











# “The Sword of His Mouth” Revelation 2:12–17

Written on: October 31, 2023  
Article by: Paul Birston

## Part 2

(Part 1 available at <https://gospelherald.org/the-sword-of-his-mouth/>)



## Holding Fast Jesus' Name

Jesus' credits His people at Pergamum with *holding fast His name*.

Jesus' name means so much, literally the Greek of Joshua, *Yeshua*, “the LORD saves,” Christ, the Messiah, *Mashiah* in Hebrew, God’s anointed Son: **“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12). Jesus is the name in which we pray to our Father. Here Jesus uses a present participle to indicate their holding fast His name is ongoing.

Their holding fast Jesus' name is the reverse of those in verses 14-15 who are holding to the teaching of Balaam and are holding fast to the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Unlike these, the Pergamene faithful are not denying Jesus' faith in the face of opposition. They are also resisting the temptation to deny him to make life easier or in a situation like the one Antipas faced, being asked to deny Jesus altogether. Jesus' faith has many dimensions. It is our total trust in Him as we noted in His admonition to those in Smyrna to be “faithful until death” – and – it embodies everything He and His inspired writers have taught us, **“the faith once for all delivered (committed) to the holy ones,”** God’s set-apart ones, that Jesus' brother Jude wrote to us about in Jude 3.

## Antipas, My Witness, My faithful One

Jesus' words about Antipas are all God reveals of this faithful Christian: Jesus' people, **“did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells”** (Revelation 2:13). We can observe that **“even in the days”** tells us there was a period of difficulty that challenged their faith, likely including pressure from pagan powers to deny Jesus. Antipas was a martyr in the original sense of the word, a *witness* to Jesus. He was faithful. The language of killing here likely indicates an intentionally violent death, the ending of his life by unnecessary and unnatural means. We remember all we learned about faithfulness in Smyrna. Faithfulness is actively believing in God, being reliable,

trustworthy, inspiring trust in others, living with fidelity, being loyal to God. Faithfulness is ultimately expressed in obedience to God in all areas of our lives: worship, family, service, work, relationships. Antipas held fast to Jesus, to His name and his faith even where Satan lived and had his throne.

Today, Satan is still living, active and working all around us. The greatest liar of time and eternity does his finest work in religion, twisting the truth of Scripture in his efforts to undercut the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection, deceive people and keep them from realising that Jesus is God. We must resist Him with the whole armour of God and the strength He gives us. We must hold fast to Jesus, to His name and His faith. We must stand up for Jesus and the wonderful faith He has given us. We must help and pray for those suffering for their witness to Christ. According to the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, in 2019, 800,000 believers died for their faith in Jesus Christ.

### The Teaching of Balaam

Not all in Pergamum followed the example of Anitpas. Jesus speaks these words of conviction in verse 14, “**But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.**”

Jesus has “**a few things**” against them. He taught in the Gospels that a little leaven can do much good like the kingdom of God itself, or much bad like the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. A few small things can change us for better or worse.

Whereas Jesus holds the seven stars, the angels of the churches, tightly in His grasp, the teaching of Balaam has infiltrated the minds and motives of some who are holding fast to them and practicing them. They were holding fast to false teachings which in turn got a grip on their lives and led them into idolatry and sexual immorality like Balaam taught Balak (Revelation 2:14; Numbers 31:16).

Balak was the king of Moab. He hired Balaam to curse Israel while they were on their journey up the east side of the Dead Sea in the Rift Valley to cross the Jordan near Mount Nebo in Moab opposite the Jordan River and Jericho. At the time, Balaam was not willing to speak anything but what God told him to speak. Balaam ended up speaking seven discourses, literally proverbs or parables, sentences of ethical wisdom blessing Israel in Numbers 23 and 24.

We learn more about Balaam's true character in other books. Moses tells us in Numbers 22:5 and Deuteronomy 23:4 that “**Balaam the son of Beor**” was “**from Pethor in Mesopotamia.**” Though Balaam was a Gentile, he knew of YHWH, the God of Israel. Though Balak hired Balaam because he considered him successful and sent Balaam two delegations of officials with large sums of money, in Numbers 22:18, “**Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, ‘Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the Lord my God.’**” Balaam consulted God (Numbers 22:8). In

Deuteronomy 23:5 (and Joshua 24:10) we learn that **“Nevertheless, the LORD your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you.”**

We learn in Numbers 25:1–3 that immediately after Balaam’s seven speeches Israel succumbed to idolatry and sexual immorality, (just as they fell into idolatry and revelry at Mount Sinai), **“While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel.”**

Numbers 31:16 confirms that Balaam was behind Israel’s immorality and idolatry at Peor, **“Behold, they caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to be unfaithful to the LORD in the matter of Peor, so that the plague took place among the congregation of the LORD!”** Balaam met his demise when God had Israel execute his vengeance on the Midianites (Numbers 31:1–8).

About 1,500 years later, Peter and Jude reveal Balaam’s true character including how he was motivated by money. In his second letter, 2:15, Peter writes, **“forsaking the right way, they have done astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.”** and Jude writes in his letter verse 11, **“Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”**

Jesus said Balaam **“kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel.”** The stumbling block, the *skandalon*, lead them to **“eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.”** Jesus’ word for sexual immorality is the root of pornography, to engage in illicit sexual activity, to fornicate, to whore.

Repeatedly through Scripture and history we see a strong connection between false teaching, idolatry, and sexual immorality. It shows up in Corinth and the churches to whom Peter and Jude write and among religions of all kinds today. We see it among pagan gods and cults: Baal worship, Asherah, other fertility gods, the paradox of temple prostitutes, and the Bacchus / Dionysus cult.

Sexual immorality is a major problem in God’s mind for several reasons. It is contrary to His purpose and design for men and women at Creation. It is selfish. It puts self before God. This is idolatry. It is a major stumbling block in our time leading to the objectification of women and the abuse of millions of adults and children. It is contrary to God’s nature: His purity and His faithfulness. GOD is pure and faithful.

### **God’s Truth vs. False Teaching**

God’s answer in our time as always is truth and righteousness, two of His main attributes which we access through the sound teaching of His Word, our immersion into Christ, His Spirit and our obedient walk with Him. We must avoid, refute and correct false teaching. We must flee from the same timeless idols of money, materialism,

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fame, and promiscuity. The author of Revelation wrote at the end of his first letter, “**Little children, guard yourselves from idols**” (1 John 5:21). His root word for guard is the same as for prison. We need to lock up ourselves safely away from idolatry and the dangers in which it would prefer to capture us. Jesus is our safe refuge and strength.

To be continued...

Waterloo, Ontario

# GREAT LAKES CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL CAO STEPPING DOWN

Written on: October 31, 2023  
Article by: admin

## News Release: GLCC Board of Directors



**W**e celebrate with but are saddened to announce that Don Rose, the Chief Administrative Officer of Great Lakes Christian College (High School and Preschool) is stepping down from his role effective June 30, 2024, after twenty-seven years of service as a teacher (1997-2006) and an executive administrator (2006-2024). During this time, he simultaneously served as the President of Great Lakes Bible College in Waterloo, Ontario (2006-2011) and as Principal of the High School program (2013–2018). While he continues to be passionate about the mission of GLCC, he stated that he would like to focus on quality time with his family and explore new professional, spiritual, and creative endeavours.

Of his years as an employee of GLCC, Don says: “Any measure of success I have had would not have been possible without God’s grace and strength, the support of my loving family, the incredible commitment of my colleagues, the generosity of countless volunteers and donors, a welcoming and vibrant local community, the families who entrusted us with the care and education of their children, and the curious, challenging, intellectually and spiritually hungry, and altogether wonderful students themselves.”

In 2024, Don and his wife, Corrie, celebrate 31 years of marriage. They have three children who, by June 2024, will all be GLCC alumni: Micah (Class of 2017), Emily (2019) and Joshua (2024). As Don seeks and discovers where God is calling him next, we thank him for his years of service and leadership and pray that the next chapter brings him and his family much grace, peace, love, and prosperity.

To provide a positive transition, applications are being accepted for the CAO role until January 8, 2024.

# Unexpected Events

Written on: October 31, 2023

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

**W**e began our last newsletter by observing, “Wherever we have gone, whatever we have done, we have always found that there are extra jobs to be done. There are always things that come up in addition to the task one first had in mind.” It has happened again. Unexpected events have come up.



But before we tell you about that, let us update you on the food situation in Timbutini, which we mentioned last time. Three significant things have happened regarding the needy people at Timbutini.

1. A congregation in Ohio is taking up a collection to help us with the purchase of food for the time being. This is only a stop-gap measure while we work toward a more sustainable long-term solution, but it is of critical importance. One cannot just hand a hoe and a package of seed to a hungry person and say, “Plant the seed and in a few weeks you will harvest a crop.” The person must be fed while awaiting that crop. With the help we are expecting to receive soon, we should be able to do that.

2. A member of the congregation, who had a fairly large piece of land that he could not cultivate on his own, has offered to let the church members use that land and share the produce. This brother is a fairly new Christian, baptised about two years ago. This is a very encouraging development.

3. A couple in Indiana has made a sizable donation, a part of which will be used to help us to develop that land.

a. Some seed and some tools will be needed. We are considering a rototiller to be included among the tools but have not yet decided if that will be a good investment. Drip irrigation lines are also under consideration.

b. The land must be fenced to keep the stray cows and goats out.

c. One young brother in the congregation operates a tractor for his uncle. The uncle is not a member, but he will allow his tractor and plough to be used at a rate of 500 Emalangeni per hour. We estimate that two to three hours should be enough time to plough the property. If we are correct, the ploughing will cost less than \$100 (\$1 currently = 17.5 Emalangeni).

d. We hope to plant some maize (corn) and beans so that something is grown right away. We are seeking expert advice so that the long-term use of the land is handled as wisely as possible. Brother Peter Setimela (Ph.D University of Nebraska), is our main resource for advice.

## The New Unexpected Events

The first unexpected event is a small one – a hail storm. The car was in the carport, but the hail came down at an angle and took out the back window and the taillights. Long-term, it is just one of the little annoyances of life that we must face. It was not just our car, by the way. Our landlord has major damage all over the place – broken windows and guttering that looks like it was made of Swiss-cheese.

The second unexpected event is more of a big deal, for Thayer at least. He has wanted to teach an occasional class at one of the schools to stay in touch with students and to be reminded of what life is like for a teacher in Africa. Daybreak Bible College in Zambia invited him to teach a class several months ago, but that had to be delayed until next year – because of Thayer’s surgery.

African Christian College, which is just down the road from us, is a place where he did not expect to be asked to teach. But it has happened. The brother assigned to teach church history withdrew less than two weeks before the class was due to begin. Thayer received an “emergency teaching request” on October 12 asking him to begin teaching a class he has never taught before on October 23. Starting that soon proved impossible but the class did begin today, October 30.

It is stressful, but it has already proven beneficial in certain interesting ways. It has been exactly twenty years since Thayer taught at that school on a regular basis. The truth has not changed; but certain things about the classrooms and the students have changed. It is good to have a chance to catch up on those changes. The students will learn from his class. What he learns in teaching this class will help us refine future textbooks.

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# Numbers: Organisation and Leadership

Written on: October 31, 2023

Article by: Thayer Salisbury

## Part 3

### Teaching Numbers in the Local Church

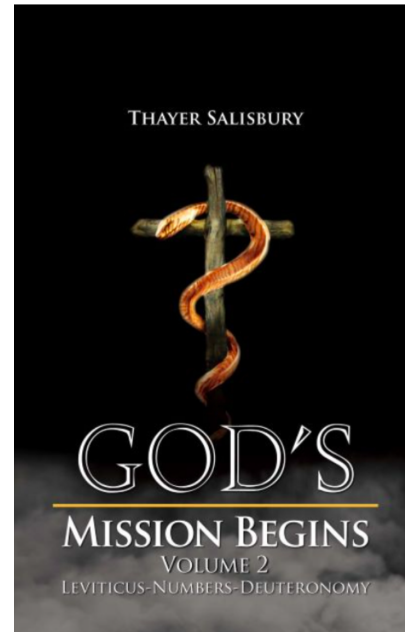
When Mathias returned home from the Founders' Day, he began a careful study of the book of Numbers. He wanted to teach it in the church, but he knew that he needed to prepare carefully if he was going to do it well. Some people would resist the idea that an Old Testament book could have value for Christians in the twenty-first century. Some would be resistant to the leadership ideas that Brother Matla had suggested could be taught using this book. If Mathias did not carefully prepare, he knew that he might do more harm than good.

### Redeeming the Time

Since Mathias had to work in a factory all day, he did not have a lot of time to devote to his study. He needed to plan carefully. He needed to take advantage of what time he did have. He would have three times when he could study. He could do a little bit of reading during his breaks at work. He could study some at home in the evening. After the children were put to bed each evening, he would have an hour at most. On weekends he had a lot to do, but he could set aside the early morning hours for study. On Saturday he might get up to two hours of study. Sunday it might be a little less.

Mathias began by reading all the way through Numbers a couple of times. He wanted to get the overall picture of the book. It was not easy. Some parts of it were boring. But after reading it twice, he noticed some parts that seemed very useful. He also began to see how it all fit together and how it all seemed to point to the importance of being organised and respecting our leaders.

Mathias and his wife always read a portion of scripture to their children before putting them to bed. He thought about reading Numbers, but he realised that portions of it would not be suitable. He did, however, pick out some portions that would be suitable for the children. He began to include some of these stories. He decided that the story of how Aaron and Miriam opposed their brother, Moses, would be particularly good for the children. It would introduce the sins of racial prejudice and sibling rivalry, as well as the importance of respecting the leaders God has chosen.



Mathias also thought of other biblical stories that addressed good leadership ideas that he could read to his children. King Saul took decisive action during the first military challenge of his kingship (1 Sam 11). But later King Saul did nothing when Goliath challenged the army of God. In that case, David, a shepherd boy, showed greater faith and better leadership than the anointed king (1 Sam 17). Those were stories that even children could enjoy. They were also leadership examples that needed to be taught to the church.

Mathias decided break time at work could be used for reading and rereading the Old Testament texts on leadership. For deeper study and making notes, he would use the evening and weekend hours.

He phoned Brother Matla and asked if he could recommend any books to help him study the background of the biblical books he was reading. Brother Matla suggested a book called *The New Bible Dictionary* for background study. He explained that, in this case, “dictionary” did not mean that it defined words. Instead, it was more like an encyclopaedia of biblical information. Brother Matla said that Mathias was welcome to have his copy. Now that Brother Matla was blind, he could no longer use it. He would be glad for Mathias to have it if he would really use it.

Later, Mathias proposed to Dennis and Paul that they go together to purchase three good commentaries on Numbers. Dennis objected saying, “Why not just look up information on the Internet? That is free.” Mathias explained that what he was finding on the Internet was often unreliable. The information was free because advertisers paid the people who post the information. Since they get paid by how many people view their post, the bloggers tend to post what is sensational rather than what is helpful and true. Content that gets a lot of “hits” makes a profit. Truth that does not attract much interest does not bring in profits.

Paul offered to pay for the three books that the friends would share. He said, “I will make this my Christmas present to you. Mathias can use the books first. When he is done with them, he can pass them on to whoever needs them next.”

## **The First Class**

It took three months, but finally Mathias felt ready to volunteer to teach the Sunday morning adult class. When he announced that they would study “Numbers” one of the young men joked, “I am not good at maths. Couldn’t we study something else?” The rest of the class did not say anything, but they looked surprised.

The first week, Mathias had three goals in mind for the class.

First, Mathias wanted the class to understand that the book had leadership and organisation as its theme. He feared that many of them thought of the book as a collection of unrelated stories. He feared that they often missed the real point of the stories because they had never considered the overall theme.

Second, he wanted to admit to them that there were parts of the book that they might find boring and difficult to read.

Finally, he wanted to show them that even the census account, one of the most boring parts of the book, contained an important lesson.

## **Unexpected Developments**

The first week went well. People took greater interest in the study when they realised that Mathias had prepared well and had a clear grasp of the theme.

He showed them the importance of the census. Most of them quickly realised that it would have been impossible for the leaders to lead the people across the wilderness if they had not known how many people they were leading.

Toward the end of class, Mathias asked if there were any questions or comments. Nigel, one of the oldest brothers said he had a comment.

He began, "I have been a member of this church for over thirty years. I do not recall ever having a class or a sermon from the Book of Numbers. What you have said already makes me realise that many church problems might have been avoided if we heeded better leadership examples.

"Many people have fallen away from this church through the years. There may be many reasons for that, but one reason could be that we do not even attempt to keep track of our members. We do not maintain a membership list. We do not take weekly attendance. Sometimes a member has wandered away and no one even notices for weeks or months. If we took a census of those who claim to be part of this church, and then took attendance and checked on the ones who are missing, we might be able to keep some of them from falling away from the church."

Mathias could see that others had also agreed with the application of the study that Brother Nigel had made. Mathias thanked Brother Nigel for his comment. But then he added, "Should we not do something about this? We seem to be agreed that a membership list and the taking of attendance would help. But who will volunteer to do this? It is no good to agree to the idea if we do not take action." After a little more discussion, two people were assigned to help Brother Nigel develop a membership list. One of the sisters agreed to take attendance each week. She was to report the absentees to Mathias each week. He would then announce the names of those who were absent and lead a prayer for them.

Mathias also asked the members to consider checking on those who were absent. "If they are absent just once," he said, "send a text saying, 'We missed you. Are you okay?'" If they miss more often, and especially if they do not respond to the text messages, let us try to go to visit in person."

## Other Developments

The second week they studied the importance of confessing our wrong when we realise our guilt. This was based on Numbers 5:5-7. The third week they talked about the Nazirite vow, from the sixth chapter. These classes were okay. Mathias felt they were still paying attention, but there was not much discussion.

At the end of that third class, Mathias told them to read chapter seven. He warned them that they might find it a little boring. He promised them that they would find the application interesting.

Mathias always opened the class with a song and a prayer. Then he would ask them to open their Bibles to the passage for the day. But he did things differently the fourth week. After the prayer, instead of having them turn to the passage, he asked a question. “Have any of you ever lived and worshipped in an area belonging to a different tribe?” Several indicated that they had. Mathias then asked, “How did you feel on Sundays? Did you find it any more difficult to worship in that situation?” Most of those who had experienced this said that it was more difficult to worship when worshipping with a church that was mostly of another tribe. One brother blamed the other Christians for making him feel uncomfortable. But most of those who had experienced this said that it was no one’s fault, it was just an unavoidable result of the differences in language and customs.

Mathias went on to explain how each of the Israelite tribes brought the very same gift for the Tabernacle, and how that would have helped to avoid tribalism in their worship. He then led the class into a discussion of the problems tribal differences can cause, especially in urban areas where many tribes may be present at worship. Someone questioned the value of this discussion. He pointed out that their congregation was of one tribe. Mathias agreed that it was not a problem for them. But, he added, “It is likely to be a problem for our youth as they move about looking for employment. Even during their schooling it can be a problem.”

Mathias called on Brother Nigel for the closing prayer. Brother Nigel prayed that the whole church, and especially the youth, would consider how to work with and welcome believers with different backgrounds. Mathias was pleased to notice that Brother Nigel’s prayer included references to Romans 14, and Revelation 14:6. It was good to see that some members of the class were connecting what they were learning from Numbers with other passages of scripture.

To be continued...

<sup>1</sup> For more excellent insights on organisation and leadership in Numbers, see Thayer’s very helpful book *God’s Mission Begins: Vol 2: Leviticus – Deuteronomy*. Available as a Kindle Book at [www.amazon.ca](http://www.amazon.ca)

Matsapha, Eswatini, Southern Africa

# My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Written on: October 31, 2023  
Article by: Dave Knutson

A lot has been said about the *last words* of Jesus, spoken from the cross. He asked his Heavenly Father to forgive all those responsible for his suffering and death and promised a place in paradise to a thief at his side. He arranged for the disciple whom he loved, to take care of his mother. And at the end, he announced the completion of the work for which the Father had sent him – before audibly yielding his spirit to Father’s care.



But in the middle of these seven statements, Jesus cried out “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”. These words perplex and challenge us as more than all of the others.

Did Jesus really think that his Heavenly Father had abandoned him? And did the Father in heaven actually do so?

Since Jesus could not possibly have been mistaken, it seems to many, that God actually did leave him – all alone. They explain that this is what the Apostle Paul referred to in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:21 when he wrote: ““God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God”. Thus at that moment, God forsook Jesus – ‘turning his back on him’.

Sometimes the inferences that we draw are not necessary. They do not exhaust the range of possible explanations nor are they consistent with other scriptures. In an effort to understand what Jesus meant, let’s review the scene at the cross in light of its immediate context and the larger setting for the life and ministry of Jesus.

The scriptures teach that the Son of God came to earth for the express purpose of going to the cross. Very early in his ministry, Jesus began to talk about the certainty and manner of his execution. Luke 9:51 marks a pivotal moment beyond which Jesus thought of little else...all future action brought him consciously to his appointment with death. He understood that God required Him to die on ‘a tree’ as an atoning sacrifice for our sins and He did all in his power to make it so. And while Jesus did not have a death

wish, the petitions that he made to the Father in Gethsemane, always ended with “*not my will but yours be done*”.

Does it seem likely – that in the final moments and having suffered so much at the hands of his tormentors, that the Father should abandon him or that He should think that God had done so? When Jesus voiced these words, the successful completion of divine plans laid in eternity was only moments away.

Had our heavenly Father who had sent an angel to strengthen Him at Gethsemane now withdrawn all support? Had God *walked away* and cut all ties...moments before his Son's death? And were this so, is it likely that Jesus would have been surprised, given his foreknowledge of what God had ordained should take place?

To see if this is so, let's return to the cross and allow the gospel of Matthew to set the stage (Mt. 27:38-44)

“At that time two rebels were being crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those passing by were speaking abusively to Him, shaking their heads, and saying,

- “You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild *it* in three days, save Yourself!
- If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”
- In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself! He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. *He has trusted in God; let God rescue Him now, if He takes pleasure in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’*”
- And the rebels who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him in the same way.

Once on the cross, Jesus was beyond the physical reach of the Jews, but they were not finished with him. They wanted to rub it in and in the process, spin a narrative that would discourage further belief *in* Him. What they said was disingenuous and ignorant.

- They knew that he had spoken of his resurrection when he promised to raise up ‘this temple’ in three days. That prophecy required his death, or there could be no resurrection. To prevent that, the authorities did all that they could to secure his grave.
- Having rejected all of the miracles that proved his deity, they promised to become his disciples if he just did one more.
- And adding theological weight to their mockery, they quoted Psalm 22:7-8, where the Psalmist wrote: “All who see me deride me; They sneer, they shake their heads, *saying*, Turn *him* over to the Lord; let Him save him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”

It was then in response to these accusations and with divine assurance that the Father approved of his sacrifice, that Jesus interceded for his killers and pardoned a crucified sinner. And having done so, He too quoted from Psalm 22.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm played a pivotal role in the crucifixion of Jesus. Not only is it messianic but it is filled with specific references to things that happened during his execution.

Consider what the psalmist wrote:

A reproach of men, and despised of the people. Psalms 22:6

They ... laugh me to scorn. Psalms 22:7

They shake the head. Psalms 22:7

Let him rescue him. Psalms 22:8

Seeing he delighteth in him. Psalms 22:8

For there is none to help. Psalms 22:11

Many bulls have surrounded me. Psalms 22:12

I am poured out like water. Psalms 22:14

And all my bones are out of joint. Psalms 22:14

My strength is dried up. Psalms 22:14

My tongue cleaves to my jaws. Psalms 22:15

And You lay me in the dust of death Psalms 22:15

For dogs have surrounded me. Psalms 22:16

A company of evil doers have encompassed me. Psalms 22:16

They pierced my hands. Psalms 22:16

And they pierced my feet. Psalms 22:16

I can count all my bones. Psalms 22:17

They look, they stare at me. Psalms 22:17

They divide my garments among them. Psalms 22:18

And for my clothing they cast lots.. Psalms 22:18

When Jesus cried out “My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”, He was quoting Psalm 22:1. He pointed his detractors to the opening line where it seemed to the psalmist that God had forsaken him...only to conclude a few verses later, that God had not.

Consider the first five verses of this psalm along with the final three. This psalm begins as a lament but quickly turns to thanksgiving and praise for divine deliverance

### **My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?**

Far from my help are the words of my groaning.

My God, I cry out by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest.

Yet You are holy, You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

In You our fathers trusted; They trusted and You rescued them.  
To You they cried out and they fled to safety; In You they trusted and were not disappointed.

After describing that scene on the cross, Verses 19-31 return to God's deliverance in verses 22-24.

"I will proclaim Your name to my brothers; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him; All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor scorned the suffering of the afflicted; **Nor has He hidden His face from him;** But when he cried to Him for help, He heard."

And because God heard His cry: (vs 27-28)

"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord,  
And all the families of the nations will worship before You.  
For the kingdom is the Lord's, And He rules over the nations.

So it is that in Psalm 22, God delivers the one who is set upon and abused with the result that the nations turn to the Lord and are saved.

A **synecdoche**, is a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole. Let me suggest that when Jesus quoted the first verse of Psalm 22, He wanted his hearers to remember the whole psalm. He knew how it applied to his crucifixion and how it all turned out in the end. Far from declaring doubt or abandonment, Jesus sent the crowd back to the beginning of that passage to get the whole story. He let the scriptures that they abused, speak on his behalf.

As it had been with David, so it was with Jesus. It may have seemed that God had forsaken him, but He had not. Psalm 22 allowed Jesus to express how he felt at that moment while holding firmly to what he knew. It was both a cry for help and a confession of faith.

Months earlier, Jesus had spoken to the religious leaders who wanted to stone Him (John 8:59). He stated very clearly that God the Father would not forsake him on the day when they would crucify Him.

"So Jesus said, "When *you lift up* the Son of Man, then you will know that I am, and I do nothing on My own, but I say these things as the Father instructed Me. And He who sent Me is *with Me*; **He has not left Me alone**, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." John 8:28-29.

And that is what happened. God made his presence known through miracles, signs and wonders. Darkness set in at high noon and lasted for three hours. An earthquake shook the city, saints rose from the grave and the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. The presence and power of God was on such display that even the

Roman centurian at the foot of the cross confessed that "...surely this man was the Son of God".

In a more private setting Jesus had foretold, that at his arrest the disciples would abandon Him. Yet in their absence, He would not be alone (John 16:32). "Behold, an hour is coming, and has *already* come, for you to be scattered, each to his own *home*, and to leave Me alone; and *yet* I am *not alone*, because the Father is with Me".

It is in the context of these statements by Jesus, that we should understand his final words.

As He breathed his last, (Luke 23:46) Jesus quoted Psalm 31:5a where the psalmist wrote: "Into Your hand I entrust my spirit" before adding "You have redeemed me, Lord, God of truth". Jesus was speaking to God the Father who was present still, having never left.

Coming from the cross, Psalm 22:1 and Psalm 31:5 were our Lord's answer to those who crucified Him and mocked. He appealed to scripture as he fulfilled it, so that in the days to come, others might also fulfill the scriptures by calling upon His name.

Nowhere in scripture do we find that God rejected his Son – least of all at the very moment when all was 'finished'.

# THE JOURNEY

Written on: October 31, 2023  
Article by: Tim Johnson

It was 1975, a year that saw the end of the Vietnam War, a dramatic rise in the price of oil by OPEC, the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald in Lake Superior, and the last naturally occurring case of smallpox in the world diagnosed and treated. It was also the year I graduated from the White's Ferry Road School of Preaching in West



Monroe, LA, and we embarked on a long drive to Moncton, New Brunswick, to preach the gospel and begin a new congregation in a city that had none. We were newlyweds, naïve, scared, and possessed little money. Our U-Haul trailer seized up and had to be replaced, the car had a flat, and we pulled into our new province in the middle of a January blizzard. Not a nice welcome.

Every missionary faces similar uncertainties, and most are more serious than the kinds of things we experienced. In fact, for all of us, life is much like a journey through a foreign land on our way to our ultimate home in heaven. We can find motivation and solace in the journey of Abraham and Sarah as they wandered from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran, then on to Canaan and a new life. For them, every step of the way must have seemed difficult after leaving the security of their hometown.

Ur of the Chaldees was a large, wealthy community in Abraham's day. Archaeologists have been excavating the place for over 100 years. National Geographic describes the work of Leonard Wooley in the 1920's excavating the southeastern Iraq site, and his fabulous discoveries that revealed a rich society. (You can Google the NG article for details). Due to war and unrest in that part of the Middle East, archaeologists have been kept out until last year, when work resumed. It seems ancient Ur during Abram's time was a powerhouse of trade and manufacturing. The family of Abram's father, Terah, was prosperous and cultured. Ur was the kind of place people desired to move to, not leave. There was security there. Yet when God told Him to leave, the family obeyed without objection. We're not told how God contacted them, whether through a dream, vision, or audibly, but Abram was convinced the God of heaven needed to be obeyed.

Terah decided to go with them and brought Abram's brother, Nahor, and his nephew, Lot. They delayed in Haran, which was situated in the northern section of the fertile crescent in the area where the Euphrates River emerges from the Taurus-Caucasian mountains. After Terah's death, they moved on into the land of Canaan.

It must have been a large caravan, for the Genesis record says, “Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan.” (12:5) There is a debate over Abram’s actions, whether he really left his relatives behind, and whether he should have stayed in Haran as long as he did.

Comments by Charles Pfeiffer are helpful: “Abraham was a man of ‘like passions’ with ourselves, however. He seems to have delayed in Haran when he should have moved on into Canaan (Gen.11:31-12:5)<sup>1</sup>.”

Hebrews 11:8 simply states, “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

What can we learn from Abraham’s journey from Ur to Canaan? Let me suggest three things to consider.

First, we are all pilgrims, not permanent residents. Hebrews says of Abraham, “By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land.” (11:9). Peter called Christians in Asia Minor “aliens and strangers” (1 Pet.2:11). Statements like these remind us that this world is not our permanent home, therefore we shouldn’t act like it is. Many of us put down roots in places we would never think of leaving. And it may not be the best thing for you to go somewhere else. But how are we to view ourselves in this world? I’ve met several Christians who told me, “I love it here and I could never live anywhere else.” Yet, how is the church to spread the gospel throughout the world if we are determined to remain at home? Pilgrims and aliens understand that their lives aren’t vested in this world alone, for we have turned our attention to “the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God.”

Second, we can trust God for answers we don’t have yet. Without the full destination yet revealed, Abraham and his family must have wondered every day where they were going. Would they run out of supplies? Will the weather cooperate? Will foreign people interfere? What will become of us? Much later, the Israelites asked the same questions as they pulled up roots regularly and moved around the desert. Don’t we tend to ask the same questions, especially as costs keep rising and the world seems so uncertain? God looked after Abraham and Sarah as they proceeded on their journey. Their growing wealth is not mentioned until their stay in Haran, which may be an indication that Abraham was a skilled herdsman and businessman. God had promised to bless him and make his name great (Gen.12:2), and that would only increase as time passed. We are told many times in the New Testament not to worry and to put the kingdom first, for God will never desert or forsake us. He will answer our questions and eventually make our way clear (Matt.6:25-34; Heb.13:5-6). This is the outcome of faith as we journey through life.

Third, we are to focus on a heavenly home, not earthly riches. Western society seems fixated on accumulating wealth at all costs. The homes of the super-rich are displayed on the Internet – bragging like the kings of France over their palaces. One game-show

host lives in a \$16-million behemoth of a house. Many want luxurious properties and bulging bank accounts by the time they retire. By contrast, while God blessed Abraham with wealth and possessions, he lived in tents for the rest of his life, “for he was looking for the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God.” (Heb.11:10) Clearly, his focus was on a heavenly home in the future. This prevented greed, selfishness, and cruelty towards others. Paul warns us, “If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” (Col.3:1-2)

It is said of people like Abraham and Sarah, “But as is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” (Heb.11:16) He foreshadowed the life of faith that God now wants us to practice.

Stephen, Paul and the Hebrew writer all point out that Abraham was a man of faith who trusted God to sustain and guide him on his great journey. May we do the same as we journey though ours.

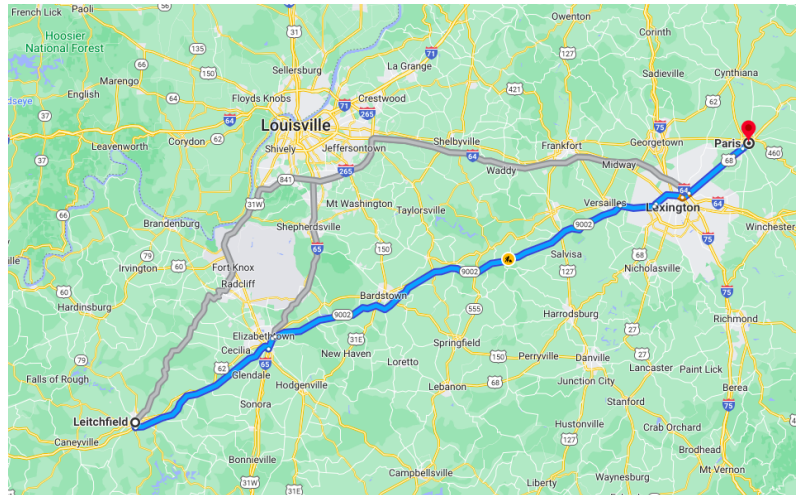
<sup>1</sup>Charles Pfeiffer. “The Patriarchal Age”, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, Page 15. 1961.

Barrie ON

# Measuring our Stride

Written on: October 31, 2023  
Article by: Thayer Salisbury

**T**om and George are both healthy. Tom, being slightly taller and more athletic than George, has a longer stride. With each full step, Tom moves slightly more than a meter, about 10% more. George, with his shorter stride falls a bit short of a meter, about 5% short.



If both are called upon to walk to a destination 5 kilometres away, which of the two will need the fewest steps and therefore be more likely to arrive first?

Our instinctive response is “Tom, of course, for he has the longer stride. He will need only 4546 strides to reach the destination. George will need 5264 strides to reach the destination.” But this response overlooks the possibilities of other variables.

## Other variables

The destination may be 5 kilometres away, but we have not yet considered the possibility of obstacles.

During a recent visit to the States, I used the GPS on my father-in-law’s phone to get directions. Later, when borrowing a friend’s car, I was able to use a GPS built into the car. While they could be helpful at times, both were troublesome on occasion. The GPS on my friend’s car seemed to be set to take the shortest possible distance – including making use of narrow gravel roads between corn fields. The phone-based GPS erred in the other direction, sticking to major highways even when those highways took us on a very indirect route.

If, in the example above, Tom chooses a route that happens to be plagued with obstacles, he could end up taking more strides and more time than George.

There would also be the possibility of a directional mistake. Tom might have the longer stride, but if he begins to travel in the wrong direction he will take more, not fewer, steps.

If a driver in Leitchfield, Kentucky is asked to deliver a truckload of pumpkins to “Paris,” he might rightfully conclude that the boss was not expecting him to drive to France. But should he go 175 miles to the southwest, to Paris, Tennessee, or should he drive 130 miles to the northeast, to Paris, Kentucky? Or should he head 229 miles north, to Paris,

Illinois, or even 400 miles west to Paris, Missouri? In this case the driver would do well to get some clarification before beginning his journey.

If three drivers all started from Leitchfield to Paris at once, which would arrive at the desired destination first? It might not be the one who drove the fastest. It is likely to be the one who took the time to ascertain which “Paris” was the desired destination.

## **Fools rush in**

I recall a chapel talk made by the Dean at Oklahoma Christian in 1977. Some students who were not doing well in their classes had made the excuse that they were too busy with ‘church work’ to give attention to their studies. He had been an English Literature professor. He referred to a female character in a 19th century novel. According to his description, this woman was always so busy supporting various social ‘causes’ that she neglected her own family. The result was chaos within her family and ultimately harm to society.

Dr McBride then called attention to the fact that the business of students is to study, and thereby prepare themselves for years of service. Of course, we might and should find ways of being useful while engaged in studies. But our main task, as students, was to master our subjects. Rushing ahead to serve, when we did not yet have a clear understanding of how we were to serve effectively, was not the right way to honour the Lord.

Looking back after all these years, I have no doubt that most of those who were faithful as students have also been faithful in their various fields of service. Likewise, I suspect that those who skimmed on their studies when they were students have been ineffective in their area of service. In the cases I know firsthand, this is certainly true.

## **Measuring our stride**

The most important measure is not length of stride but direction of stride. A short stride in the right direction is better than a long stride in any other direction.

Therefore, let us do good work rather than fast work. Let us plan our course rather than rushing into it. Let us give more attention to our direction than to our speed.

“Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. <sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. <sup>16</sup>But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness (2 Tim 2:14-16).