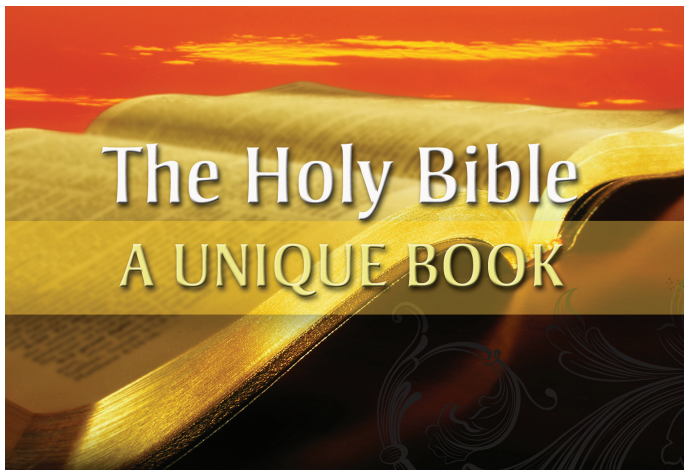

Pilgrims Journal

“They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.” (Heb 11:13–16)

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The Holy Bible—A Unique Book

“The Bible is full of mistakes.” “The Bible is just piece of classic literature: why take it so literally?” “Why give your life and mind over to a book?” “I have a hard time reading that book—too many ‘thee’s’ and ‘thou’s’.” “The teachings of the Bible are not so much different than the sacred texts of the Hindus or the Muslims, or any other religion for that matter.” And on and on it goes...

There seems to be no end to the shallow questions and responses that are often given by some to avoid the claims of God and His Word on their lives. But, to be fair, there is some truth to the first sentence of this article. **The Bible is full of mistakes.** The first mistake can be found with Adam and Eve. The second one with Cain as he killed his brother Abel. And mistake upon mistake (or should we call them what they are: sin) has been made because man turns a deaf ear to his Creator, Who is only looking out for man’s well being. The honesty of the Bible in revealing the flaws of many of its heroes is itself a testimony to its accuracy. This transparency of the scriptures can be appreciated by sincere seekers.

This leads us to the dual purpose of this article: to convince the **sincere seeker of truth** of the unique truthfulness of God’s Holy Word, and to show how that

uniqueness applies to our lives today. **The Bible is unique in its teachings, its survival, its authorship, its translation, and its circulation.** No one needs to protect the reputation of the Bible—the Bible stands ready to defend itself against the naysayers, as seen, for example, through a study of fulfilled prophecy.

Unique In Its Circulation & Translation

We begin by a look into *the uniqueness of the Bible’s circulation and translation.* A 1965 statistic declared that in order to keep up with the demand in that year, Bible societies would have to print and distribute close to 33,000 Bibles a day for all 365 days of the year. That represents one Bible every 3 seconds, 22 every minute, and 1369 every hour. In the calendar year 2003, the Canadian Bible Society estimated that some 21.4 million copies of the whole Bible, 14.4 million New Testaments, and 15.5 million portions (Gospels of John, etc) were distributed. No other book in human history can make claim to such universal demand and publication as the Bible. Although men are still imprisoned for publishing and proclaiming the good news of God’s great love to man, the Word of God continues to spread throughout the world, especially into lands of persecution. Stories are abundant about how pallets and cases of Bibles have been brought across borders of countries hostile to the Bible and Christianity. As for its

translation, no other book in man's history has been translated into more languages than the Bible. Of the close to 6500 languages known in the world today, the whole Bible has been translated into 414 languages, the New Testament into 1068 languages, and portions (Gospels of John & other) into 2355. Admittedly, these facts do not prove that the Bible is God's word, but they certainly do testify to its uniqueness. Again, the sincere seeker of truth should at least be provoked to further inquiry, as to why this book has merited such continuous demand.

Unique In Its Authorship

The Bible is also *unique in its authorship*. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2Pet 1:21). These "holy men" were of diverse occupations (from farmers to royalty), education (from unlearned to erudite), location (from three different continents), and disposition (from backslidden to passionate). Again, some portions of the Bible were written in times of immense despair, and others in moments of overwhelming joy in God. Solomon was a king of incredible wisdom and wealth, whereas simple Amos was "a herdsman, a gatherer of sycamore fruit" (Amos 7:14). Men such as David, Moses, Daniel, and Joshua were political and/or military leaders, while others such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Samuel

were dedicated wholly to the service of God. The apostle Paul was well taught in the literary classics of his time and also astute in his Jewish faith; the beloved physician Luke, a fellow Bible writer and travel companion of Paul, was an educated Gentile. Peter and John, however, were "unlearned." From such diversity, how could one expect the unity as seen in the Bible?

If you were to take any topic of discussion today, and have 40-odd people to write or comment on that same topic, you would expect a variety of opinions, and even contradictory statements. If those 40 people were also spread across the occupational and educational spectrum, with the influences of their diverse cultures and customs across their three continents—and were furthermore scattered across the strata of time: writing over the course of 1500 years (some 40 generations)—you would definitely expect an extremely incoherent body of text, an inharmonious conglomeration of ideas. Yet God's Word, written under those very circumstances, has an undeniable continuity about it. All of the human authors mentioned, and the many more besides, speak with one heart and mind. The law and the prophets, the poetry and the history, the epistles and the gospels, all speak in unison, with a voice that declares: God is love, man is fallen, and God in His love has restored and redeemed fallen man unto Himself. The "Paradise Lost" of Genesis

becomes the “Paradise Regained” of Revelation. Again, the cohesiveness of scriptures by itself does not alone establish the infallibility of scripture, but even detractors of God’s Word will have difficulty denying this uniqueness of God’s Word: its authorship.

Unique In Its Survival

The Bible is also *unique in its survival*. No book in the history of man has been attacked with such venomous hatred. “And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he [King Jehoiakim] cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth” (Jer 36:23). Modern day Jehoiakims even to this day are doing their utmost to block the Word (whether written or spoken) from going forth, but all such efforts will prove useless. “We might as well put our shoulder to the burning wheel of the sun, and try to stop it on its flaming course, as attempt to stop the circulation of the Bible,” writes Sidney Collett in his book *All About the Bible*. The famous French infidel Voltaire once boasted that his pen alone would destroy the edifice that took the apostles centuries to build. He died in 1778. Some 50 years later his house and press were put to good use in the Lord’s work by the Geneva Bible Society. “There shall none of My words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith

the Lord God” (Eze 12:28). Voltaire could not make his own words come to pass, but God’s words shall be fulfilled (to be discussed in more detail later). The courageous survival of scriptures against the most vehement detractors is a testament again to its uniqueness.

Unique In Its Teaching

The Bible is also *unique in its teaching*. As mentioned earlier, it does not shy away from the major sins and faults of its characters. The flaws of its heroes give opportunities to reveal God’s nature in His dealings, whether by judgment or by His mercy. The Bible offers God’s wisdom for man to live by. Heavenly encouragement beckons to man, to persevere to the end and obtain the prize, an eternity in sweet communion with the One Who created him. If we would pay attention to the Bible’s central teachings (repentance, faith, love, mercy, surrender to Him, etc), our lives would be enriched: physically, morally, mentally, and spiritually. Where else do you see such teachings as found in the Sermon on the Mount? Christ said He did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but rather to fulfill them. The law, previously given by God in the Old Testament, was to exact revenge, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Now His wisdom found in Matthew 5:39 is “that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

Where else can you find such beautiful teaching? The Bible is very practical for our day to day lives. Proverbs 22:7 says “the borrower is servant to the lender.” A recent statistic has revealed that the top ten credit card companies own 87.5% of the \$972.5 billion owed by consumers in the USA alone. If those credit cards were placed one to another lengthwise it would reach some 70 miles into space. Did you ever get a call from a collection agency looking for payment? “My check is in the mail.” Right! It is in the Bible that we see God’s righteousness revealed: “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). This uniqueness of the Bible’s teaching doesn’t necessarily prove the Bible to be true, yet considered in unison with the other uniquenesses of scripture, it would be hard to reach a different conclusion.

Unique In Its Prophecies

The Bible is also unique in the prophecies it contains. No other book has been able to predict future events like the Bible. For the sake of brevity we shall just consider some prophecies concerning Tyre and Babylon in the Old Testament. Much more can be said of the prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ but, God willing, that will be dealt with in a future article.

Consider any of the major seaports of the world. International commerce is carried on through the shipping trade there. Tyre was such a place: a place where the trade of the eastern world would meet the west. Many books

written on the subject of apologetics (ability to give good reasons for faith) include the prophecy of Ezekiel 26:4,12. Here Ezekiel prophesies how the nations would “...*destroy the walls of Tyrus, and break down her towers: I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock...and they shall make a spoil of thy riches, and make a prey of thy merchandise, and destroy thy pleasant house: and they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water.*” Again, in verse 14: “*And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon.*” Only three years after Ezekiel gave this prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar started what was to become a thirteen-year siege of this great metropolis. When the inhabitants finally capitulated, he crashed down their gates, only to find that most of the inhabitants had fled to an island about a half mile off the coast. After sacking and destroying the mainland part of the city, he left with little or no spoil. Note: Nebuchadnezzar was sent there by God Himself. God was going to pay the freight. God recompensed Nebuchadnezzar and his army by giving him the land of Egypt (See Eze 29:17-20).

About 240 years later, in 332 BC, an irate Alexander the Great comes onto the scene. After taking the mainland city, he took the debris of the city and with it built a causeway out to the island. This was no easy feat, as the defenders staged raids on the work crews and inflicted

whatever damage they could. But Alexander was able to procure some ships from other Phoenician cities he had conquered (to protect himself from the marauding parties), and after seven months he conquered it. From that time on, several times it tried to rise from its ashes, but unto this present day the only things to be seen there are fishing vessels and nets drying.

Prophecy Against Babylon

Babylon stands out in history as a great city. No wonder Nebuchadnezzar declared, *“Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”* (Dan 4:30). This city was quite glorious for its time. Consider these stats about Babylon: 14 mile sides, 56 mile circumference (compare it to the Washington DC Capital Beltway, I-495, which is 66 miles), 196 square miles, 30 feet wide moat, double walls, outer wall 311 feet high and 87 feet wide (they could race 8 chariots abreast), 250 watchtowers 100 feet higher than the wall, 100 gates of solid brass, hinges and jambs. There were 55 temples to Marduk, 53 to heavenly gods, 300 to earthly gods, 189 to Ishtar, Nergal, etc. But God was against her! *“And Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the*

shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged” (Isa 13:19-22). This prophecy as well as one in Jeremiah 51:26 *“And they shall not take from thee a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but thou shalt be desolate for ever, saith the Lord,”* declare the judgment of God upon this wicked nation. When the Persians came to do battle with this great city they realized what a daunting task it would be to defeat this fortress. But one of Cyrus’s counselors noticed that the Euphrates River ran under the walls, so they diverted the river. With the help of two deserters, Cyrus and his troops marched into the city, while Belshazzar and the Babylonians were partying with the vessels taken from God’s house in Jerusalem (Dan 5:23). Babylon was taken without much of a battle on October 13, 539 BC. From that time and on, Babylon died a slow death. Archeological excavations during the past century have proven that not many of the ruins of this once great metropolis are even above water. Nor have any of the work crews associated with the digging wanted to camp within its walls. Owls are plenteous there (sometimes in flocks of as much as 100), as are some beasts of the fields

(foxes, jackals, and occasionally a lion). Saddam Hussien about ten years ago wanted to take some bricks made from ruins of Babylon to rebuild it again. We saw what happened to him in early 2007. An estimate of the probability of these prophecies being fulfilled is **1 in 5 billion**.

Dear reader, if all these things are true, to the minutest detail, how can we possibly reject any of the words spoken by God. His Words have always been, are now, and will continue to be true throughout eternity. Sir Walter Scott in his book *The Monastery* wrote:

*Within that awful volume lies
The mystery of mysteries
Happiest they of the human race
To whom God has granted grace
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray
To lift the latch, and force the way;
And better had they ne'er been born
Who read to doubt, or read to scorn.*



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Have you ever been, or are you currently, in a situation where there seems to be no answer, no resolution, no deliverance in sight? Do you look at yourself and realize that you have been struggling with the same trial, problem or besetting sin year after year? Are you going through a problem in your work, a crisis in your family, or a battle in your personal life that seems to have no end? That is the best time and place for the God of hope and the God of the impossible to bring hope and possibility to your life. If we can believe God, in 2010, **the Lord can change our situations, our circumstances, and even our lives, to make the impossible possible!**

*“For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through **the scent of water** it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant”* (Job 14:7-9). Do you feel cut down like a tree? Perhaps at one time you were on fire for the Lord, growing spiritually, serving the Lord in various ways, but now because of the hard path you have walked you feel like you have failed the Lord and all hope is lost. Yet the Word of God says that even if there is a scent of water (not even if

there *is* water, only the *scent* of it), there is still hope that that tree will rise again. Dear friend, know today that whatever the situation or circumstance of life you are going through, no matter how dark and trouble-filled things are, the **God of the impossible can reach out to you and change everything**. Can you smell the water? Get ready, for the Lord will do great things for us in 2010. ***“With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible!”*** (Mat 19:26).

Christ Formed In Us

When the angel appeared to Mary to tell her that Christ the Lord would be born of her, she received this good news with gladness, yet she had a doubt in her mind. *“How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”* (Lk 1:34). In the natural, it is impossible for a virgin to have a child, so naturally Mary doubted. But the angel said, *“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God...**for with God nothing shall be impossible**”* (Lk 1:35-37). It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that this was accomplished. Have you ever looked at yourself and thought, *“It is impossible for me to be like Jesus!”* Sometimes we can look at ourselves, with all our weaknesses and failures, and lose hope. Yet it was the God of the impossible who formed Christ in Mary and it is **the same God who will form the character of Christ in us** as well—no matter how impossible the task may seem. If we believe, we will see the glory of God (2Cor 3:17-18).

Prison To The Palace

The Lord had given two dreams to Joseph, foretelling his promotion above his brothers. He was already the favorite son of his father, as evidenced by his multi-colored coat given by his father. Thus, in his father's house, the fulfillment of these dreams seemed very likely. But then he was betrayed by his brethren, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and finally cast into prison. His situation now seemed to be going in the opposite direction of his dreams. If you had had a word with Joseph in his prison, to tell him that he would be next to Pharaoh, second-in-command of a world empire, he might have thought it impossible. If he were a high ranking government official, perhaps he might have had a chance at the throne. But an unknown prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeon? **No way!** Yet the **God of the impossible took him from the prison to the palace in one day!** Could Joseph's story be yours: all are against you, trials and troubles surround you, and things keep getting worse? Do you feel like you are in a prison without hope, where deliverance seems impossible? Don't fear, the same God that took Joseph to the throne in one day will also one day, in just a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, take us to His throne to be with Him forever! (Rev 3:21). One day we will leave the prison of this world and receive a glorious resurrected body to rule with Christ for all eternity. What a blessed hope the Lord has given to us! But even today, in your present situation, the

God of the impossible can deliver you as He delivered Joseph. When things seem to be getting worse, just believe in the God Who can turn the whole situation around.

Total Recovery

David knew he was anointed king, yet had to wait until God's appointed time to be enthroned. In that waiting period, a murderous King Saul hunted him to the point where David had to flee to the Philistines for refuge. One day, while David and his men were away from their "refugee" camp, the Amalekites raided the camp and took **all** they possessed—even the women and children (1Sam 30:1-5). David was already without a country, had just lost his possessions and family—and then his own men spoke of stoning him! Whatever seemed to have been slowly mounting in his favor was now stripped away from him: David was reduced to nothing. He had waited for years to be crowned, just to lose now all that he had accrued. If you had told David that in just a little while he would be king, he would have probably thought it was impossible. Maybe the day before it would have been possible, when he had all his men, his wives and children and all his possessions with him. But now in a state of nothingness to have a hope of ever being king? **No way!** David was "greatly distressed," but he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God" and the God of the impossible did the impossible for him (v.6). The Word of God says that "**David recovered all**" (v.18). To have recovered 50%

or 70% would have been amazing (expecting the Amalekites to have killed some captives and to have used or destroyed some of the plunder). Yet the word of God says that **all—everything, 100%—was recovered by David**. This was surely the work of the God of the impossible. A few chapters later, David ascends to Israel's throne and goes on to conquer Zion and Jerusalem. It's a wonderful testimony about how **God can take us from nothing and give us everything!** *“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* (Rom 8:32) Are you going through a situation where you have lost everything and you don't even know where to start or how to begin again? **Believe in the God of the impossible** because He will fill your life to overflowing again and take you to the throne! You might be waiting for years for the promises of God to be fulfilled in your life, like David waited, and things only seem to get worse and not better. Yet if we patiently wait on the Lord, **He will make all things beautiful in His time** (Ecc 3:11).

Doubly Blessed

In his day, Job was one of the richest men on the earth. He feared God and lived an upright life. Yet we know how the Lord allowed a great trial to come to the life of Job. He lost everything: his children, his house, his cattle, all of his possessions, and finally his own health. Yet Job did not curse God but blessed the Lord in all his afflictions. We

read about the beautiful end of Job and how God blessed him with twice as much at the end of his life (Job 42:10; Jms 5:11). Job was already very rich to begin with, and to tell him then that by the end of his life he would have twice as much seems plausible. Surely as time went by, he could expect his business and riches to multiply until he ended up with double. However, if you waited to make that statement to Job after he had lost everything, including his health, if at that time you had told him that he would have twice as much in the end—**no way, that would be impossible!** Yet the God of the impossible turned everything around for Job and not only **restored all that he lost, but blessed him far above what he could ask or think of**. Do you feel like you have lost the blessing of the Lord or wasted time and energy on things outside the will of God? The God of the impossible can restore all the wasted years and bring you not just to the place you were before but even more abounding and fruitful in all the will of God! The God of the impossible is able *“to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”* (Eph 3:20). All we have to do is believe.

Delivered From Destruction

The three Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, also found themselves in a tough situation. King Nebuchadnezzar had set up an idol and commanded that all should bow down and worship the image.

Three God-fearing young men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, would not worship the idol and were brought before the king for punishment. When questioned, they answered the King with great boldness: “O *Nebuchadnezzar*, *we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up*” (Dan 3:16–18 NIV). Nebuchadnezzar became furious and commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter. Now if you told these Hebrew boys that the same enraged king ordering their death would turn around to commend, honor, and exalt them in the kingdom, they might have said “*no way, that’s impossible!*” But **the God of the impossible saved them** from the flames of death and they walked out without even the smell of smoke, for God’s great glory. God’s name was exalted, the young men were honored, and the king decreed that all should worship their God. Dear friend, are you going through a fiery furnace trial with no visible escape? Believe in the God of the impossible. Is there someone like Nebuchadnezzar who is speaking roughly to you or giving you a hard time? Is there someone poking, pricking, backbiting, and speaking evil against you? If you think about that person being changed and saying good things about you—*no way, that’s impossible!* Believe in

the God of the impossible to change that person just like He changed King Nebuchadnezzar. **He can do it and bring a beautiful reconciliation** between you and them. Only believe!

Fruitful In Famine

Isaac experienced a time of great famine, yet the Lord told him to ***stay in the place where He would tell him and not go down to Egypt*** (Gen 26:1–3). Going to Egypt would have been the easy way out of the famine (spiritually it can speak about backsliding) but Isaac obeyed the word of the Lord and God promised that He would bless Isaac. In the time of famine it would be hard to grow any crops but to get a hundredfold crops—*no way, that’s impossible!* Yet in the time of famine “*Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him*” (v.12). Dear friend, are you going through a famine in your spiritual life? Are things dry and unfruitful all around you? **God can make you fruitful even in the time of famine!** God can bless you and cause you to increase even when the situations around you are far less than ideal. The situations and circumstances surrounding us do not limit the power of God which works mightily on our behalf. If we can only believe, the Lord will do great things for us!

Death To Life

In John 11 we read the story of Lazarus. Lazarus was sick and so his sisters sent for Jesus to come. Jesus, however,

intentionally waited some days before responding. When He finally arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had already been dead four days. Martha immediately told the Lord He should have come earlier. *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”* (v.21). She felt Jesus could have healed him, but now as he had died, nothing could be done. Jesus offered hope: *“Your brother will rise again.”* Martha could only agree that Lazarus would rise at the last day when everyone else does. Jesus was trying to inspire hope and faith but Martha just looked at the impossible present situation. When Jesus finally came to the tomb where Lazarus was buried, he commanded that the stone be removed. To this, unbelieving Martha objected and said, *“But Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”* Jesus gave her a strong rebuke and said *“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”* Jesus went on to **raise Lazarus from the dead** and it brought great glory to God as news spread far and wide. Dear friend, are you going through a Lazarus-like situation today? Are you facing a sickness or disease that seems incurable? Have those around you lost faith and hope that God can turn the situation around? Or maybe you have a loved one that is facing a serious physical infirmity? In Lazarus’ story the Lord was **looking for faith to believe and see the glory of God. If we can only believe we will see the God of the impossible working wonders and miracles in our lives and the lives of our families.** Is there anything too hard for the Lord? Even if the

situation seems hopeless and past the point of no return, yet the Lord can still make a way where there seems to be no way! Have faith and trust in Him!

Nothing Is Impossible

Beloved ones, today you might be facing a situation that seems impossible. Throughout the Word of God we can see the God of the impossible fighting the battles of His children and making the impossible possible in their lives. We have seen just a few examples in this article but time and paper will not permit us to tell of all the **wondrous acts of the God of the impossible.** If you see your situation, and in the natural there is no sign of hope or deliverance, then that is the best place for the Lord to take over because then when the answer comes, all the glory belongs to Him. If we would only believe, we shall see the glory of God and the great things that the God of the impossible can do! □

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“Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Psa 61:1-2).

In this life we are faced with many overwhelming situations. Especially in this day and age, with the economy the way it is, not to mention all the other countless problems we encounter in our day to day lives, it is not uncommon for us to feel overwhelmed at times. In the world people suffer with stress, anxiety, and all sorts of nervous disorders, none of which seem to have any lasting remedies. The children of God go through many of the same pressures as the children of this world and may even come to the place of exclaiming, “It’s too much! I can’t take it anymore! How much longer is this going to go on?” Obviously the Psalmist David went through similar experiences. In Psalm 142 he says, “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me...I cried unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living” (Psa 142:3,5).

The Higher Place

In all of our trials, where can we turn to for an answer? David reveals the secret: “I will cry unto Thee when my heart is

overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” David was no different than us. He certainly had times of great distress and tremendous pressure. But he knew the answer: it was to **cry out to God**. Beloved, have you found God to be your answer in the midst of all the difficulties of life? **There is a higher place that God wants to lead us to** in the midst of the flood tide of problems. David knew of this place of refuge where he could run to in times of trouble. He gives his testimony by saying, “For You have been a shelter for me and a strong tower from the enemy.” In another place the Word of God says, “The name of the Lord is a high tower, the righteous can run in and be safe.” It seems that David had run to that place of refuge on numerous occasions in his life. What about us?

Way Of Escape

In verse two of this psalm, we notice that David says, “**lead me** to the rock.” Why must we be led to that place? One reason could be that we are not naturally inclined to go to that place of refuge on our own. In the midst of the trials, God has prepared a “**way of escape**” for us, a quiet refuge, a place where we can hide for a while (1Cor 10:13). However, with our human reasonings, we may try all of our own efforts to get relief from our situation first. Only as we see that our carefully contrived plans are of no avail and when things seem to be getting more unbearable as the days go by, do we begin to cry out to God in our distress. Oh, we may have been crying before, but now we will cry out with **all** our heart as we realize that God is our only hope. “And ye shall

seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you, saith the Lord” (Jer 29:13-14). By allowing our own plans to fail, He is teaching us that we cannot trust in ourselves. At the same time, He is leading us to the place He wants us to be in, to that rock of refuge. We will come to the same realization that Peter came to when he said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). As we enter into that “place of escape,” God begins to speak to us and gives us the strength and grace we need to be able to bear whatever it is that we are going through. This by no means signifies that the trial has ended, but rather that we find strength from the Lord to go through it until God chooses to take us out. “But will *with the temptation* also make a way of escape, *that ye may be able to bear it.*”

A Wealthy Place

What would be the reason that the Lord would allow our most difficult situations to be prolonged? In Psalm 66 we read, “We went through fire and through water: but Thou *broughtest us out into a wealthy place*...and I will declare what He hath done for my soul” (Psa 66:12,16). There is a definite work that God wants to do in our lives through each trial that He allows us to go through. Yes, we *will* go through fire and water, but what awaits us at the end? A wealthy place of spiritual riches, a deep work of grace in our souls. Even as tribulation works patience, the trials we go through in our lives will do an eternal

work in our character as we learn to spend time with the Lord and hear His voice. But most of all, our personal prayer life will increase.

This Rock, who is Christ, is higher than we are (Psa 61:2). When we fly in an airplane, as the plane takes off, all the things on the ground seem to get smaller and smaller. All the people on the ground begin to look like little ants crawling around, until finally we cannot see them at all. Suddenly everything on the ground seems so minute. Of course, they’re not getting smaller, but that’s how they appear to us as we soar up to the clouds. Beloved, when we are living in the earthly plain or on the ground, so to speak, even the smallest trial will seem so big! When the spies came back from scouting out the promised land, the ten that brought the evil report spoke of giants and cities having walls up to heaven! They felt like little grasshoppers in their own sight. But Joshua and Caleb saw things from a different point of view. They saw all the same obstacles, but from a different vantage point. And what was their report? “If God delight in us, He will give us the land.” *With their eyes on God, they saw that He was bigger than all of their problems.* That is why God wants to bring us to that rock that is higher than we are. Because when we get on that rock that is far above all of the cares of this life, what will happen? We’ll be looking down at our problems. Then suddenly that thing that seemed so big and that situation that seemed so impossible, will no longer appear the same, because we’ll be looking at it from a different perspective altogether. We’ll be seeing it from God’s viewpoint. That’s the place God wants to lead us to.

God's Viewpoint

God's viewpoint is from the heavenly places where He has called us to sit. He does not see things in an earthly sense or for just an earthly benefit, but He sees, plans and works all things together for our good and for a great eternal purpose. He knows and understands things that we don't know or see. Our view of life from earth is very limited and short-sighted, but His view from His throne brings light and understanding to all our trials and afflictions. ***He sees the past, present and future and knows what is best for us even if we can't see it.*** That is why we must run to that Rock who is higher than us and see things as He does (1Cor 2:9-10). Then we will see the eternal things and the heavenly blessings waiting for us as we endure our light affliction on this earth (2Cor 4:17-18). We can run boldly to His throne of grace and find rest and refuge in His presence today.

In The Time Of Distress...

Even as we begin to find that place of escape in God's presence, there may still be times when the overwhelming intensity of the trial brings us to tears. When David and his mighty men returned to Ziklag, they found that the enemy had come and taken their wives, their children, their livestock, and everything they had (1Sam 30). They had also burnt Ziklag with fire and there was absolutely nothing left. Imagine if you would come home one day, and God forbid, find your house burned down and your family gone. How would you feel?

David and his mighty men came home and found this formidable situation right before their very eyes. The Bible says that these mighty men of valor "wept until they had no more power to weep." The situation was just too much for them to bear. So in their anguish, they blamed David and even wanted to stone him. What did David do? ***He encouraged himself in the Lord. He knew his God.*** And in that seemingly impossible situation, when he took time to seek the Lord and His counsel, God spoke to Him: "take your men and go after the enemy, and I am going to give all of them into your hand." God gave him the solution to the problem. And when they obeyed the Word of the Lord, verse 18 tells us that "David recovered all." Beloved, ***in all of our impossible situations, all we need to do is run to that place of refuge, to that Rock that is higher than we are.*** In that place—in the same way that God spoke to David in his distress—God will speak a word that brings peace and quietness to our soul in the midst of the storm. "I will hear what God the Lord will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people" (Psa 85:8). He is still the Master of the wind and the wave, and one word from Him is enough to calm any storm in our life.

...Rejoice!

As He leads us to that rock that is higher than we are, and we are seated in heaven with Him, what will He enable us to do? ***To rejoice even in the midst of trials.*** "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" (Psa 2:4). When we sit in the heavenly places, as God

shows us His view of the situation, we will be able to laugh at the same trial that once made us to cry. That does not necessarily mean that our trials will become easy, but we'll know that God is with us and that He is doing His eternal work in our lives through each and every difficulty. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

Abiding In The Rock

We've spoken about running into that refuge in times of trouble, but the rock that is higher than we are is not a place that God only wants us to run to when we have problems. David said, "For Thou hast been a shelter for me and a strong tower from the enemy. I will **abide** in Thy tabernacle forever, I will trust in the covert of Thy wings" (Psa 61:3-4). The word "abide" in the Hebrew actually means to "lodge". **His presence is a place where we should learn to live.** David had learned that secret. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust" (Psa 91:1-2). This is God's desire for us today: that we would learn to abide in that secret place. As we spend time with Him, in the midst of all our trials, we will be able to hear His voice and receive His peace, no matter how violent the storm may be. Beloved, when our hearts become overwhelmed in our trials, let us pray like David, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." It's the safest place to be! □

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THE GREATEST

PART 3 — HARDLY SIMPLE

As noted in the two previous studies of this series, John the Baptist was the greatest man and prophet ever born of a woman. He was the culmination of Old Testament prophetic ministry. And Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophetic message (Rev 19:10). Up until the time of John, God spoke to humanity mainly through men (Heb 1:1-2). After John announced the arrival of the Messiah, God Himself now speaks directly to mankind through Jesus Christ. The gospels do, however, reveal a lot about John. Though his ministry was long ago fulfilled (after he introduced Jesus), there is still a great deal to be learned from him today. We started this series investigating some of the aspects of John's anointing and humility. In this installment we will concentrate on some characteristics connected with his humility. In doing so we will contemplate the **strength, simplicity and suffering of John's life and ministry.**

Strength In Humility

As he passed his final days in prison, John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask if He really was the Christ.

This seems like a moment of doubt and weakness on John's part, yet Jesus chose this occasion to testify of John's strength. The Lord said that John was not like a weak reed shaking in the wind but that he was the greatest of men (Mat 11; Lk 7). At first glance it might appear a mistake to list strength as an aspect of humility. This is because those of humble circumstances are often despised as small, poor, or powerless by naturally minded men. Yet when we have the mind of Christ, which is seen in His meekness and lowliness, we are able, like John, to lift others up and bring down the proud—the proudest of whom is Satan (Phil 2:3-9). It is when one submits to God that he is able to resist the devil (Jas 4:6-7). Though the greatest man ever born on earth, John only claimed to be a voice. He never promoted himself, but prophesied, preached, and proclaimed the coming Chosen One. We can see an example of the greatness of John's humility when he testified that he was not even worthy to untie Jesus' shoe. John desired his own decrease and Christ's increase. ***True saints are humble not because they are weak and have nothing to boast about, but because they know how great their God is.*** God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. All who refuse to humble themselves before God will be humiliated. If we try to keep struggling on in our own strength, we will become more and more overburdened and weak. Yet when we become yoked together with Christ, our burdens become light. The more we surrender to Him, the more we win; the more we

work with Him, the more rest we receive (Mat 11:28-29). Jesus has said, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Our response should be, “when I am weak, then am I strong” (2Cor 12:9-10).

Word In The Wilderness

John’s upbringing and environment was humble and simple. ***Simple hard that is, not simple easy.*** Both of John’s parents were already old and “well stricken in years” when he was born (Lk 1:7). They likely passed away while he was still quite young. So he would not have had their nurture and care for very long. Nor did he have the support of any siblings, family or society around him. All that the Bible reveals about his childhood and earlier life is that “he was in the deserts till the day of his shewing to Israel” (Lk 1:80). One can wonder as to what kind of experience, education, and culture he could have received in such desolate and isolated places. Yet it was in the deserts that he grew, became spiritually strong and did his ministry. We frequently find in the scriptures that God deals with His chosen ones in deserts. Speaking about the Lord’s portion and His people, the Word of God says, “He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye” (Deut 32:10). God dealt with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, and many others, while they were alone in deserts. This is still

true for the New Testament saint today. God says of His bride, “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her” (Hos 2:14-16). ***It is often in uncomfortable places and situations that God comforts us and brings us to a place of repentance and restoration.*** It may not be for our whole lives like John, but God will set us apart for a season from “our own and known” so that He can possess us and we can know Him better. If not in a literal desert, we might find it is in a spiritual wilderness, surrounded by wild beasts that God tames and trains us.

The Greatness Of God

Some may feel disadvantaged by their upbringing, education or environment. However, being deprived of a supportive family, schooling or society does not mean that one is separated from the Lord or His church. Where we live can appear to us as a wasteland. A believer may feel that God has placed him as a witness in a barren and empty land. Yet it will be in those very locations that he discovers that the ***Lord can do extraordinary things in ordinary places.*** It brings God glory throughout eternity to make something wonderful out of something awful, to get the greatest from the least.

Low Maintenance Saints

Rugged simplicity was a defining characteristic, not only of John’s upbringing, but of his whole way of life as well. “John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle

about his loins, and his meat was locust and wild honey” (Mat 3:4; Mk 1:6). From John’s raiment we again find a connection with the prophet Elijah. When the Baptist was first revealed to Israel, at the same place where Elijah was caught up to heaven and dropped his mantle, John was seen girded similarly to that hairy prophet (2Kn 2:13; 1:8). Jesus also spoke of John’s clothes when he asked the multitudes what they went out into the desert to see, “a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they that wear soft clothing are in king’s houses” (Mat 11:8). The camel is a hardy animal of the desert that can stand the heat, drought and dust storms found there. Not known as a comfortable ride, its hair would not be attractive or comfortable to wear either. In keeping with a prophet’s office, ***John’s attention was on eternity and not on his attire.*** We cannot picture him wearing tailored suits or worrying about being seen in the latest label. He wore what could be found in and what would last in the desert. It was the same with his provisions. His food came from insects that could be found even in the uncultivated wildernesses. Locusts (or grasshoppers) do not seem to us a very appetizing meal, even if they were dipped in honey. John took whatever came to hand. ***He was seeking the Kingdom of God, not his own comfort and convenience.*** In contrast to many present-day Christians, John was a low maintenance saint. New Testament saints and servants of God too must learn to be content in whatever state they find themselves.

They need to know how to be either full or hungry, how to be abased or to abound. Most of us do not think we would have trouble with the full and abounding part (Phil 4:11-12; Tit 6:8). To be spiritual, one does not have to inhabit desert caves, wear roadkill for clothes or eat only food that comes from bugs like John the Baptist. Neither being an ascetic or aesthete is the way to get close to God. Jesus himself said that He came eating and drinking in all kinds of society and that John did not. The Lord grew up in a community and a large family though John did not. Yet when the time came, Jesus forsook all. Not all are called to such a rough and ready life of hardship as John was, but we should all be willing for it if it is God’s will.

Possessed By Possessions

Like a pioneer or trailblazer John the Baptist traveled light. One who does not have much in this world can move around in it and call others out of it more easily. ***Some Christians have allowed themselves to become possessed by their possessions.*** They find themselves chasing after the latest technology rather than running after Christ. Nonessential things become essential to them. One cannot imagine John coveting the newest iPod, lusting after the latest laptop or getting carried away with designer clothes, food or cars. Somehow he survived without the Internet, TV, and microwave ovens. He only had the most basic of necessities. Instead of easy lives,

John, Jesus and the early apostles all had hard deaths. This does not mean that all are called to the desert but could it be that God is calling us to simplify our lifestyles and downsize our closets, cupboards and cars? Remember *we cannot take our earthly treasures with us when we go*. Might it not be time to lighten our loads also and get ready for the coming of the Lord?

Voice In The Wilderness

To make the path to the Savior easier for others, John had to suffer and do hard work in hard places. All his services were open air meetings in a desert. In spite of this, people went out to him from all over Israel (Mat 3:5). An error in much of modern-day Christianity is to think that the gospel can only work in places where things are comfortable and climate controlled. It seems that some assume that God will not speak unless it is through state-of-the-art equipment and the best balanced speakers, or that calls to repentance can only take place on padded carpets. If the electricity failed in these types of meetings, so would the revival. John had another kind of comfort to offer. When he was asked what he had to say about himself and his ministry, John only claimed to be a voice in the wilderness as foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Jn 1:23; Isa 40:1-9). This prophecy proclaimed “comfort, comfort” for God’s people. But it was the kind of comfort and refreshing that comes

from repenting and returning to the Lord and His word. What a voice it was! It still cries out in the wilderness of this world, *“prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”* □

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The workmanship of His hands

THE WONDROUS HAND

Isaiah spoke of the wonders of God: *“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span (of His hand), and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance...”* Furthermore the Lord also says in the book of Isaiah: *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the **right hand of My righteousness.**”* He engraves those who serve Him in His hands of mercy and strength. It is so that *“all the people of the earth might **know the hand of the Lord**, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God forever.”*

God whose hands are good has also made us with hands to do good. Those who have studied the human hand have come away astounded that such a wonder of creation is so close to us. Sir Isaac Newton said that **“in the absence of any other proof, the thumb on our hand would alone convince me of God’s existence.”**

The human hand is a marvellous mechanism, one of the most perfectly developed in creation for all-round uses. It has the strength to handle a sledge hammer or the delicacy of touch of the eye surgeon. The flexible, sensitive fingers can perform extremely precise, complicated tasks one moment and then do rough tasks the next. Man tends to take pride in his brain but without such a hand to do its bidding he would not have gone far.

The human hand is comprised of a broad palm with five fingers attached to the forearm by means of a wrist joint. This is an exquisite design and is exceedingly complicated in its sleight and movement. The hand is made up of 8 wrist bones, 5 bones in the palm and 14 digital bones in our fingers and thumb. We work our fingers by remote control. Of course, in one sense, we work all of our moving body parts by remote control—the control center is our brain. However, the fingers are special, because there are no muscles inside the fingers. The muscles that move your fingers are located in the palm and up in the mid forearm. They’re connected to the finger bones by tendons which pull and move the fingers like the strings of a marionette! Despite this, the muscles which power our fingers are strong—strong enough in fact for some people to climb vertical surfaces supporting their entire weight at times by a few fingertips. The muscles which accomplish this feat are

stronger than you might imagine, for biological engineering requires that the force generated by the muscles which bend the fingertips must be at least four times the pressure which is produced at the fingertips.

The thumb is controlled by 9 individual muscles, which are controlled by all 3 major hand nerves and moves in such a complex fashion that there are 6 separate descriptive terms just for particular directions of movement of one thumb joint—that is the basal joint which is at the base of the thumb.

What are our hands for? According to evolution, the hand arose from paws when it was discovered that throwing stones and sticks were better for protection than fighting up close with paws. Furthermore, an individual who could pick up a stick and use it as a club was better off than someone who tried to only fight with fists. Eventually those who could throw better or hold clubs better because of chance mutations in the hands (such as the opposable thumb) survived and passed their genes on to the next generation. Such ones could defend themselves, their families and secure more food sources than other groups who were “backward” in their “development.” This is what evolution basically says. But is it true? The fossil record says “no.” There is no proof of the validity of this theory. Right from the very beginning of this tale, we find problems, not the least of which is that human hands are in no way built

for fighting which they would have needed to be, at least at the start of the human race. Medical science would tend to agree with this due to the number of injuries caused by fist fights admitted into emergency rooms. Boxers who now protect their hands with a padded glove, nevertheless tend to ruin these same hands after several fights. Therefore we can see that even with the best protection, we are not built to fight.

So then, what are hands for? According to the Word of God, they are made to bless. Our hands are so very intricate in structure. This intricacy was not made to destroy, but rather to build up. Adam was made to care for the creation; his hands were made to till the land and bring order to it. The Bible relates that hands were used among other things to consecrate, to ordain, in healing, in blessing children, in prayer, as a token of contract and friendship. The right hand is a symbol of power, authority and blessing.

Compare all this to the animals and you can easily see the difference. There are so many things an animal can do with its paws, especially the front paws. The lion and tiger have sharp, heavy claws with which they kill and tear their prey apart. They do not need knives to get the meat from the bones; you might even say they have built-in knives within their paws.

Or think of the tiny mole, digging his way deep into the earth. With only his paws (and sometimes his mouth) to work with he digs, digs, digs. Soon he has a long tunnel. The prairie dog even has underground rooms, all shovelled out of the solid earth. We need shovels to dig, but these little creatures make their long tunnels without any tools, that is, without any tools except their paws.

But, at the end of the day, all these animals with their clever paws that they use to dig, or hold, or tear, or wash are unable to put their shovels, knives or other things down and take up another tool. Each one can do *only* the thing his paws are shaped and designed to do. The lion and tiger cannot dig tunnels in the ground; the mole doesn't use his paws to tear meat from bones.

Man, who in some ways can do so little with his hands, in other ways can do so much because he can take a shovel and dig. Then he can lay down the shovel and take a knife and cut. He can take a trowel to plaster mud on a dam. And then when the work is done he can lay his tools aside. Animals do not change their "tool-hands"; they do only what their paws are made to do.

Man is more than just an animal. He is more than just an ape which has learnt to stand on its hind legs and use the

front legs as hands. We are made in the very image of God who does marvellous works with His hands of glory. □

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In a time when religious law was laid down by the Pope, where the truth of salvation based on faith was scarcely known, and where the common man had no idea what was actually written in the Holy Scriptures, William Tyndale arose as a man with an inspiration, desire and passion to bring the truth of the Word of God to a language that could be read by even a lowly peasant boy. As we have seen from the cover article of this issue of *Pilgrims Journal*, the Bible is very unique and powerful. It is the most published book in history—even today. Yet there was a time when the Bible was scarcely available to the common man. It was during such a time that William Tyndale lived. He sought to change that, no matter what the cost—and it would cost him, dearly.

William Tyndale was born around 1490 and lived during the time of the Protestant Reformation. He was influenced by the works of Desiderius Erasmus (who printed the first Greek New Testament—from which Luther made his famous German translation) and also Martin Luther (who many credit as the principle force behind the Protestant Reformation with his “95 Theses”). During this time, the Catholic Church was the law and whatever the Pope said was final. In England, the Bible was read in Latin

which the common people could not understand and even many priests found it difficult to comprehend. However, because of this, the church could say whatever they wished and pass that along as the “Law of God.” As a result of this, many unscriptural teachings and doctrines were formed which led the church away from Biblically-based doctrines and principles.

Tyndale was a gifted linguist, fluent in English—his mother tongue—as well as Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, German, and Italian. Although Tyndale was an ordained Catholic priest, he read the writings of Martin Luther, and because he was also able to read the Bible in its original text, he was able to see that many of the teachings of the Catholic church were erroneous. Every day he would see more and more that the Reformation truths were correct according to the Bible. He saw, as Luther pointed out, that salvation was based on faith in the finished work of Christ on Calvary and not on outward works that can be done or purchased by man. He was convinced that the way to God was found in the word that the Lord had given to His people. On one occasion Tyndale was discussing truth with a Catholic scholar. This scholar became so enraged at Tyndale’s views that he said it is better to have the Pope’s law than God’s law. In response, Tyndale said what came to be one of his most famous quotes—and vision—in life: ***“I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow, shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.”*** And so began Tyndale’s dream of translating the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into English for the common people of England.

About 150 years before Tyndale lived, John Wycliffe was born and he also had a desire to see the Bible in the language of the common people. However, during his day they did not have the printing press and therefore copies of the English Bible were copied out by hand and passed around. His translation was from the Latin Vulgate Bible and not from the original Greek. Yet Wycliffe laid the foundation. Because of Wycliffe's work, the British Parliament passed a law that condemned heretics to be burned. And later, the Archbishop of Canterbury created a law that forbid the translation of the Scriptures into English or any other language without permission (it also condemned the *reading* of the Scriptures in any other language as well). Anyone caught doing this was considered a heretic and therefore would be punished with death by fire. During those days, many horrific acts were carried out by the church. Once an eleven-year-old boy was burned for having the Lord's prayer in English. Another time seven followers of Wycliffe were burned for teaching their children the Lord's prayer in English!

Tyndale, knowing these laws, sought for an official authorization to translate the Bible into English. He did not receive this approval and once his desire was made known, Tyndale had to flee for his life because they wanted him burned as a heretic. Until his death, Tyndale was a fugitive traveling from place to place in Europe translating the Word of God into English. In four years, he was able to complete his translation of the New Testament and have it printed. In 1534 Tyndale published a revised New Testament which many consider the "glory of his life's work." His vision to see

the Word of God in the hand of a common man was fulfilled in part—but it didn't come without pain and sacrifice.

As copies of his translation were smuggled and spread abroad in England, many embraced the truth. They could see salvation and justification by faith and grace alone. Lives were changed and people had a new revelation and understanding of the Word of God. The Protestant Reformation was well underway. Yet it was hard for Tyndale to hear about many being burned at the stake for converting to Christ as a result of reading his translation and his books. Tyndale's good friend John Frith was burned alive. Richard Bayfield who was in charge of the ships that brought Tyndale's books to England was also killed along with many others. One day in 1532, James Bainham stood up during mass at St. Augustine's church in London and held up a copy of Tyndale's New Testament and begged the people to die rather than deny the truth of the Word of God. He also met the same fate: death by fire. Not only did they burn people, but in total shock to Tyndale, Bishop Tunstall burned Tyndale's translation of the Bible as well—they began burning the Word of God itself!

After seven years of exile from England, the King sent a message to Tyndale expressing his desire to bring Tyndale back to England. Tyndale was moved by this request and willingly offered to give himself up and surrender to the King if the King authorized a translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into the common English language. The King refused and Tyndale continued his work in exile. Later, Tyndale was captured and

put in prison for eighteen months under the charge of heresy. On October 6, 1536, William Tyndale was tied to the stake, strangled by the executioner, and then burned with fire. His last words were: ***“Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes!”*** He did not die in vain. Within four years of his death, the “Great Bible” was authorized by King Henry VIII of England which was the English translation of the Bible largely based on Tyndale’s translation.

Till today, much of Tyndale’s work still continues. Tyndale translated the whole New Testament and portions of the Old Testament. The King James Version authorized in 1611 was the work of over 50 different scholars, yet over 80% of the New Testament and 70% of the Old Testament remain as Tyndale’s translation. He was truly a gifted linguist who used his abilities for the glory of God. He lived and died for a great vision and we are still reaping and enjoying the fruits of his labors today. □

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Perseverance

“Be not sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and perseverance inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12 NET)

While sluggish faith wilts over time, precious faith perseveres to the end. An outstanding example of perseverance to believe for the impossible comes to us from the early pages of American naval history. John Paul Jones was captain of the *Bonhomme Richard*, a merchant ship converted for battle. It was old and slow, and not fit to fight or flee: but its captain's heart made up for what it lacked. On September 3, 1779, he with 42 guns on board pursued two British ships, the *Serapis* and the *Countess of Scarborough*, which had a cumulative total of 72 guns. The *Serapis* held the advantage in crew, ammunition, speed, and maneuverability, and had the back-up of the second ship. To make matters exponentially worse for the *Bonhomme Richard*, two of their own old 18 pounder guns exploded, killing and wounding many. For fear that the other four guns would have similar problems, the battle continued without using them.

Jones gave orders to bind the two ships together, and now the British guns fired directly onto the adjacent American ship. The aged vessel caught fire again and again, and water rose ominously. Many of the American guns were rendered useless or silenced. The *Serapis* fired directly onto the aged hull of the *Richard*, and it was obvious that it would not be long before the American ship would be sunk. As if all this were not enough to discourage the persistent captain, another American ship nearby called the *Alliance* repeatedly fired upon his ship as well, either in total confusion, or worse yet, absolute treachery.

In the midst of these cacophonous and chaotic exchanges of artillery, one of the American gunners was somehow misinformed that Captain Jones had also been killed. The gunner called to the British to offer the ship. The British captain asked for confirmation: did they want to surrender? John Paul Jones, very much alive and hearing the query, emphatically delivered his now famous response: “I have not yet **begun** to fight!”

After three and a half hours of battle by moonlight, and a well-tossed hand grenade that landed in the midst of the British ammunition, it was the British that surrendered from their superior ship, and with more crew members. The Americans boarded the enemy vessel as victors, even as their own ship slowly disappeared into the sea. Who would have thought that the British captain would surrender to the captain of a sinking ship? But he who does not tire, will tire adversity.

John Paul Jones' cry embodies the spirit that we Christians of the last days must possess. When it seems like all hell is breaking loose on every side; when it seems like the fellowship is sinking, and "friendly fire" is tearing us down from within; when it seems like everything furthers the cause of the enemy and diminishes our own—it is at times like these that heroes of faith are needed to rise up, and challenge the forces of darkness with the battle cry: "We have not yet *begun* to fight!" The Captain of our salvation has gone before us: and if God now be for us, who can be against us?

Many have started this race, many have entered the battle's fray: but the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Who then, will be declared victorious? We are given this blessed assurance: **He that endures to the end shall be saved.** Our battles are for a much higher cause than that of the naval captain, and with perseverance we shall inherit all that has been promised to us. "Endure hardness, good soldier of Christ!" Victory is ours, if we would but *persevere!*

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