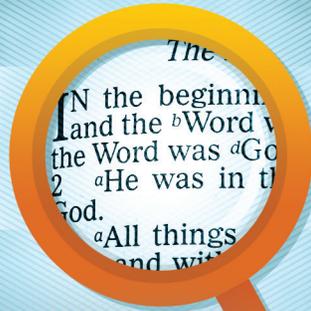


BIBLE



OPTICS

What lens are you using?

The WORD or the world?

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- 03. *Who are the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11?*
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From the Editor

Do you remember when a video clip of a burning Bible and an American flag flashed across social media back in August? It followed months of protests over racial injustice, and shocked conservative politicians and Christians alike.

It was just one incident, but it highlighted an uncomfortable reality. America today is a secular nation filled with racial tensions, political unrest, and economic woes. On the one hand, religious devotion is increasing; on the other, confusion, conspiracy theories and distrust abound. Anarchy is a very real possibility.

As Christians, how can we be a light in the midst of darkness? There is only one way.

Truth. We must understand and live out God's truth.

And there is only one source of objective truth. "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17 KJV). What we need today is the Gospel—the good news—of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed" (Romans 1:17).

In this issue of Bible Optics, we look back to another time in history when economic woes, antagonism against religion, and rage against the government swept a nation into anarchy and ruin. Friends, there are important lessons for us to learn. Let us not miss them.



Marshall McKenzie | Editor
Church Growth Director, KTYN Conference

When the Light Goes Out The French Revolution: Then & Now

History, we know, is apt to repeat itself, and to foist very old incidents upon us with only a slight change of costume. — George Eliot

2020 has been a tumultuous year, hasn't it? A global pandemic splashed fear across the globe while racial tensions and political polarizations deepened divisions in our nation. The rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer. Both religious and atheistic fervor flourished.

It seems that the light of God's Word is fading. Will it go out entirely, we wonder? The events that shook our nation in 2020 should remind us of another time in history when reason reigned and division destroyed a nation.

Two hundred years ago France was rocked by similar issues. Wealthy aristocrats and clergy found themselves at the mercy of angry peasants. Riots and ruthless killing drenched the streets in blood. Bibles were burned and reason was enthroned as queen. In the "age of enlightenment," France was shrouded in darkness.

The light went out in France. The French Revolution offers striking parallels to our world today. Today, in our "information age," we find our nation shrouded in darkness. The light of the Bible no longer illumines the hearts of men, and our society is fast becoming divisive and chaotic.

True Gold



My grandpa had gold fever. For years he spent his spare moments gold panning at the creek. I loved to watch him swirl the water in his pan. “There’s gold, Grandpa!” I’d shriek at the first sign of shiny gold in the black sand.

“Not yet,” he’d say. “That’s fool’s gold. See how it floats away? The real stuff is heavy and sinks to the bottom.” He patiently washed away the sand until we saw the real gold, clinging to the bottom of the pan. He fished out the flakes and placed them in a tiny glass vial. I held them up to the light in awe. Real gold!

True Gold

The shiny stuff wasn’t the only gold grandpa sought. He considered God’s Word “More to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10). Just like he searched diligently for the river’s gold, he searched God’s Word and lived it out in his life. His faith was simple. Profound. Real.

He knew the difference between the cheap, changeable opinions of this world and the true gold of godliness. There was no fool’s gold in his faith.

Finding Gold

Our world today is filled with conflicting voices. Real news. Fake news. Atheistic philosophies. Evangelistic zeal. Do you know how to sort it out and find the gold of truth?

Jesus gives us the answer. “The sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:4-5).

How do we learn to recognize His voice? There is one answer: **careful, prayerful study of God’s Word**. His Word is the one tool He has given us to wash away the fool’s gold and uncover the real gold of truth. Just like finding real gold, Bible study takes time, patience, and hard work. There are no shortcuts.

It’s a secret that you and I would do well to rediscover today. Too often we come to God’s Word in a frantic rush and find little more than fool’s gold. Let’s invest time, patience, and hard work in our Bible study so we can uncover the beautiful gold of solid truth.

“Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things; for my mouth will speak truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; nothing crooked or perverse is in them. They are all plain to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold” (Proverbs 8:6-10).

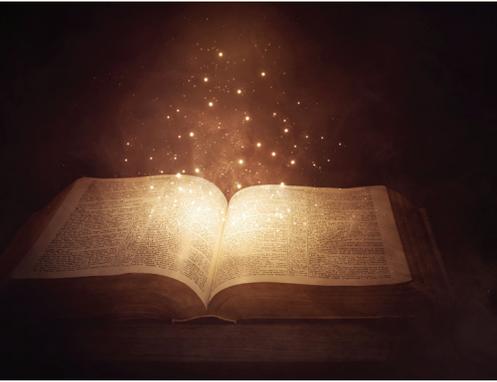
By: Shenalyn Page



Not sure how to study the Bible for yourself? Read “A God Led Conversation, Practical Principles for Personal Bible Study, part 1” on page 8 to learn ways to understand the Bible better today.

Bible Q&A

Who are the “Two Witnesses” of Revelation 11?



Revelation is a prophetic book of signs and symbols filled with allusions to the Old Testament. To understand these allusions, we must let Scripture interpret Scripture.

“The two witnesses... are the two olive trees and the two lampstands” (Revelation 11:4). This is a clear allusion to the “two olive trees” in Zechariah which are “the word of the Lord” (Zechariah 4:3-6). The “two lampstands” are also an apt representation of the Scriptures. David says, “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130) and “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Throughout the Bible, the Word of God is portrayed as having a twofold nature. The Ten Commandments were written on “two tablets of stone” (Exodus 34:1). The Old Testament is referred to as “the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). The Word of God is likened to a “two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). The Scriptures are a combination of humanity and divinity (2 Peter 1:21). And Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14) is both human and divine.

During the 1260 days [literal years] of Roman Catholic supremacy, 538 AD to 1798, the two witnesses prophesied in “sackcloth” (Revelation 11:3). Sackcloth was the garb of prophets (Zechariah

When the Light Goes Out *Continued from Page 1*

Let’s examine the parallels between the French Revolution and today. What lessons are we to learn? As Christians, how would God have us respond to the darkness around us?

The Seeds of Revolution

Sixteenth century France is often remembered for its extravagant wealth and lavish lifestyles. Yet this was only true for a handful. France had developed into a tyrannical hierarchy. The clergy and nobility heavily taxed the commoners. Most peasants needed at least two jobs in order to provide for their families, pay taxes, and return tithe to the church.

Any attempt to go against the state church could lead to death. Religious war against Protestants was constant. Seeds of anger towards the church and state festered in this feudalistic society. Over the next two hundred years, the people became increasingly weary of a corrupt monarchy and a power-hungry church.

Then, on July 14, 1789, angry Parisians converged on the Bastille, a prison and royal fortress that symbolized everything the people hated about the monarchy and church. The capture of the Bastille sparked revolution and resulted in tragic bloodshed. An angry nation protested and rioted and sought to overthrow the government.

The Light Goes Out in France

The removal of civil authority was only the beginning in France. All Christian resemblance was removed from French life. The dechristianization of France began with the church; priests and clergy were massacred by angry mobs, legislation stripped the church of all its power. In 1793, the council of Indre-et-loir abolished the word Sunday; removed the Gregorian Calendar, and set up a 10-day week. The French Republican Calendar abolished the Sabbath, saint’s days and any reference to the church. All church iconography and biblical reference, including street names and buildings, were removed. Churches were converted into “temples of reason.” Bibles were used as kindling and France became a wholly secular nation.

A Nation Divided

On May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old African-American male was killed during a police arrest. This abuse of power proved to be the tipping point that pushed America, and the world, into a politically divisive era. Like the people of France in the 18th century, our nation became enraged with the systems of authority. Activists took to the streets, preachers to pulpits, politicians to the news outlets and the President to Twitter. Peaceful protests turned violent, riots filled the streets of our cities, and police departments were burned. Tear gas and rubber bullets were used on American citizens.

Many Americans have come to see the institutions of authority in the U.S. as a threat, just like the French saw the Bastille as a symbol of tyrannical authority. The shadows of the French Revolution are upon this nation.

Will the light of the gospel which promotes peace and brotherly love cease to exist?

Paul describes our day well. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power, and from such people turn away” (2 Timothy 3:1-5).



13:4) and a sign of mourning (Jeremiah 4:8). The Bible was kept from the common people during this period, which made it a time of mourning for the two witnesses.

They have power “to strike the earth with all plagues” (Revelation 11:6). It was the Word of God that brought the plagues upon ancient Egypt and it is the Word of God that will bring the seven last plagues of Revelation 16.

During the Reign of Terror, the French burned Bibles and their “dead bodies” (Revelation 11:8) lay in the street. Beginning in 1793, the national assembly outlawed the Bible for “three-and-a-half days [literal years]” (Revelation 11:9).

Afterwards, they “stood on their feet” (Revelation 11:11) and heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Come up here” (Revelation 11:12). The two witnesses’ resurrection and ascension to Heaven represent the printing and widespread distribution of the Word of God by the many Bible societies of the 19th century.

Jesus upheld the importance of both portions of the Bible. He says of the Old Testament, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify [bear witnesses] of Me” (John 5:39). Of the New Testament He said, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to

Today, we see Paul’s warning coming to pass. While 40 million Americans filed for unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic, billionaires became \$647 billion richer. Pornographic sites gained a massive increase in visits since the beginning of the pandemic. A large sector of American Christianity seeks to align itself with political parties in order to gain earthly power, instead of focusing on the mission of Christ.

Unforgiveness, slander, unkindness, ingratitude, brutality, pride... we see Paul’s list of sins in every corner of our society. If we are honest, we find them in ourselves. We too need to be transformed by God’s grace.

The book *Education* pg. 228, by Ellen G. White, perfectly depicts how the history of France is repeating itself. “At the same time anarchy is seeking to sweep away all law, not only divine but human. The centralizing of wealth and power; the vast combinations for the enriching of the few at the expenses of the many; the combinations of the poorer classes for the defense of their interest and claims; the spirit of unrest, of riot, and bloodshed; the world wide dissemination of the same teaching that led to the French Revolution—all are tending to involve the whole world in a struggle similar to that which convulsed France.” Though the French Revolution was far bloodier and more violent than the events of 2020, the darkness that wishes to engulf the light of the Bible is again creeping over the world.

Our Mission

If history is repeating itself, what are we to do as Christians? Are we to stand by and watch the world spiral into chaos? No! Let us remember the words of Jesus, “And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:10-14).

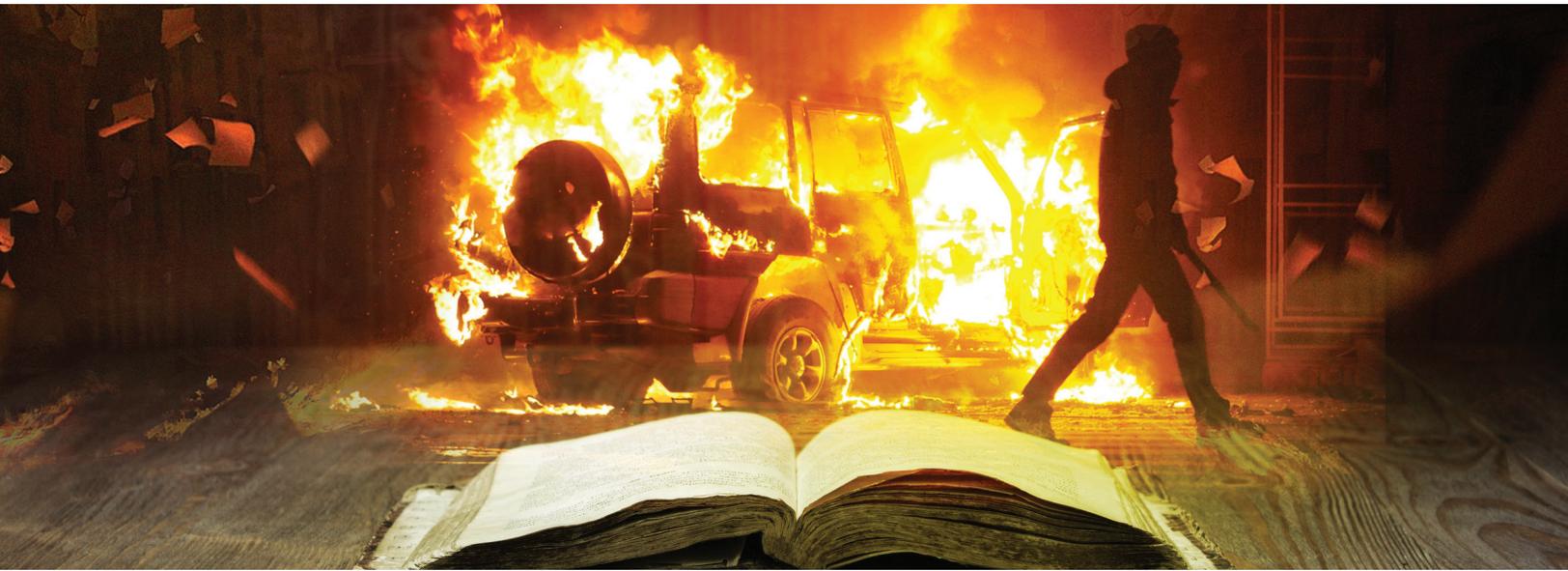
Did you catch that? The “love” of many will grow cold. Friends, it is the love of God—seen in the Scriptures, experienced in our hearts, and played out in our lives—that will enable us to endure to the end. Regardless of the hate, the betrayal, the lawlessness that has surrounded us in 2020, we are called to love. The gospel must be preached for it is the good news of God’s love for fallen man. This is our only mission. We must not allow the light to go out. Darkness cannot cover the face of the earth. We must let the light of Christ’s love shine so bright within us that others will be drawn to it.

The world is being thrown into chaos because of the seeds of dissension that Satan has sown. We must not allow the pattern of divisiveness that tore France apart and is tearing America apart now, to be mimicked within the body of Christ, for “every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste and a divided household falls” (Luke 11:17). Let us be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) so that we can complete our God-given task.

The Bible accurately predicted the events of the French Revolution (see Q&A sidebar on the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11). The Bible has prophesied that this world will come to an end, and that no kingdom on earth will stand against the kingdom that Christ will establish. Jesus is coming soon. Yet the light of the gospel must be preached to every nation, city and town before He comes. Are you doing your part to share God’s good news with everyone around you?

Let us not be discouraged by the darkness that fills the hearts of humanity. The light of God’s love will shine supreme in this world very soon.

By: Elijah Ramjattan



Revelation. Not Revolution.

The Devil's Conspiracy & God's Answer

Covid is killing. Corporations are closing. People are protesting. Polarization is palpable. How do we explain the chaos around us? Who is to blame?

It is evident that someone is pulling the strings. Yet the multitudes are unaware of his sinister agenda and tactics.

“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12). The Bible tells us that the evil mastermind is none other than Satan, the fallen angel, and his army of evil angels.

The Devil delights in misinformation. Fake news was around long before social media. This has been the enemy's approach from the beginning. To understand what we are up against, we must go back to the beginning, when the villain was still Lucifer, “the shining one.”

Revolution in Heaven

“By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence” (Ezekiel 28:16) and “war broke out in heaven” (Revelation 12:7). What was Lucifer “trading” that filled him with violence and led to war in Heaven? Satan is the one “who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). He was, and still is, in the business of selling lies. In fact, he is the “father of it” (John 8:44).

Lucifer led a revolution in Heaven and “endeavored to excite dissatisfaction concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings, intimating that they imposed an unnecessary restraint” (The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White, p.495). After his attempted takeover in Heaven, he brought the same tactics to Earth.

He said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’” (Genesis 3:1)?

His lies were blatant and seductive. “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4, 5).

Since that fateful day in the garden, Satan has been telling us that we don't need God; that we can decide good and evil for ourselves. He's been feeding us a diet of lies and we've gobbled it up for thousands of years. We've joined the devil's revolution against God.

Hijacking the Church

Satan especially hates God's people. From its inception, he set out to corrupt God's New Testament church. He even deceived Judas and used him as a “secret agent” among the Twelve Apostles.

After the death of Christ and the apostles, the spirit of antichrist influenced church leaders. “The man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3) rose to power and sat in the temple of God. The Roman bishop was legally recognized as head of all churches by emperor Justinian in 538 AD. For centuries the Bible was prohibited. People were forbidden to read or even possess it. Priests twisted its teachings bringing disgrace on God. The truth was veiled in darkness.



Disguised as reverence for God, the revolution continued.

During the Dark Ages, God's children were turned from Christ to cruel, erring men over whom Satan held sway. They were told that the head of the church was their mediator and that they could atone for sin by their works. Pilgrimages, penance, and indulgences could appease the wrath of God and purchase His favor. The lies were thick. But the truth would not remain in obscurity.

Light Shining in the Darkness

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5 NIV).

In 1510, when the great reformer Martin Luther was climbing “Pilot’s staircase” on his knees, “suddenly a voice like thunder seemed to say to him: ‘The just shall live by faith.’ Romans 1:17. He sprang to his feet and hastened from the place in shame and horror” (The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White, p. 125).

He soon began teaching the supremacy of the Scriptures over tradition. He taught that no doctrine was to be received that was not based firmly on the Word of God. It was the vital principle of the Reformation and the unraveling of the church state union. True knowledge of the word of God dispelled the midnight of the Dark Ages.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105 KJV). “The spirit of liberty went with the Bible. Wherever the gospel was received, the minds of the people were awakened. They began to cast off the shackles that had held them bondslaves of ignorance, vice, and superstition. They began to think and act as men” (The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White, p. 277).

Light Rejected

In France, the ruling class rejected the light of the Reformation. The country remained loyal to the corrupt church and heinous crimes were committed. The worst was the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre against the Huguenot Protestants on August 24, 1572.

Under the influence of his mother, Charles IX sanctioned the killings. A bell tolled in the dead of night, signaling the time for slaughter. Thousands of Protestants were murdered in cold blood.

Protestants fled the country taking with them intelligence, arts, industry, and order. Cities fell into decay, farms withered, morals declined, and poverty ensued. The masses were taxed heavily, the money being used to support the excessive lifestyles of government and clergy. Unrest was rising.

The Enlightenment began with the introduction of Descartes’ philosophies in 1637. By the 18th century, Voltaire and others claimed reason was the supreme authority. Society should be based upon reason rather than faith. The church had left a bad taste in the mouths of many and the ideas of the “Age of Reason” threatened the authority of the church and monarchy.



Two new ideas that developed were deism (belief in a creator god that does not interact with his creation) and atheism. “I think, therefore I am” replaced the Great “I AM.”

Out of the Abyss

We can’t blame the people of France for rejecting the distorted image of God shown to them. But sadly, they also rejected the Bible which would have revealed to them the true God. “Mistaking license for liberty, the slaves of vice exulted in their imagined freedom” (The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White, p. 281).

Starting in 1793, during France’s “Reign of Terror,” the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11, a.k.a. the Old and New Testaments, were cast down and “the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 11:7) made war against them. In the words of Pharaoh, France exclaimed, “I know not Jehovah” (Exodus 5:4 ASV). The spirit of atheism reigned. The worship of God was forbidden. Bibles were burned, evidently lying “dead” (Revelation 11:8) in the street. Doctrines of devils replaced the doctrines of God as revealed in the Bible. (Note: Please read the Bible Q&A sidebar on “Who are the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11” for a greater understanding of these verses and their connection to the French Revolution.)

Church, state, family, law, and order all suffered when France rejected the Bible. “Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord,” “they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes” (Proverbs 1:29, 31 NIV).

“Those who will not read the lesson from the book of God are bidden to read it in the history of nations.”



all the nations, and then the end will come”
(Matthew 24:14).

“In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (1 Corinthians 13:1). It is by God’s “two witnesses,” the Old and New Testaments, that His Word is established.

Dig Deeper

The Great Controversy, Chs. 15, 29; Revelation 11; Matthew 27:11-55; Romans 8; 1 John 4

Got a Question?

Is there a Bible verse you’ve been puzzling over? Or a concept that someone shared and you’re wondering if it’s Bible truth or not? Or maybe it’s a world event that you’re trying to make sense of from a Biblical perspective.

We’d love to be of assistance.
Send your questions to:
godled@kytn.net.

“Atheists, infidels, and apostates oppose and denounce God’s law; but the results of their influence prove that the well-being of man is bound up with his obedience of the divine statutes. Those who will not read the lesson from the book of God are bidden to read it in the history of nations” (The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White, p. 285).

A Revelation of God

Satan’s conspiracy is simple: Cause humanity to suffer and lead us to blame God. He executed it brilliantly in the French Revolution. He led the people of France to blame their troubles on religion. They rejected the false image of God they had seen and chose instead to rely on their own reason. The results were horrific. What France needed was a revelation of God, not a revolution.

The people needed to see God’s glory as revealed in His character. “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty” (Exodus 34:6-7).

The Bible, the book the French rejected during the French Revolution, was the only thing that could sweep away the morass of lies and allow the light of God’s glory to shine in.

The same is true for us today. We too must see God’s glorious character as revealed through His Word. It is the only way we can be freed from the enemy’s lies.

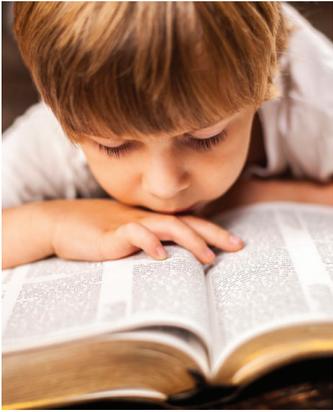
The truth of Jesus as found in the Scriptures is our only hope. Will you receive it?

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed”
(Romans 1:16, 17).

By: John Cloud

January Issue: God’s Coming Kingdom. There is a kingdom coming that we can embrace with all our hearts – God’s kingdom.

A God-Led Conversation



Practical Principles for Meaningful Bible Study, Part 1

I'll never forget the thrill of meeting Jesus when I was a teenager! I loved reading my Bible. It was life to my soul. In time though, I began listening to others' opinions on the Bible instead of deepening my faith in a personal God through my own Bible study. Before long I was pretty confused. I have found that many people are in a similar situation. They are bewildered by the opinions of others and confused about what God really thinks. Perhaps you are one of them.

The turning point came when I started praying to hear God's voice. He began teaching me principles of Bible study that have made His Word truly become "the Word of Life" to me (1 John 1:1). I'd like to share those principles with you in this four-part series on understanding the Bible.

A God-Led Conversation

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." Jeremiah 33:3

One of the most important things God taught me is that He wants us to understand His thoughts. His desire to converse with us is far greater than our desire to talk with Him. God wants to engage us in conversation so that we can understand Him clearly through His written Word.

But I have learned that understanding the Bible does not come through a superficial scan. Instead, true Bible study is made up of three repeated steps:

1) Biblical reading, 2) Biblical thinking and 3) Biblical application.

We will explore these steps in detail in coming issues. As we do, you'll see how they work together to radically expand your understanding of God's Word. They have transformed my life. I know they'll transform yours, too.

For today, I invite you to begin praying this prayer from Jeremiah 33:3 each day:

"Father God, I want to understand your Word! Please teach me. I want to hear Your voice speaking to me. Thank you for answering, just as You have promised, and showing me great and mighty things about Yourself. I can't wait to see what You have for me today in Your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen."

By: Pastor Marshall McKenzie



Pastor Marshall McKenzie

*Church Growth Director
KYTN Conference*

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