



A GOOD REPORT

JAN-MAR 2025

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Why This Magazine?

This magazine takes inspiration from two key passages in scripture:

Mark 1:14-15 and Philippians 4:8.

The first passage shares the greatest news ever proclaimed

—THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM—

while the second encourages a life that reflects those values and is pleasing to God.

The Worldwide Church of God (WCG) produced a magazine called The Good News,

which aimed to provide valuable support and encouragement

to those seeking the path to eternal life,

while also proclaiming the good news of God's soon-coming Kingdom.

In the same spirit, A Good Report, published by the Church of God Assembly (CGA),

seeks to carry on this commission, offering insight and encouragement

to both our members and visitors.

We trust you will find each issue informative, helpful and inspiring.

Christ is our Living Savior

Sheldon Monson

Jesus Christ rose from the dead to become our Living Savior. He is not a dead Savior. It was God the Father who raised Him from the dead and granted Him eternal life. Had He remained dead and in His tomb, we would have no hope of salvation.

As Passover approaches, it is important to understand what few people on Earth truly grasp. Many today believe that Christ completed God's plan of salvation on the stake through His death. But if the process of salvation was completed by His death, then why is the resurrection necessary? It was essential for Christ's blood to be shed so the penalty for our sins could be paid in full, and so we could be reconciled to the Father, it is not His blood that saves us. If Jesus had remained dead, we could not be saved—we could not receive eternal life. The glorious truth is that we are ultimately saved by the resurrected and living Christ.

This truth is clearly stated in Romans 5:8-10:

BUT GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US. MUCH MORE THEN, HAVING NOW BEEN JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD, WE SHALL BE SAVED FROM WRATH THROUGH HIM. FOR IF WHEN WE WERE ENEMIES, WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE, HAVING BEEN RECONCILED, WE SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE.

These verses affirm that we are forgiven, justified of past guilt, and reconciled to the Father by the death of

Christ—but that we shall be saved by His life, through His resurrection. The Scriptures define sin as the transgression of God's law, or lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Moreover, the Word of God clearly states that all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and

If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.

that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Unrepented sin results in the second death—eternal death.

While we are mere mortals and all will die (1 Corinthians 15:22), many have been taught that humans possess an immortal soul. However, this belief contradicts Scripture. The Bible plainly states that “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). Sin not only brings unhappiness, pain, and suffering, but also cuts us off from all contact with God. “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

When we sin, we must repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38).

Repentance involves examining ourselves by God's standards, recognizing our sins, feeling deep remorse for transgressing His law, and then committing to live according to His Word. Even then, it is God who grants us repentance (Romans 2:4, 11).

If we sincerely repent of our transgressions and truly believe in Christ and His message, as demonstrated by our actions, He pays the penalty for our sins in our place. We are then justified. Our sins and guilt are washed away, and we are reconciled to the Father. This pardon is unmerited and is a gift of God's grace. However, this grace does not give us license to continue sinning (Romans 6:1-2). When we are forgiven and reconciled, we are in a position to be saved.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes our resurrection to immortal life possible and allows us to be born into the divine Family of God. Jesus Christ is the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29). Those who belong to Him, and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells (Romans 8:9), will be resurrected into God's Family when Christ returns to this Earth.

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Ambassadors of Jesus Christ

Based on Contributions From

Jim Parlato

*All true Christians have an important role as representatives of the Kingdom of God.
As official representatives we must remember how to properly carry out our duties.*

Some of us are fortunate enough to have a friendship that we have maintained for the majority of our lives. I have had such a friend for 56 years. Though we have different beliefs, we have managed to maintain our friendship through mutual respect. My friend, now retired, had a long and successful career in the foreign service. Through our friendship, I have had the opportunity to visit countries I might never have gone to on my own. We have traveled to Belgium, Japan, Myanmar, and Russia. It was a real treat to tour the American embassies in each place and experience unique sights that a civilian would not normally have access to.

*Finding common
ground involves
knowing when to
speak and when to
remain silent.*

In 2001, I visited my friend and his family in Russia. In order to travel, I had to undergo considerable preparation to meet the host country's requirements. One major obstacle was securing a visa from the Russian

Embassy, which required my friend to officially sponsor me. There was a lot of paperwork, both from the Russian Embassy and the U.S. State Department. The paperwork I received from the U.S. State Department made it clear that while I was in Russia, I would be representing the United States. It also cautioned me to carefully follow Russian laws.

WE ARE AMBASSADORS

One document I completed had a detailed list of behaviors: "Don't do this, don't do that, don't act like a fool in public" etc. My friend assisted me by highlighting, circling, and adding arrows to emphasize each behavior, making sure I understood the point. I thought it was very humorous. However, the key message was that I was representing my home country in a foreign land, and my behavior mattered.

I reflect on that experience because it reminds me that as a Christian, I, too, have a role in a Foreign Service. In fact, all of God's people represent a foreign government—we hold the office of Ambassador. In II Corinthians 5:20, it states:

NOW THEN, WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, AS THOUGH GOD WERE PLEADING THROUGH US.

The second half of that scripture is often overlooked: "God is pleading

through us." This speaks directly to an ambassador's responsibility.

SELFLESS REPRESENTATION

An important characteristic of ambassadors is the ability to suppress personal opinions, always reflecting the official position of the government they represent. For baptized Christians, this means we must always carefully consider what we say. The phrase "suppress personal opinions" refers to those natural, carnal thoughts that can suddenly pop into our heads. This can be challenging because, in moments of weakness, our mouths can run faster than our brains can filter. But being careful about what we say requires us to know the official government position—God's Word. Any advice we give or stand we take on important life issues is empty unless it's backed by the Word of God. Christ himself said:

DO YOU NOT BELIEVE THAT I AM IN THE FATHER, AND THE FATHER IN ME? THE WORDS THAT I SPEAK TO YOU I DO NOT SPEAK ON MY OWN AUTHORITY; BUT THE FATHER WHO DWELLS IN ME DOES THE WORKS.

(John 14:10)

Jesus made it clear that He was not just giving His own opinions. True Christian ambassadors must be knowledgeable in the scriptures and always be ready to give an answer if



asked, according to 1 Peter 3:15. The goal is for our approach to everything to align with the truth. There should never be any conflict or contradiction. Even in worldly politics, it makes sense for an ambassador and the President to be on the same page.

COMMON GROUND AND PATIENCE

An important skill in building relationships is finding common ground. We must develop this skill. Good ambassadors emphasize areas of agreement and de-emphasize disagreements. For those in God's Church, this never means compromising our core beliefs or the Truth. Christ never compromised with the truth. Finding common ground involves knowing when to speak and when to remain silent.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "To everything there is a season," and in the second half of verse 7 it states: "A time to keep silent, and a time to speak." Christ himself explained this principle further in Matthew 7:6:

DO NOT GIVE WHAT IS HOLY TO THE DOGS; NOR CAST YOUR PEARLS

BEFORE SWINE, LEST THEY TRAMPLE THEM UNDER THEIR FEET, AND TURN AND TEAR YOU IN PIECES.

Skilled ambassadors know when to speak boldly under pressure. And when not to. Over the years, many Christians have had discussions about church doctrines, hot-button topics, or current events with someone who has not yet been called. Sometimes, it's wise to back off and let things go. It does no good to force the truth on someone who just wants to argue. Through God's Spirit, we must be bold and speak the truth, but always with genuine concern for others, never in a self-righteous or argumentative way.

Finding common ground also requires patience. A Christian ambassador must listen to understand and pray for inspiration to provide answers that reflect the mind of the King we represent. In Colossians 4:5-6, it says:

WALK IN WISDOM TOWARD THOSE WHO ARE OUTSIDE, REDEEMING THE TIME. LET YOUR SPEECH ALWAYS BE WITH GRACE, SEASONED WITH SALT, THAT YOU MAY KNOW HOW YOU OUGHT TO ANSWER EACH ONE.

The New English Translation renders verse 5 more plainly: "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunities."

We never know if or when a family member, coworker, or perfect stranger might create an opportunity for us to share knowledge and understanding about the Kingdom of God.

APPOINTMENT

In an honest government, there is no way to buy or "politic" your way into a position. In the world, however, this is rarely the case. Generally, in the US, the position of ambassador is a reward for supporting the president. It's supposed to be an appointment based on merit—fruit. God's representatives are appointed to their position based on the fruit of their lives; they are not voted into the job.

None of those called by God have walked through the door and demanded to be appointed as ambassadors for the Kingdom. God the Father draws people to Christ (John 6:44) because He can see our individual potential to contribute to the work. In John 15:16, Christ said:

YOU DID NOT CHOOSE ME, BUT I CHOSE YOU AND APPOINTED YOU THAT YOU SHOULD GO AND BEAR FRUIT, AND THAT YOUR FRUIT SHOULD REMAIN, THAT WHATEVER YOU ASK THE FATHER IN MY NAME HE MAY GIVE YOU.

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Passover Preparation: Examine Yourself!

Greg Kaidannek

Each year, in advance of the Holy Day cycle, baptized true Christians must allocate sufficient time and energy for self-examination.

Human beings cannot remove sin from their lives on their own. We all need God's help. Before partaking of the Passover's yearly symbols, it is imperative that we individually approach God, asking Him to reveal where sin exists in our lives. Through the guidance of His Spirit, we can turn to His Word, which will expose those impurities, bringing them to the surface so they can be removed.

In I Corinthians 11:28, the Apostle Paul wrote, "But let a man examine

[dokimazo] himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." We understand that the unleavened bread represents Christ's physical body, broken for our physical sins (I Cor. 11:24; II Pet. 2:24), and the wine represents His blood, shed for our spiritual sins (I Cor. 11:25; Matt. 26:28).

It is only God who has the power to forgive sins, and Christ has already paid the ransom of death required for us individually. Each year, we take time to remember God's incredible love and mercy for His people. We reflect on Christ—the God of Creation's—selfless act of sacrifice. We also remind ourselves of the covenant we made with God the Father, and our Lord, Master, High Priest, and soon-coming King at baptism, as we rededicate ourselves to this way of life.

We must make time for in-depth and thorough self-examination! Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines the word *dokimazo* as "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals," and "to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy."

The Greek word *dokimazo* comes from the root word *dokimos*, which, according to Strong's, means "properly acceptable (current after assay), that is, approved." Thayer's adds that the term also means "accepted," particularly in reference to coins and money. Therefore, once purified, weighed, and measured, the metal is deemed of sufficient worth and able to be used as an item of real, acceptable value.

Until we subject ourselves to the fire of self-examination, we have no idea what our character is truly worth because it is masked by the sin that surrounds it. We must take the time to separate the two through intense study to determine how much godly character we have truly built.

The more comprehensive our lists and our studies, the better the results of our character assessment. As we approach this coming Passover, and regularly throughout the year, never forget that we are all "smiths." Allow God and His Son to refine our character.

Be sure to take the necessary time, with God's help, to assay yourself, knowing that your very salvation depends on it (Phil. 2:12)!

Taking time to review will reveal the purity in our character. The Bible contains many "lists" that can support us during self-examination. Below are a few examples addressing areas of life we need to overcome and/or grow.

- The works of the flesh – Gal. 5:19-20
- The works of darkness – Eph. 5:3-5, 8
- "Old man put-offs" – Eph. 4:30-31
- The fruits of the Spirit – Gal. 5:22-23
- The beautiful attitudes – Matt. 5:3-7
- The Ten Commandments – Exodus 20
- Marriage and family – Eph. 5:22-6:4; Col. 3:18-21
- "New man put-ons" – Eph. 4:26-29, 32

Pebbles to Pearls

Larry Alverio

We have all experienced a time or two that we have found a pebble in our shoe. This can be very irritating and painful while we are walking. Sooner or later, we have to stop and remove that pebble before it becomes a major pain! Ouch!

Growing up in Hawaii it was a pebble in our “flip-flops” which often occurred while strolling along the beach. It was either the hot sand or a pebble! Neither choice was comfortable.

From time to time we will all encounter irritating situations. How do we handle them when they occur? The children of Israel had to learn some hard lessons because of disobedience. In Judges 2:3: “Therefore, I also said I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns on your side and their gods shall be a snare to you.” Notice how God allowed them to have a thorn, a very annoying situation. This was a great pebble in their sandals!

We see that Paul also had a thorn in his flesh which he called “a messenger of Satan.” He went before God three times asking for help and healing. The Bible records how God answered him. In II Cor. 12:7-9 it states, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul was not healed at that time. Sometimes God allows us to go through irritating times in order to perfect us.

Irritations can become a beautiful pearl.

Oysters make pearls in response to an irritant, such as a grain of sand or another object. When any irritant makes its way between a mollusk’s shell and mantle the creature produces nacre, a protective coating that helps reduce irritation. Nacre is also referred to as mother-of-pearl; it’s made of microscopic crystals of calcium carbonate, which also lines the interior of the mollusk’s shell. Layers of nacre coat the irritant, eventually forming an iridescent gem, “the pearl.”

Occasionally God allows irritating situations to perfect us so we can become a beautiful pearl.



Continued from page 5

And in verse 19, He further states:

IF YOU WERE OF THE WORLD, THE WORLD WOULD LOVE ITS OWN. YET BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, BUT I CHOSE YOU OUT OF THE WORLD, THEREFORE THE WORLD HATES YOU.

Being chosen as an ambassador may be a point of pride for a worldly politician, but for true Christians, it should be humbling to think that God Himself saw something in us.

As ambassadors for the Kingdom of God, Christians represent a different way of life. Our job is to advance the position of the government we represent. That government is selfless, kind, patient and perfect from top to bottom. It can be a difficult task to fulfill but we can and we must with God’s help.

Proverbs 13:17 records, “A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a faithful ambassador brings health.” Christians must always faithfully represent and allow God to plead through us the most wonderful message of healing, peace, safety and abundance - His coming Kingdom- wherever we travel.

Preaching the Gospel at the Jamboree

Based on Contributions From

Mike Dickson

“And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness...” - Matt 24:14



In August 2024, the Dickson family and two others hosted their first-ever Homesteaders United Jamboree just outside Asheville in Fletcher, North Carolina. It was a two-day paid event designed to bring together like-minded individuals passionate about self-sufficiency, sustainable living, and traditional skills.

One of the defining aspects of the Jamboree was its emphasis on hands-on learning. Rather than just listening to lectures, attendees had the opportunity to actively participate in workshops and gain practical experience in essential homesteading skills.

Some of the most popular workshops included Butchering & Processing, Composting & Soil Health and Knife & Tool Sharpening.

The interactive nature of these workshops provided applicable skills that they could immediately put to use on their own homesteads.

Beyond the hands-on workshops, a

lineup of inspiring speakers shared their expertise and personal experiences.

Wrapping up the event, each speaker participated in a live Q&A panel, providing attendees the opportunity of asking thought-provoking questions. One of the most impactful discussions explored the topic of homesteading and farming on the Sabbath and how these practices align with the Feast of Tabernacles. This insightful exchange sparked deeper reflection on the intersection of faith, stewardship, and the homesteading lifestyle.

While the Jamboree was a separate two-day event, an optional open Sabbath service was held for those who wished to stay and participate. Over two thirds, more than 100 people, stayed and attended the Sabbath service.

During the service, hymns were sung from the Church of God Hymnal and two special music performances were performed by youth.

Mr. Sheldon Monson delivered a split sermon titled “Is This the End of the United States?” revealing the true identity of modern Israel—a vital key to unlocking understanding to Bible prophecy. He also addressed the nation’s current trajectory, emphasizing the consequences of sin and what lies ahead.



Mr. Mike Dickson’s message, “Why Were You Born?”, explored the profound truth of man’s existence—that our ultimate purpose is far beyond what most in modern Christendom understand. He shared the biblical teaching that God is building a family, one that includes each of us. He emphasized that we are destined to reign with Him here on Earth, fulfilling a glorious purpose contrary to what most believe.

Several families who attended the Jamboree have continued to ask Bible-based questions while others have shown continued significant interest in Sabbath Service live streams.

As the first-ever Homesteaders United Jamboree came to a close, it was clear that this was just the beginning. The overwhelming positive response from attendees has paved the way for future gatherings, and plans are already in motion for the next event.



Reno/Tahoe Nevada Ski Weekend



4th Annual Surfside Texas Beach Weekend



Spring Holy

Passover: April 11th after sundown - Days of Un

PASSOVER

The Passover pictures our being reconciled to the Father through our Savior Jesus Christ who rescued us from the penalty of our past sins.

The historical record of the first Passover that the Israelites kept in Egypt is found in Exodus 12. The lambs they selected were without blemish, a male of the first year (Exodus 12:5).

As soon as the lambs were killed, the blood was put on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the Israelites' houses (Exodus 12:7). They were protected from the plague of death by the blood of the lambs that had been applied. Today we can be protected from the penalty of eternal death our sins have earned through the shed blood of Christ, our Passover Lamb, who was sacrificed for us (I Corinthians 5:7).

Jesus instituted the New Testament Passover symbols on the evening of the very day the Passover lambs had always been slain – the 14th of Abib. During supper, on the evening before Jesus' crucifixion, He instituted the washing of feet as a part of the new way of observing the Passover (John 13:1-17). He commanded His disciples to follow His example and to wash one another's feet (John 13:14-15), teaching others to do likewise (Matthew 28:19-20).

He also introduced the symbols of the bread and the wine. Unleavened bread was to symbolically represent Christ's body which was brutally beaten (Mat-

thias 26:26-29). It is through Christ's

stripes that we may be healed (Psalm 103:2-3). Wine was to symbolically represent His blood, which was to be shed for the forgiveness of past sins (Matthew 26:27-29).

Christ was arrested like a criminal (Matthew 26:47-56). He was brought informally before the Sanhedrin by night, beaten and spit upon (Matthew 26:67). He was then sent to Pilate and Herod and mocked by their soldiers (Luke 23:11). Before delivering Christ to be crucified, Pilate had Him scourged (Matthew 27:26). After He was crucified, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, which ended His life.

In ancient Israel males had to be circumcised in order to partake of the Passover (Exodus 12:48). In the New Testament, circumcision is of the heart (Romans 2:29). Those who repent, are baptized, and have received God's Spirit (through the laying on of hands) have become spiritually circumcised. Therefore, the Passover, unlike any of God's other annual festivals, is limited to baptized members of God's Church.

Jesus commanded His disciples to keep the Passover in memory of Him until He returns (I Corinthians 11:26). It was kept by the apostles, is kept by the Church today, and will be kept by Christ and born-again Christians when He establishes the Kingdom of God on Earth (Matthew 26:29).

UNLEAVENED BREAD

The observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread impresses on us that we must do our part to keep the sins Jesus covered with His shed blood out of our lives. The Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures the keeping of God's commandments.

Immediately after the Passover, God commanded the Israelites to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:15-20). The first and the seventh days were set apart as "holy" days on which the people were to assemble.

The Israelites were to put all leaven and leavened food out of their homes and off their property during the seven Days of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 13:7). A leavening agent is any substance used to puff up – to produce fermentation, causing dough to rise. Yeast, baking soda, and baking powder are leavening agents.

Leaven is often referred to in the Bible as a symbol for sin (Matthew 16:6). Leaven puffs up, and so does sin. Unleavened bread is a flat bread that contains no leavening agent, and therefore typifies the absence of sin.

God specifically commands His people to eat unleavened bread each day during this festival (Exodus 12:15). The act of eating unleavened bread during these days symbolizes the keeping of the commandments -active obedience to God.

God wants Christians to forsake this world's ways of sin (Revelation 18:4).

Days 2025

Unleavened Bread April 13-19 - Pentecost June 1st

PENTECOST

We are to continually “strive” – to expend energy and effort – to put sin out of our lives (Hebrews 12:1-4).

As a child, Jesus went up with His parents keeping the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Luke 2:41-43). In the year Jesus was crucified, His enemies were expecting Him to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Mark 14:1). More than 20 years after Jesus had been crucified and resurrected, Paul and his companions had observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread at Philippi (Acts 20:6).

The Apostle Paul, inspired by God, told New Testament Christians that they should keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (I Corinthians 5:7-8). Paul was telling the members of the Corinthian Church to put out spiritual leaven, just as they had already put out all physical leaven in preparation for this festival. They were to keep the Feast not only with unleavened bread, but also with the spiritually unleavened attitude of righteousness, sincerity, and truth.

For those who have been called to Christ by the Father, putting all leaven and leavened products out of their dwellings for the seven days of this festival pictures their putting sin out of their lives. Since seven is the number God uses to denote completeness and perfection, the seven days of the Feast remind us that God wants His people to work at putting sin completely out of their lives.

This feast is called the “Feast of Weeks” (Deuteronomy 16:9-10), “Feast of Firstfruits” (Exodus 23:16), and Pentecost, since it was the fiftieth day of the spring harvest season, (Gk Pentekoste- means “fiftieth”).

In the Old Testament, on the morning of the first day of the week (Sunday) during the Days of Unleavened Bread, a sheaf of newly sickled barley was brought to the priest to be accepted by God: The “wavesheaf offering,” representing the first of the firstfruits harvest.

It was on the very same day that Jesus was accepted by His Father as the spiritual “wavesheaf” offering in heaven. Christ therefore fulfilled the symbolism of the Old Testament wavesheaf offering as the first resurrected Son of God (I Corinthians 15:20).

It was on the day of Pentecost that God first sent His Spirit to begin His Church – to beget and strengthen the firstfruits He was beginning to call into His Church, symbolically represented by the two “wave loaves” (Leviticus 23:17-20). Fifty days after Christ’s sacrifice was accepted in heaven, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples just as He had promised (Acts 2:1-6).

Pentecost is now a memorial that commemorates the founding of the New Testament Church of God, for it was on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 31 that the firstfruits of God’s spiri-

tual harvest began to be prepared for reaping into His Family.

Those now called into God’s Church are a part of God’s spiritual firstfruits – the first group to be offered salvation. He is preparing the future rulers and teachers of His Kingdom (Revelation 3:21).

God knows that to successfully put sin out of our lives and keep it out, our own human willpower and abilities are not enough. We need the spiritual strength of God’s Holy Spirit to help us obey God’s spiritual law.

Shortly before His trial and crucifixion Jesus told His disciples that He would send the “Comforter” – the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-18). His Spirit had been with the disciples, but Jesus promised to send it to be within them, as it had been within Him (John 14:17). The disciples miraculously received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost A.D. 31 (Acts 2:1-13). This marked the beginning of God’s Spirit-begotten New Testament Church.

It is necessary to obey God to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). Christians must not only have God’s Spirit, but also be yielded to it, letting it transform them so that they become more like Jesus Christ and His Father (Romans 6:13). The indwelling of God’s Spirit allows His followers to obey Him, overcome sin, and endure to the end.

The Story of Noah: An Example for Our Time

Based on Contributions From

Jake Monson

The account begins in the Garden of Eden: After Adam and Eve sinned, God explained to Adam that the ground was cursed (Genesis 3:17). Before their sin, the ground yielded its fruit without any need for hard labor.

When Adam's son Cain murdered his brother Abel God cursed the ground again, making it even less productive when man worked it (Genesis 4:12). Earth's soil was cursed twice, only two generations into mankind's existence.

Mankind did not get off to a very good start and the next several generations just continued along the same general trend.

TWO LINES FULL OF MEANING

There are two main lines of Adam's descendants in the Bible: Cain's and Seth's. Cain's name essentially means "to get" or "gotten" (see Genesis 4:1), and his story represents the "getting" way of life. Cain gave offerings to God that were not accepted because he lived selfishly and sinfully—his actions culminating in the murder of his brother Abel. Cain's descendants, like Lamech, became infamous, with Lamech even taking multiple wives and committing murder (Genesis 4:19-23).

In contrast, Seth's descendants, starting with his son Enosh, sought God,

calling on the name of the Lord. This line produced notable figures like Enoch, a prophet who walked with God. Enoch begot a righteous man, a preacher of righteousness, and a faithful servant. This man's name was Noah. In Genesis 5:28-29, it states:

LAMECH LIVED ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-TWO YEARS AND HAD A SON. AND HE CALLED HIS NAME NOAH, SAYING, 'THIS ONE WILL COMFORT US...'

The name Noah means "comfort." But what was Noah comforting them in? "...concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed." Noah was to bring comfort to man.

As time passed, violence continued and filled the Earth. Powerful men known as the nephilim—meaning bullies or tyrants—took whatever they wanted, including wives not given to them by God.

God had enough of mankind's sin and gave them a 120-year warning before destroying the Earth with a flood. This was a sign of God's grace, giving people time to repent and return to Him. God has always worked this way with humanity throughout time.

If we create a timeline with Adam's

creation at year 0, Seth's life began at year 130 and ended 912 years later at year 1042. Seth's family line started off better than Cain's. God told Adam in Genesis 2:17, "the day you eat of it you will surely die." This was a dual warning: Sin would lead to death, and humans would not live to see 1,000 years (II Peter 3:8). Adam and his descendants all died within a 1,000-year period.

When we look at Seth's line, Enoch stands out, dying relatively young at the age of 365. This is only about 30-40% of the life expectancy at the time. Jewish tradition claims that Enoch invented writing but was also killed by Lamech (one of Cain's descendants, Genesis 4:19). Genesis 4:23 corroborates Lamech's confession of having killed a man.

Enoch was a preacher of righteousness, and because of his closeness with God, God took him without allowing him to experience the pain or fear of death (Deuteronomy 34:6). This is similar to how God later took Moses.

Enoch's son, Methuselah, lived to be 969 years old—the longest recorded human lifespan. His name means "it will come," and the irony is that he died when it came: The Flood. The flood occurred in the 1656th year since creation, precisely 120 years after God's warning to Noah.

DURING THE 120 YEARS

Noah began building the ark during the 120-year warning period, but he also had a family. He balanced the immense responsibility of preparing the ark with the joys and challenges of fatherhood. In order to succeed in life, it's essential to have a plan. God always has a plan: He has a 7,000-year plan for mankind, and He also had a detailed plan for Noah and the Ark. God gave Noah explicit instructions: The Ark was to be built from gopher wood, covered inside and out with pitch. God provided measurements, described the ark's contents and told Noah to bring his family, as well as two of every unclean animal, and seven pairs of each clean animal (showing that Noah knew about clean and unclean meats). God also set a specific time-frame for boarding the ark (Genesis 6:14-7:10).

Noah followed these instructions faithfully, and as a result, he was abundantly blessed.

THE FLOOD

There are different interpretations of the cubit measurement—either 18 inches or 24 inches. If Noah used the larger cubit (24 inches), the ark's dimensions would be equivalent to about 553 train freight cars, each 13 feet high, 50 feet long, and 9 feet wide—ample space for all the animals and provisions.

The flood began with 40 days and nights of rain after Noah closed the ark. The Bible also mentions that the fountains of the great deep were “broken up,” indicating violent eruptions from beneath the Earth, not a gradual flooding (Genesis 7:11).

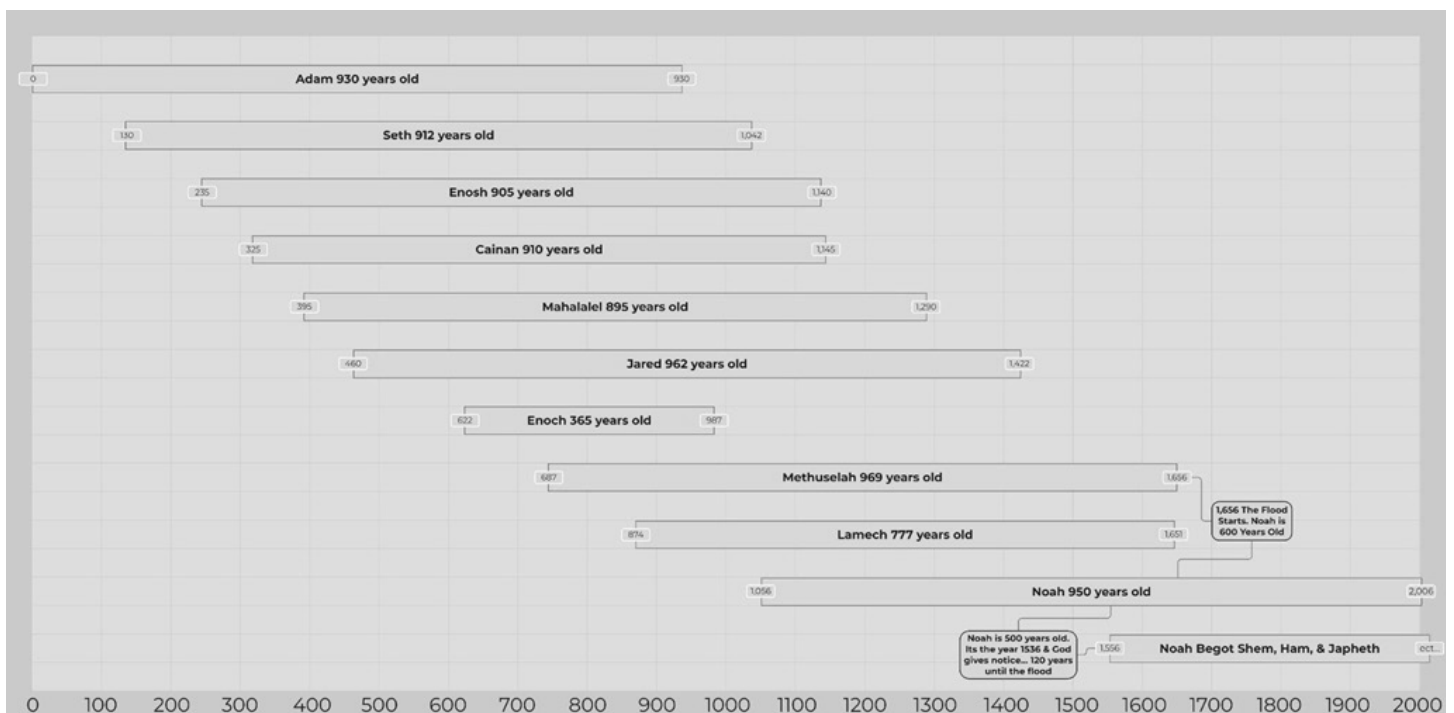
The flood covered the entire Earth, rising 15 cubits (approximately 30 feet) above the highest mountains. This clearly shows it was a global flood, not a localized one. Water is self-leveling, so if it covered the highest mountains, it would have leveled the whole Earth. The Bible makes it clear: The Flood was worldwide, and every living thing

that moved on the Earth perished.

God caused a great wind to stop the fountains of the Earth and end the rain. Noah noticed the waters began receding. He sent out a raven, which flew to and fro until the waters dried up, and a dove, which returned to the ark without finding a resting place. The different flight ranges of the birds allowed Noah to estimate the distance to dry land.

The raven could fly up to 100 miles, while the dove flew about 50 miles, helping Noah determine that dry land was somewhere between 25-50 miles away.

Seven days later, Noah sent out a dove again. This time, it returned with an olive leaf, signaling that the waters had receded. After another week, Noah sent out the dove again, and it didn't return. At this point, Noah knew they were near dry land.



THE ARK LANDS

The ark came to rest on Mount Ararat, which means “high land” or “sacred land,” both of which are fitting. Genesis 8:13-14 states:

IN THE SIX HUNDRED AND FIRST YEAR, IN THE FIRST MONTH, THE FIRST DAY OF THE MONTH, THE WATERS WERE DRIED UP FROM THE EARTH; AND NOAH REMOVED THE COVERING OF THE ARK AND LOOKED, AND INDEED THE SURFACE OF THE GROUND WAS DRY. AND IN THE SECOND MONTH, ON THE TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY, THE EARTH WAS DRIED.

The ark had a covering, possibly some water-repellent material. After a year and ten days aboard the ark, Noah waited for God’s command to leave. God told Noah to exit the ark, followed by his family and the animals, so they could multiply and fill the Earth.

Noah’s obedience shows his incredible character. He waited for God’s perfect timing. Upon exiting, Noah built an altar and offered a burnt offering from every clean animal. God was pleased with the offering, symbolized by the soothing aroma, and He vowed never again to destroy the Earth with a flood (Genesis 8:21-22).

God also reaffirmed His covenant with humanity, giving mankind dominion over the animals, but emphasizing that humans cannot kill one another without consequence. The rainbow was established as a sign of God’s covenant, a promise that the Earth would never again be destroyed by water.



LIFE’S LESSON

Noah is remembered for his faithfulness (II Peter 2:5) and is never condemned for the actions of his grandson, Canaan. He lived another 350 years after the flood, though the Bible records very little of his life thereafter. What defines us is not what happens to us, rather it is how we respond.

In Hebrews 11:7, Noah is called an heir of righteousness, a man of faith. In Ezekiel 14:14, he is called a righteous example. Despite the challenges he faced, Noah stands as a model of true faith. In the face of

all the societal trials he endured for over 120 years, not to mention the destruction of everything he had ever known, he remained utterly steadfast in his obedience and trust in God.

Jesus likened the end times to the days of Noah (Matthew 24, Luke 17). We are living in these end times where people are focused on themselves and have totally disregarded God. In the dark days ahead, we should reflect on Noah’s example and take it to heart—living with faith and readiness. Our salvation and comfort is coming soon!

Do Not “Lose Heart”

Based on Contributions From
Justin Wilsbach

In today's society, true Christians face many pitfalls and challenges that can easily lead to discouragement and even the temptation to give up. It's crucial to keep the bigger picture in mind.

In 1924 the Washington Post published a poem titled “No Hope” by James J. Montague.

In modern terms, this poem could be summarized as: Life is hard, and then you die. It's a discouraging view, reflecting the harshness of life in this world—especially for true Christians. But despite these difficulties, we must never allow ourselves to become so discouraged that we lose heart. Big changes are coming, ones that will transform the entire world and universe. And they are certain!

In the final chapters of the Bible, God paints a picture of a new heaven, a new Earth, and a magnificent city— New Jerusalem —coming down from heaven. Revelation 22:1 begins with a vision of “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb”. This river is unlike any we know today. It brings life and is calm and non-threatening. Imagine the tranquil sounds of flowing water as you stroll down the street, perhaps stopping for a cool, refreshing drink. On each side of this river will be the Tree of Life, bearing twelve different fruits and leaves that will heal nations. Deserts will bloom with vibrancy and every nation will have food and water for an abundant healthy life. Proceeding from God's

throne, life will spread across the Earth as everyone learns to live by God's perfect laws and serve Him.

This is amazing knowledge and truth. God offers mankind incredible hope and encouragement with these beautiful descriptions of a new Earth. Can we truly grasp it?

TREE OF LIFE NOW

When Adam and his descendants were cut off from the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life, it was because of their choice to eat from

‘Twas ever thus, since childhood's hour
I never had a joy,
That some malign, superior power
Did not, ere long, destroy.
To gain some joy from this I try,
Though life is hard and rough,
Yet I suppose that I shall die
If I live long enough!

the wrong tree. God could not allow Adam and Eve to live forever after what they had done. But did you know that those who have been called by God in this age have access to the Tree of Life now? Those of us who have been called, baptized and chosen already possess eternal life within them. This small small token of the Holy Spirit is our hope of the

resurrection and eternal life. It is through the power of this spirit that God will change our physical bodies (see Rom 8:18). Our calling is a personal invitation from God to be in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6).

This resurrection is considered blessed because those in it receive eternal life—never to die again—and will be priests of God reigning with Christ for 1,000 years! Those who successfully overcome and endure to the end will freely eat of the tree's fruit (Rev 2:7).

This beautiful picture of the future must always be in the forefront of our minds. We are living in the last age before the return of Jesus Christ, and we must remember that God has an appointed time for all of this. We should never think that He is delaying Christ's return, lose hope and fall away. Hebrews 2:1 states,

THEREFORE WE MUST GIVE THE
MORE EARNEST HEED TO THE
THINGS WE HAVE HEARD, LEST WE
DRIFT AWAY.

God knows our thoughts and the pulls of the flesh that we fight against daily.

MAINTAINING VISION

The Bible warns us to keep a clear vision of our future in Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no revelation (future vision), the people cast off restraint...”. It’s so easy to get distracted by this world and its problems. We see society turning sin into a “normal” way of life. If we are not on guard we could drift away.

The news media is filled with violence, lies, deception and corruption at the highest levels, which can deeply affect us personally. The lack of immediate justice in our society can lead to discouragement or bitterness. We must not become bitter (Heb.12:15), God is full of mercy and patience and in His time, He will bring every sin into judgment. Our hope is not in this world, but in the soon coming Kingdom of God. We must not let discouragement take root and cause us to lose heart.

Christ offers encouragement in John 14:1-2:

LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED; YOU BELIEVE IN GOD, BE-

LIEVE ALSO IN ME. IN MY FATHER’S HOUSE ARE MANY MANSIONS (OFFICES; ABODES); IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU. I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU.

What an awesome promise! Jesus Christ Himself is choosing and preparing a mansion for every one of his people.

Consider taking time to step away from the noise of the world. Turn off your television, computer, and cell phone, and go outside to enjoy some of God’s creation. Sit under the stars, reflect on God’s promises, His plan for you, and your ultimate destiny.

We must remind ourselves that the Bible is full of inspiration that can bring great joy and encouragement, especially if we study it regularly.

My youngest daughter reminded me of her favorite passage: II Corinthians 4:16-18. These verses encourage us to press on and not give up, despite the challenges we face:

YOUR FAITH IS ALSO VAIN. 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.

(I Corinthians 15:13-18).

“But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (I Corinthians 15:20). What an amaz-

THEREFORE WE DO NOT LOSE HEART. EVEN THOUGH OUR OUTWARD MAN IS PERISHING, YET THE INWARD MAN IS BEING RENEWED DAY BY DAY. FOR OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION, WHICH IS BUT FOR A MOMENT, IS WORKING FOR US A FAR MORE EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY, WHILE WE DO NOT LOOK AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN, BUT AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN. FOR THE THINGS WHICH ARE SEEN ARE TEMPORARY, BUT THE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT SEEN ARE ETERNAL.

God’s chosen people must press on and do their part to qualify to be part of God’s family in His Kingdom. He wants each of us to make it. God sees us in the Kingdom, and He has a place reserved for us, if we endure until the end. Jesus Christ is coming soon, and His reward is with Him.

Revelation 22:1 pictures a time when all mankind will be given the opportunity to know and serve God. He has revealed His plan to us now! Grasp the vision, and take heed - never lose heart!

Continued from page 3

BUT IF THE SPIRIT OF HIM WHO RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD DWELLS IN YOU, HE WHO RAISED CHRIST FROM THE DEAD WILL ALSO GIVE LIFE TO YOUR MORTAL BODIES THROUGH HIS SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN YOU
(Romans 8:11)

The apostle Paul wrote:

BUT IF THERE IS NO RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, THEN CHRIST IS NOT RISEN. AND IF CHRIST IS NOT RISEN, THEN OUR PREACHING IS VAIN, AND

ing and precious truth!

Christ was raised from the dead and ascended to the throne of God the Father in heaven to receive a kingdom. He promised that when He went, He would return—this time as King of kings and Lord of lords to rule over the world. Jesus’ gospel was the Good News of this coming Kingdom. If we repent, believe, overcome, and endure to the end, we shall sit with Christ on His throne, ruling over the nations (Revelation 5:10). Our living Savior will return soon. God speed that day!

Offerings: A Tool For Growth

Based on Contributions From
Peter Schexnayder

Although often simple, what God demands of us is not always easy. There is much more to regular offerings to God than meets the eye. He provides us another tool to develop His holy, righteous character.

As the spring Holy Days approach, all of God's people around the world are preparing for their annual offerings to God. Since establishment, it is a fundamental understanding that these days must include an offering—but what is the reason behind it?

Certainly, there are many reasons one might give an offering, and one of them is the direct command from God to do so. It's that simple. However, this reason might not seem entirely satisfying or comprehensive. Christians, who understand God's

purpose for mankind—to put off sin and develop holy, righteous character—have likely been conditioned to look for lessons not only in these Holy Days but also in the acts God commands us to undertake. There is yet another reason why God has given man the opportunity to give offerings to Him.

GOD'S PROMISE

In Malachi 3, leading up to verse 10, God rebukes the people for robbing Him by failing to bring their tithes and offerings. He proclaims a curse upon them for their disobedience,

but in verse 10, He offers a powerful promise:

BRING ALL THE TITHES INTO THE STOREHOUSE, THAT THERE MAY BE FOOD IN MY HOUSE, AND TRY ME NOW IN THIS, SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS, IF I WILL NOT OPEN FOR YOU THE WINDOWS OF HEAVEN AND POUR OUT FOR YOU SUCH BLESSING THAT THERE WILL NOT BE ROOM ENOUGH TO RECEIVE IT. AND I WILL REBUKE THE DEVOURER FOR YOUR SALES, SO THAT HE WILL NOT DESTROY THE FRUIT OF YOUR GROUND, NOR SHALL THE VINE FAIL TO BEAR FRUIT FOR YOU IN THE FIELD, SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS.

These are substantial promises. God is asking His people to test Him—to see if He will not bless them abundantly in return. Not only will He provide more, but He will also make the fruits of their labor more easily accessible. Essentially, God is saying 'Test Me in giving an offering, and see if I won't give you back more, through your labor while removing obstacles from your way.'

In other words, to remove roadblocks from those receiving it. God commands His people that they must bring something as an offering each Holy Day. Coming empty-handed is not an option (as is stated in Deuteronomy 16:16.) This test goes beyond simply obedience to the letter of the law thereby implying quantity. God is testing His people to give a little more than what is absolutely comfortable to give.



For those established in their working lives, the decision may involve balancing income and expenses, possibly adjusting based on the season. Regardless of how these things are determined, the key is that God has asked for His people to venture out beyond their comfort zone. But why would he push His people beyond their limits?

OUTSIDE THE COMFORT ZONE

There is a psychological concept that describes the place where people learn the most—at the edge of what they are comfortable with. This space is called the zone of proximal development and it is the reason behind why people do slightly dangerous things when adjusting to the world around them. It is why people find empowerment and confidence in things such as skateboarding or higher education. It is why parents intuitively speak to their children just above their current level of comprehension, and why parents will withdraw their arms from a toddler—encouraging them to take that extra step.

While the term ‘zone of proximal development’ was coined in the 1920s by a psychologist named Baggotsky, it has been around in man since creation. God designed us this way! When He asks us to test Him, this puts us in this zone. Spiritual growth is what God desires from His children above all else. People learn the most in the peaks and valleys of their lives (although, arguably, it’s more in the valleys.) Downward slopes certainly teach patience, and upward slopes cultivate gratitude. When things are hard, the only option is to push through and to learn the lessons— especially Humility.



Malachi 3:2-3 states:

BUT WHO CAN ENDURE THE DAY OF HIS COMING? AND WHO CAN STAND WHEN HE APPEARS? FOR HE IS LIKE A REFINER’S FIRE AND LIKE LAUNDERERS’ SOAP. HE WILL SIT AS A REFINER AND A PURIFIER OF SILVER; HE WILL PURIFY THE SONS OF LEVI, AND PURGE THEM AS GOLD AND SILVER, THAT THEY MAY OFFER TO THE LORD AN OFFERING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Although these verses refer directly to Christ’s second coming, they describe a process of refinement that God uses to purify our character. The trials many experience leading up to God’s Feasts are reminders of Satan’s attempts to distance God’s people from Him. God finds value in testing and purifying His children before an offering is taken up. Yet another reason why it is important to exercise James’ plea to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2).

LEARNING AND GROWTH

As we have seen, the zone of proximal development is a place to learn and develop new skills. But what does this have to do with offerings? Offerings help us develop trust and reliance on God. This is not the only reason Christians give offerings, but it is a real and important one. The Apostle Paul was inspired to write:

BUT THIS I SAY: HE WHO SOWS SPARINGLY WILL ALSO REAP SPARINGLY, AND HE WHO SOWS BOUNTIFULLY WILL ALSO REAP BOUNTIFULLY. SO LET EACH ONE GIVE AS HE PURPOSES IN HIS HEART, NOT GRUDGINGLY OR OF NECESSITY; FOR GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER. AND GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE ALL GRACE ABOUND TOWARD YOU, THAT YOU, ALWAYS HAVING ALL SUFFICIENCY IN ALL THINGS, MAY HAVE AN ABUNDANCE FOR EVERY GOOD WORK. AS IT IS WRITTEN: HE HAS DISPERSED ABROAD, HE HAS GIVEN TO THE POOR; HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER (II Corinthians 9:6-9)

God is able to provide for His people, and He promises to bless them abundantly when they give offerings cheerfully and faithfully. This is not just a one-time process. Learning and growing are iterative. Each time we give a Holy Day offering God gives the opportunity to take one more toddling step, as He pulls His arms back just a little farther, further building our relationship with Him.

It's important to note that, just as a parent doesn't expect a toddler to walk across the room after two steps, God doesn't expect us to give beyond our means. He specifically states that everyone should give as they are able, without putting their family or livelihood at risk. God is not asking us to sacrifice everything we have, but rather to stretch beyond what feels comfortable.

In Mark 12:41 it states:

NOW JESUS SAT OPPOSITE THE TREASURY AND SAW HOW THE PEOPLE PUT MONEY INTO THE TREASURY. AND MANY WHO WERE RICH PUT IN MUCH. THEN ONE POOR WIDOW CAME AND THREW IN TWO MITES, WHICH MAKE A QUADRANS. SO HE CALLED HIS DISCIPLES TO

HIMSELF AND SAID TO THEM, "ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU THAT THIS POOR WIDOW HAS PUT IN MORE THAN ALL THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN TO THE TREASURY; FOR THEY ALL PUT IN OUT OF THEIR ABUNDANCE, BUT SHE OUT OF HER POVERTY PUT IN ALL THAT SHE HAD, HER WHOLE LIVELIHOOD.

An important historical note, the monetary unit of 'mite' did not exist in Christ's time. This was the smallest denomination of currency at the time of King James (circa 1611). The coin was actually called a 'lepta'. This is worth about six minutes of an average daily wage. An average daily wage, remember, is called a denarius. Comparing that to, a person in modern America, at a minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, each lepta was worth about \$0.73.

This widow knew and understood the value in testing God and developing her relationship with Him, despite her poverty. What stands out most of all is that she would have been well within her right to put in the bare minimum as an offering and fulfill the letter of the law. It was the smallest denomination of coin, but she didn't have only one of them. This woman had every op-

portunity to put in a single copper lepta, but she didn't. She put in two!

CHARACTER OPPORTUNITY

God desires growth in this life from His people. Offerings are a tool God uses to develop reliance and trust in Him. Three seasons a year, seven instances annually, Christians appear before God and have the same choice to make, just as this poor widow did. Seven instances in a year, all are presented with an opportunity to grow closer to God, to step out in faith and give a little beyond our comfort zone. These moments offer us the opportunity to test God on His promises.

As the spring Holy Days approach, remember that as we actively search out and remove sin from our lives we must also actively fill that void with something else—something that aligns with God's will. Instead of relying on earthly crutches, turn your sense of dependence toward God. Consider testing God this season, stepping out in faith, and developing trust through your offerings.

Special thanks to **Hannah Wolford** for her custom cover artwork depicting **Luke 8:24**

*Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water.
And they ceased and there was calm.
But He said to them, "Where is your faith?"*

