

Hope: Present and Future

JARL K. WAGGONER

Through faith in Christ, we have eternal life and peace with God, and we always have hope. Regardless of present circumstances or future ordeals, we always have hope. In Christ our hope is not manufactured by self-reliance or trust in other people. It is a sure hope, based on our risen Saviour and the promises of God.

Daniel possessed such hope as he looked forward to the kingdom of God. The resurrection of Christ gave hope to the disciples, even as it gives us hope today. And the Apostles Peter and Paul proclaimed a hope that has practical value for every Christian.

These people all looked beyond their own time, and so do we. We are constantly looking forward, wondering what the next day or year or decade might bring. We wonder whether difficult circumstances will end or prosperous times will continue. We wonder whether our health will continue to decline or work or family matters will be resolved, and we wonder how long we might have to live in this world. Life itself is difficult enough in this world; it is nearly impossible to navigate successfully without hope.

Our first unit of studies this quarter comes from the book of Daniel. The Prophet Daniel was given visions that looked far beyond his own time to the coming kingdom of Christ (lesson 1). Though Daniel saw the rise and fall of

great world kingdoms, God gave him assurance that the Lord's kingdom is coming and that He will reign in righteousness. What greater hope could there be for the exiled prophet?

In lesson 2 we find Daniel looking forward to the prophesied return from exile. But he knew that even that event, which was assured by God's promise, would be empty if the Israelites returned to their land in sin. The hope God gave moved Daniel to confess the sins of his people. Daniel took God at His word, but he also took God's promise as a call to pray.

Our last lesson in Daniel again takes us into prophecy. Daniel did not live to see the events God revealed to him here, but he understood that the God who foretold the events is also the God who controls all history. That truth should bring comfort and give hope to every believer.

This quarter's second unit focuses on the resurrection hope and begins with a lesson from Luke 22. Even as Jesus introduced the Lord's Supper, which speaks of His death for sinners, His disciples were distracted by their selfish concerns about who would be greatest in His kingdom. Jesus reminded them yet again that serving others is the real measure of greatness. Our hope in Christ is much better than the worldly desire to have power over others.

Lesson 5 recounts the story of the

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two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their hope had been shattered by Jesus' death. Only the appearance of their resurrected Saviour could restore their hope. Hope for us likewise resides not in ourselves but in Him and His bodily resurrection.

Jesus' postresurrection appearances to His disciples and instruction of them revealed how all God's promises had been kept (lesson 6). Even though Jesus left them and ascended into heaven, they were assured that God's promises for the future were certain. This is the kind of hope every Christian should have.

Lesson 7 recounts the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower Jesus' followers after His ascension. As Jesus had told them, they would not be left alone in the world. Because of the Spirit's presence in us, we have the sure hope that we can endure and do things that would otherwise be impossible. The disciples are a prime example of that.

The next two lessons come from Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. He reassured them that both they and those believers who had already died had the promise of being united with Jesus at His return. We may face many troubles in this life, but that does not mean the Lord has abandoned us. His plan is fixed and will be carried out, and in that there is comfort and the hope we

need to take us through any situation.

The third unit of the quarter takes us to Peter's two epistles. These four lessons describe not only the hope we have in Christ but also the impact this hope has on our daily lives.

Lesson 10 reminds us that even when facing trials such as persecution, there is reason to rejoice. This is because God has given us a living hope that will never disappoint us or lead us astray. We have an eternal inheritance that gives us a proper perspective on the trials we face.

In lesson 11 we find Peter's second letter presenting a clear call for us to live godly lives. We are assured that through Christ we have been empowered to overcome the wickedness of the world. Yet this hope we have in Christ is not just for our comfort; it is also meant to motivate us to grow in our faith, continually adding to our faith the virtues that will make us godly people who truly reflect the life of Christ.

Lesson 12 returns to I Peter to emphasize again the importance of serving one another. This commitment to fellow Christians will be fostered as we look forward to the hope of Christ's coming.

The final lesson, from II Peter 3, warns all who treasure the hope of Christ's return that many will scoff at that promise because they treasure their own lusts. Our hope is certain because God has promised it, but we must maintain a proper perspective. Only God knows the time when all will be fulfilled, and He is not bound by our concept of time or our longings. We can rejoice, though, that His plan is on schedule and that any seeming "delays" are simply demonstrations of His patience toward the unsaved.

Our hope in the present is based on the resurrected Christ, who died in our place and for our sins. Our future hope is based on the promised return of that same Saviour. Let that hope comfort us, encourage us, and inspire us to greater commitment to Christ and to living holy lives.

A Glorious Reign Ahead

Lesson: Daniel 7:9-14

Read: Daniel 7:1-28

TIME: probably 553 B.C.

PLACE: Babylon

GOLDEN TEXT—“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

Lesson Exposition

Babylon’s king Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in 605 B.C. While he would return later to destroy Jerusalem and take most of the people captive, at this time he simply forced Judah’s king to swear allegiance to him. Nebuchadnezzar also took a number of captives with him when he returned to Babylon. Among them was Daniel (Dan. 1:1-6).

Though far from home, Daniel remained faithful to the Lord, and as a result he prospered as a trusted adviser to Nebuchadnezzar and succeeding kings. Not only was Daniel honored by the kings, but he was also honored by God, who gave Daniel great wisdom and prophecies of the future.

The prophetic vision of Daniel 7 came to Daniel in the first year of Belsazzar’s reign (vs. 1). This was 553 B.C., almost fifty years after Daniel’s arrival in Babylon. Though now in his sixties or seventies, Daniel was still faithful and still serving and still being used by God.

THE COMING JUDGMENT— Dan. 7:9-12

A description of the Judge (Dan. 7:9-10). Daniel’s vision of the “Ancient of days” cannot be fully under-

stood apart from the context in which it appears. While sleeping, Daniel received visions from the Lord, which he carefully recorded when he awoke. In the visions, he saw four great beasts arise from the sea. The fourth beast had ten horns, and one of those horns, a little one, plucked up three of the other horns “by the roots” (vs. 8). This little horn is also described as “speaking great things.”

This description of the beasts is immediately followed by the description of the heavenly Judge, the Ancient of Days. Daniel himself was confused by the visions until an angel explained to him that the four beasts represented four kings and thus four successive kingdoms (Dan. 7:17). These four great world kingdoms were Babylon, in Daniel’s time; Medo-Persia, which would soon displace Babylon; Greece; and then Rome (cf. 8:20-21). The ten horns were ten kings. The little horn, or king, would subdue three of them.

This little horn, described in Daniel 7:24-25, is the antichrist of the end times. He will “speak great words,” “wear out the saints,” attempt to

“change times and laws,” and exercise dominion for three-and-a-half years. His reign will end when the Ancient of Days judges him. This is what is pictured in verses 9-12.

That the thrones were “cast down” (Dan. 7:9) can be understood as meaning that they were previously “set up” and thus a reference to heavenly thrones. The focus, however, is on one throne, the one occupied by the “Ancient of days.” In view of verse 13, this One is clearly God the Father. The white garment and hair speak of His purity, and the fiery appearance probably suggests judgment.

The scene in Daniel 7:10 adds to the awesome description of God’s glory. Thousands upon thousands minister to Him, and multitudes more stand before Him. These are angels and saints who will serve Him throughout eternity. What is depicted here, however, is a scene of judgment. “The judgment was set” suggests that the Judge Himself is seated and ready to pass judgment. The books that are opened, like the books in Revelation 20:12, probably record the sins of the ones about to be judged.

A description of the judgment (Dan. 7:11-12). In his vision, Daniel not only heard the boastful words of the little horn (vs. 8) but also saw his judgment. The judgment of the antichrist places this vision in the context of the end times and Christ’s return (cf. vss. 26-27). Since the fourth empire, Rome, is depicted as continuing until the establishment of Christ’s eternal kingdom, “it must be regarded as continuing in some sense today, and as operating in a very lively way at the very consummation of the present age” (Culver, *The Histories and Prophecies of Daniel*, BMH).

This judgment results in the destruction of the fourth beast, meaning

that both the antichrist and his kingdom are destroyed. The antichrist himself, the one known simply as the “beast” in Revelation, is consigned to the burning flame of the lake of fire (Rev. 19:19-20).

Interestingly, Daniel was careful to point out that the other beasts—the three kingdoms that preceded the final Roman kingdom—would lose their dominion but still survive for a time (Dan. 7:12). John Whitcomb pointed out that Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece were “not totally destroyed when they lost their dominion but were largely merged into succeeding empires, so that elements of each still exist in the final phase of the Roman kingdom. Totally different, however, will be the fate of the fourth kingdom at the second coming. Nothing of it will be left to contaminate Christ’s millennial kingdom” (*Daniel*, Moody).

THE COMING KING—Dan. 7:13-14

At this point in Daniel’s visions, a second Person appears. He is described as “one like the Son of man” (Dan. 7:13). While “Son of man” can refer simply to a human being, it became Jesus’ favorite title for Himself. In fact, Jesus specifically applied this verse to His second coming (cf. Mark 13:26; 14:62). The Son of Man is the divine Son of God, and He will return in “the clouds of heaven” (Dan. 7:13; cf. Acts 1:9-11; I Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7).

“The expression ‘like a son of man’ . . . identifies the appearance of this final Ruler of the world not only as a man, . . . but also as the heavenly Sovereign incarnate” (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

While on earth, Son of man was Jesus’ favorite title for Himself. “Since Jesus had this particular passage in mind, he spoke of himself as *the* Son

of Man. . . . Moreover, v. 13 is the only place in the OT where [Son of man] is used of a divine personage rather than a human being” (Gaebelein).

In Daniel, the Son of Man, Jesus the Messiah, is said to come near to the Ancient of Days. Then God the Father gives to Him “dominion, and glory, and a kingdom” (7:14). The Father bestows on the Son the eternal kingdom. This occurs at Christ’s second coming. Following that time known as the tribulation, when the antichrist and his kingdom have dominion on the earth, Christ will return to earth and put an end to him and his rule. Then the Son will receive His righteous kingdom from the Father. This kingdom will be inaugurated with His thousand-year reign on earth.

Christ’s kingdom will reflect the glory that is fitting for One who is both Creator and Redeemer. People of all nations and languages will serve Him. Furthermore, unlike the boastful kingdoms of the world, which are destined for destruction, Christ’s kingdom will be everlasting. His millennial reign on earth (Rev. 20:1-5) will continue into eternity. His kingdom will endure forever, and His dominion will be without end.

Daniel’s prophecy is not easy to grasp in all its details; in fact, the prophet himself needed divine help to understand it. But in the end, this prophetic preview, which reaches into eternity future, was a source of great comfort to Daniel.

Daniel had not seen his homeland for half a century, and his people were still in captivity because of their rebellion against God. Yet the vision he saw and recorded assured him that God was still in control. He was still at work in the world; He still had a plan for His people. And in the end, God will receive the glory He is due, for people of all nations, including

Daniel’s own beloved people, will serve the Lord in His eternal kingdom.

When things become difficult and seemingly unbearable, we are tempted to lose hope. This is because our vision is so limited. We cannot see the end with our eyes. But in God’s Word, we do see the end. And we who know the One who has planned the end can rest in Him. He is still at work, He is still in control, and He still has a plan for each of us. And one day we will join that throng around the throne, saying, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Rev. 5:12).

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PRACTICAL POINTS

1. While our descriptions of God are necessarily inadequate, we must always acknowledge His holiness (Dan. 7:9).
2. Our view of God is deficient if we see only His love and ignore His holy justice (vs. 10).
3. Apart from repentance, rebellion against God assures eternal judgment (vs. 11).
4. God’s justice is inescapable, but the timing of it is in His hands (vs. 12).
5. Christ’s coming is a source of comfort for all who know Him, for it means justice will be served (vs. 13).
6. The focus of our lives must not be on the temporary delights this world offers but on the eternal kingdom of which we as Christians are already a part (vs. 14).

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Daniel's Prayer of Confession

Lesson: Daniel 9:4-14

Read: Daniel 9:3-19

TIME: 539 B.C.

PLACE: Babylon

GOLDEN TEXT—"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him" (Daniel 9:9).

Lesson Exposition

Daniel's prayer of confession in Daniel 9 was the result of his study of Scripture. Daniel had been studying Jeremiah's prophecy and realized that the seventy years of captivity God had foretold through that prophet were nearing an end.

The Lord had declared that Judah would "serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jer. 25:11). At the end of those seventy years, the Lord would punish Babylon for their sin and bring His people back to their land (Jer. 25:12; cf. II Chron. 36:20-21).

With the fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians in 539 B.C. and the accession to the throne by Darius the Mede, apparently a governor under the conqueror Cyrus the Persian, Daniel knew from Jeremiah's prophecy that the end of the Captivity was very near (Dan. 9:1-2). Since the Captivity began in 605 B.C., Daniel realized that within three years it would be over. And, in fact, Cyrus soon made a decree ending Judah's captivity and allowing them to return to their homeland (II Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).

Though Daniel did not know the exact day the Captivity would end, he

knew that it would be soon and that God's promise could be trusted. Why, then, did he offer his prayer of confession? Would God not have brought the Captivity to an end anyway? Daniel understood that in His sovereignty, God not only declares the ends; He also declares the means to those ends. The Captivity would indeed end after seventy years, but it would end as a result of the prayers of His people (cf. II Chron. 6:36-39).

It was important to Daniel to properly confess the sins that had led to God's judgment. The continued existence and prosperity of the Jewish people in the land would depend on their faithfulness to God and His Word. So Daniel determined to turn to the Lord on behalf of his people in "prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes" (Dan. 9:3).

ADDRESSING THE GOD OF ISRAEL—Dan. 9:4

It is interesting that Daniel stated that he prayed to the "Lord my God, and made my confession" (Dan. 9:4). Daniel was probably in his eighties now, and he could look back on a life-

time of faithfulness to his God. God had given him favor before Nebuchadnezzar and delivered him from the mouths of hungry lions. Daniel is one of the very few persons in Scripture about whom nothing negative is recorded. Yet when Daniel confessed the sins of his people, he included himself.

Truly godly individuals are the most sensitive to sin in their own lives. Those who seek to live holy lives are very conscious of their own sin and do not discount it. Daniel confessed the sins of his people, but he did not exclude himself. He knew he too was guilty of sin, and he was willing to confess it along with the sins of the nation. It is often said that revival begins with confession from the leadership.

Almost every prayer recorded in the Bible begins with praise for who God is. Daniel's prayer is no different. He addressed the Lord as "great and dreadful" (Dan. 9:4). This was an acknowledgement that God's awesome and holy nature is infinitely beyond man. In His presence, we become painfully aware of our sin (cf. Isa. 6:1-5) and must confess it.

This awesome God is the One who keeps His covenant with man and is merciful and compassionate and forgiving toward those who repent and obey Him (cf. Exod. 20:5-6). Genuine confession comes only when God is acknowledged for who He is: the holy yet merciful God.

CONFESSING THE NATION'S REBELLION—Dan. 9:5-11

Confession of rebellion (Dan. 9:5-6). In making confession for the nation, Daniel again included himself, saying, "We have sinned, . . . committed iniquity, . . . done wickedly, and have rebelled." "Sinned" here refers to missing the mark; "iniquity" views sin as something that is twisted or distorted. To do wickedly and rebel is to deliber-

ately go against God and His standards. "Their sins consisted essentially in 'departing' from God's precepts and judgments" (Culver, *The Histories and Prophecies of Daniel*, BMH) as summarized in the Ten Commandments.

In addition, the entire nation had rejected the warnings and calls to repentance issued by God's prophets. From the kings to the lowliest of the people, all were guilty of rebellion against the God of Israel.

Admission of humiliation (Dan. 9:7-11). Judah's rebellion had reaped devastating consequences. Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed. The temple was ransacked and leveled. And the people were displaced from their homeland and taken captive into foreign lands. This was God's righteous judgment, as Daniel acknowledged; for the people the result was "confusion," a word that refers to open shame.

The people of Judah dwelled in shame in all those countries to which they were dispersed. The people who had once enjoyed God's blessing now did not even have a land of their own. They were at the mercy of pagans, who mocked them. They were subject to the shame they had brought upon themselves—kings, princes, and fathers of the nation alike.

The people's rebellion did not change who God was, though. He was still a God of mercy and forgiveness; so Daniel could still appeal to Him (Dan. 9:9), confessing the nation's sins and seeking God's forgiveness and restoration. So, once again, Daniel confessed the sins of his people. They had not obeyed God's voice and God's law, which had been set forth so clearly and repeatedly by His prophets (vs. 10). For centuries they had broken God's commands, and they had suffered the curse God had promised (vs. 11).

ACKNOWLEDGING THE LORD'S RIGHTEOUS RESPONSE—

Dan. 9:12-14

In keeping His word (Dan. 9:12-13). The Babylonian Captivity was the fulfillment of God's words. God had specifically warned that continued disobedience to His commands would result in conquest and captivity (cf. Lev. 26:27-35; Deut. 4:25-27; Isa. 1:19-20).

The people of Judah, along with their "judges" (Dan. 9:12), or rulers, had suffered in captivity for almost seventy years as a result of their rebellion. Indeed, Daniel characterized God's judgment of Jerusalem as being like nothing ever seen before. The "siege by the Babylonians brought starvation, cannibalism, and total destruction. No other ancient city, so far as we know, experienced such a catastrophe as God heaped upon His beloved wife, Jerusalem (Ezek. 24:16-27)" (Whitcomb, *Daniel*, Moody).

In spite of the judgment they had brought upon themselves, the Jewish people did not turn to God in repentance. They continued in their sin and ignored God's truth. Repentance was still necessary.

In upholding His righteousness (Dan. 9:14). Daniel confessed that the Lord was entirely justified in His actions. In fact, His righteousness required His judgment upon Judah. As Gleason Archer wrote in his commentary on Daniel (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan), "If a nation like Judah, instructed so perfectly in the truth of God, could fall into idolatry and immorality and defy the Lord to punish them as he had promised to do," if the Lord had not punished them, how could obedience be expected of anyone else?

Daniel's confession was genuine.

He acknowledged his people's sin and admitted their punishment was deserved. The answer to the prophet's confession came with the decree of Cyrus that released the captives. Interestingly, God also answered by sending additional revelation regarding Israel's future, especially with regard to the Messiah's coming and the ultimate fate of Israel and the world in the end times (Dan. 9:24-27). The One who was true to His word in punishing Judah could certainly be trusted to fulfill His promises for the future, and those promises meant the restoration of Israel.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We will never be prone to confess our sins unless we have an understanding of God's true character (Dan. 9:4).
2. True confession not only admits sin; it also agrees with God that it is despicable (vss. 5-6).
3. Sin inevitably results in shame before both God and man (vss. 7-8).
4. We can rejoice continually that God never changes; His mercy and forgiveness are always available, in spite of our repeated sins (vss. 9-10).
5. God has ordained that there will always be consequences for sin, and He is true to His word (vss. 11-12).
6. Thank God that He chastises us for our sin, for such chastisement is designed to drive us to repentance (vss. 13-14).

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Daniel's Vision Explained

Lesson: Daniel 8:19-26

Read: Daniel 8:1-27

TIME: about 551 B.C.

PLACE: Babylon

GOLDEN TEXT—"The vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days" (Daniel 8:26).

Lesson Exposition

The book of Daniel records events that took place in Babylon during Judah's Captivity. However, Daniel's prophecies of the future reach far beyond his own time. In fact, they outline the entire course of history clear up to the very end of time.

The prophetic visions recorded in Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 11 all look ahead to troubling times as successive empires take their turns wielding power on the world stage. All are doomed to ultimate destruction, however, for in the end the everlasting kingdom of the Lord will be established.

The four world kingdoms presented in the visions in Daniel 2 and 7 are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Daniel had a firsthand view of the Babylonian Empire, and he lived to see the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire. The Greek Empire, still in the distant future for Daniel, is the focus of the vision given to him in chapter 8.

DIVINE INTERPRETATION—

Dan. 8:19-25

The coming kingdoms (Dan. 8:19-22). In 551 B.C., during the reign of Belshazzar, the last king of the Babylonian Empire, God gave Daniel a

prophetic vision (vss. 1-12). In the vision, Daniel saw a two-horned ram with great power pushing north, south, and west. Then a male goat with one large horn appeared. This goat destroyed the ram. But then its horn was broken, and in its place four other horns arose.

From among the four horns of the goat, a smaller horn arose. This horn became great. It exalted itself, removed the daily sacrifice, and trampled on the truth.

Daniel was perplexed by the vision, and God instructed the Angel Gabriel to explain the vision to the prophet (Dan. 8:15-18). Gabriel began by stating that the vision related to "the last end of the indignation" and "the end" (vs. 19). This is a hint that while the prophecy relates to historical figures connected with the third world empire, it also looks ahead to the end times.

The angel went on to explain that the one ram with two horns represented the allied kings of Media and Persia. This empire in fact pushed its frontiers north, south, and west. The male goat represented the kingdom of Greece, which displaced the Medo-Persian

Empire in the fourth century B.C. The great horn of the goat was the first king of that empire, namely, Alexander the Great.

Upon the death of Alexander in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided among four of his generals, none of whom was as powerful as Alexander. This is portrayed by the goat's four horns. These four Greek generals . . . "took over Macedon-Greece, Thrace-Asia Minor, Egypt-Palestine and Syria-Persia" (Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

At the time of Daniel's vision, the Medo-Persian Empire was still on the rise. It would be another dozen years before Babylon fell to the armies of the Medes and Persians. The Greek Empire of Alexander was still another two centuries in the future. This remarkably detailed and accurate prophecy is another reminder to us of who God is. We do not know the future beyond what He has revealed to us. But we know the One who has already ordained the future. Nothing is beyond His reach; nothing is outside of His plans.

The coming king (Dan. 8:23-25). Finally, the little horn that arises among the other four horns of the goat is described as "a king of fierce countenance." This king comes on the scene in the "latter time of their kingdom." In 175 B.C., Antiochus IV Epiphanes became king of Syria, an area that included ancient Israel.

Antiochus was determined to unify his kingdom, and he attempted to do this by eliminating religious differences. This required the destruction of Judaism. Jewish historical sources describe the brutal steps he took to do this. He outlawed Sabbath observance and even entered the temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar.

Antiochus Epiphanes is undoubtedly the little horn pictured in

Daniel's vision. In Daniel 8:23-25, that vision describes him as very intelligent ("understanding dark sentences"); wielding great power derived from another; destroying, prospering, and doing his own will; persecuting the people of God; exalting himself; bringing destruction upon those who are at "peace"; and opposing the "Prince of princes." Ultimately, he was "broken without hand," dying not at the hands of enemies but from sickness.

"Two noteworthy traits will characterize Antiochus's rule: (1) his treachery and intrigue (v. 25), in order to catch his victims unawares and unprepared . . . ; (2) his overweening pride, which led him to claim divine honors (v. 25). In fulfillment of this, the coins of Antiochus actually bore the title *theos epiphanes* ('God manifest')" (Gaebelien).

Antiochus ruled during the period between the Old and New Testaments. Many of the events associated with him are recorded in the Jewish book of I Maccabees. His actions ultimately resulted in a revolt that led to the cleansing of the temple (an event from which comes the Jewish holiday Hanukkah) and a measure of independence for Israel until Rome took control in 63 B.C.

Antiochus played a significant role in Israel's history, so it is not surprising that Daniel's prophecy foretold his coming. In retrospect, the Jewish people could look back at how Daniel's prophecy regarding Antiochus was fulfilled and be assured that his prophecies about Messiah also would come about.

Likewise, we can look back at Daniel's fulfilled prophecies and, as a result, look forward to those yet to be fulfilled, knowing that God's plan for the future is set and that His righteousness guarantees this plan will exalt Him alone.

There is another question that must be discussed here: Was this prophecy *entirely* fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes? Many scholars have noted that some of the language does not fit well with this Greek king. For example, Antiochus was not known as particularly adept at “understanding dark sentences” (Dan. 8:23), and Gabriel himself indicated that the vision pertained to the time of the end (vss. 17, 19).

There are several possibilities. The prophecy could, in spite of the “problems,” relate solely to Antiochus. It is also possible to take the prophecy as still unfulfilled and future to us and thus related not to Antiochus but to the end-time antichrist, who will also exalt himself, persecute God’s people, and oppose the Prince of princes. Or the prophecy could relate to both Antiochus and the antichrist, a dual fulfillment sometimes seen in prophetic Scriptures.

A final possibility is that the prophecy was historically fulfilled in Antiochus but is “intentionally typical of similar events and personages at the end of the age. . . . [It] goes beyond Antiochus to provide prophetic foreshadowing of the final Gentile ruler” (Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*, Moody). In view of the seemingly obvious connection with Antiochus and the end-time references, this possibility might be the best approach.

DIVINE INSTRUCTION—Dan. 8:26

The Angel Gabriel concluded with divine instruction for Daniel. He preceded that instruction with the statement that the vision of the evening and morning was true. This is a reference to the 2,300 days of oppression by Antiochus before the temple was cleansed (Dan. 8:14), and it is an affirmation of the entire prophecy.

The instruction was to shut up, or

seal, the vision because it pertained to many days in the future. In other words, the meaning of the prophecy, though explained to an extent, would not be entirely understandable to Daniel. Only after its fulfillment would its meaning become clear.

We all have a natural curiosity about the future. But prophetic Scripture is not designed to satisfy our curiosity. It is designed to teach us about God, comfort and encourage us in our troubles, spur us on to godly living, and exalt the Sovereign Lord. Like generations before us, we may not live to see the fulfillment of all that has been foretold, but these prophecies remind us that our Lord is worthy of all our praise and worship.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Since God has revealed much about the future, it is clear He wants us to know about it and benefit from it (Dan. 8:19).
2. Kings and kingdoms come and go according to God’s plan for history (vss. 20-21).
3. Even the wickedness of evil leaders is used by the Sovereign Lord in His program (vss. 22-23).
4. As long as evil exists in this world, God’s people can expect persecution (vs. 24).
5. Those who oppose God will oppose God’s people and God’s plan (vs. 25).
6. Not all of God’s prophetic revelation can be understood fully right now, but we can trust Him to reveal it to us in His time (vs. 26).

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The Privilege of Serving

Lesson: Luke 22:14-30

Read: Luke 22:14-30

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—“He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26).

Lesson Exposition

Even before coming to Jerusalem this final time, Jesus had spoken repeatedly of His coming arrest, suffering, death, and resurrection (cf. Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). As He now joined His disciples for the Passover, the beginning of those events was just hours away.

Somehow Jesus' disciples had failed to understand His words. They were unprepared for His coming departure. Thus, this Passover became not just a remembrance of past deliverance from Egypt but also an opportunity for Jesus to prepare His disciples for the traumatic events ahead and the glorious opportunities that awaited them.

INTRODUCING THE LORD'S SUPPER—Luke 22:14-20

The Passover (Luke 22:14-18). Jesus had sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover He would observe with His disciples (vss. 8-13). When all was ready, they gathered at the designated place (vs. 14).

Jesus expressed His great joy at being able to eat the Passover meal with His disciples (Luke 22:15). But He also

made it clear this would be the last time He would be with them for this occasion, for soon He would “suffer.” He then explicitly said that He would not eat the Passover with them again until it is “fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (vs. 16). Jesus looked forward to joining them again in such a meal as this, but that would not come until the kingdom was fully established in the future.

While Jesus' desire to be with His disciples must have been obvious to them, they seemed completely oblivious to every indication that He would soon suffer and die. Like many people today, they seemed to remove all thought of death from their minds. It was too unpleasant to consider. Yet, as Jesus made clear, His death was not the end for His followers but the beginning of a glorious future.

Jesus then took the cup, gave thanks, and passed it to the disciples (Luke 22:17). This was part of the Passover observance, which looked back to Israel's Exodus from Egypt. But Jesus also looked forward. Again He stressed that such a joyous meal with His disciples would not occur again until the kingdom of God had come in all its fullness (vs. 18).

The communion (Luke 22:19-20).

At this point Jesus introduced a new element to the Passover observance. He took a loaf of bread, gave thanks, and then broke the bread and distributed it to the disciples. As He did so, He said, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."

The new aspect to the meal was Jesus' equating of the unleavened bread with His own body. "The 'bread' (v.19) was the thin, unleavened bread used in the Passover. 'Gave thanks' translates the verb *eucharisteo*, the source of the beautiful word "Eucharist," often used to signify the Lord's Supper" (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

It seems clear enough that Jesus' words are not to be taken literally here. Rather, He was introducing a symbol: the bread represented His physical body, which would suffer and be given on the cross in sacrifice (Luke 22:19; cf. I Pet. 2:21-24).

Jesus instructed the disciples to do this "in remembrance" of Him (Luke 22:19). "This do" means to eat the bread and is properly understood as "continue doing this." It is a command to observe this practice continually as a reminder of the price He paid for our salvation.

The Lord then took the cup and said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20). Just as He introduced a new and continuing practice with the bread (vs. 19), so He now introduced a second element of the new observance He was commanding. The cup symbolized Jesus' blood, which sealed the new testament, or covenant.

Blood speaks of Jesus' death, which was necessary to satisfy God's justice (Rom. 3:25) and provide forgiveness (Heb. 9:22). His blood was shed for us (Luke 22:20). Thus, this symbol points to Christ's substitutionary death, which

fully satisfies the demands of a holy God, who requires just payment for sins.

But what are we to make of the reference to the new covenant? This covenant is first mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and promised Israel future restoration and salvation. Like other covenants, it was sealed by a blood sacrifice (cf. Gen. 15). Christ's blood instituted the new covenant. Yet the same blood that guarantees Israel national forgiveness also guarantees individual forgiveness of sin to every believer. Thus, all who trust in Christ participate in that new covenant promise.

Because the new covenant promise to Israel still awaits future fulfillment (cf. Rom. 11:26), the Lord's Supper, or communion, that we observe today not only looks back in remembrance to Christ's death but also looks forward to Christ's return and the fulfillment of His promises to Israel (cf. I Cor. 11:26).

While you might have limited opportunities to observe communion with other believers, it is important that you make every effort to do so as often as possible. It is commanded of believers and is a testimony to our faith in Christ.

WARNING OF BETRAYAL—Luke 22:21-23

A shocking announcement (Luke 22:21-22). Even as the disciples struggled to grasp what Jesus was saying to them, He made a shocking announcement. He would be betrayed by one who was present with Him at the table. In fact, the form of the word translated "betrayeth" indicates that the betrayal had already begun (cf. vs. 3-6).

Jesus knew He had to die, for this was the foreordained plan of the Father (cf. Acts 2:23). But the betrayer can hardly be excused on this basis. Judas was responsible for his ac-

tions and was rightly condemned by Jesus.

An informal investigation (Luke 22:23). Jesus' statement caused the disciples to begin considering which of them might be the betrayer. While Judas apparently was still present, he was no more suspect than the others.

TEACHING ABOUT GREATNESS— Luke 22:24-30

Greatness disputed (Luke 22:24). It seems discussion of the betrayer's identity led to a dispute over which of the disciples was the greatest. It is sad that as Jesus faced the cross, the disciples' only concern was their own status; but this was a continuing issue that had already been a subject of concern (cf. Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46).

Greatness explained (Luke 22:25-27). Jesus rebuked the disciples for their selfish ambitions. They were demonstrating the same attitudes as pagan rulers, who gloried in their authority over people and considered themselves "benefactors" to whom people looked for all good things.

This was not to be the case with Christ's followers. Jesus taught that God measures greatness by service to others. The greatest of God's people are not those who are served but those who serve God and others without any thought of worldly acclaim or status. Jesus Himself modeled this truth (Luke 22:27; cf. Mark 10:44-45).

Greatness rewarded (Luke 22:28-30). Those who follow Christ as servants of the Lord do not seek worldly reward, but they will be rewarded by God. Jesus said that His disciples, who had been by His side throughout His trials, would receive a "kingdom" just as the Father had conferred a kingdom on Him. This

means they will have places of honor and responsibility in the coming kingdom, when Christ's reign is fully manifested.

The faithful disciples will enjoy fellowship with the Lord in His kingdom and will judge "the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30; cf. Matt. 19:28). They will have prominent roles in Christ's kingdom but only because they have learned to be servants of people, not tyrants over them.

Life is not always easy. Our trials may seem to rob us of opportunities for service. But those trials are God's way of preparing us for service, both in this life and in His eternal kingdom.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should be as desirous of spending time with the Lord as He is of spending time with us (Luke 22:14-18).
2. Christ's sacrifice on our behalf must ever be on our minds (vss. 19-20).
3. We must never think we are incapable of betraying our Lord but should always be willing to engage in honest self-examination (vss. 21-23).
4. We must not allow the world's values to become ours (vss. 24-26).
5. Our service to God will be pleasing to Him only when we put others ahead of ourselves (vss. 26-27).
6. As we serve others here and now, God is preparing us for service in His eternal kingdom (vss. 28-30).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Hope Restored

(Easter)

Lesson: Luke 24:13-21, 28-35

Read: Luke 24:1-35

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: near Emmaus

GOLDEN TEXT—“As he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him” (Luke 24:30-31).

Lesson Exposition

It is easy for us to read the Gospel accounts and be amazed that Jesus' disciples did not see what we see. Why did they not anticipate Jesus' arrest and crucifixion? Why were they not eagerly awaiting His resurrection? After all, He had told them about these things beforehand—several times!

We must understand that Jesus' followers had preconceptions of the Messiah and what He would do, and it was hard for even Jesus to rattle their expectations. They were also caught up emotionally in events that were happening very rapidly. Their reluctance to believe Jesus had risen from the dead only adds to the evidence for His resurrection, for they clearly were not prone to making up such a story!

The two disciples traveling to Emmaus were probably typical of all Jesus' followers. But through their grief and disappointment (and ultimate enlightenment), we gain greater understanding of our Lord and the hope His resurrection offers.

CHRIST REMEMBERED— Luke 24:13-21

The journey toward Emmaus (Luke 24:13-16). On the third day after His crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead! The first report of His resurrection came from women who had visited Jesus' tomb early that morning. They had found the tomb empty and had seen angels who told them that Jesus was alive. A short time later, Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Lord. It was now late in the day, and two of Jesus' followers were walking toward Emmaus.

One of these two disciples was named Cleopas (Luke 24:18); he is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. The identity of the other disciple is the source of much fruitless speculation. The fact is we do not even have a name to go on.

The two men had come from Jerusalem and were traveling to Emmaus, which the Bible says was a trip of “about threescore furlongs” (Luke 24:13), or about seven miles. The exact location of Emmaus is unknown today, but it was probably northwest of

Jerusalem.

The purpose of the two in going to Emmaus is unknown, but their conversation naturally focused on the events in Jerusalem in the past few days. Since we do not know who these disciples were, we do not know how much they personally witnessed; but they were well aware of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion and of the first reports of the empty tomb early that morning (Luke 24:20, 22-24).

It was on these things that they "reasoned" (Luke 24:15) as they traveled. Their later conversation indicates that they were confused and did not know quite what to make of these matters.

As the two disciples proceeded toward Emmaus, they were joined by the risen Lord Jesus Himself. We are told, however, that "their eyes were holden that they should not know him" (Luke 24:16), meaning that they were kept from recognizing Him. In His resurrection body, Jesus, while recognizable, had a different appearance about Him; so He was not always immediately identifiable (cf. John 20:14-16). Here it seems God supernaturally *kept* these two from recognizing Jesus until the right moment.

The recollection of recent events (Luke 24:17-21). As they walked, Jesus asked the two what they were discussing. He had been with them long enough to hear some of their conversation, so His question concerned not the content of their discussion but rather its meaning and why it would cause them to look so "sad." His question was meant not to elicit information but to challenge their thinking and lead them toward seeing the truth and necessity of His resurrection.

Cleopas's answer revealed astonishment that this stranger could not

have heard anything about what had happened in Jerusalem. These things were no secret and were probably the topic of conversations everywhere.

When Jesus inquired further, the two disciples explained that the things they were discussing concerned Jesus of Nazareth. This One they described as "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Luke 24:19). While this description falls short of a full understanding of Jesus as the God-Man, it is certainly true. Jesus called Himself a Prophet (4:24; 13:33), and His words and works amazed people and identified Him as a Prophet beyond any of the ones of Old Testament days; He was One who was approved by God and people (cf. 4:14-15).

The two went on to explain that "the chief priests and . . . rulers delivered him (Jesus) to be condemned to death, and . . . crucified him" (Luke 24:20). Responsibility for Jesus' execution is laid on the Jewish leadership here, though the Romans carried out the crucifixion.

The two disciples then expressed their disappointment at the way things had turned out. They had hoped Jesus was the One who would redeem Israel (Luke 24:21). "Undoubtedly they possessed a more political than religious understanding of how the Christ would redeem Israel. For them the redemption of Israel meant Israel's liberation from their enemies, i.e., the Romans" (Stein, *Luke*, Broadman). What they failed to realize was that Jesus' death in fact brought redemption for all who would believe in Him.

CHRIST REVEALED—Luke 24:28-35

Invitation (Luke 24:28-29). Jesus rebuked these two for being "slow of heart to believe" (vs. 25). He then went

on to explain all that the Old Testament Scriptures said about the Christ (vss. 26-27).

As the two disciples came to their destination in Emmaus, Jesus acted as though He would continue on (Luke 24:28). This gave the disciples the opportunity to extend to Him their hospitality, which they did. The disciples insisted that He stay with them, since it was now late in the day. Jesus accepted their invitation.

Revelation (Luke 24:30-31). The three sat down to eat. During the meal, Jesus “took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.” There was nothing unique about these actions, but the similarities with the Lord’s Supper (22:19), as well as the feeding of the multitude (9:16), are clear.

As Jesus did this, the eyes of the two disciples “were opened” (Luke 24:31). That which previously had been withheld from them was now unveiled. Whether or not God used something in Jesus’ actions to open their eyes, His identity suddenly became clear to them. But just as they realized the risen Jesus was with them, He “vanished out of their sight.” His eating with them proved His physical presence; His sudden disappearance proved His resurrection body had some unique qualities (cf. John 20:19, 26).

Response (Luke 24:32-35). The disciples immediately recalled how they were stirred by this One’s teaching of the Scriptures as they traveled. This further confirmed that this was truly Jesus. Without hesitation, the two left for Jerusalem to tell the good news.

When they arrived in Jerusalem that night, they found the eleven disciples gathered together and affirming the Lord’s resurrection already. In fact, the resurrected Christ had appeared to Simon Peter. The Gospels do not

record the details of this meeting, though it is mentioned again in I Corinthians 15:5. The disciples, who now joined the Eleven, added their story to the growing testimony that the crucified and buried Jesus was now alive.

The disappointment and grief of Jesus’ disciples ended with the glorious news of His resurrection. Jesus’ death has meaning for us only because He did not remain in the tomb. His physical resurrection from the dead assures us that His death has freed from sin all who trust Him. We have hope, peace, and assurance of eternal life because Jesus lives.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We should be aware that it is easy to talk about Jesus even while ignoring His words to us (Luke 24:13-17).
2. Knowing the truth about Jesus is essential, but it is just the first step toward faith in Him (vss. 18-20).
3. If we are disappointed in Jesus, it is because we have misunderstood Him and His ways or we are harboring sin in our hearts (vs. 21).
4. Godly hospitality brings blessings to us as well as to those we serve (vss. 28-29).
5. We are called to present the gospel of Christ to people, but only God can open their eyes and hearts to Him (vss. 30-31).
6. There is never a reason for hopelessness when we know the risen Saviour (vss. 32-35).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Promises Kept

Lesson: Luke 24:36-53

Read: Luke 24:36-53

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44).

Lesson Exposition

The disciples were not easily convinced that their Master had been raised from the dead. Even as reports came from various sources on that Sunday describing His appearances, Jesus' followers were filled more with confusion, doubt, and fear than with the faith that later characterized them.

The risen Lord Jesus very patiently convinced them of His physical resurrection and allayed their fears. But this was just the first step. They needed to know the truth of His resurrection and what Scripture taught about it so that they would be prepared for the ministry they would have in the near future. And while Jesus would leave them again physically, He would also empower them for that ministry.

THE APPEARANCE OF CHRIST— Luke 24:36-43

Allaying the disciples' fears (Luke 24:36-38). “As they thus spake” indicates that the setting here is still the day of Jesus' resurrection. It was now evening, and various people had reported seeing the risen Jesus, including Peter (Simon), the two disciples

who had returned from Emmaus, and several women.

Thomas was not present (John 20:19-24), but the other ten remaining disciples were there, along with some others. As they discussed all that had happened that day, “Jesus himself stood in the midst of them” (Luke 24:36). His appearance was sudden and supernatural, for the doors to the room were locked (John 20:19).

Jesus' first words to them were “Peace be unto you” (Luke 24:36). While this was a typical Jewish greeting, it took on added meaning here, for the disciples “were terrified and afrighted” (vs. 37), thinking they were seeing a spirit.

Jesus further asked why they were troubled with doubts (Luke 24:38). While many thoughts were going through their minds, it seems their chief concern was the nature of the One who stood before them. Were they seeing an apparition or one who possessed a physical body?

Giving evidence of the resurrection (Luke 24:39-43). Jesus promptly addressed this concern. He pointed to

the wounds in His hands and feet and urged the disciples to touch His body. It was indeed real.

Still, the disciples “believed not for joy” (Luke 24:41). Intellectually, the proof was clear; but psychologically, they were hesitant to believe, thinking, as we say, it was too good to be true. They did not want to embrace a hope that could yet be shattered. Jesus then gave further evidence of His physical resurrection by eating in their presence the fish and honeycomb the disciples had with them. Clearly, Jesus was not a disembodied spirit, for only one with a physical body can eat.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus is central to our Christian faith (cf. I Cor. 15). It is the answer to any doubts that might arise in our minds. If Christ is truly risen—and He is—our hope is sure, and our faith is true. Surely that is why Jesus was so careful to give such clear evidence of His resurrection.

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST—

Luke 24:44-48

Reminders of Scripture (Luke 24:44-45). Jesus then began to teach His disciples things they needed to know. First, He reminded them of what He had previously taught them. This previous teaching was what the Old Testament said about Him, the Christ. “The law of Moses,” “the prophets,” and “the psalms” represent the Jews’ threefold division of the Old Testament. Thus, Jesus was saying the teaching of the entire Old Testament pointed to Him and had to be fulfilled.

As He had for the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus now “opened . . . their understanding” (Luke 24:45). Through His teaching and interpretation, the disciples now clearly saw the truth.

Requirements of Scripture (Luke 24:46-48). Specifically, the Old Testament foretold, even as Jesus Himself had, that He would suffer and die and be raised on the third day. Because God’s Word proclaimed it, it had to happen this way. Jesus’ presence with them now was proof that the teaching of Scripture is indeed trustworthy.

“Jesus went beyond showing how prophecy was fulfilled in his passion and resurrection. It was also fulfilled in the preaching of *repentance and forgiveness of sins*” (Morris, *Luke*, InterVarsity). Jesus may have had any number of Old Testament passages in mind (cf. Isa. 42:6; 60:3), but it was clear that God’s plan required that the gospel message “be preached . . . among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47; cf. Acts 1:8).

In short, the gospel calls on people to repent, or turn from their sin, placing their faith in Christ. This brings remission, or forgiveness, of sins (Luke 24:47). In saying the disciples were “witnesses of these things” (vs. 48), Jesus was looking ahead. They had been witnesses to His life, teaching, death, and resurrection; now they would be witnesses who would testify to these truths and proclaim the gospel of salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike.

THE PROMISE OF GOD—

Luke 24:49

Jesus not only called His followers to be continuing witnesses to the world; He also promised them the power to carry out that calling. This refers to the Father’s promise of the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit (cf. Joel 2:28-29; John 14:16, 26).

It is comforting to know that regardless of the limitations we might have—physical, financial, intellectual, and otherwise—we who know Christ have

been given the power to minister effectively for Him in our various locations and circumstances.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST— Luke 24:50-53

Jesus' departure (Luke 24:50-51). While the narrative continues seamlessly here, the events described in verses 50-53 actually occurred forty days later, as Luke himself makes clear from his narrative in Acts 1:3-12. After more than a month of periodically appearing to His followers and teaching them further about the "kingdom of God," He led them out to Bethany on the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:50). There He "blessed them" and then was "carried up into heaven" (vs. 51).

"Jesus' action in . . . blessing the disciples (v. 51) was priestly. . . [Luke] places Jesus clearly within the spiritual setting of the priesthood. As resurrected Messiah, Jesus has the authority to bless" (Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

Jesus' ascension marks the end of His physical presence with the disciples. His work would continue in heaven as their (and our) Intercessor (Heb. 7:25; 9:24). The special work of the Holy Spirit would soon begin. The disciples were prepared for the Spirit's imminent coming, and He would prepare them fully for the task before them.

The disciples' worship (Luke 24:52-53). Jesus had now departed. Before, when Jesus had left them to be crucified and buried, His followers had lost all hope and secluded themselves in fear. When He departed for heaven this time, their reaction was very different. Now they had the hope Christ's resurrection brings, and they had a fuller understanding of all that had happened (cf. vs. 45).

As a result, the disciples "worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). They were fully convinced not only of the resurrection but of Jesus' deity as well. This brought worship that expressed their inward joy. Their worship did not end on the Mount of Olives but continued in the temple as they praised God (vs. 53).

The resurrection is a past event, but it means that we can have the same joy today that it brought the first disciples. It gives us the assurance that the One we serve is the eternal God and that He has given us victory over death. He gives us eternal hope, a hope that looks beyond the sufferings and struggles of this life and gives us reason to rejoice.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. When confusion or doubts arise, we need to focus on the hope we have through the resurrected Lord (Luke 24:36-43).
2. The Bible will be largely a mystery to us unless we see that all its parts point to Jesus Christ (vs. 44).
3. The Bible is a supernatural book that requires that we seek divine help in understanding it fully (vss. 45-46).
4. God's eternal plan includes us as the witnesses called to take the gospel to the world (vss. 47-48).
5. God has promised to give us the power we need to fulfill the role He has for us (vs. 49).
6. The work of Christ in the past, along with His present work, calls for our continual worship and praise of Him (vss. 50-53).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

New Power to Proclaim the Truth

Lesson: Acts 2:1-13

Read: Acts 2:1-36

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).

Lesson Exposition

The coming of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the Lord’s promise was a unique event in history. It marked a new phase in the Spirit’s work and a new phase in God’s plan as the newly created church began its work of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

THE SPIRIT’S COMING—Acts 2:1-4

The gathered disciples (Acts 2:1). In obedience to Jesus’ command, the disciples remained in Jerusalem to await “the promise of the Father” (1:4). They were now gathered together on the Day of Pentecost. This group included at least the Eleven (cf. vs. 13) but may well have also included Matthias, who had replaced Judas (vss. 15-26), and even some or all of the 120 followers of Jesus who had previously gathered in an upper room in the city (vss. 13-15).

The Day of Pentecost fell on the fiftieth day “after the presenting of the first sheaf of the harvest on the day following the Passover Sabbath” (Kent,

Jerusalem to Rome, BMH). So this was about ten days after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:3).

The Feast of Pentecost, which is also called the Feast of Weeks, celebrated God’s provision of the annual harvest. In God’s providence, this day also would mark the beginning of a great spiritual harvest as the gospel was proclaimed publicly and thousands responded in faith.

The physical phenomena (Acts 2:2-3). Jesus had promised that after His departure, the Spirit would come to comfort, teach, guide, and empower His followers (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8). The Spirit’s coming would be unique in that He would be with believers *forever* (John 14:16). This marked a dramatic change, for prior to this the Spirit came upon people to empower them for certain tasks but did not reside permanently in all believers.

While the disciples looked forward to the Spirit’s coming upon them as Jesus had promised, they probably did not expect the phenomena that

accompanied it. The house where they had gathered was filled with the sound “of a rushing mighty wind” (Acts 2:2), and something like tongues of fire rested on each of them (vs. 3).

The reason for these unique phenomena is not altogether clear, but we find many unusual and unique events in the book of Acts that corroborate the work of the Holy Spirit. In an age when the Bible was not yet complete and the church was something entirely new, such signs made it abundantly clear that these believers had received the promise of the Spirit and that He was indeed at work in and through all of them. The wind and the fire together speak of the Spirit’s power (cf. Matt. 3:11).

The supernatural result (Acts 2:4). The disciples were immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. While being filled with the Spirit is mentioned elsewhere and can occur repeatedly (cf. 4:8, 31), what is described here is later referred to as the baptism of the Spirit (cf. 11:15-17). This is that act of the Spirit that brings believers into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). It occurred here for the first time. From the moment of salvation, it is the experience of every believer today to be indwelt by God the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:9).

The Spirit’s coming to indwell the disciples was accompanied with an outward sign: they “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). “Tongues” is simply a common term for “languages” (cf. Rev. 5:9).

While there is much discussion about the nature and purpose of the spiritual gift of tongues, what was going on here seems rather apparent. By the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were enabled to speak in languages they had not learned. As the following verses explain, these lan-

guages were those spoken in various regions of the Mediterranean world (Acts 2:6).

The disciples’ willingness to obey Jesus’ words and wait on the promised Spirit was rewarded. Too often we get “ahead” of God. In our impatience, we move without His direction and consequently without His blessing; and in time we pay the price for doing so. We should always be ready to respond to the opportunities the Lord opens for us, but we should not be so eager that we try to force open doors He has left closed.

THE CROWD’S RESPONSE TO THE SPIRIT’S COMING—Acts 2:5-13

The amazement of the crowd (Acts 2:5-8). Luke, the author of Acts, now inserted an important fact. There were Jewish people from “every nation” in Jerusalem at this time. This would have been obvious to a Jewish reader, for Pentecost was one of three annual festivals, along with Passover and Tabernacles, that required the appearance of all adult males at the central sanctuary (Deut. 16:16).

Those “devout” (Acts 2:5) Jews who lived outside the land of Israel came to Jerusalem for Passover, and many of them probably stayed for Pentecost. What a perfect time it was for the outpouring that was taking place!

It seems the disciples moved from the house to a public place, for a large group of people gathered around them. They were drawn either by the sound like a rushing wind or by the various languages they heard spoken.

As they came together and heard the disciples, they “were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:6). They recognized the disciples as Galileans; yet these people from various lands were hearing

these men speaking in their own dialects (vs. 8)! “These Galileans appeared for the moment to share between them a command of most of the tongues spoken throughout the known world” (Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, Eerdmans). There was no natural explanation as to how they were able to do this, especially since Galileans were looked down upon due to their manner of speaking (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

The diversity of the crowd (Acts 2:9-11). Luke now listed the various nationalities present. They included Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and those who dwelled in Mesopotamia. These were all from lands to the east of Israel. Judea was the Jewish homeland, though the word here may refer to a region in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia were provinces in Asia Minor that were home to many Jews. Egypt, Libya, and Cyrene were in Africa, where Jewish people also dwelled.

Many of these visitors to Jerusalem may also have spoken Aramaic, the language of Israel at this time. But now they were hearing the disciples speak the languages of their native lands.

What exactly were the disciples saying as they spoke in these various languages? We know they were proclaiming “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11), but what that included is left unstated. It surely must have included the works of the Messiah Jesus.

The questioning of the crowd (Acts 2:12-13). The responses of the crowd included both amazement and doubt. Some saw this as having some special meaning, though they did not know what that was. Others somehow dismissed it as the rantings of drunken

men.

There was meaning to the event. What was happening meant the Holy Spirit of God had come upon and into His people with power. And it drew a crowd who would have the opportunity to hear Peter’s bold sermon proclaiming Jesus as both Lord and Christ (cf. Acts 2:36). The response to that sermon added three thousand people to the community of believers (vs. 41) and prepared the way for the gospel proclamation far beyond Jerusalem.

God does not always use supernatural means to reach the lost, but He does always use His Word as faithfully presented by His people. Let us be sure we are committed to doing that in our little corner of the world.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. It is essential that we meet with fellow Christians as often as we can, but it is also essential that we be of one accord (Acts 2:1).
2. Physical signs are not what is most important; the spiritual reality of the Spirit’s power and presence is (vss. 2-4).
3. God gives us not only spiritual power but also opportunities to employ it in His service (vss. 5-6).
4. When we act in the Spirit’s power, it will grab the attention of unbelievers (vss. 7-8).
5. God’s goal should be ours: that all hear the gospel in their own language (vss. 9-11).
6. We should not be intimidated by mockery; it is a common response of unbelievers (vss. 12-13).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Living with Hope

Lesson: I Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

Read: I Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

TIME: A.D. 51

PLACE: from Corinth

GOLDEN TEXT—“God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thessalonians 5:9).

Lesson Exposition

Paul’s first letter to the church in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:1-10) addressed some concerns that had come to his attention.

HOPE FOR THE DEAD— I Thess. 4:13-18

The assurance of hope (I Thess. 4:13). The Thessalonians had failed to understand how Christ’s return related to those who had already died. Sadly, their ignorance of this truth had led them to “sorrow” like those who had no hope.

The Thessalonians’ error concerned those who were “asleep” (I Thess. 4:13), or dead. It seems they believed that those who had died would “miss the blissful reunion, or at least come behind those who lived until” His coming (Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, Moody).

The reason for hope (I Thess. 4:14-17). There was no reason for such grief, for Christ’s death and resurrection give hope to all who believe in Him. Paul thus began to explain Christ’s coming in relation to both the living and the dead. First, he said that those who have died in Christ will be with Him. Just as the resurrected Christ will re-

turn, so the saints who have died will be raised to join Him. Second, Paul said that the living will not “prevent,” or precede, those who have died.

The first phase of Christ’s return will occur when He descends “from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God” (I Thess. 4:16), announcing the arrival of this glorious event. “The dead in Christ shall rise first”; then believers who are alive at that time will be “caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (vs. 17).

This event is called the rapture. Christ will come to take His own to be with Him forever. Later, after the time of judgment, He will return to earth to establish His righteous kingdom.

The “Latin, *raptus* [for ‘caught up’] is the source of the popular designation of this event as the ‘rapture.’ So sudden will it be that Paul likens it to a blinking of the eye (I Cor 15:52). In this rapid sequence the living will undergo an immediate change from mortality to immortality. . . . Together with the resurrected believers, they will ascend, be enshrouded in the clouds of the sky (cf. Acts 1:9), and

meet the Lord somewhere in the interspace between earth and heaven” (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

The comfort of hope (I Thess. 4:18). These truths were a source of great comfort to the Thessalonians concerning their departed brethren, and they give comfort to us too. As we face difficult days, we can look forward with hope.

INSTRUCTION FOR THE LIVING— I Thess. 5:1-11

Be watchful (I Thess. 5:1-7). While Christ’s return offers comfort to believers, it means judgment for unbelievers. The “day of the Lord” describes a time of divine judgment before the establishment of His kingdom. Believers will join the Lord, but unbelievers will suffer His just judgment.

Paul reminded his readers that there was no need to speculate about the timing of this day (I Thess. 5:1). It will come “as a thief in the night” (vs. 2)—at an unexpected time when people are lulled into thinking they have found peace and safety.

Christians, however, are not in the darkness of sin (I Thess. 5:4). They are “the children of light, and . . . of the day” (vs. 5). They live in the realm of the truth and will not experience the coming judgment, for the Lord will deliver them from it.

Paul told the Thessalonians to “watch and be sober” (I Thess. 5:6). They were to be prepared for the Lord’s coming. They would be delivered from His judgment, but they needed to guard against adopting the attitudes of unbelievers (vs. 7).

Be prepared (I Thess. 5:8-10). As we look forward to the Lord’s coming, we should be in complete control of our senses. Such soberness is assured by clothing ourselves with faith,

love, and the hope of salvation. These Christian virtues protect us from worldly attitudes and prepare us for Christ’s coming. Salvation here is the promised deliverance from God’s judgment. Keeping this hope alive inspires us to live holy lives (cf. I John 3:2-3) and to take comfort in knowing that because Christ died for us, we will be with Him forever (I Thess. 5:10).

Be encouraged (I Thess. 5:11). As the rapture brings us comfort (4:18), so the judgment that follows it is the basis for edifying one another (5:11). As the Day of the Lord approaches, we should be encouraging one another to live holy lives that testify to the hope we have in Christ.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Ignorance of biblical teaching can rob us of the hope Christ has given us (I Thess. 4:13-14).
2. There are no second-class saints, for all are included in God’s plan (vss. 15-17).
3. We find comfort and hope in the doctrine of Christ’s return (vs. 18).
4. We should not presume to tell unbelievers when judgment is coming, but we should warn them that it is coming upon them unless they repent (5:1-3).
5. The hope we have in Christ’s return should lead us not to spiritual laziness but to holiness of life (vss. 4-8).
6. It is not enough to take comfort in God’s future plans; they must be used to exhort our fellow Christians (vss. 9-11).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Standing Firm in Hope

Lesson: II Thessalonians 2:1-3, 9-17

Read: II Thessalonians 2:1-17

TIME: A.D. 51

PLACE: from Corinth

GOLDEN TEXT—“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, . . . comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work” (II Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Lesson Exposition

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul addressed another misunderstanding. This one too concerned the end times.

CORRECTION REGARDING THE END TIMES—II Thess. 2:1-3

Paul’s plea (II Thess. 2:1-3a). In speaking of the “coming of our Lord Jesus” and “our gathering together unto him,” Paul was pointing to the first phase of Christ’s return—the rapture (cf. I Thess. 4:13-17). He appealed to his readers on the basis of what he had already taught them about this event.

The Thessalonians were in danger of being “shaken” and “troubled” (II Thess. 2:2) by teaching that the “day of Christ,” or the Day of the Lord, had already arrived—that the rapture had already occurred and that they were now living in the prophesied time of tribulation.

This teaching purportedly had come from Paul himself, and apparently a forged letter from Paul had been circulated to promote these ideas. The persecution the Thessalonians were undergoing (II Thess. 1:4-5) surely

contributed to their willingness to accept this teaching. But Paul warned that they must not allow anyone to deceive them in this matter.

Paul’s explanation (II Thess. 2:3b). Paul explained that the Day of the Lord had not yet begun because two prophesied events that would mark the beginning of that day had not yet occurred. First, the “falling away,” the apostasy, had not yet come. While many had turned from the faith, this was not the apostasy of the end times that Paul spoke of in his final letters (I Tim. 4:1-3; II Tim. 3:1-5; 4:3-4).

Second, Paul said that the “man of sin . . . the son of perdition” (II Thess. 2:3) had not yet been revealed. This is the antichrist. He will be clearly revealed to those who know Scripture at the very outset of the Day of the Lord and the tribulation period (cf. Dan. 9:27). “He is called . . . ‘the son of perdition.’ The Hebrew idiom ‘son of’ indicates character or destiny. . . . The same expression describes Judas Iscariot” (Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

Since neither of these events had taken place, the Thessalonians could be sure they were not now living in the prophesied period of judgment. Indeed, as Paul said, believers have not been “appointed . . . to wrath” (I Thess. 5:9).

INSTRUCTION REGARDING THE END TIMES—II Thess. 2:9-12

About the antichrist’s power (II Thess. 2:9-10a). If the Day of the Lord had already begun and the Thessalonians actually were in the tribulation, the antichrist would have been present and obvious to them. His satanic power to perform impressive signs and wonders will deceive multitudes of people.

About the antichrist’s followers (II Thess. 2:10b-12). The very fact that people are deceived by the antichrist will confirm that they have rejected God’s truth and salvation. God has a purpose in all this. Indeed, since these people “deliberately chose falsehood in defiance of the truth of God, God subjects them to the power of the error they chose” (Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, Moody). He will turn them over to believing a “lie” and to the condemnation they deserve.

ASSURANCE REGARDING THE END TIMES—II Thess. 2:13-17

Paul’s thanksgiving (II Thess. 2:13-14). After the sad description of those deceived by the antichrist, Paul thanked God that the believers in Thessalonica had been chosen for salvation and “belief of the truth.” They were not—and would not be—among those who are deceived. Like all who accept the gospel, they were destined for glory, not wrath.

Paul’s exhortation (II Thess. 2:15). The Thessalonians’ hope was in Christ. And this is a hope they could “stand

fast” in. Paul exhorted them to “stand fast in the midst of opposition . . . and in the face of uncertainty of the time of the return of Christ” (Ryrie, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Moody). Indeed, they would stand strong as long as they clung to the true teachings of God.

Paul’s prayer (II Thess. 2:16-17). Paul concluded by exhorting the believers to “stand fast” (vs. 15) in the truth. He prayed that the One who had given them “everlasting consolation” (vs. 16) through Christ would comfort them and make them stand strong in their words and works.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We must never allow personal struggles to lead us to question God’s plan or love for us (II Thess. 2:1-3).
2. The farther we stray from the truth of God’s Word, the more likely it is we will be deceived by lies (vss. 9-10).
3. We should warn those who reject God that they run the risk of being abandoned by Him (vss. 11-12).
4. Our prayers should be filled with thanksgiving for what God has done for us and others (vss. 13-14).
5. To stand fast in the faith, we must hold tightly to biblical teaching (vs. 15).
6. Our prayer should always be that God would help us stand strong for Him in our words and works (vss. 16-17).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

A Living Hope

Lesson: I Peter 1:3-12

Read: I Peter 1:1-12

TIME: A.D. 63

PLACE: from Babylon (possibly Rome)

GOLDEN TEXT—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (I Peter 1:3).

Lesson Exposition

In writing to persecuted believers throughout Asia Minor (I Pet. 1:1), Peter reminded them that in spite of their suffering they still had reason to rejoice.

REJOICING IN A LIVING HOPE— I Pet. 1:3-4

Peter began by praising God for His great mercy in bringing about the new birth of all believers. This new birth results in a new and “lively” (I Pet. 1:3), or living, hope. This living hope we have is the opposite of an “empty, false, deceptive hope” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude*, Augsburg), for it is based on the resurrection of our living Saviour.

The hope we have as Christians is that of an inheritance that cannot be destroyed (I Pet. 1:4). It is kept for us by God, awaiting the time when we take possession of it. This inheritance includes all the blessings of heaven, including Christ Himself.

REJOICING IN GOD’S PRESERVATION—I Pet. 1:5

Peter declared that not just our heavenly inheritance is kept for us by

God; we ourselves are also kept by Him. His power preserves us for the time we will take possession of our inheritance. That is when the salvation He has secured for us through Christ will be finally and fully revealed to us.

REJOICING IN TRIALS—I Pet. 1:6-9

The extent of trials (I Pet. 1:6). While the salvation and inheritance Peter described is a source of great joy, this hope was confronted by the difficult circumstances of Peter’s persecuted audience. How could they rejoice in their salvation even while they suffered? The apostle pointed out that their trials (“temptations”) were “for a season.” Unlike their eternal inheritance, their suffering was temporary. They might be distressed for a time, but that should not decrease the joy of their salvation.

The benefit of trials (I Pet. 1:7). Furthermore, “the trial of . . . faith” is used by God to refine the believer’s faith, just as fire refines gold. Such a tested faith can bring greater praise and honor from Christ when we appear before Him, and this is reason for rejoicing

even in our suffering.

“Gold is one of man’s most prized objects . . . Extremely durable, gold belongs to the perishing world-order. Faith, which is more valuable than gold because it lasts longer and reaches beyond this temporal order, is purified in the tests of life. Gold, not faith, is presently valued by men. But God will set his stamp of approval on faith” (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

The right perspective in trials (I Pet. 1:8-9). Christians who are being persecuted must keep a proper perspective. Their faith has been properly placed in the risen Lord, who guarantees eternal life with Him. They cannot see Him presently; but even as they suffer they can rejoice that the end result of their faith is assured. The salvation they have received in Christ has a future aspect, and it will be fully realized when they step into His presence in heaven.

REJOICING IN THE GREATNESS OF SALVATION—I Pet. 1:10-12

A salvation explored by the prophets (I Pet. 1:10-11). Our thoughts are to be directed constantly to the salvation we have in Christ. When we understand the true greatness of God’s work of salvation, we can rejoice regardless of our earthly circumstances. Peter emphasized the greatness of our salvation by pointing out that the prophets of old who spoke about “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” did not themselves fully grasp what it all meant. It was God’s plan that it remain something of a mystery to them.

As Peter’s readers suffered, they would be encouraged by remembering that Christ too suffered before entering His glory.

A salvation revealed to believers (I Pet. 1:12). Things the prophets could not fully understand about Christ and His suffering have been revealed to believers since the death and resurrection of Christ. We see clearly what was unclear to them. As such, their role had been to minister to us.

Behind all this was the Holy Spirit, moving some people to write the Scriptures and others to preach the gospel to us so that we could ultimately receive and enjoy the salvation God has given. It is a great salvation indeed—so great that even “the angels desire to look into” it (I Pet. 1:12). When we possess such a salvation and the inheritance it brings, there is *always* reason to rejoice.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Our living hope comes from our living Saviour; to abandon hope is to reject His gift (I Pet. 1:3-4).
2. We can be thankful that God keeps us by His power, not by our feeble efforts (vs. 5).
3. Trials should not rob us of joy; they are God’s means of strengthening our faith (vss. 6-7).
4. We must ever keep our faith planted in Christ, for only there will we find indescribable joy (vss. 8-9).
5. We should accept suffering as part of God’s plan, for it was even part of God’s plan for His Son (vss. 10-11).
6. We can rejoice in knowing that the Holy Spirit has moved people and arranged circumstances to allow us to come to God (vs. 12).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Equipped for Godliness

Lesson: II Peter 1:3-14

Read: II Peter 1:1-21

TIME: about A.D. 64

PLACE: unknown

GOLDEN TEXT—“His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (II Peter 1:3).

Lesson Exposition

Peter’s second epistle was written shortly before his death. In it he encouraged believers to grow in grace and live godly lives, and he gave them directions for doing so.

GOD’S ROLE IN GODLINESS—

II Pet. 1:3-4

Providing the power (II Pet. 1:3). We are not left alone to find our way toward godly living. God Himself has the major role. “His divine power” has given us all we need for living spiritually centered lives characterized by godliness.

This divine power comes to us through an intimate knowledge of Christ, the One who has called us to Himself. “Glory and virtue” (II Pet. 1:3) speak of His splendor and moral excellence revealed in salvation (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan). They describe His Person and work, which form the basis of His promises in verse 4.

Providing the promises (II Pet. 1:4). Through Christ, God has given us “great and precious promises.” Peter did not list what those promis-

es were, but what follows indicates they related to salvation and the inheritance of the believer (cf. I Pet. 1:3-4).

Instead of the promises themselves, Peter listed the results of the fulfillment of those promises. Through salvation we have been made “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4); that is, by faith in Christ, we are empowered to overcome and escape the wickedness of the world, which is generated by sinful lusts.

OUR ROLE IN GODLINESS—

II Pet. 1:5-11

Adding to our faith (II Pet. 1:5-7). The new birth and the spiritual power that comes with it are essential to our growth in godliness, but they do not mean that we have no role ourselves. We must cooperate with God in this growth by building on the foundation He has laid.

To the faith we have already as followers of Christ we are to diligently work to add the seven qualities Peter listed. This requires hard work and a lifelong commitment to spiritual

growth.

“Virtue” (II Pet. 1:5) is moral goodness, which is the practical and natural expression of faith. “Knowledge” comes from diligent study of God’s Word. “Temperance” (vs. 6) means self-control, and “patience” here means endurance, especially in trying times. “Godliness” is reverent conduct toward God.

To these are to be added “brotherly kindness” (II Pet. 1:7) and “charity” (love). These two virtues go hand in hand. Kindness toward our brethren should lead to a love that reaches out unconditionally to all people.

Being certain of our faith (II Pet. 1:8-11). Peter’s list in verses 5-7 serves as a very practical guide to our spiritual condition. If we see these virtues increasing and multiplying, we can be certain of having fruitful lives in service to Christ.

On the other hand, a lack of these qualities indicates a lack of spiritual growth, suggesting we have forgotten that we have been “purged from [our] old sins” (II Pet. 1:9). Our lives then show little evidence of the work of Christ.

In fact, the absence of this evidence may even call into question our very salvation. Thus, Peter said to “make your calling and election sure” (II Pet. 1:10). We are to examine ourselves in light of these spiritual qualities. Their presence not only makes us fruitful; it also gives us assurance of a glorious entrance into Christ’s future kingdom.

“In [Christ’s] coming to earth, his rule or kingdom will be visibly manifested and imposed . . . This will mark the end of this age and inaugurate the earthly messianic phase of the kingdom . . . last[ing] for a thousand years. Yet the kingdom does not end, for God’s reign is eternal” (Gaebelein).

PETER’S ROLE IN GODLINESS—

II Pet. 1:12-14

Reminding us (II Pet. 1:12). Peter’s role in this whole process was to remind his fellow Christians of these truths and to urge them to acquire the needed virtues.

Stirring us (II Pet. 1:13-14). Peter’s aim was not just to remind them, though. He was also attempting to stir them to apply the power and promises of God to move toward fruitful lives.

Like Peter, who knew his time in this world was short (II Pet. 1:14), we have limited time. We should follow his example by using that time to actively grow more Christlike by God’s grace and to urge others to do the same.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. In Christ we possess all we need to live godly lives; we have no excuse for falling short of that (II Pet. 1:3).
2. We should not look within for the resources we need for life but to God and His promises (vs. 4).
3. The Christian life demands an unending commitment to developing and practicing godly virtues (vss. 5-7).
4. The fruitfulness of our work for Christ is directly related to the content of our character (vs. 8).
5. Godly character is the true measure of our commitment to Christ (vss. 9-11).
6. As long as we live, we should be encouraging others toward godliness by both our words and our actions (vss. 12-14).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

Serving One Another

Lesson: I Peter 4:1-11

Read: I Peter 4:1-19

TIME: A.D. 63

PLACE: from Babylon (possibly Rome)

GOLDEN TEXT—“As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (I Peter 4:10).

Lesson Exposition

The New Testament is filled with exhortations to serve Christ and to serve others. The two concepts are inseparable. If we are to serve others, we must adopt the selfless attitude of Christ and reject our old ways.

LIVING IN THE PRESENT, NOT THE PAST—I Pet. 4:1-6

Adopting the attitude of Christ (I Pet. 4:1-2). Christ’s suffering is a major theme of I Peter (cf. 2:20-25), and the author returned to it in chapter 4 in order to encourage suffering believers to have the same attitude as Christ.

Even as they suffer, Christians are to imitate Christ’s patient attitude and to remember that in dying they are freed from sin. One who is physically dead is no longer subject to temptation and sin. The point Peter was making is that spiritually believers have died with Christ and thus are free from sin’s power. They need to live in the knowledge of that truth (cf. Rom. 6:1-7). The will of God, not fulfilling the desires of the flesh, is to be their goal.

Rejecting the attitudes of the past (I Pet. 4:3-6). Like Peter’s readers, we all lived like “Gentiles,” or pa-

gans, before salvation. We had ample opportunity to follow the lusts of the flesh into all sorts of sins. Those sins listed here were typical of the pagans of Peter’s day, but they are also typical of unbelievers in our own day.

In Christ we have new desires and the power to overcome sin. As a result, unbelievers often think it strange that we do not pursue the same course of life as they do. They might even speak evil of us. We must not be intimidated by their hostility or tempted to join them, for Peter reminded us that those people must one day stand before the divine Judge of the living and dead. Thus, these voices from the past have nothing to offer us.

First Peter 4:6 can be quite confusing, but the best interpretation seems to be that the dead are “those Christians who heard and believed the gospel during their lifetime, but afterward died” (Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude*, Baker). These deaths were likely due to persecution. They were “judged according to men in the flesh”—that is, by unbelievers—but they were and are alive in the spirit.

This statement should serve as a warning not to judge ourselves or others by the world's standards. The unbelieving world judges people by its own perverted values. Those who are suffering for their faith in Christ are seldom considered worthy of praise in the world's eyes. Our understanding of what is truly important must be determined by God's Word alone.

LIVING FOR GOD'S GLORY— I Pet. 4:7-11

A call to watchfulness (I Pet. 4:7). As Christians we are to see life from an eternal perspective. Though we do not know the timing, we know the end is approaching. Christ's return and the end of all things is a motivation for us to be "sober" (self-controlled), watchful, and prayerful, always guarding our relationship with God.

A call to serve others (I Pet. 4:8-11). Our lives are also to be marked by a Christlike commitment to serving others. This means having "fervent charity," or love, among ourselves. Such love will be characterized by a spirit that is willing to forgive even a "multitude of sins."

Such concern for others will also be evidenced by offering hospitality to fellow believers without hesitation or complaint. "Hospitality between Christians was an important, concrete expression of love in a world without our modern inns and hotels. This virtue . . . is commanded for us all . . . Hospitality is to be 'without grumbling'—a phrase that connotes the difficulty of carrying out this command. In certain cultures . . . the bringing of strangers into a house may be somewhat shocking. Yet Christians overcome these conventions" (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zonder-

van).

Every gift we receive should be readily used. The spiritual gifts God has given us are to be used to minister to one another. Everyone who belongs to Christ has something to offer; each one has been gifted to serve others.

Peter concluded by emphasizing that our service, whether great or small, whether in speaking or serving, is to be selflessly offered to God's glory and praise. God alone, through Jesus Christ, is to receive all "praise and dominion for ever and ever" (I Pet. 4:11). We are called to serve others and honor God, not elevate ourselves.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. In Christ we are free from the power of sin; we have no reason or excuse for living as though sin were still our master (I Pet. 4:1-2).
2. A changed life will bring hostility from the world, for our lives are a rebuke to sinful lifestyles (vss. 3-4).
3. We should not fear the unjust judgment of unbelievers, for only God's judgment is truly important (vss. 5-6).
4. Keeping Christ's coming in mind will keep us in the right place spiritually (vs. 7).
5. Every Christian can minister effectively to others because he has been equipped by God to do so (vss. 8-10).
6. We have been called to serve others, not ourselves; and in so doing we honor God (vs. 11).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

The Hope of His Coming

Lesson: II Peter 3:3-15a

Read: II Peter 3:1-18

TIME: about A.D. 64

PLACE: unknown

GOLDEN TEXT—“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

Lesson Exposition

Peter’s epistle was intended to remind his readers of the prophets’ words and the Lord’s commands through His apostles (II Pet. 3:1-2). Particularly prominent are those scriptural statements regarding the Lord’s coming.

THE ERROR OF SCOFFERS—

II Pet. 3:3-7

They follow their lusts (II Pet. 3:3). In introducing his subject, Peter warned that in the “last days” there would come “scoffers, walking after their own lusts.” The “last days” broadly speaks of the time between Christ’s first and second comings. As Christ’s return approaches, those who deny Him will be present and vocal (cf. chap. 2). The love of their own lusts will lead to their denial of the truth.

They deny the Second Coming (II Pet. 3:4). Specifically, these people scoff at the idea of the Lord’s return. Their argument is a familiar one: Nothing has changed since the beginning; there is no divine intervention; all things occur naturally.

They are willingly ignorant (II Pet. 3:5-7). The scoffers’ argument reveals an ignorance that is willful. They simply

refuse to believe the truth that God has indeed intervened in history. Verse 5 describes the original Creation. This event itself required God’s activity as did the universal Flood of Noah’s day (vs. 6).

Because they deny these historic truths, the scoffers are incapable of knowing that the same God will intervene again in bringing about divine judgment on the world He created and judged once before. The coming judgment by fire will bring with it the condemnation of the wicked.

THE WISDOM OF BELIEVERS—

II Pet. 3:8-15a

They have the Lord’s perspective (II Pet. 3:8-9). God’s children are not to be disturbed by the ignorant arguments of the ungodly. Yes, we continue to await Christ’s promised return, but we must do so with God’s perspective. While the Lord’s coming might seem to be delayed, He is not bound by our limited concept of time. With the eternal God, a thousand years is as one day (cf. Ps. 90:4).

If the Lord’s coming seems to be

delayed, it is only because He desires all to be saved and is patiently allowing sinners more time to repent. Scoffers presume on the patience of God.

They accept the Lord's promise (II Pet. 3:10). Though many years have passed, believers must not be moved from God's promise that the Day of the Lord will indeed come and that it "will come as a thief in the night," suddenly and unexpectedly. The Day of the Lord refers primarily to a time of judgment, often the judgment of the end times. Here it looks beyond Christ's return to the end of His millennial kingdom, when the present heavens and earth will be "burned up," to be replaced by the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Rev. 21:1).

"The 'elements' (*stoicheia*) could be stars (heavenly bodies) or the basic materials that make up the world. . . . It is possible that in this verse Peter is looking at three realms (the heavens, that of the heavenly bodies, the earth); . . . Some have seen the splitting of the atom or atomic fusion in this verse" (Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

They respond properly (II Pet. 3:11-15a). The judgment of the Day of the Lord reveals the horrifying nature of sin. Reflecting upon God's ultimate response to humanity's sin should cause us to pursue holy living.

In fact, when we realize the coming judgment is the vindication of God's holiness and will usher in "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (II Pet. 3:13), we can properly look forward to that day and perhaps even hasten its coming. If the word "hasting" means here (vs. 12) to speed along, it probably indicates that our efforts to take the gospel to others is God's means of bringing them to re-

pentance, thus helping to bring to completion His great plan for the ages. However, it must be noted that the word may simply mean to eagerly desire.

In II Peter 3:14, the apostle again stressed the practical value of looking ahead to the fulfillment of God's plan. A proper perspective on the future gives us a proper perspective on our present lives. It drives us to diligently pursue holiness so that we are "blameless" and enjoy true peace. And it helps us understand God's desire for people to be saved and His patience in withholding His judgment as long as He does (vs. 15).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The scoffing of unbelievers is to be expected and must never be allowed to distract us from God's promises (II Pet. 3:3-4).
2. We should never listen to those who willingly reject God's past works (vss. 5-7).
3. We will be frustrated by God's promises if we insist on His fulfilling them in our way and in our time (vss. 8-9).
4. God does not reveal future events to satisfy our curiosity; He does it to motivate us to holiness (vss. 10-11).
5. The coming judgment should not frighten us but encourage us to live holy lives appropriate to our eternal home (vss. 12-13).
6. Righteous living is encouraged and empowered by the Lord, but it takes diligent effort on our part (vss. 14-15).

—Jarl K. Waggoner.