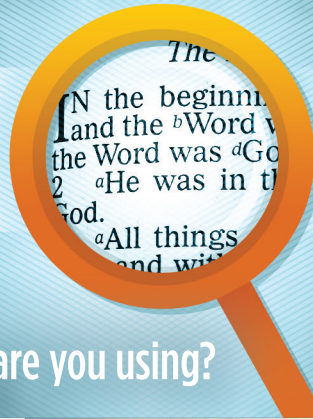


BIBLE OPTICS



What lens are you using?

The WORD or the world?

This issue:

- 01. *Which Leader Will You Follow?*
- 04. *The Right Place To Find Gold*
- 05. *History Repeats Itself... But Not Forever.*
- 07. *Q&A - Kingdom of Grace vs. Kingdom of Glory*
- 08. *A God-Led Conversation, Part 2*



From the Editor

We've just stepped across the threshold into 2021. We do so with trepidation, don't we? 2020 tread harshly on all of us. Will 2021 do the same?

Some hope that a new president will right the wrongs. Others are sure he won't. Can we know what will come?

Yes. Jesus tells us "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars... For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows". (Matthew 24:7-8). Unfortunately, 2020 will not be the end of our challenges.

Yet Jesus promises that those "who endure to the end shall be saved" in His heavenly kingdom (Matthew 24:13). Though we may not know what 2021 will be like, we can rest assured that Christ is establishing a "kingdom that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44).

The Conqueror of evil, the King of the universe, the Savior of humanity, is coming quickly. Do not let the sorrows of today keep you from having faith in tomorrow. "Surely, I am coming quickly" (Revelation 22:20).

Which Leader Will You Follow?

Sometime this month, the future leader of this nation will place his left hand on the Bible, raise his right hand in the air, and repeat the presidential oath. In that moment, he will become the most powerful person in the modern world. Then he will stand before the nation as your new president and make promises to you—plans, solutions, and goals for a better tomorrow.

The dawn of a new presidency calls each of us to pause and reflect. For the last year our nation has fixated on who can save us from the mess of 2020. For some, the inauguration is a celebration; to others, a disappointment.

Why is it that you and I are so prone to fix our hopes for a better future on a mere man? The Bible tells us that it is an age-old tendency with dire results. Yet God's Word does not leave us hopeless. It reveals the campaign of another Man—One capable of fulfilling His promises and ushering in the better future which we desire.



Marshall McKenzie | Editor
Church Growth Director, KTYN Conference



The Desire to be Ruled

Long ago, God chose the Israelite nation to be an example of how His kingdom functions. God Himself was their king, ruling through chosen judges. As the nation grew however, the people became obsessed with the idea of having a king like their secular neighbors. God granted their request, but told the prophet Samuel, “they have not rejected you but have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Samuel 8:7,8). The children of Israel had inaugurated a king and dethroned God in their hearts.

Like the Israelites, we often trick ourselves into believing that an earthly ruler can save us. In doing so, we replace the only One who can actually establish justice and peace. “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of host will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7).

Christ’s Final Battle

Political leaders run for office on a platform of ideas; they promise a better economy, an increase of jobs, a way to combat racial tensions, or to alleviate poverty. Yet how rarely they fulfill their promises.

At the beginning of Christ’s campaign for our hearts, He presented his platform of ideas in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In the Beatitudes, He identifies

“The children of Israel had inaugurated a king and dethroned God in their hearts.”

those who will be in His kingdom—the meek, the pure in heart, the peacemaker and the oppressed. He explained His laws and their true heart meaning. He taught about divorce, lust, anger, retaliation, and promises. But most of all He taught us to make love for God and man supreme. The platform of Christ’s kingdom is not built on unrealistic promises. It is built on the ethos

of heaven—LOVE—and guaranteed by God’s power at work within us.

The Inauguration that Changed the World

Christ’s 33 year-long campaign accomplished much. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, and caused storms to cease. His voice echoed through the valleys and penetrated the hearts of men. Yet His work was not complete.

For thousands of years the world had languished under the great dictator, Satan. He had demonstrated his ruling principles of self-service, hatred, and deception. Millions followed in his ranks. Now, through a most unusual battle, Christ would defeat Satan so he could be inaugurated as the King of our world.



Christ, “who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22), was beaten, battered and bruised. A crown was placed on His head—not one bedazzled with jewels and gold, but a crown that would pierce the flesh of his brow, and cause blood to flow down His face. He was presented to the world, not on a podium high above for all to see, but rather on a cross. The King of the universe hung on a tree like a painting nailed to a wall. Hell assumed victory at the death of Christ. However, hell’s defeat was evident when He rose from the tomb and ascended to heaven. Christ’s selfless love revealed at the cross prepared the way for Him to be inaugurated as King of humanity and take up His work for us in the heavenly sanctuary.

Follow the Leader

When Jesus came to this earth, He explained that “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). When we accept Christ as our Savior and are born again, we become citizens of His Kingdom of selfless love. If we allow Him to rule our hearts, He will do more through us than we could ever accomplish on our own.

We need not rely solely on elected officials to bring peace on earth. Christ invites us to join His campaign for humanity. He wants us to teach the things He taught, heal the hurting, fight for the disenfranchised, and lead souls to Him. While Christ completes his work in the heavenly sanctuary, we must complete our work on earth.

We seek these things because we are part of a “kingdom [that] is not of this world” (John 18:36). This is the great truth. God’s coming kingdom of glory cannot be corrupted by the nations of this world. Its existence is beyond any government or kingdom. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation give us confidence that God’s kingdom will be established, and that we will be a part of it.

“

The King of the universe hung on a tree like a painting nailed to a wall.

Let the inauguration of Christ bring us into closer communion with Him. Seek to be the change that God has ordained. On the dawn of His kingdom, let us promote His campaign, His message of truth, and strive to finish the work He has given us.

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in”. ~ Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Speech

By: Elijah Ramjattan

DIG DEEPER

Genesis 1-3; Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, ch. 42; Revelation 21-22

The Right Place To Find Gold

For years my grandpa dreamed of discovering a big gold nugget. The prospect of finding it drew him back to the creek again and again. He almost always found gold, sometimes just flakes, other times nuggets as large as a pea. Yet the find of a lifetime eluded him.

One day when grandpa was 92, my dad and brother took him to a creek high in the Sierras where he'd long dreamed of panning. "Prospectors made it rich there," he said. They searched out the lowest places, winched giant boulders aside, scanned the ground with the gold detector, panned out the gravel. Nothing. The sun hung low when they gave up and headed home.

Have you ever had an experience like that with the Bible? You came to God's Word expecting to find some treasure of truth you'd never seen before, but left feeling like you gained nothing?

I have. There are days when it seems I find little in my personal devotions. Other days my Bible reading yields flakes – a single Bible verse to claim, peace in the midst of the storm, insight for today's parenting challenge--little bits of gold from my Heavenly Father.

But I long for more from my Bible study. I yearn for deeper insights into His love and justice, a greater closeness with my King. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:2).

Like David, "I rise before dawn and cry for help; I wait for Your words" (Psalm 119:147).

It's that desire for more that keeps me coming back to the Bible each day. I don't always find the big nuggets, but here's what God has taught me: I won't find the gold of truth unless I spend time with His Word.

Think of it this way. My grandpa would never have found gold if he had not regularly prospected at the creek. You have to be in the right place to find gold. In a same way, you and I will never find God's nuggets of truth unless we daily pick up our Bibles and read them. It is how we put ourselves in the right place to find God's gold, that helps our treasure trove of truth to grow.

And you never know when God will surprise you with an extra special nugget of truth.

That's what He did for grandpa. Not long after that fruitless trip to the mountains, grandpa went panning at the creek by his house. This time a glint of gold in the dirt near his truck caught his eye. He reached down and picked up a nugget over an inch in diameter.

How he delighted to show me that nugget! It was his find of a lifetime. Yet grandpa hadn't worked for it at all. He was simply in the right place at the right time to receive God's gift to him.

Dear friend, will you too join me in daily coming to God's Word in search of truth, so that together we will be in the right place at the right time to discover God's greatest treasures? (Grandpa's gold nugget is pictured below.)

By: Shenalyn Page



Not sure how to study the Bible for yourself? Read "A God-Led Conversation, part 2" on page 8 for practical tips that you can use to understand the Bible better today.



History repeats itself... but not forever.

What will stop the cycle?

Many are concerned about the future of our nation. Political strife, the virus, economic issues, general unrest... is America doomed? If history repeats itself, the answer is yes. Over the course of history, every world empire has eventually fallen. The Portuguese, Ottoman, Ethiopian, and Roman empire all came to an end.

What if we could live in a stable, enduring kingdom? One where our leader kept all his promises and there were no divisive political parties. A place where social and economic classes ceased to exist, and prejudice was a thing of the past. What if pain, suffering, and even death didn't exist there? Would you want to be a part of that kingdom? It sounds too good to be true, but such a kingdom once existed.

Before the rise-and-fall of manmade empires began, God Himself set up a perfect kingdom and put humanity in charge. The time is coming when God will do this once more. In fact, the process has already begun. Let's look at the kingdom we lost, and how and when it will be restored.

A Kingdom Lost

Our planet was born pristine from the hand of God. Man was given dominion "over all the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Adam and his bride ruled from the home "the Lord God planted" (Genesis 2:8). Abundant provision was made for man and animal alike. The Tree of Life sustained human life perpetually. The ecosystem was perfectly balanced. No taint of pollution existed. Death had yet to touch plant, animal, or human. God Himself walked with man in the garden (Genesis 3:8). This kingdom, where all "was very good" (Genesis 1:31), was meant to last forever. Wouldn't you like to live in a place like this?

We don't know how long our planet existed in this blissful state. But we do know that early on the parents of our race violated the one prohibition given them: they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Dominion was forfeited,

the serpent rejoiced, and death laid claim to each of us. Not content to lose His earthly children, Jesus willingly offered Himself to be the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

Claiming rulership of Earth, Satan walked "to and fro" and "back and forth on it" (Job 1:7).

A Promise Made

Centuries later, God said to Abraham, "Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you" (Genesis 13:17). Essentially, he was being told to walk "to and fro" and "back and forth" symbolically reclaiming the earth. Man's dominion over the earth was to be restored. God promised he would be "the heir of the world" (Romans 4:13) when God "swallows up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8).

The promises to Abraham apply to us today. "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

The Price Paid

The salvation of humanity and the restoration of God's kingdom were not an afterthought. The Son of God was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20) to shed His blood for our redemption. Compelled by love, Christ came to save our wayward world.

When Jesus died on the cross, our redemption was paid in full. Satan's destruction and earth's renewal was guaranteed. Christ, the "heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2) will soon return for His "purchased possession" (Ephesians 1:14). He says, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

NEXT ISSUE: Do you have church members that are missing in action? Do you know what happened to them? What is it that Jesus promised would keep each of us faithful to Him? Discover the answers in the February issue of Bible Optics.

A Kingdom Prophesied

Hundreds of years after Abraham walked the earth God gave Daniel a prophecy that precisely foretold the rise and fall of world empires. This prophecy tells of a “stone cut out without hands” (Daniel 2:34) that would demolish all earthly kingdoms and “set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44).

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). Was Jesus announcing the establishment of the eternal kingdom Daniel foretold? It certainly doesn’t appear that we are now living in God’s eternal kingdom.

So, what did Christ mean? Just this: He came to establish God’s kingdom in the hearts and lives of His followers, so that we would be prepared to live in His eternal, heavenly kingdom.

Jesus demonstrated the foundational principles of God’s kingdom in His life of self-sacrificing service. He also taught us how to become a part of it. “Repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15) Jesus said. Then we will be “born again,” (John 3:3) and “the kingdom of God [will be] within you” (Luke 17:21). This miracle of the new birth initiates the Kingdom of God in each of our lives.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed” (Matthew 13:31) and it has been growing since Christ’s day.

The Kingdom Restored

What will this kingdom be like when it is full grown?

Someday very soon, the Creator will “make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). He “will wipe away every tear... there shall be no more death, nor sorrow... There shall be no more pain” (Revelation 21:4). There will be neither prey nor predator. “The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox” (Isaiah 65:25 NASB). We will “build houses” and “plant vineyards” (Isaiah 65:21) and “long enjoy the work of our hands” (Isaiah 65:22). Nothing will grow old or decay. “Neither moth nor rust” (Matthew 6:20) will destroy.

We will drink of the “river of the water of life” (Revelation 22:1) and again eat of the Tree of Life (Revelation 22:2). There will be no more sin or death (1 Corinthians 15:26). Immortality will be restored, and God will walk among us. As in Eden, we “shall see His face” (Revelation 22:4). We will “inherit the kingdom prepared for [us] from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

The capital of this very real kingdom will be the New Jerusalem. Jerusalem means “city of peace.” Unlike the earthly Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem will live up to its name. Made of “pure gold,” (Revelation 21:18) the city will reflect the character of its inhabitants. Every inhabitant of the New Earth will keep God’s commandments (Revelation 22:14) and there will be peace among all people.

This peace will permeate everything. Our bodies and minds will function perfectly. Stress, depression, and anxiety will not exist. Neither will diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. There will be no broken people or broken relationships. Friendships will last forever.

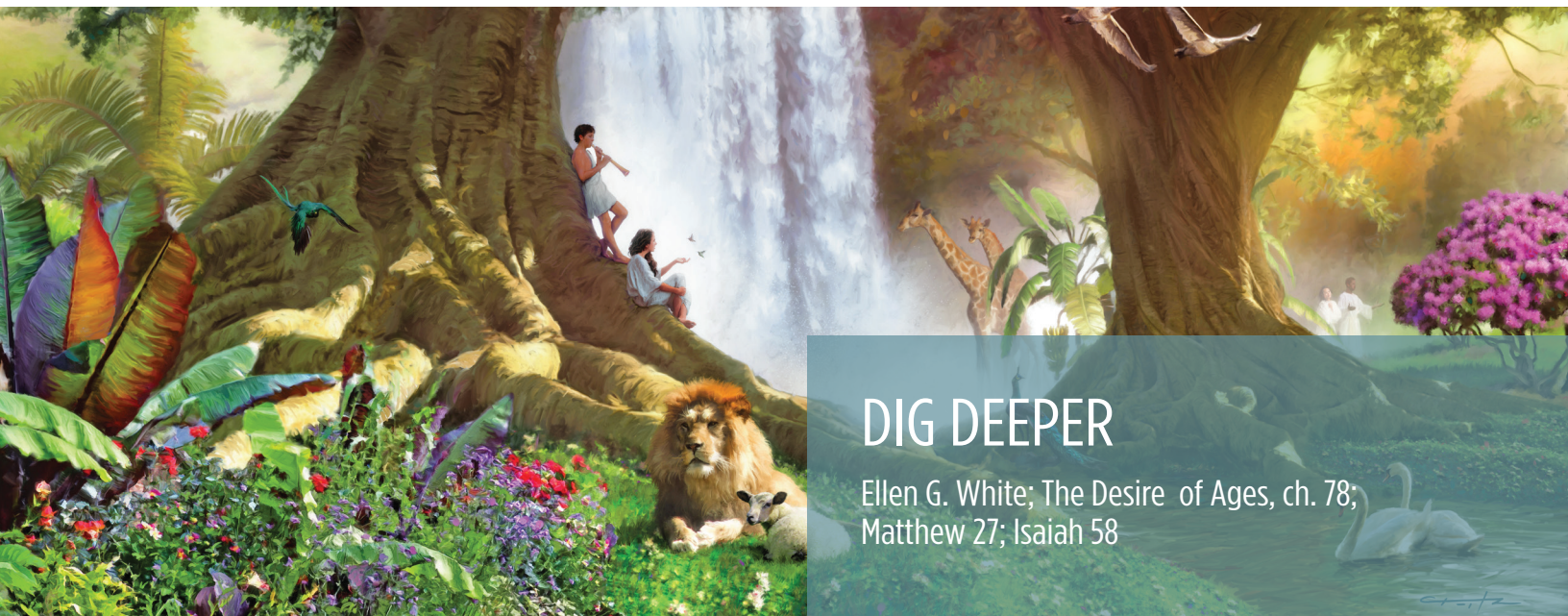
The Son of God cries out as He did in the original Garden of Eden, “Where are you” (Genesis 3:9)? There’s a place for you in His perfect kingdom. Have you accepted His invitation?

“In [His] presence is fullness of joy; At [His] right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalms 16:11).

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love” (The Great Controversy, Ellen G. White, p. 678).

I hope to see you there.

By: John Cloud



DIG DEEPER

Ellen G. White; *The Desire of Ages*, ch. 78;
Matthew 27; Isaiah 58

Bible Q&A

What's the difference between the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory?

Jesus announced the arrival of the kingdom of grace at the beginning of His ministry, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). By His death on Calvary, Jesus opened the doors to this kingdom. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11).

Jesus also told us how to enter the kingdom of grace: “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). It is by the grace of God that we are “granted repentance” (Acts 5:31; 11:18) and given “a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3) so we enter His kingdom. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

When Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21), He was referring to the establishment of the principles of God’s kingdom in our hearts. This is accomplished by the gift of the Holy Spirit when we enter the kingdom of grace. “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

We must enter the kingdom of grace now if we are to be a part of the kingdom of glory in the future. The kingdom of grace is a spiritual kingdom that we can enter now. The kingdom of glory is its physical counterpart that will begin at the second coming of Christ. This is when He will grant the redeemed eternal life (Revelation 22:12). After God destroys sin and death, He will create a new earth (Isaiah 65:17). The New Jerusalem will be established and God will dwell with His people (Revelation 21:3). That will be the final phase in the establishment of the kingdom of glory.

We enter the kingdom of grace by faith. At the second coming we will enter the kingdom of glory by sight. When we enter the kingdom of grace we are spiritually “born again” (John 3:3). At Jesus’ return we’ll be born once again “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52) and receive immortal bodies. In the kingdom of glory we will receive things that we’ve hoped for in the kingdom of grace. Until that day, we can “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2).



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 its 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.

DIG DEEPER

Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 2:11-15; Romans 8:1-4
1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Revelation 21-22

A God-Led Conversation, Part 2



Biblical Reading—The First Step in Bible Study

“Daddy, how can I know that I’m ready for heaven?” my eleven-year-old daughter queried recently. “I know Jesus is coming soon, and the Bible is supposed to help me get ready. But it doesn’t make any sense when I read it.”

Her question thrilled my heart. She was ready to learn something I’ve longed to teach her for years – how to really study the Bible. We sat down with her Bible and I explained the first step in true Bible study: Biblical reading.

“If you want to get something out of the Bible, you have to understand what it really says,” I explained. “The first step is to pray for God’s guidance and then read each chapter seven times.” Her mouth dropped open. “Why?”

“Because it will help you see what the Bible is actually saying. You’ll start to have questions about what you read. As you pray about those questions and we look for answers, you’ll be having a conversation with God about the Bible. Start with the book of John. It will help you understand who Jesus is.”

She’s taken her Bible reading seriously, reading each chapter at least seven times since then. She’s telling me about things she’s learning now. She has questions too, but that’s a good thing because questions are the beginning of the conversation God longs to have with her.

How about you, my friend? Do you know that you’re ready for heaven? Is your time with the Bible the beginning of a conversation with God, or simply an obligation to meet each day? God is longing to converse with you through the Bible and prepare you for heaven. Will you let Him?

Biblical Reading

Biblical reading is thoughtfully reading each verse in the context of its chapter and the book it is in. It is praying for the Holy Spirit’s insight, reading each chapter multiple times (at least seven) and noting verses that capture your attention. Why read multiple times? Because our minds are cluttered with the details of life.

Reading several times enables us to focus specifically on what we are reading, set pre-conceived ideas aside, and understand the immediate context of each verse. True Biblical reading is taking the Bible as it plainly reads. As you read, certain verses will stand out to you. These attract your attention for a reason. God knows what you are going through. He knows what you are thinking about. He will point out verses that apply to areas in your life that He wants to address.

By: Pastor Marshall McKenzie

Pastor Marshall McKenzie

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