

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 25, Number 2

March-April 2016



*The honour of your presence
is requested at the marriage of*

INVITATION TO A
Royal Wedding

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An invitation to a royal wedding would be among the highest honors a king could bestow on one of his subjects. While this may be beyond all our expectations, this is exactly what God has done for us! His calling of people into the church, the Body of Christ, is an invitation, not just to eternal life, but also to the marriage of His Son to His Bride (Revelation 19:7-9).

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Leadership and Covenants

Part Three

Many people would evaluate the United States as a nation in serious decline. Economically, it is seriously deep in debt, and its morality issues are infamous worldwide. When we consider the overwhelming evidence from the Bible that poor leadership in government, business, religion, education, and family life contributed greatly to the Israelites' repeated departures from God, where does that leave us today? Is it not logical that the same deficiency is driving the confused and immoral condition of this nation?

The pressure to choose what to do about it in our lives is increasing. This may be partly due to unpleasant personal experiences, but it is mostly because societal conditions are gradually matching the prophetic evidence about the end times. The media report each day on America's intensifying cultural disintegration, indicating that the long decline we are experiencing will not change.

As for what to do, we have a number of options. Will we choose to do nothing about the building calamity, just continue to go with the flow? Will we make an effort to join with others, as in a political party or movement, to assist in changing the system that is operating in such a disgraceful, self-centered manner? Or will we decide to do neither of these, not supporting the way things are presently being done but making every effort to change *ourselves* so that we are no longer personally con-

tributing poor leadership to the present system?

We usually begin to become more aware of the nature of this world when we move through our teen years and into young adulthood. In those years, we become more sensitive to the fact that we have no control over a great many things in this life. Some of these are huge life-issues, which can pressure a person to become resentful and defensive about life.

Consider for a moment that we had no control over when we were born, whether before Christ, in the Dark Ages, in colonial times, or in this present day. We had no control over where we were born, whether in China, Brazil, Africa, or a nation of modern Israel. We had no control at all whether that nation was prosperous or poor or whether its economy was based in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, or service. We had no control over who our parents were or what their characters, educational levels, income levels, temperaments, health, or religious convictions, if any, were.

We had no control over whether we were born into a minority family or not—whether of race or religion—perhaps being barely accepted as human by the dominant group. We had no control over perhaps being born into abject slavery with little or no education available to us. These and similar realities have had their effects in shaping us into who we are today. It is impossible to escape

development by such unmanageable forces until we are equipped with the powers to exercise some control.

Righteous Control Begins With a Gift

Each of us has been born subject to a number of these forces, and it is likely we have felt victimized by some of them. Some of us, though, have received personally and directly from our Creator an awesome, life-changing gift that provides us with the chance to exercise a great deal of control over the direction and the events of life from this time until we die or Jesus Christ returns as promised.

In John 6:44, Jesus declares, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” Our Creator has invited us to participate in His ongoing spiritual creation. This gift was not given because we were well-qualified to receive it. Actually, the opposite is true: We needed this gift very much. Of our lives before receiving this gift, Paul writes:

For you see your calling [invitation], brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world, to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (I Corinthians 1:26-29)

A magnanimous act of God’s grace opens the door to provide us a far larger measure of control over the quality and outcome of our lives than we ever had before.

We are all victims of sin, not only of those we have committed along the way, but also of the sins of those who preceded us. The Bible calls the overall result of this mountainous mass of sin “spiritual slavery,” that we were “slaves of sin.” Most people live slavish lives that end only in death. A slave can be accurately defined as a person who has few, if any, choices in life. Someone else or an addiction or a lifestyle makes choices for the slave, and he merely follows, stumbling along in resentful submission to the choices of the one who owns him.

Needed: A Change of Leaders

God chose to illustrate our enslaved condition through His rescue of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from their bondage to Egypt. He desired to free them from their servitude and establish them as a separate nation of their own, a people free to determine the quality and outcome of their lives. Once at liberty, they were no longer subject to the orders and decisions of the pagan Egyptians.

Working through Moses, God succeeded in His purpose, and Israel was settled as a free people in their own land. However, the Israelites never truly learned the lesson of what having the liberty to choose required of them. John 8:31-37 gives evidence of this when Jesus confronted them about it nearly 1,500 years later.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, ‘You will be made free?’” Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.”

Even during the Israelites’ wilderness journey after being freed from Egypt, the flaws in their thinking began to surface in their conduct. Within just two years, they rejected the righteous leadership of Moses, refusing to exercise their liberty to choose to enter the Promised Land and take it as their possession.

The result of that dreadful choice was that every Israelite adult over twenty years of age except for Joshua and Caleb perished on the journey. Thirty-eight years later, the younger generation entered the land under Joshua and took it. However, after he died, the nation quickly deteriorated from the dynamic bastion of righteousness that God intended, choosing to abandon the godly causes that they had followed under Joshua. In their decline, the Israelites showed they were still enslaved by their own carnality.

John 8 proves that, despite possessing both biblical and historical records—as well as being taught by the very God of creation right in their presence—individual Israelites failed to choose to be free of the spiritual slavery to which they were currently in bondage. Why? They never overcame the slave mentality that their ancestors learned in Egypt and which they succeeded in passing on to successive generations.

Like their ancestors, they were slaves of sin and passed the same self-centered thinking processes on to their children. They persisted in the same old, carnal ways. They were each unwilling to make the changes in their thinking that God demanded after He called them out of Egypt. Why, despite their advantages, did they not change?

Freedom Is Not Free

John 8 is proof of how tightly bound we are to the anti-God carnality ingrained in our hearts. The Jews ended Jesus’

teaching session with their violent intentions toward Him so filling their hearts that He escaped only because God intervened to protect His life. They grasped that He was telling them that they had to make changes in their thinking, but they could not bring themselves to make those choices. They could not change because they were deeply enslaved by a deadly combination of factors. Simply stated, they did not believe *who He was* and *what He said*. Rather than submit to them, they fought against these truths.

God warns those who come to Him that He lays a requirement on all who want to be free. He teaches this with startling clarity in Deuteronomy 30:15-19:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.

Though His admonition is clear, some will say that this pertains only to those who made the Old Covenant with God. They argue that salvation under the New Covenant is free by means of God's grace. That, however, is a bald-faced lie. Notice how John the Baptist warns those coming for baptism just prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:7-10)

As God's representative, John demands the repentance that precedes change, as well as a high degree of loyalty in obedience to God. That level of personal loyalty does not come cheap.

Jesus Himself says in John 14:15, "If you love Me keep My commandments." Does anyone think that keeping the commandments is easy? Our carnal natures and this world are constantly pressuring us to break the commandments to fulfill some desire we think needs to be satisfied. Undoubtedly, many found what Jesus said appealing. Yet,

when He spoke as He does in Luke 14:25-27, it gave them pause to reflect carefully—and very few took up His challenge. Consider Jesus' admonishment to each person who wants to be His follower:

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Jesus demands submission to Him above everything else in life, including the self. If we think that is not costly, we need to think again! Discipleship can cost a person his relationship with the family he was born into, his livelihood, and even at times his life. At issue is how much we value the life our Savior gave to pay for our sins, as well as the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. Is our treasure in heaven, or are our hearts still bound to earth and its ways?

Christian Leadership Must Be Created

As shown earlier, when God calls us, we are not qualified for what He desires us to become. Yes, we are indeed alive in Christ, but at the same time we are carnal and worldly. The new convert is still driven by his old nature. Being in this state will not satisfy His purposes for us, to glorify Him by our lives and to be prepared to serve in His Family for all eternity. In fact, considering what God wants to prepare us for, it is almost as though we have just been born.

A major creative process must take place. Why? We must have a new heart if we are to be useful within the purposes of our Creator God. Jesus makes this plain in Matthew 15:15-19:

Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us." So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

This "heart" issue is the reason for the apostle Paul's statement in II Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." The new convert is a new creation, a parallel to Adam and Eve in their creation. God formed them both in His image (Genesis 1:26), though the material source of them was of the earth, which God also created. Isaiah 64:8 affirms what is occurring in those whom God calls: "But now, O LORD, you

are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand.”

In like manner, in the new creation, the new convert, it is God who calls (I Corinthians 7:15), who provides faith (Ephesians 2:8), who grants repentance (Acts 5:31), and who gives His Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). Just as God provided the means for Adam and Eve to function responsibly toward Him, so has He also supplied the means we need to function responsibly as a new creation.

His purpose is to create us in His *spiritual* image, so that we have qualities of heart and character as He does. These qualities will enable us to provide leadership as members of the government He will establish under Jesus Christ at His return. The prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 speaks of this government:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

The parable that Jesus gives in Luke 19:15-19 confirms that the reward for faithful, yielded service and growth given by Christ to His saints is rulership in His Kingdom:

And so it was when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first saying, “Master, your mina has earned ten minas.” And he said to him, “Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.” And the second came, saying, “Master, your mina has earned five minas.” Likewise he said to him, “You also shall be over five cities.”

On the night before His death, Jesus promises the apostles, “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30). Finally, in Revelation 3:21, Jesus declares, “To Him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

There can be no doubt that the ultimate destiny of those called into the church, who remain faithful and growing in the image of Jesus Christ, is to be given rulership with Christ in His Kingdom.

Submissive Cooperation Is Required

Creation is not magic. It requires work in all its forms, as well as vision, planning, sacrifice, wisdom, study, ingenuity, patience, cooperation, perseverance, and frequent testing of the product. These responses are required of us even though we are not literally the creator of the image of Christ. The Father and Son do the creating, knowing where They plan to place us in the government that They are forming, and only They have the spiritual powers to mold and shape us. We, however, must use the above qualities as we voluntarily cooperate by submitting to Their efforts to mold and shape us.

Jesus is our primary Model, even though examples of others who faithfully served God are included in Scripture and are available for us to follow too. Without doubt, He is the greatest leader who ever walked this earth. He was the Light of this world, showing and teaching the way of God (Acts 18:25-26). He led by perfectly following the way of God. The standard He set is without equal. We are to follow His example.

The fruit of our experiences of following Him will be the development of godly leadership that God can trust to be used in His Kingdom. We will not earn salvation by this means because we will never function perfectly as human beings. Salvation is by grace. However, the faithful loyalty of those living by means of the enabling God provides is thoroughly tested under all kinds of circumstances in life.

God seems to test us in such a way as to make it appear to us as though we are doing all the work, but all along the way, He is adding what we lack (I Corinthians 10:13). It is not easy to struggle against the desires of our carnality. The easy way is to give in and remain enslaved. It requires considerable sacrifice, and we are in fact called “living sacrifices” in Romans 12:1-2. Even Jesus had wrongful desires come to mind, and He had to overcome them (Revelation 3:21).

In order to develop the quality leadership suitable to serving with Jesus Christ in His Kingdom, we must meet the challenges of living God’s way in this evil world. Jesus humbled Himself and lived faithfully following the course laid out for Him by His Father. We are repeating the same basic pattern to create the same kind of loving leadership. We must take to heart the focus the apostle Paul laid before us in Colossians 3:1-4:

If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

(continued on page 13)

Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen

“For many are called, but few are chosen.”

—*Matthew 22:14*

One of the most hopeful and comforting passages in all the Bible can also be a source of major confusion and misunderstanding in the Christian world. The passage in question is Romans 8:28-29:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

The confusion centers on the subjects of God’s calling and predestination. If it is true that believers are predestined by God, then how can many be called and few chosen, as Jesus preached? Why would God call someone and not choose him or her? Why does He not just choose everyone? And if we are predestined, then we cannot fail, right?

These kinds of questions suggest that we need to take a look at the statement, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” It is found in two locations: Matthew 20:16 and 22:14, both from the mouth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Another commonality is that they are also both found at the ends of two parables, the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard and the Parable of the Wedding Feast. The placement of Christ’s statement makes it significant to the true meanings of the parables.

In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, some laborers work all day and others work parts of the day, but they are all paid the same wage. Those who labored for the whole day complain, while those who worked shorter periods are thankful. The owner of the vineyard tells the complainers that he is paying them only what they had agreed to when he hired them (Matthew 20:13).

Jesus concludes the parable in verse 16 with two well-known statements. The first

one, “The last will be first, and the first last,” means here that all receive the same salvation no matter when they are called, early or late. The second one, “For many are called, but few chosen,” will require more explanation, which is more clearly seen in the second parable.

The King’s Invitations

The second place where “For many are called, but few are chosen” occurs is Matthew 22:14, at the end of the Parable of the Wedding Feast. This parable must be understood in its context, that is, as a continuation of His thought at the end of Matthew 21:

“Therefore I say to you [the Jews], the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet. (Matthew 21:43-46)

At this point, Jesus launches into a parable designed to show the chief priests and Pharisees what they had done by their stubborn refusal to listen and change. It is easy to see that the king in the parable represents God the Father, and his son, of course, corresponds to Jesus Christ.

The story is simple. A marriage has been arranged for the king’s son, and the initial invitations were sent out so all on the guest list could make plans to attend. In those times, travel over long distances was far slower than today, so plans needed to be made long in advance. However, those invited, though possibly honored by the invitation, declined to attend the wedding.

So, a second, more urgent invitation was sent out to the same people, as time was getting short, but the invitees paid little heed to it, caught up in their own activities and ventures. They stated by their actions that they cared little for the king and his son. In fact, they were sufficient unto themselves with their farms and shops; they felt they had need of nothing (Revelation 3:17).

Proving their contempt, they treated the king’s servants, who had personally borne the invitations to them, with great disrespect and even killed some. The king was rightly furious, and he mustered his forces to avenge his maltreated servants to erase the disrespect shown to him. His kindness and generosity had been spurned, and he responded with wrath.

A third invitation had to be sent. For this one the guest list changed from the specially invited to the everyday person, some of which were good while others were bad. In this way the wedding was finally furnished with guests.

Wedding Garments

Commentators report that the custom in those days was for the one hosting the wedding feast—in this case, the king—to provide garments for the wedding guests. These wedding garments were simple, nondescript robes that all attendees wore. In this way, rank or station was covered, so everyone at the feast could mingle as equals.

Revelation 19:8 defines this symbol: “And to [the Bride of Christ] it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” The wedding garment identifies the righteous, those who lived according to God’s ways.

When the king entered the wedding hall, he noticed that one guest clearly stood out from all the others because he was not wearing a wedding garment. Having the man brought forward, the king asked: “Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?” (Matthew 22:12). The sense of his question is one of incredulity. It might be better phrased, “Why are you not wearing a wedding garment, even though one was provided for you?”

The man was plainly not dressed correctly for this occasion. His lack of a wedding garment was another example of extreme disrespect for both the king and his son. Again, the wording, “And he was speechless,” indicates that he was without excuse. It was not just that he lacked a wedding garment, but that he did not wear one on purpose. He had defiantly refused to put one on.

This is why the king reacts so swiftly and harshly: “Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13). His judgment is not against the man’s lack of a wedding garment per se, but that he did not intend to wear one. He was, in fact, determined not to wear one.

The man without the wedding garment desired the honor of attending the wedding feast, but he did not want to follow the custom of the king. He wanted to do things his own way. His lack of proper dress revealed his inner rebellion against the king and his instructions. So the man was executed as a rebel.

It is here that Jesus inserts His somewhat cryptic phrase, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). God’s calling clearly corresponds with the king’s invitation, and indeed, the invitation went out to both the original guest list (Israel/Judah, whose people were killed in war and whose city, Jerusalem, was burned; Matthew 22:7) and then to mankind generally. We can conclude that, while God’s calling is widespread—going to “as many as [His servants] find” (Matthew 22:9)—those who respond to His invitation and whom He subsequently chooses to wear a wedding garment are a far smaller group.

Foreknown? Predestined?

Considering the statements made in Romans 8:28-29 that God's chosen were foreknown and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, yet seeing that many are called but few chosen, we are left wondering who was foreknown and who was predestined.

Years ago, Herbert Armstrong took a safe approach in his teaching on this subject. He taught that predestination applies to the church as a whole group. In other words, in the beginning God knew that He would raise up the church to do its work in the world and to nurture His called-out ones.

More recently, we have understood this to be far more specific. The Bible indicates that God foreknew several individuals at least from before their births (Isaac, Jacob, Samson, David, Solomon, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, etc.), so His foreknowledge includes specific people. It makes perfect sense that God would want certain individuals to perform in a particular way when He wanted special things done, as that is a pattern God has used in the past.

However, God's foreknowledge and predestination "to adoption as sons, . . . according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5) is not an absolute guarantee of salvation and eternal life. The Bible is unambiguous in its assertions that a person can lose his salvation (see, for instance, Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1; 6:4-8; 10:26-31). If an individual could not lose his salvation, then why does God provide so many passages warning us of the possibility?

God is not a liar and does not warn without cause. These warnings are given because God has cause to give them! While God is sure of His ability to work out the salvation of every person He calls, each person has his part to play, that is, he must believe and cooperate with God throughout the sanctification process, growing in the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is why the apostle Paul urges us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). In other words, though God chooses us, we must also choose Him.

An individual's sins could cause him to lose this awesome opportunity. Yes, God is eager to forgive all our sins and set us back on the path of righteousness, but that act of mercy cannot begin if we do not seek forgiveness and repentance from Him. A sin is unpardonable if one refuses to ask God to pardon it.

A person can also turn away from God so willfully that he becomes a rebel against God, repudiating his former belief and "tramp[ing] the Son of God underfoot" (Hebrews 10:29). Christ's sacrifice does not apply in such a case because it cannot be applied twice to the same person. As the writer of Hebrews says, this is considering the blood of the covenant, Christ's own blood, to be common and an insult to the Spirit of grace.

Further, why would He reveal that there will be a Lake of Fire for the incorrigibly wicked if it would not be needed? Certainly, the Devil and his demons will be cast into it, as well as the Beast and False Prophet (Revelation

20:10), but Hebrews 10:26-27 indicates that this is also the fate of those who "sin willfully after receiv[ing] the knowledge of the truth" (see also Hebrews 6:8). By the way, the Lake of Fire imagery stands behind Jesus' illustrations of Gehenna fire as well as the fate of the man not wearing a wedding garment: "outer darkness" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This is why God warns us so often and so urgently in the pages of the Bible—because He does not want to lose those He has called to salvation!

Ensuring We Are Chosen

So often, it is easy to let down in our thinking, assessing that, because we believe we are members of the end-time church, we can relax in our conduct and spiritual growth. Perhaps we regard ourselves as automatically chosen, that we "have it made." That is dangerous thinking! Our emphasis, especially now as the times worsen, had better be on working to make sure we are chosen.

How is that done?

The Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:18-23 both warns and advises us on the course of our lives once we hear "the word of the kingdom" (verse 19). As Jesus explains, some, of course, never get beyond mere hearing of it, and Satan does his dirty work to keep them in the dark. These people, though technically called, will likely rise in the second resurrection, when they will be able to respond to God without Satan's interference. Members of God's church, however, are far beyond this stage.

In verses 20-21, Jesus describes those who receive God's Word "with joy," but they lack depth—their spiritual roots are so shallow that they are easily withered by adversity. Upon encountering their first trial, they fold like a cheap suitcase. We have probably all known someone who, at the thought of losing a job because of keeping of the Sabbath, rationalized that God would not want him to fail to support his family and so left the church, considering God's way to be too difficult.

Another group appears in verse 22: those in whom "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word." Some among us in former days partook of a slice of success in this world, and their wealth and position eventually became more important to them than doing what God asks of His people. They, too, spurned their calling. We read of similar people in the Parable of the Wedding Feast, who declined the king's invitation to care for their farms or businesses.

Such a person becomes distracted by the world and chooses to prioritize God, not first, but further down the list. Because he does not spend time with God or thinking about His way, he stops growing. As Jesus puts it, "He becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). In other words, he quits producing the kind of character growth God wants to see in him. His transformation into the image of Christ comes to a standstill.

(continued on page 13)

Stuff

As spring begins each year in the northern hemisphere, true Christians begin cleaning their homes of any leavening in preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8; I Corinthians 5:6-8).

Many of us also use this time for an overall cleaning of our areas of responsibility, be it our office, bedroom, dorm room, car, or an entire house, and we call this effort “deleavening.” This brings up the question of the origins of “spring cleaning.” Is there any doubt that this tradition originates with the ancient Israelites removing leaven from their homes?

When my kids were younger, they had to deleaven their own rooms, as well as help clean other areas of the home, with adult supervision of course. We took advantage of this exercise to get rid of accumulated stuff that was no longer needed. We could always fill several large garbage bags from their rooms: school papers, broken toys, mismatched or outgrown clothing, and so on. It is amazing how much unneeded stuff a person can gather in a year.

A pile of stuff would be started in the middle of their bedroom floors and added to until it was ready to go into the garbage bags. But some people really like their stuff—all of their stuff. We could always count on our daughter, Kelly, to fight for everything that went into that pile. “But I love that doll with no arms or legs!” Just as an aside, the Hebrew word *kliy*, used 325 times in the Old Testament (Strong’s #3627), is frequently translated “stuff” in the King James Version. It seems to be pronounced “Kelly.”

TOO MUCH STUFF

American comedian George Carlin did a routine in the 1980s about stuff:

Everybody’s got a little place for their stuff. This is my stuff, that’s your stuff, that’ll be his stuff over there. That’s all you need in life, a little place for your stuff. That’s all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. If you didn’t have so much stuff, you wouldn’t need a house. You could just walk around all the time. A house is just a pile of stuff with a cover on it. You can see that when you’re taking off in an airplane. You look down, you can see everybody’s got a little pile of stuff. All the little piles of stuff. And when you leave your house, you gotta lock it up. Wouldn’t want somebody to come by and take some of your stuff. They always take the good stuff . . . That’s what your house is, a place to keep your stuff while you go out and get—more stuff!

A recent number-one nonfiction bestseller in the U.S. is *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, written by a 30-year-old Japanese woman, Marie Kondo. The book sold two million copies worldwide before it was even published in America. It is a “mystical manifesto” on letting go of the stuff we do not need. *Tidying Up* has quickly developed a cult-like following, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. Fans share photos of their underwear drawers. They have started clubs and Facebook groups. They use the author’s name as a verb, as in, “I just Kondoed my recipe books.”

Do we have too much stuff? A few television reality shows focus on the subject of hoarding. We may think we are all hoarders to some extent, or know someone who is, but I have witnessed this affliction, for lack of a better word, up close. When my children were just starting school, my daughter, Tara, and a school friend would visit each other's homes after school. Tara told us a bit about her friend's house, but one day I had to pick her up and was invited inside her friend's home.

I had never seen anything like it in my life! A narrow path wound through every room, in between floor-to-ceiling stacks of newspapers, magazines, boxes, and trash—mounds and mounds of trash. It was as if some out-of-control monster was growing inside their home and slowly pushing them out.

The musician Don Henley had a great line in a song from 1989, "Gimme What You Got," where he sings, "You got stacks and stacks and stacks,/then Gabriel comes and taps you on the shoulder,/but you don't see no hearses with luggage racks." Perhaps he paraphrased I Timothy 6:6-8, where the apostle Paul tells the younger Timothy: "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."

So, do we have too much stuff? Probably. I cannot speak for anyone else, but I know I do. The problem is, I love my stuff! It is good stuff. Someone else's stuff might be trash, but my trash is stuff!

Can I live without it? Sure I can. Do I want to? Not really, but I like to think I can walk away from it when the time comes.

THINK AND CLEAN

Notice I write "when" the time comes, not "if" it comes. There will come a time in each of our lives when we will have to choose between the comfort of our current existence and following God into the unknown, just as so many in the Bible were required to do. The list is long: Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc. Each of these men, and often their wives and families as well, had settled lives, with homes full of stuff. Yet, God motivated them to leave it behind.

In Luke 17:20, the Pharisees asked Christ when the Kingdom of God would come. He gives them a short answer, then in verse 22, He begins a longer answer to the disciples. In verse 26, He mentions "as it was in the days of Noah" as an example. In verses 28-31, He provides another one:

Likewise, as it was also in the days of Lot: they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built [in other words, they accumulated stuff]; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and

brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away.

The King James Version (KJV) uses "stuff" instead of "goods." If we are outside our homes, and it is time to go, we are not to worry about our stuff.

How does this topic of "stuff" apply to the Days of Unleavened Bread? We already see the link to deleavening and spring cleaning, but there is another aspect that we might not think about. Reducing clutter as we deleaven, a kind of "simplifying of our lives," can be a useful tool in identifying aspects of the world that Satan uses to entrap us.

I Corinthians 5 is an entire chapter devoted to Paul chastising the early Corinthian church for accepting sexual immorality among them. They were proud of their tolerance; we could say that they gloried in their diversity. In the middle of this correction, Paul writes in I Corinthians 5:6-7:

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

The symbolic act of taking leaven from our houses is expanded to include ridding leaven from our minds and attitudes. Many messages have been preached about the process of deleavening, emphasizing that, as we clean, we think about the symbolism of leaven and sin.

We should try to strike a balance in our deleavening activities, knowing that cleaning every nook and cranny of crumbs does not sweep us into the Kingdom of God. God does not tell us to clean the attic if no one eating crackers has been up there the entire year. Still, it is useful to do if one has the time and ability. A more thorough cleaning however, should not take away from spiritual preparation, such as prayer, Bible study, and fasting.

LEAVING OUR STUFF BEHIND

The untidiness in our lives can be equated with a certain messiness in our minds. We need to ask ourselves what hooks this year have caught us that bind us to the world? Have we formed any attachments to our stuff that could cloud our judgment? Can any of our stuff be given to charity or to others in need, or simply disposed of in some other way in order to simplify our lives?

Our stuff is not evil, in and of itself. Certainly, my stuff is not! But we must have a clear notion of what is truly important in life—and it is not our cars, big-screen TVs, or cellphones! If the house were on fire, and once we

made it outside, we looked around on the lawn and saw that all our family was safe, would there be any reason to run back into that burning home? Is any of our stuff worth our lives?

We hear a lot about leaven and sin as spring approaches, as well we should. We eat unleavened bread during the seven days of the Feast as a sign, a memorial to God's law and His deliverance of His people from Egypt. As Moses tells the Israelites in Exodus 13:3, "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten."

Verse 6 tells us to eat unleavened bread seven days, and all leavening must be out of our homes and living spaces during that time. The reason appears in verses 8-9:

And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, "This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt." It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.

God brought His people out of a land full of pagan gods and sins of all sorts. He took them into a wilderness to teach them His laws and to build their faith. Egypt represented the world, and the Israelites walked away from it.

Notice a couple of things. In Genesis 45:16-20, when the king of Egypt finds that Joseph, his vizier, has family back in Canaan, he tells Joseph to bring them all to Egypt. The Pharaoh says in verse 20, "Also do not be concerned about your goods [*kliy*, stuff], for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours." In effect, he says, "Hop on the wagons and leave your stuff. I'll give you everything you need. Don't worry about it." They probably brought some personal keepsakes, portable memories of one type or another, but whatever homes they had, full of stuff, they walked away from.

A few centuries later, they do it again. Even though they became slaves in Egypt, they lived in homes, which held the contents of their lives. The Israelites walked away from those as well, but instead of seventy people leaving Canaan, a couple of million left Egypt. They took their wages in the form of jewelry, an easy way to carry wealth. Again, they likely grabbed some items from their homes that carried special memories for them, but mostly, they walked away from bulk of their stuff.

An interesting aside here: When they "spoiled" the Egyptians—as in Exodus 11:2, "Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and

articles of gold"—the word "articles" ("jewels," KJV) is Hebrew *kliy*, "stuff."

They left behind what had previously meant a lot to them and God provided. Is that not what Christ is saying in Luke 17:31? "In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods [stuff, KJV] are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back."

Then in verse 32 appears the ominous warning, "Remember Lot's wife." In that story, angels literally pull Lot and some of his family out of Sodom before it is destroyed. It is the evilest of places, the world in all its "glory," as it were, and Lot's wife wants to return to it, just as some of the Israelites later wanted to return to Egypt, to the world.

Is our stuff bad? Only if we put the wrong priority on it. If we are puffed up and vain about our car, home, clothing, phone, or whatever, then yes, it can be wrong. If God were to say to us, "Come here," and we responded, "Hang on a sec, let me grab my phone," then I would say, "Remember Lot's wife."

PROPER EMPHASIS

Earlier in our church history, perhaps we attached too much importance to deleavening. We probably put too much emphasis on the physical act of cleaning. We would clean the house top to bottom. In our house, we started cleaning in the attic and finished in the basement. I told my mom that I was pretty sure none of us had eaten a sandwich up in the attic, but we had to search and clean it nonetheless.

My son, Cody, remembers cleaning the garage with me prior to the spring holy days when he was young. He recalls how I had him remove every paint can from the bottom shelf of the workbench and clean the can and the shelf. He, too, wondered if anyone had eaten a sandwich curled up under the workbench. It was the same reasoning I had used a generation earlier, and it was probably used by countless other children for thousands of years.

Looking back on this with a certain amount of maturity now, I see nothing wrong with thoroughly cleaning one's home or personal space. This physical act, however—or any other physical act, for that matter—will not gain us entrance into the Kingdom of God. But, if done with an attitude of superiority and pride, it will actually separate us from God!

So, if we choose to combine deleavening with a thorough cleaning of the house or office or dorm room, a spring cleaning, that is a good thing. While we are doing this, we should not only ponder how leaven symbolizes sin, but also consider our stuff, and make sure it does not mean the world to us. After all, we will someday have to leave it all behind.

—Mike Ford

Ready Answer

Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen

(continued from page 9)

Matthew 13:23 describes the group we must be in to be chosen: “But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” The ones whom God commends are those who bear fruit. They do this by overcoming their old sinful natures, seen in the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), and growing in the traits of their Savior, seen in the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

This bearing of fruit is the requirement of being chosen, as Jesus makes abundantly clear in John 15:1-8. Notice verses 1-2: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch that does not bear fruit He takes away [margin: *lifts up*; or *removes, cuts off*]; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” He ends the passage by saying, “By this My

Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (verse 8).

What happens when one of the called fails to bear fruit? In verse 6, Jesus expands on what He said in verse 2: “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” The unfruitful branch’s ultimate end is the Lake of Fire. We fail to produce spiritual fruit at our eternal peril!

The more important question is not “Were we individually predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ from before the world was formed?” but “Now that we have been called, are we producing the fruit that glorifies God, transforming into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:2)?” If we do this, we will indeed be among the chosen—the elect—and glorified with Christ.

—John Reid

Personal

Leadership and Covenants

(continued from page 6)

Faithfully Following the Word of God

In reality, every leader follows someone who trod the path before him. We follow Christ. Though we cannot literally see Him, we walk with Him. However, we can read what He did and taught because God has provided us a faithful witness of what we need to follow to be prepared to serve under Him in His Kingdom. We must faithfully abide by what we are shown in His Word.

God promises He will be faithful (Deuteronomy 7:9). The apostle Paul declares God is faithful (I Corinthians 1:9). Both Jesus and Moses are declared faithful (Hebrews 3:1-2), and all of those leaders named in Hebrews 11 were faithful in their times of service. Now is our time to walk faithfully beside them. To be faithful is to be trustworthy, reliable, and responsible in our interactions with both God and man.

What must we do? What must we follow? The same basic things the heroes of faith did. It is easy to say we must keep God’s commandments, which is certainly true. However, notice that those great leaders of the past are all mentioned for accomplishing some task more specific than keeping the commandments. Keeping the commandments is a general responsibility for all, and doing so is important in itself. Yet, each leader also achieved a specific responsibility: Abel made a sacrifice, Enoch walked with God, Noah built an ark, Abraham offered Isaac, Moses stood fast before Pharaoh, etc.

We need to understand our calling to be more specific and distinct than being “merely” one of a multitude in the church. How specific it is for each called individual is not

yet known. Even so, being individually and personally called by the Father is awesome all by itself.

The apostle Paul shows in I Corinthians 12 that we must not think our calling is merely random, a coincidence. Such thinking glorifies neither God’s genius nor His magnanimous generosity in stooping to call us. God is following a plan. He is creating a family team, and within His actions, nothing happens by chance, not even our calling:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. . . . But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 18, 27-31)

God is expanding His Family, the church, and at the same time filling positions of responsibility to be faithfully performed by the elect. The church is called and formed as a body of people led by the Holy Spirit to do works representing God. There is undoubtedly some overlap in what the elect are required to achieve, but plainly, everyone

does not perform exactly the same specific responsibilities.

No employer, be it a large corporation or an individual entrepreneur, looks for potential employees who cannot perform the available positions. As we saw, no one, when first converted by God, is prepared to perform the tasks He has in mind for him, but each one has the potential to do just that if he will submit to the training God assigns. God is calling, training, and fitting us into the Body to follow Christ faithfully wherever He leads. This process is absolutely required of the elect because God reveals in Revelation 14:1-5 what He is preparing the firstfruits for.

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing on their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

This vision, like the similar one in Revelation 7:1-8, shows another degree of specificity in God's purpose. The numbers are similar, but in Revelation 7 the origin of each is from one of the tribes of Israel. By way of contrast, those in the church are from all nations. Those in Revelation 7 are not shown headed for a specific position within God's Family, but those in Revelation 14 are given a specific responsibility. In any case, God is pursuing specific purposes in dealing with us, so we must consider that His training of us in this life may also reflect shades of difference from person to person.

An Exceedingly High Goal

We must not allow ourselves, like so many in the world, to consider that salvation is as easy as falling off a log. Did Jesus have to suffer hatred and persecution? Did the apostle Paul endure many tough trials? Certainly, each follower of Christ named in Hebrews 11 had to experience similar things in their times of service. We must adopt the mindset the apostle Paul followed to keep himself on track:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those

things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. (Philippians 3:13-15)

He urges us not to allow our attention to be diverted toward some earthly desire that our carnality finds appealing and morphs into a need. Consider Adam and Eve's example. Despite the fact that they literally saw God and walked and talked with Him, how quickly their thoughts were turned away by Satan's presence and the highly desirable allure of what he presented! We must be aware of our vulnerability given the "right" time and appeal. A person can stay focused only for himself, so Paul implores us to keep our eyes on the goal God has revealed to us.

Jesus taught us to be keenly aware of where our treasure is (Matthew 6:20), and Paul exhorts us to be focused on our heavenly calling (Colossians 3:1-4). We are all somewhat different in what helps keep us inspired, motivated, and focused and thus more willing to trust God, patiently pressing on and persevering day by day to the end of the course He has set for us. For me, it helps considerably when I can grasp a logical progression of steps that lead to understanding. In me, this is combined with a worldview that is simultaneously vast in scope yet sharply focused so that I can see myself as a cog in a vast and wonderful plan He is directing. Not that I think I am a vital part of that plan, but I am certainly involved in it. This is such a significant and humbling honor that I do not want to disappoint Him!

This thought was the catalyst for this series. It began to form in my mind while preparing Feast of Tabernacles sermons in 2014 and sharpened during similar study of the book of Deuteronomy for the Feast of 2015. I was beginning to grasp the importance of the covenants to our salvation. Just one covenant—the Old Covenant, as we call it—is so vital that God devotes an entire book, Deuteronomy, to expounding it, using historical backgrounds, commentaries, and prophecies to help us comprehend its importance to our growth and salvation. Those meditations led me to consider the importance of the other covenants to our salvation, and so this series developed.

The covenants contain extensive foundational material that can bolster our awareness of why things are the way they are in this world, promoting understanding. Each covenant provides a clearer picture of God's desires and of His judgments, to which we can learn to submit and conform. In His children, God is creating righteous leadership so that the leadership failures of the past will not be repeated in His Kingdom under Jesus Christ.

In Christian love,



Brexit—An Unclean Getaway

On June 23, 2016, the voting citizens of the United Kingdom (UK) were given a choice to remain as members of the European Union (EU) or to exit the union to function as a fully independent, sovereign nation, ruled only by its own elected government. The referendum came to be known as “Brexit.”

With much of the entire globe, including most of the other 27 member nations of the EU, slipping rapidly into economic and political turmoil, the outcome of Brexit was anxiously anticipated, not only by the citizens of the UK and EU, but also by watchful persons everywhere.

The campaigns for and against the British exit were characterized in a multitude of fashions by citizens, politicians, and pundits, but the most common starting point pitted a resurgent nationalism against the globalist vision of a vast, centralized mega-state. In fact, many observers viewed this as a sort of international proxy vote, providing mankind a glimpse into the cauldron of worldwide sentiment, which would answer many questions as to the political future of either movement—in essence, the old world order versus the new.

However, at the time of this writing, the outcome in favor of the UK exit has seemed to uncover more questions, while revealing more instability than it was ever intended to resolve. Author Charles Hugh Smith, in his article entitled, “A Precarious State,” writes, “Brexit reflects a precarious state of shifting political tectonics that threatens the status quo.” To try to make sense of it all and for the purposes of looking ahead, let us first take a look back at the events that led up to the history-making vote.

The UK joined the European Economic Community (EEC), a predecessor of the EU, in 1973. The roots of the EEC were founded in the Continental desire to reconcile the traditional or historical adversaries of past conflicts and to make provisions for maintaining peace, which is a nice way of saying that there was a need to prevent Germany from rising again to dominate Europe. In 1975, the UK held its first voter referendum on remaining within the EEC, which was approved by a nearly two-to-one margin. However, the first seeds of the Eurosceptics, those critical of and opposed to the EU, were planted.

While various exit movements were easily defeated

by the UK Parliament over the next two decades, the EEC, in the meantime, was transitioning into a more political union, and in 1993 it adopted its current moniker, the EU, with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. That same year witnessed the birth of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) (out of the Anti-Federalist League, established in 1991), dedicated to the exit of the UK from the EU. Billed as a racist and populist party by its detractors, the UKIP has also suffered from extensive and venomous infighting throughout the twenty-plus years of its controversial existence.

Despite the political turbulence, the UKIP successfully framed its campaign for “Brexit” within the context of a rising resurgence of British nationalism. Concern had been growing in the UK that the EU, attempting to morph into a mega-state, would soon erase the distinctive character and independence of all its member states, usurping control over their borders, immigration, economies, currencies, trade, militaries, and justice systems. In addition, Germany, which was supposed to be “controlled” by the very existence of the mega-state, was instead dominating it in all aspects.

When the Great Recession of 2008 reached the EU, its greatest weakness—a cold and rigid incompetence to manage economic crises of its individual member-states—was exposed. And the UK, along with the rest of the world, took notice. On the heels of the economic woes, the Syrian immigration crisis, exacerbated by international terrorism, further strained the nationalistic leanings of the UK. Both of these crises helped to fuel the further growth and popularity of the UKIP and its call for leaving the EU. Under much political pressure, UK Prime Minister David Cameron finally agreed to hold a referendum to allow the citizens to decide their future.

While we know the outcome of the vote was for the UK to leave the EU, its long-term impact is still being debated while its short-term impact is being felt worldwide and analyzed *ad infinitum*. In the next issue, we will take a closer look at some of the responses to the Brexit result and analyze the future impact it may have on a world that is teetering on the edge of greater global conflict.

—Joseph Baity

Would Jesus Christ Vote?

Part Two

Despite this evil world being full of selfish, abusive leaders and sinful, miserable people, God has a well-organized plan for the eventual salvation of humanity. God sent His Son Jesus Christ with that specific purpose in mind, not to enter politics or to strive against the forces of evil in this world. The good news He brought is not merely about accepting Him and then, as part of this world, helping to make it better. It is about an entirely new way of life and a new governmental system headed by God the Father and Himself.

However, before He could even begin His ministry, like the first Adam, He had to face Satan in the greatest challenge in all eternity, a conflict for the rulership of the earth. He met and conquered Satan through His usage of the Word of God. While Satan quoted Scripture, perverting its meaning, Jesus quoted it and accepted its intended meaning. He withstood the Devil's temptations, rejected his deceptions, refused to obey him, and conquered him by obeying God the Father. At His command, Satan slunk away, defeated.

In that moment, Jesus qualified to replace Satan as ruler over the earth, but it was not the time for Him to be inaugurated into office (John 7:3-6). When Jesus returns to earth, He will take up rule over all humanity as King.



1. Does the gospel Jesus taught give us insight into the future of politics? Mark 1:14-15.

COMMENT: Jesus taught the good news of the coming Kingdom of God to anyone who could hear Him, and the world rejected it. He knew that most would not pay heed to His words, as this was part of God's plan from the beginning: Only those whom the Father called would follow Christ (John 6:44) because He opens their minds to the truth.

Since the Garden of Eden, God has allowed Satan to deceive humanity. During this time, He has allowed people the freedom to choose to live from the work of good or suffer from the toil of sin. The first Adam failed to depose Satan, and every human has failed similarly ever since. God allows people to choose because it is necessary to accomplish His purpose.

Then, in keeping with the principle of "in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:17), in the seventh millennium, humanity will rest from sin, and those who have been converted will enter into God's spiritual rest. At Christ's return in all His power and glory, Satan will be chained, unable to deceive the world any longer. Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, will rule through His now-immortal saints, forming the world-ruling Kingdom of God. God's benevolent government will replace every government on earth and its evil religions, economies, and society. Then, His future "political" policies will be established forever.

2. Did Jesus come to enter into earthly politics and make it a better world? John 18:36-37.

COMMENT: Pilate was concerned that Jesus was interfering in the politics of his day, but Jesus told him that, even though He was born to be King, His Kingdom was not of *this* world. Christ will establish His rule on earth as King of the world at the appointed time He returns.

While Jesus did preach to the world by warning it (Matthew 4:25-5:1), He remained separate from its politics. His primary audience was His disciples, whom He taught God's way of life. He called them out of this present, evil

age—out of its customs, philosophies, and ways—to a life of separation from the world (II Corinthians 6:17). He told them, "Follow Me."

He did not mean for Christians to leave the world physically. He knew they must live in it, but He taught that they should not be *of* it. In His final prayer, He requests, "I do not pray that you should take [My disciples] out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:15-16). Thus, Christ's disciples live in this present world as if they were foreigners, guests of the nations where they reside, as ambassadors for Christ and His coming Kingdom.

When God calls a person to repentance and conversion, He summons them to forsake former allegiances and transfer all loyalty to Christ. As Paul writes in II Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

3. What was Jesus' approach toward the world? Matthew 22:15-22.

COMMENT: Though people in the world heard what Jesus taught, marveling at it (Matthew 7:28-29), they did not believe what He said. Moreover, He intentionally taught principles in the form of parables so that they would not understand, but His disciples understood because He opened their minds (Matthew 13:10-17). His message, we can conclude, was not directed at the world at all.

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar, He replies, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." He points out a clear distinction between God's Kingdom and the nations of the world: They have authority here on earth now and should be obeyed, but they were given that authority by God (Romans 13:1). He, then, is the ultimate authority. Though Jesus paid taxes to them (Matthew 17:24-27), His first loyalty was to God. As He said, we should follow Him.

—Martin G. Collins