the lion's den in *Daniel 6*, and in the situation during the days of Esther when a decree had been signed by King Ahasuerus, sealed and delivered to the providences that all the Jews were to be

put to death. It took another decree signed by the same king, sealed, and delivered to same providences that gave the Jews the permission to fight back because the first decree still stood. Another example of this practice is King Cyrus. He made a decree that the Jews had a right to return to Jerusalem. Every succeeding king had to respect Cyrus' decree and often made another one like it to put their support behind it.

The third metal was bronze, which was less valuable than gold and silver. Alexander the Great was a monarchy supported by a military aristocracy. Such a government is only as strong as the moral character of its leaders. Alexander, because of his immoral indiscretions died at a young age. As a result, the Grecian Empire was divided between his four generals.

The fourth, the Roman Empire, was represented by iron and clay. Iron reveals this empire was stronger than others, but the clay points to a mixture and reveals its weakness. The strength rested in governmental authority having checks and balances to reign in any abusive power. For example, America's type of government is along the same lines as the Roman Empire; therefore, it would be classified having the potential of great strength. The problem is political balance is fragile and can change when those in authority sacrifice the checks and balances for personal or professional reasons, opening the door for abusive power to make its appearance. Abusive power not only enslaves the people of a nation but it makes it weak and vulnerable to be destroyed from within.

In *Daniel 7*, the vision Daniel had of these four empires was from God's perspective. The Lord knew what kind of destruction each empire would bring. For Babylon, it was like a lion, a beast of prey that not only preyed on nations it conquered but when one godless man calls the shots, he will naturally regress into an insane world that causes him to think he is sovereign, making him God in his mind. Some believe the eagle's feathers point to the time that God clipped King Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance by

Continued Pg. 8, Column 2

DARE TO DISCERN “Angels” – Part Six By Jeannette Haley

*“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”
1 Corinthians 10:12*

If you think you cannot be deceived, you already are! So when it comes to the subject of discernment and angels, be aware that there are two extremes. On the one hand some folks may not stop to give angels (fallen or otherwise) much consideration, and simply take them for granted; or on the other hand, the topic of angels (or demons) can become a total obsession. The truth is most people, especially impressionable young people, are fascinated with anything that has to do with the unseen world, and that definitely includes angels—



whether good and bad. The Bible, of course, has plenty to say about both, and it should be our final authority on any spiritual matter if we are to avoid being led astray. As a matter of interest: “Depending on the Bible translation searched, these celestial beings are referred to from 294 to 305 times in the Bible. References to angels occur at least 116

times in the Old Testament and 175 times in the New Testament.” (Source: bible.org).

Concerning the angels of God, the word angel in Hebrew is “malak” which means “to dispatch as a deputy; a messenger; of God (or also a prophet; priest or teacher; ambassador, or king.) This is good to bear in mind in order to gain a proper contextual meaning of “angels” as revealed in Scripture. The writer of Hebrews wrote in *Hebrews 1:14*, “*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*” However, what Christians need to be keenly aware of is how to discern the spirits as commanded in *1 John 4:1*, “*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*” We cannot glibly assume that the spirit behind everything and

anything that is labeled as “good,” “spiritual,” “supernatural” or “mystical” is a good spirit.

Rayola explains it this way: “When it comes to intent in a situation, you have to discern the spirit behind it. Intent in this text has to do with agenda and the way the sources behind it want to influence your worldview or perception about something. You can see this in the different news and media outlets. Keep in mind every artist is trying to influence each of our thinking. For example, the clear agenda of Harry Potter is to make witchcraft attractive to our young people. In the 1970s and 80s, the popular Star Wars movies were laced with Hindu, New Age, and Occult terms, beliefs, and practices. To the unsuspecting individuals it was just sci-fi films that were entertaining. Yet, George Lucas, the first director of the Star Wars was a practicing Hindu, and was subtly promoting his beliefs through the powerful media of his movies.

“It is not unusual to hear Christians declare that they can wade through the wrong teachings and come out unscathed, but if you do not know what you are looking at, you will not properly discern it. Keep in mind we only expose ourselves to those things we are willing to come into agreement with. The Apostle Paul talks about the fact that there is no agreement between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world (*1 Corinthians 2:10-14*). The more you expose yourself to the spirit of the world, the more dull you become to that which is contrary to God’s spirit, teachings, and walk, and the less discerning you will be in such matters. The only way to ensure sharp discernment is to be clear about what is influencing your perception and worldview, and where it is leading you in regard to your attitudes. If it is of a wrong spirit, we must be willing to separate and flee from such influences in our lives.”

This is why Paul warned the Galatians, “*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*” *Galatians 1:8*. Paul is saying that no matter who preaches “another gospel” whether he or she is of human origin, or is straight out of the spirit

world, let him be accursed. That is strong language, and certainly not “politically correct” to the modernized, “self-esteem,” “seeker-friendly” mindset. Paul then declared this, “*For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*” *verse 10*. I love strong-willed Paul, who always defined things as “black or white,” “true or false,” “right or wrong,” “holy or profane,” “belief or disbelief,” “life or death,” with no muddying, confusing shades of “gray” in between where people with divided hearts can roost in order to avoid making the decision to totally sell out to Christ. The Bible doesn’t give clearance for “mugwumps” to enter into heaven. (The popular usage for the term mugwumps is an undecided person sitting on a fence with their mug on one side and their wump on the other.) Paul went on to qualify his strong statement, “*But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man, For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*” *verses 11, 12*. [Emphasis added.]

Christians of all ages need to be able to discern if what they read, see or hear (this includes music) brings them back to a revelation of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (*1 Corinthians 2:2*) with the result of falling more in love with Him, hungering to learn more of Him and His Word, causing each of us to draw closer to Him, quickening our walk with Him in righteousness and obedience, and compelling us to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. It is also vital that Christians exercise discernment in order to determine if there is a wrong spirit in what they read, see, hear or experience. A wrong spirit will produce a nebulous “supernatural,” “mystical,” “spiritual” encounter or experience that beguiles one into an altered state of consciousness to lure one away from the cross and the foundation of Jesus Christ. Any encounter with the unseen world that results in confusion, fear, doubt, unbelief, rebellion, and lust, accompanied by a distinct disinterest in God and His Word, while arousing a strong curiosity concerning the occult in any one of its innumerable forms, with a strong desire for

“hidden, mystical spiritual knowledge and power,” is dangerous.

You have to keep in mind that Satan is not interested in beguiling and deceiving those who are already his. Instead, his goal is to steal, rob and destroy the faith of believers. The notion that Satan has very little power or involvement in the affairs of mankind—of nations, governments, and rulers, on down to individuals is simply not true. The Bible is clear that Satan, the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) does target individual Christians as well nations. For example, we all know how Satan tempted the first woman to disobedience. (See Genesis 3:4,5.) 1 Peter 5:8 confirms that he preys upon men, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” Job 2:2 says, “And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.” Then Satan slandered Job, “Doth Job fear God for nought? Has not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face” Job 1:9-11. Satan has power to inflict disease also, “so went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown” Job 2:7. Satan opposes the righteous, “And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him” Zechariah 3:1.

Of course, we know of the vicious attacks Satan used against Christ in Matthew 4, when he tempted Jesus with the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Satan’s attack on the “good seed” (the Word of God) is relentless. Matthew wrote, “When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside” Matthew 13:19. Concerning the tares and the end of the world, Jesus said, “...the tares are the children of the wicked one: The

enemy that sowed them is the devil: the harvest is the end of the world: and the reapers are the angels” Matthew 13:38, 39.

We read of Satan’s work of ruining soul and body through one of his devils in Luke 9:42, “And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.” Jesus defined Satan as a liar to the Pharisees as we read in John 8:44, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” As we see in John 13:2, Satan instigates men to sin, “And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him.”

The liberal, “seeker-friendly,” compromising Churches of today have moved away from center (Jesus Christ) and the whole counsel of God (His revealed Word from Genesis to Revelation) and have replaced the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3) with a social gospel of humanism that emphasizes “love.” This subtle shift into apostasy is camouflaged with a thin veneer of “Christianity” validated by a few Scriptures taken out of context—a “Christianity” that would be totally foreign to the pilgrim church of the early apostles. This “Christianity lite” ignores topics such as Satan, demons, sin, the judgment to come, and hell.

To be overcomers, we need to know our God, not just facts about Him. Daniel 11:32b, 33a says this about God’s people in the latter days, “But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. And they that understand among the people shall instruct many.” Jesus said, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” Luke 10:19, 20. We are assured of victory in Romans 8:37-39, “Nay, in all these

things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Ephesians 10:12 makes it clear that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Christian soldiers are encouraged to “war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience” 1 Timothy 1:18b, 19a. [Emphasis added.]

Woe unto us if we blithely ignore our duty as believers to discern the spirits, choosing instead to let others do it for us. Hebrews 5:12-14, states that this categorizes such people as babies. “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” True discernment is not based on our own perceptions, opinions, agendas, conclusions, standards, ideas, or religious formulas, but instead must come into agreement with God’s Word and perspective on a matter as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible gives us much insight, from Genesis to Revelation about the realm of angels, which we will explore in greater detail in another article. At this point, however, for your encouragement, I would like to share with you some true stories about encounters with heavenly angels, God’s ministering spirits, or messengers. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” Hebrews 1:14? When a person has an encounter with a heavenly angel (ministering spirit) there is an impact made on his or her heart (spirit, mind, emotions). The results (fruit) are normally awe, profound humility, sincere praise and

worship, giving glory to God, along with peace, joy, charity (benevolent love), hope, hunger for Jesus and His Word, increased faith and commitment, and encouragement (spiritual strength). One account was given in the 1980s by missionary Ray Wilson (a/k/a Black Buffalo) of North American Indian Missions. He related that on one of their mission trips into the heart of Mexico, he and his wife stopped at a viewpoint where they could see a panorama of mountains, canyons and a great expanse of hills and valleys. Suddenly a man appeared beside them. They had not heard or seen another vehicle, and were more than astonished when he waved his arm across the entire expanse of land, and said, "All this land belongs to my Father." Then he vanished out of their sight. They were overwhelmed and deeply moved by this visitation, and continued working to bring the Gospel to the Tarahumara people of the Copper Canyon until retirement.

Recently a pastor friend kindly shared this occurrence with us: "When we were meeting at the Grange hall back in the early 2000's in one of our services as we were praying for the sick, an angel appeared behind me on my left side, standing about 10 feet tall with a tablet recording and watching over what was going on, one of the young teenagers saw him also and started drawing him in picture. At the same time a Lion appeared to my left side and walked by my left knee brushing my leg, like a dog or cat would do letting you know he was there and all was in control. EXTREMELY interesting, I will never forget it."

A number of years ago a Christian friend told us of an amazing encounter with an angel when she was at a low point in her life. I cannot recall why she was stuck in a bus stop miles from her destination, but there she sat, on a bench in the middle of the night. She had completely run out of money, and needed a certain amount of money to continue her journey, and buy something to eat. Suddenly a stranger walked up to her, handed her the exact amount of money she needed, and disappeared. There was never a doubt in her mind that God had sent an angel to her aid.

Years ago when Rayola, Krista, and I lived way out in the middle of nowhere, (surrounded by sage brush, coyotes, rattlesnakes, and strange creatures we had never seen before), a few miles up a canyon from Moore, ID, after a time of intense prayer concerning spiritual challenges, Rayola sensed two huge angels protecting the house we lived in (that is, protecting *us* while we lived there.) This was a great comfort to us.

Another Sister in the Lord shares this story: "About 35 years ago we moved into our present house, and our bedroom is upstairs. I had been really praying about some issues we were having. My husband's family was into talking to the dead and using crystal balls, etc. We had constant warfare in our home and our children were very open to demonic spirits it seemed. I was so distressed over it, knowing that my husband wasn't saved and I was the only one in the house living for the Lord. I did a lot of praying and one night I was awakened from a deep sleep, and decided to go downstairs to pray. I got to the first step and was so distressed that I sat down on the top step and put my head down on my arms and began to cry. I felt the Lord told me to look up. As I looked up, my living room was FULL OF ANGELS. Some were on guard and others were talking to one another. They were very large and were dressed for war...I guess He shows you what He feels you would understand, but I needed to know that God was with me and I had help on my side, so He showed me my house was covered and He was in charge and I wasn't alone. I had complete peace knowing I didn't have to fear the warfare that was taking place in my home, because greater was He that was within me and with me than he that is in the world. I do have friends who have seen them (angels) too!"

As for myself, I had a life-changing experience a few years ago. I cannot say that the encounter was with an angel, but the effect it had on me was so profound that I cannot say it wasn't an angel either. Angels can come in any form they wish to appear in as humans. (*"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" Hebrews 13:2.*) It was one of those

"normal" days for me where I had a list of places to go and things to do, and I was on a dead run. I remember that it had been raining the night before, and it was damp and cold. As I walked toward the front of a Fred Meyer store, I noticed a figure sitting still on the cold, damp cement to the side of the entrance. He was dressed in clean, but obviously worn clothes. He wore a hooded jacket, and gloves. His head was down so I couldn't see his face, but I assumed he was one of the many homeless men in the area. Nobody entering or exiting the store seemed to notice his presence. As I carried my groceries out the door, I glanced in his direction. At that moment he lifted his head, and his clear, bright blue eyes not only met mine, but they seemed to look right into my soul. His beard was neatly trimmed, and His countenance was clean, sweet, and radiated peace. His countenance could be summed up a word, "purity." Furthermore, I did not recognize him from the homeless men that frequented two different gospel missions at the time, which we were ministering to.

As I placed the groceries in the car, my mind was trying to process the insistent tug in my heart. I decided to go back into the store and buy him something to eat. As I made my way to the store entrance, he remained motionless in the same position, never looking around or at anyone else that passed by. As I approached, he once again looked up into my face, and as before, no one else so much as glanced in his direction. I returned with a small bag of roasted chicken pieces and a cup of water. He was still in the same position and other shoppers remained oblivious to him. As I approached him, he looked up into my face for the third time. The radiant sweetness of his countenance I shall never forget. As I offered him the food and water, I lightly touched his face and said, "God loves you."

The only thing he said to me were two softly spoken words, "Thank you." But, there was just something about him that was *different* in ways that mere words can't explain. As I started my car and began to drive away, I began to tremble. I felt as if I had seen our LORD, looked into His heavenly eyes, and touched his face.

Suddenly the verse from *Hebrews* about “angels unawares” went through my mind. I felt undone! So many thoughts raced through my mind. *Maybe I should have bought him more food or maybe I shouldn't have put a tract in the sack, maybe...* My head was spinning and tears began pouring down my face as the Holy Spirit washed over me with the admonition of true ministry—“*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*” At that moment it hit me like a ton of bricks that the emphasis and direction I was *striving* to go in our ministry was not where God wanted it to go, but instead He wanted us to follow His leading and minister the life of Christ and healing to His sheep, be it to only one, a few, or many. And that, my friends, is how this single, unexpected, special “appointment” of God on that chilly day brought me back to center, and profoundly changed my emphasis, heart and ministry.

Have you asked the Lord what ministry He has for you today? Remember, it's not about what you can do for Him, but what He can do through you! †

ANGELIC CREATURES Quoting from A. W. Tozer

We are aware that throughout the Old Testament and in the New Testament as well, wonderful heavenly and angelic creatures walked among the people of God. Angels came to Abraham—three of them. And to Jacob. Strange beings came to Gideon as he was threshing. An angel came to Samson's mother when she was in the field. She dashed home to tell her husband, “Come back with me and see this wonderful man!”

Where these disturbed, unbalanced, insane people? Were they fanatics? No. They were normal, sane people. Their subsequent lives and experiences proved it. But in matters of faith, worship and obedience, they had been in touch with another world, a world largely invisible. They had heard another and more compelling voice. They had seen an other-worldly vision and had communed with the powers of the world to come.”

Q & A—Visions, Con't. from Pg. 4

clearly humbling him in *Daniel 4*, when the haughty king became like an animal, while the dew from heaven fell on him for seven years. I guess there is a name to this condition. It is called lycanthropy.

The bear revealed that the Medo-Persian Empire would quickly devour Babylonia, Libya, and Egypt who formed an alliance to fight against the empire, (represented by the three ribs in its mouth). This empire used vast masses of troops that would devour anything in its way.

The Grecian Empire was represented by the leopard, a swift breast with wings (great speed), that within ten years would overthrow the armies of Persia, and subdued the civilized world. The four heads represented the four generals who took over the empire after Alexander the Great died.

The final beast represented a succession of rapacious wild beasts devouring one another. We know this is the Roman Empire. Out of the revived Roman Empire a beast of supernatural powers will emerge from this empire. He will be known as the last anti-Christ.

In the final vision in *Daniel 8*, it points to political power, as well as having a spiritual implication to the beasts representing these two empires. The ram symbolizes the united power of Medo-Persia, furiously pushing in three directions (Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt). The ram was displayed on the Persian coins and was looked upon as the guardian spirit of Persia.

The goat (Grecian Empire) subdued the ram and waxed great, but the main horn was broken into four. Again the empire was split and ruled by four generals who oversaw the regions of Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, and Egypt that later were absorbed into the Roman Empire. The goat was a symbol of Macedonia, and was found on the coins, and the capital of Macedonia, Edessa means “herd of goats,” because legend has it that the king of Macedon was led to this city by a herd of goats.

As humans we have a limited perspective of history and events, but God sees everything from beginning

to the end. After the Gospel has been preached to the world, we as believers know in the end days, a cut stone, (Jesus Christ), will totally destroy the wicked power and influences of all Gentile governments, and set up His perfect kingdom.

As the Apostle John stated in the book of Revelation, “*Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*” (*Revelation 21:20*).

ENCOURAGING COMMENTS

“I just got done with reading the [December] newsletter and want to thank you for an exceptional one. It was such a good reminder that we are to be set apart in holiness and we are to be vigilant and sober about Satan and his adversaries. Very sobering and an excellent reminder to put on our whole armor of God. Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for your faithfulness to instill the truth of God's word to bring us higher in Him. Can't tell you how much I appreciate you both! It may not seem like it is worth it sometimes to keep writing, but I know it ministers to not only myself, but to others.” - ID

“Always enjoy your teaching in the correspondence you send. One year closer to seeing God's final plan for us all.” - ID

“Your friendship means much to us—and your writings have broadened our horizon greatly. We thank you always for what you do.” - ID

“We have a new pastor in our church now. There is such a move in the Spirit. We are seeing people saved, filled with the Spirit, healings almost every service—a real call to prayer and hunger for God in all our people. It's so exciting to see almost all of our congregation pushing into what God is doing—you can see such growth in people. It is so exciting to see a move forward again. I so appreciate the newsletters and the music you have sent over this year.” - OR

“*And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*” - *Hebrews 1:10-12*