

## Hope Found

*Wars often quench hope, but God cultivates hope through the great promises found in His plan.*

by Joe Horton

During the closing months of 1944, the United States military was pressing for the end of the war in the Pacific theater by attacking positions being held by the Japanese throughout the region. U.S. Naval Task Force 38 was one of the components being used to execute the American military plan. Mid-December found the task force operating in an area approximately 300 miles east of the Philippine Islands.

Having spent several days conducting offensive operations against Japanese-held positions, several ships were running low on fuel. On December 17, the task force command gave the order to commence refueling of several of the vessels, particularly the destroyer escorts that had been assigned to provide defensive support for the aircraft carriers.

Seas began to build and wind velocity increased as ships attempted to get into position to allow the replenishing of fuel stores. After several attempts in



which lines used for the transfer of fuel from ship to ship were ruptured, the decision was made to postpone refueling until the next day in the hope that the weather might moderate.

The vessels that were to take on

fuel had purged their salt water ballasts to enable them to take a commensurate amount of fuel. Due to the time it would require to replace the ballast and then discharge the tanks once again on the following day for refueling, some ship captains decided to attempt to ride out the storm with empty ballast tanks.

The following day did not bring an improvement in weather conditions; they steadily worsened. The rough seas continued to build until Task Force 38 found itself facing a full-blown typhoon. Typhoon Cobra (as the storm came to be known) was soon carrying winds approaching 140 miles per hour and producing towering waves.

Three of the ships whose stability had been compromised for want of proper ballast were unable to maneuver effectively and were lost to the storm. One

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of the destroyers that sank that day, the USS Spence, carried a crew of 339 men. Only 24 survived.

### A personal connection to this story

Seaman First Class Cleo Parson Whited, known to his family as Joe, was among those lost with the ship. He was 21 years old and was my mother's youngest brother.

This bit of family history is poignant when we consider what that young man might have become. At the same time, the story is hopeful because of what we read in the book of Revelation: "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (Revelation 20:12).

God's plan holds out the prospect of

all of us reuniting with family and friends who have departed this life and are in the grave awaiting that time when they will be called forth and given their opportunity to learn about and to embrace the salvation offered to them through Jesus Christ. It is exciting to think about having a part in introducing them to that marvelous truth.

The prophet Ezekiel, wrote about those of the house of Israel who had died and gone to their graves: "Also He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army" (Ezekiel 37:9-10).

God's marvelous plan, outlined in His annual holy days, (Leviticus 23)

teaches and reminds us that hopelessness is unfounded. Their hope is not lost; their time is yet to come, their hope is yet to be found. And we, if we hold fast and endure to the end, can have a part in revealing to them that same miraculous hope that God has given us.

To learn more about God's holy day plan and exciting opportunities in store for all mankind, request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

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VIRTUAL CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

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## To Hope and Not Despair

*Why is hope necessary and what will happen if it's lost?*

by Nathan Albright

In 1 Corinthians 13:13, we read that faith, hope, and love are three qualities that abide—the greatest of which is love. We read about the importance of love in this chapter and many other places, and we read about the importance of faith in Hebrews 11 and many other places. But where do we go to understand hope, and why it is necessary for us to hope? What is it that hope provides to the life of a Christian? Let us briefly examine what the Bible says about hope in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 and about what happens in its absence.

### Lest you sorrow as others who have no hope

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, Paul addresses a very important aspect of our hope as Christians by saying, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen

asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." Here Paul is telling the brethren of Thessalonica that there are people who despair because they have no hope in the resurrection, and that those who have died in faith will be resurrected at the return of Jesus Christ.

This is not the only time Paul ties resurrection and hope together. In Hebrews 6:13-18, Paul states about God's blessings: "For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.' And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all disputes. Thus God, determining to

show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.” Because God cannot lie we can trust Him to keep His promises of a better world tomorrow, of a world without the effects of sin and corruption, a world without abuse, without disaster, without sorrow or evil.

The importance of maintaining this hope cannot be emphasized strongly enough for, as Paul says, the resurrection is vital to our faith. “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:13-19).

There are several different points that can be made from that passage. For one, our forgiveness for sins depends on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His resurrection as the firstborn from the grave (Colossians 1:18) as the wave-sheaf offering opens the faith to us as the firstfruits of the family of God. For another, the reality of resurrection is the promise of judgment. This can be both good and bad. The reality of God’s judgment means we will either have our sins wiped away by the blood of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, or we will be condemned. On the positive side, though we may suffer in wrongs now, the reality of the hope we hold means we will be partakers in the same consolation as Christ of eternal life in God’s kingdom. “And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that

as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation” (2 Corinthians 1:7).

### A disorder of hope

One of the more vexing problems that human beings have to deal with is the question of why bad things happen to good people. We look around at the sorrow and suffering in this world, and we wonder why innocent children are abused by their relatives, why people suffer for years with horrible diseases without having deserved their suffering. This world is not fair, it is not just, and



as much as we would wish it were so, it appears beyond our powers at this present time to make it so. It is only the hope we have that God will make things right in this world or in the world to come that allows us to patiently endure the trials and suffering of this life.

In writing about recovery from child abuse, practicing psychologist Dr. Diane Langberg described the aftereffects of abuse as a disorder of hope. Suffering often robs us of the basic hope that life will get better. If all we have known is trouble and suffering, then it is difficult to imagine life without either; however, this is what the Bible describes in the

new heavens and new earth. Depression, itself often a handmaiden of abuse and other problems, is an emotional black hole where light and hope may not exist at all, nor can light and hope safely enter.

Even less traumatic events such as illness, the loss of a job, or the break-up of relationships can lead to the loss of hope because one’s own hopes and dreams and plans have been dashed. If our hope is to endure, it must be built on that which is sure and certain and not that which is fragile. We must build on the rock of Christ and not the sandy soil or our own plans and expectations (Matthew 7:24-27). We must also realize that God can restore and renew what has been damaged or harmed. After all, God’s family is ample evidence that God is in the fixer-upper business—of making the desert blossom like the rose, of making the foolish wise, the weak strong and the base ones noble—all so God’s glory can be recognized for what it is and not confused with the vainglory of mankind.

### Hope: a necessary virtue

Therefore, in light of the various aspects of this mortal life that can rob us of hope for a better and brighter world tomorrow, let us remember that we need to hope in order to endure. For we are all aware of what must be endured in this unjust and imperfect world, and it is only the blessed hope of the resurrection of glory and the blessings of God for obedience and patience that give us the strength we need to rise up and go about our lives day after day. Let us not sorrow as others who have no hope, and let us remember that God, who cannot lie, has promised that we will be raised incorruptible to reign as kings and priests as part of the family of God if we endure to the end. Let us therefore hope and not despair.

For more information on the hope of the resurrection, please request a copy of our booklet: [The Gospel of the Kingdom](#).

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# The Blessings of Abraham (Part 4 of 4) - Lessons of Abraham

*Abraham's example reverberates throughout the Bible and holds many lessons for us today.*

by William Miller

When I began this personal study of Abraham, I was hoping to discover why he has such a prominent place in the heroes of salvation chapter, Hebrews 11. What I discovered is more personally satisfying and troubling than I anticipated—satisfying, because I learned that he deserved the honor. Troubling, because I realized we each are challenged to duplicate Abraham's faith. Abraham has not been merely set on a pedestal without an explanation of why he has such strength of character, but is shown to have been intricately designed, honed by hardship, honest labor, and time into a real yet remarkable human being who is upheld and illustrated multiple times in God's Word. We must emulate his efforts if we wish for the eternal rewards he is promised.

## Instructions from the authors of the four Gospels

In the New Testament, we read the name Abraham in the very first verse. We are told that Jesus Christ's heritage came through David from Abraham. The Jews back then were concerned that Jesus Christ had a proper pedigree. Matthew was making sure that the audience he wrote for was well informed that this was so. Israelites in general and the tribe of Judah in particular have no problem honoring the greatness of Abraham. But, as shown in Matthew 4:4, there is much more to life than physical heritage: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

We read early in Matthew 8 how Jesus heals a servant of a Roman centurion. This Roman was, as far as we know, completely outside the physical promises that God made to Abraham and his children. God was looking for



something more than physical ancestry in order to dispense His blessings. The lesson is clear: faith will be rewarded. Promises were made to Abraham, and they will all be fulfilled, but having faith now can be rewarded now. Those who witnessed Jesus saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel" (verse 10), must have scratched their heads in wonder.

We conclude Matthew's references to Abraham with Jesus' own statement that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:32). The people that Jesus was talking with knew Abraham was dead, but Jesus spoke powerfully, if simply, "God is not the God of the dead!" Abraham will rise again. Our challenge is to emulate the faith of Abraham in ourselves so that we can likewise be rewarded and rise with him to meet Jesus in the air when He returns to the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Proceeding through the New Testament, we see Mark's one reference to Abraham in Mark 12:26. This reference reiterates the lesson we just read in Matthew 22.

Luke's account of Christ's parable shows the role of Abraham as a father. His references surround our reading in his Gospel account like kids around the dinner table. Consider the parable that Luke alone relates in Luke 16:19-31. Abraham is portrayed as a loving father, who wants to see his children born into the Kingdom. He must lead them to look back to the scriptures that can help them. Abraham makes that decision: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (verse 31).

I find this parable compelling because Abraham is appealed to as chief dispenser of blessings rather than recipient of the blessings that God promised: "Father Abraham...send Lazarus...[to my] five brothers...lest they also come to this place of torment" (verses 24 and 28).

Leaving aside the deeply theological aspects of this parable, which are clearly and completely explained in many of our other publications, you may note the filial connections: *father* Abraham...*five brothers*. God is our Father though most humans only dimly acknowledge this. We are all brothers, though the record of history mostly shows destructive warfare! What a botch!

God is our Father; Christ is our Brother. Only by following the faith exemplified by Abraham, over and over again, can we be given the insight to acknowledge and choose the road that ends up on the correct side of that "great fixed gulf" (verse 26). God wants a large family, but the children must be born according to His Word.

John shows love to and reveres Abraham appropriately in his inspired Gospel account. John 8, also places Abraham in his correct position. What is that position? The Jews esteemed Abraham too highly. "Then Jesus said to the Jews who

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believed on Him, 'If you continue 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 seed and were never in bondage to anyone. How do you say, You will be made free?'" (John 8:31-33) They held Abraham in much higher esteem than they should have. In verse 53 they confronted Jesus with these words, "Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets are dead; whom do you make yourself out to be?"

Isaiah 45:22-24 and Romans 14:10-12 show all humans—including Abraham—kneeling before the Eternal. That is the appropriate position for us all and we should choose to do it always. John quotes Jesus: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). What did he mean? Jesus, before he took on human nature at His birth, was the Eternal, the I Am, the Lord that Abraham had interacted with and known. Abraham was truly a friend of God, but he also worshiped that particular friend.

#### **Instructions from other New Testament writers**

**P**eter, in the first of his New Testament Pentecost sermons, appealed to the promises that the Eternal made to Abraham (Acts 3:25). Peter is an excellent example of one who made gross human errors before he received God's Holy Spirit. He did not allow his mistakes

to steal his God-ordained potential and continued to move forward in faith. In that regard, he was like Abraham (and, we hope, like us too).

Stephen refers to the relationship Abraham had with God and shows that his following the direction of the Eternal was appropriate. He displayed great faith and trust (Acts 7:2). Stephen then clearly states the time that must pass before the promises were to be fulfilled in Abraham's life. He thus says to us that we too must wait—a good lesson for all of us today.

In Acts 7:17, continuing his summary of Israel's history, we see Stephen insinuate that at least some of the fulfillment of the promises were and are very physical. The Eternal multiplied Israel as slaves in Egypt before they had any thought about greatness as a nation. Then He brought them out of bondage to a land of milk and honey. Abraham did not see this promise unfold, but he believed it would. Do we believe God's promises for us?

#### **Paul continues to point the early Church to Abraham's example**

**T**he apostle Paul never tired of bringing up the subject of Abraham to initially gain the attention of his audience (Acts 13:26). He soon found that focusing on the physical descendants of Abraham was not the way God intended him to use his talents (Acts 13:46). But he never could entirely allow Abraham and Abraham's example of faith to lie dor-

mant (Romans 4:9-13, 16; 9:7-8; 11:1-2). He knew that everyone must learn and practice the faith of Abraham if they want to be given eternal life (Galatians 3:1-9).

Abraham was just a man who will need to be raised from the dead to glory. There was another Man who gave up the glory that He had already enjoyed. Abraham is a great example, but Jesus Christ is the *perfect* example. Paul begins by showing us that, like Abraham Jesus Christ was born a man (Hebrews 2:14-17). He was much more before He became a Man, and He returned to that glory again (Hebrews 6:9-7:28). I encourage you to read all of Hebrews 7 and 8 to understand the perfection of the faith of Jesus Christ.

Paul ends his writings on Abraham by focusing on Abraham's hope in the future (Hebrews 11:8-10). We, too, only see that city, New Jerusalem, through a dark glass. We are not there yet.

Jesus Christ is the perfect, complete example, but Abraham is also a good example for us: "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God" (James 2:23). We must also always seek that same kind of relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

To learn how to develop the kind of faith that Abraham possessed, request our free booklet, [\*You Can Have Living Faith\*](#).

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## **The Blame Game We All Play**

*When we get into trouble in our lives, whom do we blame and should we blame at all?*

**by Janet Treadway**

**L**ike many people around the country, I have been following the Casey Anthony trial. I have been following it from the first time the news broke that Caylee, Casey's toddler, was missing. In 2008, Casey was indicted on charges of first-degree murder of her daughter, and her trial started in May 2011.

I was totally blown away by her lawyer's opening statement, which said that Casey's father was to blame for how she turned out, and even for the murder of her child. Casey's lawyer went on to explain, in graphic detail, the abuse that Casey suffered at the hands of her father. I am not sure why I was surprised at this defense; it seems to be the norm in our society to use the "blame game"

as a defense. This practice is commonly used in the court system to help the defendant avoid paying the penalty for their actions. According to her defense attorneys, Casey's father was responsible for the death of her toddler and for the numerous lies that she has contrived through this process. Note that on July 5, 2011, the jury's verdict was announced: Not guilty on the three major charges but

guilty on four counts of lying to law enforcement officers.

### He wasn't a "victim"

There are countless stories that I could use as examples of people getting in on the blame game (I like to call it "the victim syndrome"). However, let me relate a story I just read of a young man who, despite growing up under horrific circumstances, did not use the blame game. His name is Sung Bong Choi, a 22-year-old Korean laborer, who gave a breathtaking performance on "Korea's Got Talent."

Sung was dealt an incredibly tough hand at life—he was placed in an orphanage at the age of three and ran away at the age of five because of abuse. He lived alone, homeless, for 10 years, and sold gum and energy drinks on the streets to live. When he told the judges of the show that he was a manual laborer, people in the audience laughed. Their attitude quickly changed when he told his heartbreaking story and began to sing. There was not a dry eye in the audience, and their amusement turned into admiration.

While homeless, this young man took his GED test, went to art school (when he could afford it), and took voice lessons. [A video of his performance can be found on the internet.](#) While his story is heartbreaking, it is a story of hope, perseverance, and following his dreams. Choi is not using the blame game but is rising above his circumstances. He has become an inspiration to all who have seen him.

The story of Choi is such a contrast to the Anthony case. While Casey's family was not perfect, she had a family, a home, and parents to provide for her. Even if her father did abuse her, it is still

no excuse for her actions. She refuses to take responsibility for anything; it is everyone else's fault but her own. What is striking is that both Casey and Choi are young adults who have made completely different choices.

### Playing the blame game

While most of us are not as drastic as Casey in playing the blame game, if we are not careful, we can get in on the blame game as well; that will only hold us back in life. We can use the common excuses for not overcoming—that it is my parents' fault for the reason I am the way I am, or my circumstances, and so on... Using the blame game can only rob you, hold you back, and even cripple you. It is a crutch that many use to stay in their comfort zone, instead of



reaching out to be the very best that they can be.

Here is one example in which the blame game can be used. Do we blame our genes as to why we are overweight? "I am overweight because my parents, my sisters, and brothers are all overweight. It is in my genes, so therefore, I cannot lose weight." Instead, we should take the problem by storm and be proactive. Take it to God in prayer and study about the right things to eat and the food we should avoid to help us overcome the

weight problem. Using the blame game is the easy way out, which prevents us from being all that we can be.

### Another way of blaming

When we stand before God to receive our reward, God will take into consideration the obstacles that were laid in front of us but our reward will come from our overcoming. We all know the story of the talents mentioned in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27. The third man, who did not grow but hid his talent, is a prime example of using the blame game. Look what God did to him. God removed the one talent he did have and gave it to the first one who doubled his talents.

My own childhood was horrible and, in many ways, I can relate to Sung Choi,

but I in no way blame my parents for the outcome of my life. I am the captain of my ship, under God's great guidance and protection. I am the one to be held accountable for how my life turns out and no one else. So are you!

The blame game is a ball of chains wrapped around your ankles which keeps you from being

what God wants you to be. Ask God to remove those heavy chains and be all that our great Father wants you to be and knows you can be! Let's be an inspiration to others, as Sung Bong Choi is, by being accountable, growing, and removing the blame game from our lives.

Request our free booklets: [Making Life Work](#), [Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion](#), and [Why Does God Allow Suffering?](#)

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# Destined for a Moment

*Is our life preplanned in advance, as so many believe?*

by Robert Berendt

Some people believe that each event in our lives has been determined for us before we were born. Fate or some god determined in advance when and how we would die, what trials were to come, whom we would marry and whatever else might happen in our life. This kind of thinking can make a person become somewhat fatalistic—and filled with the belief that they have no power to make choices in given situations—even when those choices would change the outcome. It also means you don't have to accept responsibility for what you do.

The Bible tells us that time and chance happens to everyone (Ecclesiastes 9:11). You can be in the wrong place at the wrong time or in the right place at the right time—depending on whether you lose or win. Events in our lives can sometimes implant superstition or the sort of thinking that makes one believe someone bigger than we are is guiding each step of our lives. Many outstanding athletes have superstitions about various things—some go through pre-sport rituals. These rituals may have taken hold due to a past success during which they were wearing a certain item of clothing, tied their shoes a certain way and so on.

There is no question that someone bigger than us—our Creator—is involved in our lives and in our destinies. There are occasions when God really does guide our destiny. But it is wrong to think that we have no say in what happens in our lives. Jesus Christ had to control His will and conform to that of the Father (Matthew 26:39, 42). He was destined for that precise moment and yielded to God's will by choice.

We can choose to do the work of God or choose not to. A preacher can decide whether or not to preach. The act of repentance, accepting the gift of salvation from Jesus Christ, stirring up the gift of



God's Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:6) and continuing steadfastly to obey God (Hebrews 3:14-15, 18) are all areas in which we have been given the ability to choose. There are numerous encouragements to do the right thing. These would not be needed unless we "could" make choices. There are also consequences of our choices—both good and bad. Our choices may or may not please God. Since God truly is God, it just makes sense that we should seek to please Him (1 John 3:22), because He controls entrance into His Kingdom. It would be good and wise to be on His side. We make that choice.

Some people, however, are destined for a moment. It seems that there are times in which God has a certain task He wants someone to do for Him. He prepares the way for that person to be able to serve, but still allows that person the

final say. God wants willing servants—not slaves He must constantly control. Naturally there are great rewards for those who do strive to please God. The circumstances may not be of our choosing, or even of our liking, but the choice to serve or not to serve Him is ours.

Let us consider the example of Queen Esther. Esther was a beautiful young Jewess who was used by God to save the Jewish people. Although she was only one of many wives of the king, she was granted special favor. God's intention has always been that a man was to have one wife only (Matthew 19:4-6, Titus 1:6). Esther may have wished for a better circumstance, but God used what was available. He gave Esther great favor with her husband and when her uncle Mordecai came to ask Esther to intervene with the king due to the proclamation of death to all the Jews, Esther hesitated because she

knew of the dangers that she would have to face. Mordecai told Esther to consider that she may have come to this kingdom just for that moment (Esther 4:14). Yet, Esther was given the choice. Mordecai told her that if she chose to refuse, help would come from somewhere else, but she and her father's house would perish. It seems Esther was destined by God to be ready to serve Him at this moment in time.

We can muse and wonder at the moments God has been planning and waiting for. When was Mary chosen to become Jesus' mother? Why did God wait until Zacharias and Elizabeth were so old before He told them that they would have a son named John? God does His works for a number of reasons and purposes. Everything glorifies Him and shows His nature as well as His power.

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Prophets like Jeremiah, Elijah and others were chosen by God and used at special times. Like Jonah, they could refuse, but God has a way of showing us what we are to do and why. Through our yielding to Him, we grow in understanding and are closer to being in His image and having divine nature. By allowing us to choose, we also reveal what is in our hearts.

God does have a purpose for people and often works to bring about the circumstances that will cause that prophecy or statement to come to pass. The remarkable look into the future in the book of Daniel also shows us that some are destined for their moment in history. God stated in Isaiah 44:28, almost 150 years before Cyrus was born, that he would be

the king that would issue the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. That prophecy came true in 2 Chronicles 36:23. He told of Joseph and the saving of the house of Israel. The list is lengthy of those God used at a given moment in time. All could have refused and God would have found another way. But because He is God, He can do a lot to ensure the fulfillment of that moment in destiny. God still leaves a choice as in the example of Esther. He rejoices in willing, obedient servants.

We are left to wonder in awe and amazement at the work of God. In every generation God may have assigned a responsibility to a certain individual. Perhaps the preparation of Samuel led to the moment he would anoint the first king of Israel. David's appearing at the time

of Goliath was no accident. There may be many such moments in the life of a servant of God, or there may be only one important moment. Is it possible that we could be exactly where God wants us to be for a specific reason and for a specific moment in time?

When we humbly and gladly strive to serve Him, He grants us many moments in which to act and serve. Our time is our own and God does not direct each minute. He does tell us to study and prepare ourselves to serve Him when He has a task or responsibility for us. You have had a moment, whether you knew it or not—and you will have many more if you are willing (Matthew 25:10). Be ready every day.

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