

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

*"You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD."
—Leviticus 19:32*

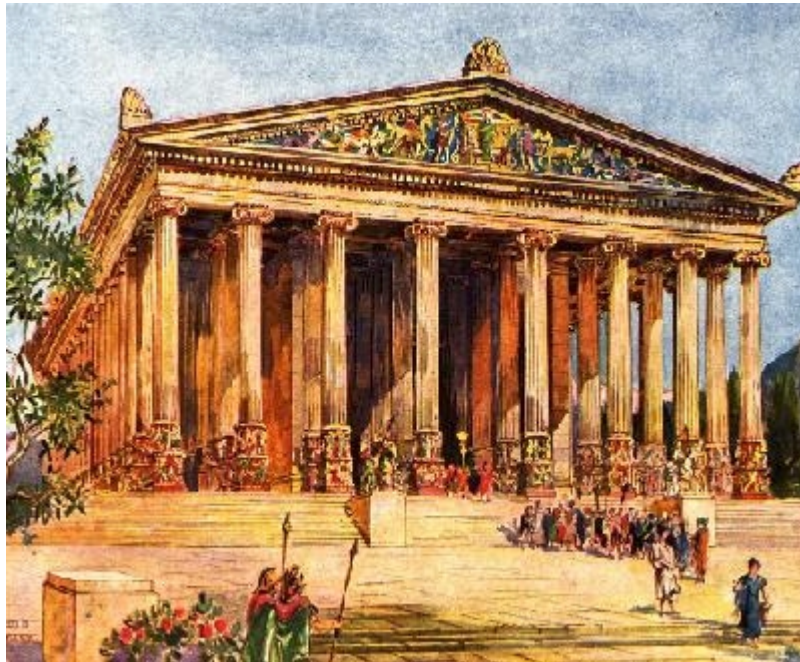
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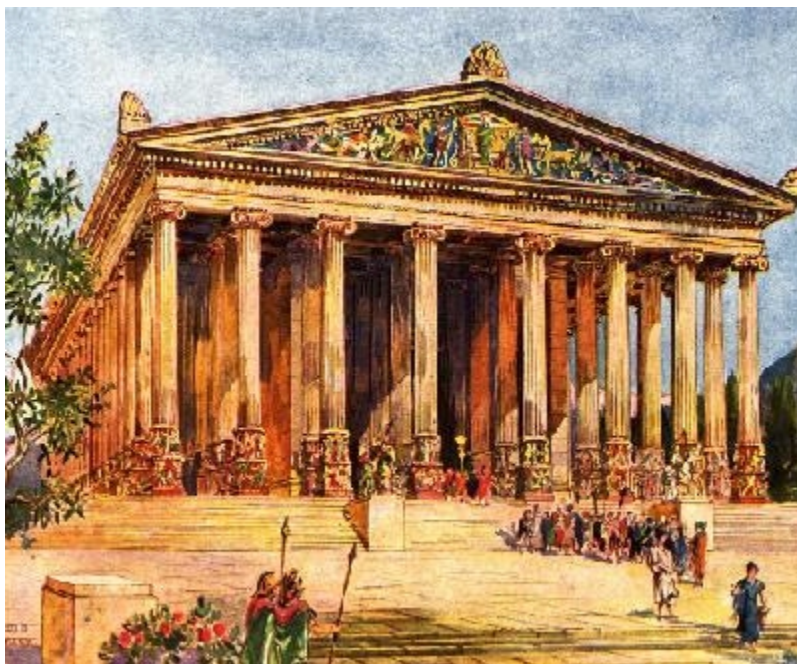
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Archaeology in Acts, Part 3: Paul's Later Travels

By Mario Seiglie

Luke provides us with a detailed and accurate account of Paul's apostolic missions during the first decades of the Church



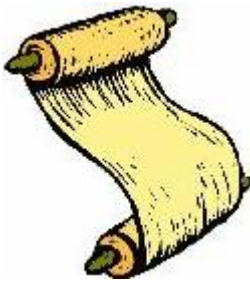
IN THE PREVIOUS TWO INSTALLMENTS in [this series](#) we covered events from the start of the Christian Church to Paul's first travels through the Mediterranean world. In this article we conclude our discussion of the book of Acts by covering Paul's trips to Ephesus, Jerusalem and Rome.

The Ephesian scripts

After visiting Corinth, Paul began his return journey to Jerusalem by way of Ephesus, an important city of Asia Minor.

“And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to *Ephesus* ... And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their *books* together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:1, 18-20, emphasis added throughout).

The Greek word used here for “books” is *biblos*. The word originally referred to “the inner part... of the stem of the papyrus [plant]” and later “came to denote the paper made from this bark in Egypt, and then a written ‘book,’ roll, or volume” (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Book”).



Since the 1870s archaeologists have made intensive efforts to find ancient papyrus scrolls, especially in Egypt where the desert climate can preserve such fragile treasures. They have realized remarkable success, finding scrolls dating back to New Testament times. Among the papyrus scrolls discovered are some containing the wording of magical spells; these scrolls were used as amulets (charms).

“A number of such magical scrolls have survived to our day,” notes F.F. Bruce. “There are especially famous examples in the London, Paris and Leyden collections. The special connection of Ephesus with magic is reflected in the use of the term ‘Ephesian scripts’ for such magical scrolls. The spells which they contain are the merest gibberish, a rigmarole of words and names considered to be unusually potent, arranged sometimes in patterns which were part of the essence of the spell, but they fetched high prices ... The closest parallel to the Ephesian exorcists’ misuse of the name of Jesus appears in the Paris magical papyrus, No. 574, where we find an adjuration beginning on line 3018, ‘I adjure thee by Jesus the God of the Hebrews’” (*The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, 1974, pp. 390-391).

Since the 1870s archaeologists have made intensive efforts to find ancient papyrus scrolls, especially in Egypt where the desert climate can preserve such fragile treasures.

The value of such costly scrolls that were destroyed is given in the Bible as “fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19), a sum scholars say would be worth around \$48,000 in modern currency.

One of the seven wonders of the ancient world

Paul’s preaching in Ephesus caused many to turn away from their idols and pagan practices. This led to an uprising among the craftsmen who made their living making statuettes of the goddess Diana and her temple.

“And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said, ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.’”

The temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece.

“Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians!’ So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into *the theater* with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions” (Acts 19:23-29).

The temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was *four times* the size of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. Its ruins were brought to light by the British archaeologist John T.

Wood in 1869. Later he found, in remarkably good condition, the huge theater mentioned in Acts 19:29. It could seat more than 24,000 people.

William Barclay comments about the temple of Diana: “It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. There were 127 pillars, each the gift of a king. They were all of glittering marble and 36 were marvelously gilt and inlaid. The great altar had been carved by Praxiteles, the greatest of all Greek sculptors. The image of Diana was not beautiful. It was a black, squat, many-breasted figure, signifying fertility; it was so old that no one knew where it had come from or even of what material it was made. The story was that it had fallen from heaven” (*Daily Study Bible*, 1975, comment on Acts 19:1-7).

Another reference work adds: “Thousands of pilgrims and tourists came to it from far and near; around it swarmed all sorts of tradesmen and hucksters who made their living by supplying visitors with food and lodging, dedicatory offerings, and souvenirs. The Temple of Artemis [Diana] was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of the deity” (Richard Longnecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 9, 1981, p. 503).

It's not surprising that a lucrative trade of small statues of Diana and her temple existed in Ephesus. Commenting on verses 24 and 27, A.T. Robertson explains: “These small models of the temple with the statue of Artemis [Diana] inside would be set up in the houses or even worn as amulets ... Temples of Artemis [Diana] have been found in Spain and Gaul [France]” (Online Bible software, 1995, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*).

Throughout Europe archaeologists have found many statues of the many-breasted goddess Diana (or Artemis, as she was called by the Romans). In 1956 an impressive statue of Diana was discovered in Ephesus; it stands prominently in the museum there.

Into this scene of popular paganism entered the apostle Paul. Demetrius had accused him of teaching that “man-made gods are no gods at all” (Acts 19:26, New International Version). In other words, Paul had fearlessly taught keeping the Second Commandment and avoiding worship of religious images. Thanks to the help of friendly government officials in Ephesus, Paul was protected and the crowd was finally dispersed.

It is a bit ironic that although the cult of the goddess Diana gradually died down, another cult eventually replaced her in Ephesus. “Christianity,” says historian Marina Warner, “fastened on her [Diana] and added such typical feminine Christian virtues as modesty and shame to her personality ...” (*Alone of All Her Sex*, 1976, p. 47). Diana, continues Warner, “was associated with the moon ... as the Virgin Mary is identified with the moon and the stars' influence as well as with the forces of fertility and generation” (p. 224).

At the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431 the veneration of Mary became an official element of the Roman church. Warner says about Diana: “Memories of her emblem, the girdle, survived in the city [Ephesus] where the Virgin Mary was proclaimed *Theotokos* [Mother of God], three hundred and fifty years after the silversmiths, who lived by making statuettes of Diana, rebelled against the preaching of Paul and shouted, ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians’ (Acts 19:23-40). There could be, therefore, a chain of descent from ... Diana to the Virgin, for one tradition also holds that Mary was assumed into heaven from Ephesus ...” (ibid., p. 280).

Paul's arrest in Jerusalem

From Ephesus Paul hurried to Jerusalem to be there, “if possible, on the Day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16). When he arrived he soon went to the temple to worship and fulfill a vow along with four other Jewish Christians.

“Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they had supposed that Paul had brought into the temple)” (Acts 21:27-29).

Paul was arrested on a false charge of having taken a gentile (a non-Israelite) inside the temple. Next to each temple entrance was an inscription warning everyone that only Israelites were permitted to enter.

After Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, the Roman authorities discovered a plot to kill him and hurriedly sent him to nearby Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea.

F.F. Bruce explains: “That no Gentile might unwittingly enter into the forbidden areas, notices in Greek and Latin were fixed to the barrier at the foot of the steps leading up to the inner precincts, warning them that death was the penalty for further ingress. Two of these notices (both in Greek) have been found—one in 1871 and one in 1935—the text of which runs: ‘No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death’” (*The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, 1974, p. 434).

Paul's journey to Rome

After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, the Roman authorities discovered a plot to kill him and hurriedly sent him to nearby Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea. Since he was a Roman citizen, a rare and great privilege in those days, he was entitled to full military protection. In Caesarea he submitted to several preliminary hearings that left him imprisoned for more than two years. Finally he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to the emperor in Rome.

The voyage to Rome, on a cargo ship, was harrowing. Luke accompanied Paul on the trip, and his narrative is a masterpiece of accuracy down to its tiniest details. “Luke's account of Paul's voyage to Rome,” explains *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, “stands out as one of the most vivid pieces of descriptive writing in the whole Bible. Its details regarding first-century seamanship are so precise and its portrayal of conditions on the eastern Mediterranean so accurate that even the most skeptical have conceded that it probably rests on a journal of some such voyage as Luke describes” (Longnecker, p. 556).



The remains of several ships similar to the one described by Luke have been found on the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. They corroborate the precision of Luke's account. "These grain ships were not small," notes Barclay. "They could be as large as 140 feet long and 36 feet wide. But in a storm they had certain grave disadvantages. They were the same at the bow as at the stern, except that the stern was swept up like a goose's neck. They had no rudder like a modern ship, but were steered with two great paddles coming out from the stern on each side. They were, therefore, hard to manage. Further, they had only one mast and on that mast one great square sail, made sometimes of linen and sometimes of stitched hides. With a sail like that they could not sail into the wind" (*Daily Study Bible*, comment on Acts 27:21).

On the voyage to Rome, Paul and his company were shipwrecked on the island of Malta and barely made it to the beach without drowning. There they waited several months until another ship took them to Rome.

The Appian Way

Luke's account continues: "And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns" (Acts 28:14-15).

According to archaeological and literary evidence, Luke accurately recounts the way stations to enter Rome from the west, the shortest route from the nearest seaport.

"At Neapolis, Paul and his contingent turned northwest to travel to Rome on the Via Appia—the oldest, straightest, and most perfectly made of all the Roman roads, named after the censor Appius Claudius who started its construction in 312 B.C. During the seven-day stopover at Puteoli, news of Paul's arrival in Italy reached Rome. So a number of Christians there set out to meet him and escort him back to Rome. Some of them got as far as the Forum of Appius (Appii Forum), one of the 'halting stations' built every ten to fifteen miles along the entire length of the Roman road system ... Others only got as far as the Three Taverns Inn, another halting station about thirty-three miles from Rome" (ibid., comment on Acts 28:15).

On the voyage to Rome, Paul and his company were shipwrecked near the island of Malta and barely made it to the beach without drowning.

Luke thus provides us with a detailed and accurate account of Paul's apostolic missions during the first decades of the Church. The book of Acts ends with Paul waiting for his case to be heard by the emperor. From later historians we learn that he was set free and continued his apostolic journeys for several years until he was again arrested, imprisoned and ultimately beheaded in Rome.

For more interesting reading, check out our free booklet, [The Gospel of the Kingdom](#).

These articles on Acts were part of a longer series on "The Bible and Archaeology" that were printed in the [Good News](#) magazine. They have been compiled into two downloadable PDF files which you can find at <http://ucg.org/booklets> in the upper right corner.

Grandparents

By Robert Berendt

Families are made up of different generations. Grandparents have a strong role in the family and here is one example of that love and honor.



I KNEW ONLY ONE of my grandparents. My grandmother on my mother's side who we all called Oma arrived in Canada in 1952; and when I first met her, she was old. She remained old until she died at the age of 99 years. I remember the spinning wheel she would use. She saved the wool from cast-off wool garments and used it to knit slippers.

My Oma had some great adventures in her life. There were many sorrows as well as joys. We children were always greeted in such a way that we felt special and appreciated. She always seemed excited to meet with us. It is vital that a child feels important and wanted—my Oma added a new dimension to that. She had stories to tell of concentration camps, flights from advancing armies in World War I and World War II, hunger and, always, her faith in God. She could speak several languages and never stopped working. I often wondered how a person with so little and who had lost so much could remain calm and serene in her life.

I recall my youngest daughter standing beside Oma as she used the spinning wheel. Oma always had a candy for her it seems. Since my daughter was small and could only speak English—and that was one language my Oma never did learn—I wondered how they could carry on a conversation. One day I asked my daughter if she understood what Oma said. She said, “No, but sometimes I say yes and sometimes I say no.” That seemed to be enough for the two of them to be very comfortable with one another. There was something about Oma that attracted everyone.



A blessing

Grandparents are a special blessing from God to little children—just as little children are a blessing to their grandparents. Psalm 128:6 includes as a blessing—seeing one’s own children’s children. Proverbs 17:6 states that children’s children are the crown of old men. It is true that grandparents are not the parents, but in many cases, grandparents have had much to do in the raising of children. Psalm 103:17 speaks of God’s mercy to one’s children’s children.

A grandparent needs to be very careful not to interfere with the responsibility of the parents, but there is a very important role to play.

Deuteronomy 4:9 admonishes grandparents to teach the things they have seen and learned to their children and their grandchildren. Generations ago, changes were usually very slow. Not many were highly educated and the pace of life was different. Today we live in a different world. Information is easily obtainable and societies are changing as never before. A grandparent needs to be very careful not to interfere with the responsibility of the parents, but there is a very important role to play. I have observed grandparents walking with their little grandsons or granddaughters. They have time to pay close attention to the little ones, and they can provide a whole different scope or range of teaching to the children.

Grandparents are the most stable individuals in our society. They exude patience, calmness and thoughtfulness. God expects them to have learned to be diligent in learning the lessons life has taught. Grandparents have the luxury of time to show the value of stopping to smell the roses in this busy world. Not all grandparents have attained the lofty status of being wise and respected, but my Oma did and in my observations most grandparents have qualified themselves for this honor. I do not remember many physical gifts that my Oma gave to me, but I will never forget the lessons in humility, patience and giving attention to others that I experienced. The most valuable gifts we receive in life are not physical, but rather, the unseen and spiritual ones.

It is vital that a child feels important and wanted.

Humility is a character trait that is vital if we are to enter into eternal life. In 1 Peter 5:5-7 we find that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Humility toward God is the vital ingredient that allows Him to lead us and direct our minds. He gives grace to the humble. Jesus reflected this teaching in the beatitudes of Matthew 5. Here we read about “the poor in spirit,” “those who mourn,” “the meek,” “the merciful,” “the pure of heart” and “the peacemakers.” All of these words describe a person of great humility. By the time old age arrives, those lessons are usually learned. There is an old saying: “We get too soon old and too late smart.” The point is that we do get smart in old age and that is the value of a grandparent. Grandparents lead by example and not commands.

Learning the lessons of life

Proverbs 16:31 states: “The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness.” There is a condition implied here. The senior is to be obedient to God. Psalm 119:172 reveals that “all God’s commandments are righteousness”—that is, they reveal what righteousness is. During our lives we are to have learned to sort the wheat from the chaff and to grasp that which is truly valuable—and that is the way of God. A grandparent, then, also has the responsibility to be honorable—that is, his or her deeds make the person worthy of honor. When

God inspired Moses to write that people are to “rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man” (Leviticus 19:32), He stated this with the understanding that a senior person would have learned the lessons of life.



My Oma experienced the death of some of her children. She had to send some to a foreign land for fear of World War II, never to see them again. She lost everything that she ever worked for and saved. I remember that she was the one who would search out the dried pieces of bread that no one wanted to eat in our home—she ate them without butter—just as she had done for years during and after the war. She shed many tears as so many others have also had to do. She earned her position of love and admiration within our family. She knew what the scripture meant when

Job wrote, “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). She did not just lie down and quit in the face of adversity—she acted. In the concentration camps, she was known as one who could massage sore and aching bodies. She boldly approached Russian soldiers for the safety of her children. Her hands were busy until the day she died.

I have seen my own mother take on the role of Oma. She is 92 years old now and revered by our family. She, too, has passed the tests of life and is passing lessons learned on to her children. Lessons of faith in God and constant effort in solving the problems life has to offer. Our family is very fortunate to have four generations alive at the same time. My mother is Oma to about 17 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. Recently the fifth generation has arrived and in a few years, there will be more. That makes her a great-great-grandmother. She truly is a great, great Oma. She is wise and a very valuable part of our family.

I have seen my own mother take on the role of Oma. She is 92 years old now and revered by our family.

I am an Opa (grandfather). I, too, am the only grandparent my grandchildren will ever know. It is hard to think of any greater blessing in life than to have my grandchildren write about me one day and say, “He was a great, great Opa.” May that blessing be yours, too, one day!

Can God Forgive Me?

What do you do when life has turned upside down and you've gone completely the wrong way in life? Can God still forgive you?



I GREW UP IN A NICE HOME, in a typical family, in a suburban neighborhood. We attended the local church and were good friends with our neighbors. Even though I was not sheltered, I was a naive child and lived in a Pollyanna world. This was my early life. It was a good one and I was happy. Then, as if overnight, it all changed. My life went from normal and happy to crazy and sad without warning.

My parents got a divorce; my father started dating and my mother began to drink. Life would never be the same for me and it was scary. My siblings and I were on a new track and for me the destination was very unclear.

My siblings and I were on a new track and for me the destination was very unclear.

My mother started drinking whenever she wasn't working. She worked in the morning, drank, worked in the evening and then drank some more. She was rarely home and we had a lot of time to ourselves to do as we pleased.

My dad's visits became shorter and shorter as he started dating, and he became the constant enemy of my mom. I grew more and more distant from both my parents and began to seek out support from others. At age 11 I began hanging around with older girls who introduced me to smoking; and before I knew it, I was a pack-a-day smoker.

As time passed, I grew farther away from my family, especially my dad. I filled the void by spending my time with boys and going to parties. It wasn't long before I was regularly smoking marijuana and drinking. I started having sex at the age of 13. I never wanted to be alone, so I kept

a boyfriend close at hand and never broke up with one boy until I had another on the hook. I jumped from boyfriend to boyfriend.

Continuing a downward spiral

It is not surprising that I soon tried smoking hashish and taking downers. Because of downers and supplying them to someone else, a boy almost died and I was listed as a pusher in my junior high school.

Things continued to spiral and at the age of 16 I turned up pregnant. I went to Planned Parenthood and they confirmed the pregnancy and then gave me counsel ... if you can call it that. They pretty much told me to abort and said little to nothing about adoption or keeping my child. Although I was scared by what was happening to me, I was more afraid of my boyfriend's and my parents' reactions. So, just before my fourth month of pregnancy, I had an abortion. No one except my boyfriend and a couple close friends knew what I was doing. My boyfriend and I skipped school and headed downtown to a clinic located in a basement. They gave me a pill that made me have horrific cramps and later vacuumed the life away from within me. The next day I returned to life as if nothing had happened.



I continued to have illicit sex and do drugs into my 20s, although by then I had added cocaine, crank and other kinds of speed. I also sampled various other drugs along the way and there is more, which I don't need to go into here to make my point. Everything finally came to a climax one night as I hung over a toilet; bleeding profusely from the nose and vomiting, unable to get up to my feet. At that moment I realized I was going to die. Whether that was true or not, I will never know for sure, but I believed it at the time. I broke into prayer as I wallowed there in the bathroom. I begged God to spare my life and if He allowed me to live I would give up my ways and clean up my act. Well, it was not long before I was up and back in bed, shaken, but recovering. Although I still occasionally smoked pot, I was pulling myself together and quite quickly at that. I am sure God helped me through that night.

I had always believed in God and had visited many different churches over my life, but never found a place for myself. I read my Bible and was questioning much of what I read. It didn't seem to jive with what I was learning at church. So I gave up reading and attending church. Plus I would never have to deal with the feeling of God not accepting me like I was and the guilt I always felt sitting in church. A sermon could send me into tears. Problem solved, right?

So, just before my fourth month of pregnancy I had an abortion.

Turning my life around

A few years later I discovered the truth via a religious television program that led me to Church. I was instantly struck with how different it all sounded and I started to study intensely. It was

through Bible study, church attendance, fellowship and prayer that I learned how forgiving God is.

God knows that when we depend only on our carnal selves we will ultimately fail, and fail miserably. That's why in Acts 2:38 Peter says to "repent and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (New International Version throughout). It is only with God's help and the gift of the Holy Spirit that we are able to overcome. Also in Acts 3:19 it says: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ who has been appointed for you—even Jesus."

It was through Bible study, church attendance, fellowship and prayer that I learned how forgiving God is.

Psalm 37:39-40 says: "The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their refuge in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him."

God gives us every opportunity to turn ourselves around, to make our way onto the right path. We just have to face our troubles and put them behind us. We have to empty ourselves of our evil, carnal ways and replace it with God's Spirit, filling our lives with the ways of Christ. We all sin, and there is no way around that. Romans 3:23 says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Can we then be forgiven of the sins we commit? Yes, we can if we are only willing to change.

In 1 Corinthians 6:9 we read that we must not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, etc. will not inherit the Kingdom of God, but in verse 11 it states that this is what some of us used to be. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

When I decided to turn my life around and give it to God, I was forgiven for my past. Many who read this may feel that their lives were not as bad as mine was. Others may feel their lives were worse. But whatever the case, the point is, that you can be and will be forgiven if you are just willing to change and give yourself over to God. If you look within yourself, you will probably find that there has always been a bit of yourself trying to follow after Christ, trying to do what is right.



As I said before, I always believed in God and even at my worst I knew I was doing wrong and working God out of my life, but I was unwilling to give up my way of life at that point. The funny thing is that if you had asked me about it then, I would have claimed that I was a Christian and even been willing to discuss the Bible with you as if I was very knowledgeable. I was blind then, but somehow I knew that God was nearby, even if He was out of reach to me. I was also spending a lot of time punishing myself for things I had done. I couldn't reach out to God. I didn't believe He would be there. I didn't believe He would forgive such sin.

It was only when I gave up the carnal way and started to walk as Christ walked that I became stronger. In 1 Peter 1:15 we read, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do." I

learned that only after trying to do this could I have my eyes opened up to God's truth. Each year that goes by I become a bit wiser, I become a better person. I have a long way to go and will never accomplish it in this life, but at least I know that I can put it all behind me. Never forgetting, but never returning to it.

I thank God for my life now and I praise him daily, for I know that He loves me, He cares for me and protects me. Just as the prodigal son returned to a loving father, we can return to God, or come for the first time. Sometimes we turn away from God and stop living by His law. We must realize God is always happy to welcome us back.

Can God forgive me? He already has!

For even more reading that can answer your questions, please request our free booklet [What Is Your Destiny?](#)

The author wishes to remain anonymous.

The Feast of Prosperity

By Jerold Aust

Our world is wracked by poverty, injustice and unrest. But a little-known biblical festival reveals how a new world of peace and prosperity will dawn.



KING SOLOMON WAS ONE OF THE RICHEST and wisest men in history. He became prosperous because he promoted peace through his wisdom. In fact, his kingdom had so much gold that silver “was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon” (1 Kings 10:21).

The queen of Sheba paid a visit to Solomon to verify all she had heard about him and his wisdom and wealth. These were her parting words:

“It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw it with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard ... Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness” (1 Kings 10:6-9).

Wisdom, wealth and peace abounded in Solomon’s early reign. But his time is only a foretaste of a coming era of unprecedented peace and prosperity that God promises will envelop the earth!

A feast of abundance

Today wealth abounds in the advanced Western nations. Yet at the same time, millions suffer in grinding poverty. Thousands die every day from starvation and malnutrition-related illnesses. But it need not always be this way. At a time ahead, all human beings will enjoy prosperity. Let’s take a closer look at why and how this transformation will occur.

God outlined the major steps in His plan for humanity through a series of festivals He first revealed to the ancient Israelites, recorded in Leviticus 23. (To understand the significance and symbolism of all of these feasts, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet [*God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*](#))

In this article we’ll focus on the meaning of one of those commanded observances, the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival is kept in the autumn of the year (in the Northern Hemisphere) based on the agricultural seasons of the Promised Land. The Feast of Tabernacles coincides with the final harvest, marking an end to gathering all the bounty God has given mankind. Also called the “Feast of Ingathering,” it was to be celebrated “at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field” (Exodus 23:16) and “when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress” (Deuteronomy 16:13). This festival was a time of great abundance.

God commanded the Israelites to save up a tithe, a tenth, of their increase during the year and, at His festivals, to “eat [it] before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses ... that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always” (Deuteronomy 14:23). God’s feasts were a time of great celebration and abundance. He further instructs them: “And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household” (verse 26).



We see from His instructions that it was to be a celebration involving the entire family, that they might “learn to fear the LORD [their]God always.” He further commanded that they were to generously share in their abundance with those less fortunate and to give offerings to God in recognition of His blessings (Deuteronomy 16:13-17).

An era of peace and prosperity

The kind of prosperity Israel experienced during the Feast of Tabernacles helps us understand what God has in store for all mankind—to bless humanity with peace and prosperity for 1,000 years. God is immensely generous and wealthy, and He has promised that mankind will share in His wealth. Revelation 20:4 reveals that Jesus Christ, at His return, will establish a 1,000-year reign on earth, an era commonly known as the Millennium (from the Latin words for “thousand years”). For 1,000 years, humanity will live in unprecedented peace. This is not the kind of peace that human beings commonly know. Our kind of peace generally means an absence of war. But God’s peace far eclipses man’s peace. Peace means safety, a well-being characterized by happiness, friendliness and cooperation.

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Through the prophet Micah, God described the kind of peace Christ’s reign will bring to earth: “... Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid ...” (Micah 4:4). There is no fear in God’s peace. It promotes good health, physically, mentally and emotionally. Through the prophet Amos, God fills in the picture even more. “Behold the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them’” (Amos 9:13-14).

Ezekiel shows the earth will become like the garden of Eden: “So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited’”(Ezekiel 36:35). Isaiah adds that “the wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing ... They shall see the glory of the LORD, the excellency of our God” (Isaiah 35:1-2).

A dramatic change

Ironically, for Christ to institute this time of peace, He must put down by force human armies that will resist Him (Zechariah 14:1-4, 12; Revelation 17:14; 19:11-21). The prophet Isaiah tells us that when Jesus returns to earth, He will forcefully subdue all opposition to Him, His government and His kingdom (Isaiah 11:4). Satan and the demons will be incarcerated for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:7). Even the wild animals will possess a tame spirit (Isaiah 11:6-9). When Christ initiates this 1,000-year period with His second coming, the earth will be in a bad way (Isaiah 24). The prophets’ words make this clear in this and other predictions of divine intervention.



From Christ’s arrival onward, there will be restoration and renewal, led by Jesus and supported by His faithful and obedient followers who will have been changed to immortality (Revelation 20:4; Acts 3:19-21; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Those who have survived the

period of “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21) will begin a rebuilding process (Isaiah 58:12). With no devil and his demons around to spread satanic attitudes of hatred, war and greed, this will become a time of unprecedented prosperity.

God’s peace and prosperity will break out all over the earth. In Isaiah 11:9 God promises us, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” Humans at last learning God’s ways—and putting them into practice—will be the key. In this peaceful and prosperous setting, children will play in the streets without fear of being run over, injured or kidnapped (Zechariah 8:3-5). Parents can sit and visit without fear of unwanted intrusion or being mugged. Families can grow old together, and grandparents can enjoy their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The kind of prosperity Israel experienced during the Feast of Tabernacles helps us understand what God has in store for all mankind.

The prophet Micah tells us: “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Micah 4:2-4). This is the kind of world God has in store for us!

The Feast of Tabernacles today

The members of the United Church of God, publisher of *Virtual Christian Magazine* and the *Good News*, magazine will gather in dozens of locations around the world in October in obedience to God’s command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. There they will observe this Feast, worshiping God and learning more about this coming age when Christ will rule and all nations “shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16).

Visitors are always welcome. To learn more about the Feast of Tabernacles and locations where it will be observed, visit our Web site at <http://www.ucg.org/feast/>. If you’d like to learn more about God’s feast days, request your free copy of the booklet [*God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*](#).

Who's Minding Your Grandchildren?

By Marilyn E. Braley

Parents aren't always able to stay home with their children. One option may be the children's grandparents. Here is one woman's experience with her own grandchildren.



A FEW GENERATIONS AGO the answer would have been obvious. Today with two incomes required for the financial survival of most families, you may not be so sure.

Much has been written about the difficulties of finding good affordable day care and the stresses of working parents. Less has been written about the effects on the infants and toddlers who are forced to spend much of their childhood in the care of strangers who may or may not be suited for the care of these precious grandchildren.

We have read a lot about the need that children have for long-term love and relationships.

In his excellent book, *Grandparenting: The Agony and the Ecstasy*, Jay Kessler makes the point that "God in his wisdom has ordained that each child should have six adults to provide care and back up." He makes the point that in today's society grandparents are increasingly important.

We have read a lot about the need that children have for long-term love and relationships in order to help instill godly values and character that will last them for life. It has never been easy to rear children and it is even more challenging today with the pressures and time constraints that are placed on young parents today.

Day care dilemma

Most grandparents are not familiar with some of the more modern forms of child care available today such as a day care center unless they have visited or worked at one as I did a few years back.

I was quite excited. I thought that it would be a great way to earn some money while my son was in school and be able to hug kids at the same time. What it did was open my eyes to the fact that it was not what it seemed to be.



The children were safe and got their physical needs met. The employees tried to do a good job and care for the children. Standards for care—such as being required to change diapers hourly, wearing rubber gloves and washing their hands after each diaper change, plus frequently sterilizing the toys—were strictly adhered to. Employees had frequent fire drills and were expected to treat the children with respect.

The problem was that employee turnover was ridiculously high, an average of every three months. At the time I worked, the state of Texas allowed a ratio of four infants (from 3 months to 1 year old) for every teacher; six toddlers (up to age 2) for every teacher, and nine 2-year-olds for every teacher.

As any grandparent can tell you, there is no way that your grandchildren can get their needs for individual attention or nurturing met in such an environment. If your grandchild has brothers or sisters, then chances are good that he will be separated from them during this time as well.

The grandparent option

As grandparents we can't change society, but perhaps we can change the childhood experiences of our grandchildren by making a few sacrifices and postponing some of our pleasures at least during their critical formative years. Perhaps we can help our grown children by moving closer and offering to take care of our grandchildren while our children work. Even Grandpa can pitch in so that the entire burden doesn't fall on Grandma.

When our daughter and son-in-law were pregnant with our first granddaughter, they faced the child care dilemma. Not only was day care expensive (nearly \$5,000 a year for their soon-to-be infant), but they also weren't excited about leaving their most precious possession in the care of strangers.

They were very grateful that Grandma volunteered to take care of their daughter. Grandma benefited too, in that I was able to provide needed stability to a young family and one-on-one nurturing to a precious little girl made in God's image. I knew that my granddaughter would be getting good care and plenty of individual attention.

Now that I am taking care of two precious granddaughters, ages 1 and 3, I am still convinced that this is a marvelous way to serve and make a lasting contribution to beloved family members. It is a major sacrifice and Grandma does get tired. Still it does have its rewards. Seeing how excited two little girls were to see their Grandma after I returned from a trip is just one example of the many joys.



Even though they can't have their parents full time, at least they are getting the next best thing. They are getting grandparents who are crazy about them, who know their mom and dad and who are like them. They don't have to be separated from each other for long periods or worry that Grandma and Grandpa will suddenly decide to quit, move or go on to other things.

Grandparents, if you can at all, offer to take care of your grandchildren. The sacrifice is well worth it, and the benefits will last forever. You'll know who is minding your grandchildren. They will someday thank you for it!

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Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

My Days at Preteen Camp

By Lorelei Nettles

Preteen Camp: It's a wonderful experience that shouldn't be missed. Look inside to see pictures and get more information on one of the U.S. preteen camps.



IF YOU HAVEN'T SENT YOUR YOUNGER ONES to a Church-sponsored preteen camp, you should consider it. Several exist throughout the United States, and I had the chance to experience one of them at Osage State Park in Oklahoma. Staff and children combined came to

more than 90 people attending. Children ranged from 6 to 12 years old. On Monday, when we arrived, the temperature was between 104 and 106 degrees outside. The cabins were a bit warmer, but we soon had the air conditioners humming.



A varying schedule was planned for the campers each day and each of the six dorms were involved in the following activities: swimming, craft classes, fishing, challenge games, board and other indoor games, as well as many other activities. Happily, the temperature during the following days of camp cooled some, making it much more enjoyable for everyone.

Two Christian Living classes were conducted per age level. The first class was on words. Tom Clark, the class instructor said, "They understood lying and taking God's name in vain are wrong, but we discussed gossip, put-downs, deceit and disrespect as well. This age group is wonderful to work with. They are filled with wonder and energy, but still have an innocent approach to life. The second class was on prayer and the kids gave examples of how prayers were answered, which shows God is interested in them and hears their prayers! In the end they saw how they can and should be praying each day."

Carol Blackwell and Andrea West led the kitchen staff. No one left hungry. There was plenty of food to go around. On the last day we also were able to sample the fish caught by the children during the week. Favorite meals were pizza, hamburgers and, of course, the desserts.



The kitchen staff worked from soon after sun-up until about 8 to 8:30 at night. They spent an extra few hours in cleanup on Wednesday. A grease fire had started in the rear of the stove. It seems the stove had not been cleaned in a very long time. We were happy to have Mike Blackwell

on hand to save the day! He came in with a fire extinguisher to put out the fire. Luckily, no food was lost that day. We had just finished the dinner meal and had taken it out of the kitchen, and into the dining hall beforehand. So it was not as bad a situation as it could have been.

After the fire, one of the kitchen staff talked with the park ranger. He commented that it was amazing how so many people could work together in such a small space. He said that if it had been him, even with a bunch of his friends, trying to do what the staff had done, they would all have ended up fighting. He thought we looked like an assembly line; and he was very impressed with how slick, fast and smoothly the cleanup went.



Campers and staff alike enjoyed the early morning and early evening hours. This was the best time to see the native wildlife. Turkeys, deer, possum, owls, scorpions, various birds and, of course, the fish the children caught were spotted.

The youngest campers who were experiencing their first time at camp arrived a bit nervous, but soon settled into the routine. The kids I spoke to said they were eager to return next year. All the children worked well together and each day a different dorm had dining hall and/or bathroom detail. They really put all of their efforts into it, and I viewed no disputes over the work.



We also had a nurse, Karen Smith, on hand to cover any medications to be dispensed, bandage scraped knees and look after anyone who was feeling out of sorts. Fortunately, we only had one child who had come to camp a bit ill and had to go home. Occasionally, even a staff member came looking for an aspirin or a bandage.

The staff at camp worked hard, and they were often worn out and looking for a break. But it was all worth it when you saw the campers' smiling faces. When there was time, some of the staff took a swim, took a walk or run, read a book or just took a nap.



One of the best parts about camp for me was the feeling of security. One early morning I was up alone, sitting outside in the dark. I was a distance from the cabins with no one within shouting range. It was the first time in a long time that I wasn't nervous about such a situation. At one point someone walked up out of the shadows and it didn't bother me a bit. In any other situation I would have been very nervous, but I felt secure in the fact that I was surrounded by people who cared for one another. God was in that camp with us. I didn't have to worry about theft or harm. I did not even realize how calm I had been until I got home. I realized it was a taste of the Kingdom to come. How wonderful that will be, when we won't have to worry about dangers and can trust everyone around us.



Mr. Blackwell and Mr. Clark ran the awards ceremony on the last day and each child received a certificate of participation. Some of the dorm staff put on a little skit that was very amusing, and gifts were given to the Clarks and the Blackwells for all their work at camp. Then as the children waited for their parents to come for them, they had water fights, played ball, played in the sand or sat and talked with their dorm leaders and other staff. A few left behind a piece of clothing or a lost toothbrush, but no one—staff or camper—left without a feeling of loss for the new friends they had met and would not see for a while.

Think about sending your preteen to camp next year. Talk to your local pastor to see if there's one in your area. It's an experience that is not to be missed!