

Hartford Bible Students

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FEAR: How to Conquer the Great Prophetic Reality of Our Time

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed...” — Isaiah 41:10

Over the past two years, the most searched verses on popular Bible apps contain the words “fear not” and “be not afraid” as found in Isaiah 41:10 and Joshua 1:9. This search data reveals that Christians of every nation are becoming increasingly fearful and perplexed over the unstable conditions prevalent in the world today. Ezekiel 7:17-19, Luke 21:26

Never before in history has so much tragedy and turmoil been witnessed in such vivid display by so many. News events are transmitted via cell phones worldwide as they happen — wildfires, mud slides, hurricanes, earthquakes, famine, sickness, mass-murders, terrorism, and every imaginable evil. Even more disheartening are news reports filled with the hypocrisy of those who were supposed to be pillars of the community and faithful shepherds of the church — crimes against the innocent have now been exposed and add an even greater burden to weaken faith

Why does Faith Falter and How Can We Increase Our Faith to Withstand the Storms of Life?

To bring stability to our faith, we must first understand the root causes of doubt. There are at least five underlying conditions which undermine faith: (1) lacking a proper Scriptural understanding of prophetic events and the plan of God; (2) an overwhelming personal experience which is very difficult to endure; (3) a sense of helplessness when viewing the broad spectrum of trouble throughout the earth; (4) an underlying physical condition which exhausts our spiritual strength; and (5) repeated exposure to temptations which we permit to constantly plague us. To complicate matters, Satan and the fallen angels take advantage of these five vulnerabilities, suggesting thoughts which make us question our faith even more. Ephesians 6:12

Cause # 1: Lack of Bible Understanding Remedy: A Solid Foundation

For our faith to survive the storms of life we must seek to know God’s merciful character and plan as revealed in His Word. A faith based upon knowledge is the shield and buckler of a child of God. (Psalm 91:4; Romans 10:17) Knowing what God is doing in the earth in preparation for His Kingdom is a critical remedy to dispel our doubts and fears. The Apostles urged: “Add to your faith... knowledge...” “Study to shew thyself approved...” 2 Peter 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15

God has provided in His Word an understanding of prophecy at this time so that His children will not be in distress when they see earth-shattering events unfold. On the contrary, a misinterpretation of prophecy will cause confusion and unnecessary fear. And so, it is important to prove all things by harmonizing the Scriptures. (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

But, beware — in Christian bookstores today there are many books which sensationalize and fictionalize the events of prophecy. In these books, highly symbolic passages are interpreted as literal, and although the Bible does indicate trouble in the earth at this time, the wrong interpretation of Scripture can totally distort the loving character and plans of God.

Thus, it is a good practice to square every doctrine with two pivotal truths: (1) Jesus’ ransom for all to be testified in due time; and (2) the fact that “God is love” and “His compassions fail not.” (1 Timothy 2:3-6; 1 John 4:16; Lamentations 3:21-23) We should test doctrinal interpretations to see if they are in harmony with the loving character of God who has provided for a full and fair opportunity of salvation for all mankind in due time. This is the hope for a world now in crisis, and this hope will reinforce our faith and put our minds at rest.

Cause # 2: Overwhelming Personal Trials Remedy: Knowing Why God Tests Faith

There are two primary reasons why God permits His children to endure hardness under the pressures of this world in crisis. First, it is good to remember that Christians are not exempt from the common troubles of this life. "Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people... but at the time that you are put to the test, He will give you the strength to endure..." (1 Corinthians 10:13 GNB) True heart sympathy for others can only be gained by going through the hard experiences common to all. Jesus is referred to as a "sympathetic high priest," and like our Master, Christians must be developed through the trials of life to have sympathy for mankind and their sufferings. Hebrews 5:8; 2 Corinthians 1:7

The second reason why God does not spare His children from trials is that, by the end of their Christian journey, the followers of Christ will be tested upon their faith. Therefore, God-like character must be developed over time by experience, and then tested to be proven worthy of a crown of life. (Revelation 2:10) "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:7) For those who seek the reward of living and reigning with Christ in God's Kingdom, they must have a developed, crystallized character which has remained loyal to Him, even under pressure. This is why God permits repeated testings.

This Christian era has been a time to educate and develop a select group of faithful saints taken out from this imperfect and corrupt world — a Bride for God's Son. This Bride class, also known as the body of Christ or the Church, will be willing to submit to the same kind of death as her bridegroom — a sacrificial death. "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Romans 6:5)

For some this will mean giving up a successful career to live a more humble and simple life, and thus, be more available for service to God. For another it will mean the alienation from loved ones who are repelled by God's Truth. For another it will mean a life of illness

or tragedy, and the joyful acceptance of enduring this as a momentary affliction during this short life. Only God knows what is best for His children's education, and by providence, He will work all things together for their good. (Romans 8:28) Yes, for the Christian, "...though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen... but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Cause #3: Helplessness in the Midst of Global Troubles Remedy: Understanding the Permission of Evil

To have a stable faith in God, we must be convinced by the Scriptures that He is loving and wise — providing all things for man's eternal welfare. God, whose character is supreme love, would not have permitted 6,000 years of evil to reign over His creation without a useful purpose and, ultimately, a grand outcome. 1 John 4:8 To understand why God permits evil, we must first realize the difference between permitting and causing. God has permitted man to have a temporary experience with evil, but He did not cause the evil. No, Satan, the "god of this world" is the great first cause of all evil upon mankind! Satan is the unrelenting enemy of God and God's creation. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2

Our Heavenly Father desires mankind to live in peace, health and happiness, but He now allows Satan to rule for a limited time in order that the world may learn valuable lessons — experiencing the painful consequences of evil and selfishness. Thus we read, "This sore travail has God given to man to be exercised therewith." (Ecclesiastes 1:13) As an illustration, although parents will try to intervene at times when a child ventures off onto a dangerous path, often, it takes the hard lessons of a rebellious life to learn that trust and obedience would have saved much pain and suffering. Just as the loving parents were waiting — ready to take back the child with compassion and open arms — so too, God is long-suffering with humanity. He knew that Adam and Eve would not comprehend His warning about sin and its devastating fruitage. Out of love, God formulated a plan whereby Adam's disobedience might provide a

valuable, long-lasting, though difficult lesson for all mankind.

**Cause # 4: Physical Condition Exhausts Spiritual
Strength Remedy: Look Forward with Hope
Built on the Scriptures**

Physical and mental weakness is a fact of fallen human life. Everyone at some time will experience some condition which will cause real suffering. At times like these, we need to see how our Master Jesus handled his trials: "...who for the joy set before him, endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:2) By study and prayer, Christians can learn through their experiences to have this same hopeful attitude. The joy which allowed Jesus to endure the heaviness of his cross was the knowledge of God's loving plan for all mankind. (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

Keeping in mind this big picture of how God's plan is working out good for His creation is what provided the joy that helped Jesus endure his cross. This is the same joy which will carry the faithful through every trial. And so, we can rejoice, even though there are times of trial, for we realize that there is a Divine purpose to our suffering. "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things...that I may win Christ." Philippians 3:8

Discovering how and when God will end, not just the suffering of the Church but also the world's suffering, is critical in strengthening our faith structure. Jesus' death — "a ransom for all to be testified in due time" — makes possible two primary phases of God's redemptive plan. The first phase is the selection of Christ's Church which is taking place now. The test of faithfulness, under adverse conditions, is one of character refinement — that each might be able ministers in God's Kingdom to those who were not capable of accepting Christ now. Consider James' words in Acts 15:14-17: "God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name [the true Church].... after this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue [remainder] of men might seek after the Lord..." Note that it is a small group, "a people for His name," that is selected first

out of the Gentiles. During this Christian Age, the Lord is only converting a few, a "little flock" "who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honor and immortality." Romans 2:7 The second phase of God's redemptive plan is setting up the "tabernacle of David," which was an Old Testament illustration of the Kingdom of Christ. After Christ returns, believers are united with him, and their work will be the conversion of "the residue of men." Revelation 22:17 prophesied of that time: "And the Spirit [Jesus Christ] and the bride [the true Church] say, Come [to the residue of men]. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that thirsts come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

**Cause #5: Constant Exposure to Temptations
Remedy: Avoidance and Resistance with Prayer**

Sin sickness is a foe which undermines faith. It must be fought with determined effort and prayer for grace and strength. This is a powerful statement: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) The heart is the battleground, and Satan is our enemy. We are not, however, to battle directly with Satan, for we are no match against him and his minions. We are to resist his influence, his deceptions, and his endeavors to lead us into error and sin. The instant we resist temptation and stand up for the Lord we become "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Ephesians 6:10

From the beginning of creation, God desired the human family to experience the privilege of exercising free will. This liberty of choice has, of necessity, been a hard lesson. God could have programmed the ideal man to be blindly obedient, but man would be no better than a robot. Instead, God created humanity with the ability to obey Him by choice. Because of the vivid lessons provided by the cruel consequences of disobedience, man is learning why obedience to God is the only path to happiness. Ultimately, under the more favorable circumstances of God's Kingdom, man will choose to love and respect his fellow man and his environment. He will joyfully render love, respect and perfect obedience to his Creator — trusting in His gracious provisions. Understanding why God has allowed the exercise of free will helps us to choose righteousness and resist evil. Romans 6:1, 12, 13

Faith is not developed overnight, and God understands when we cry out, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) The Christian is said to be in a schoolhouse, and every experience, even that which tests our faith and obedience, is an opportunity to learn and grow more into the character likeness of our Master and example.

Developing a Deep and Abiding Faith

Sometimes, even with a firm faith built upon the knowledge of God's plans and purposes, experiences may overwhelm us and our faith begins to sink. The Apostle Peter experienced this, when, in his zeal, he began to walk on the water toward his Master. But when the waves became rough, Peter began to sink, and he called to the Lord for help. (Matthew 14:22-33)

This illustrates to the Christian that, when his experiences of life become rough like waves in the ocean, he is to keep his focus firmly on Jesus for help and strength, and to trust that God will provide every need through His Son. Philippians 4:19 A deep and abiding trust in God is proportionate to the development of our faith. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Psalm 91:1)

As we grow in knowledge we grow in faith, and we come to see that our all-loving and all-wise Father is in control. We learn to trust Him, even in difficult times, because He is too wise to err and He has an ultimately good purpose for everything that occurs in our lives. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28) His promises belong to those who love Him more than self, and they belong to those who have answered the call to live according to His purpose.

Looking ahead, we see that there is hope beyond this present time of trouble upon the world. This fearful season at the end of the Christian era will usher in the golden age of blessing for all. Christ and his Bride — sympathetic because of their experience with pain and suffering during the time of this present evil world — will be the honored agents of God in bringing the lost world of mankind back into harmony with Him. (Isaiah 35:1-10)

At that time, those now blinded by error, sin and selfishness will come forth from their graves and will begin to see that the permission of evil has been for their education and development. Their hearts and minds will be more prepared to accept the new government under the leadership of the Prince of Peace. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment..." See Isaiah 32:1-4; Jeremiah 31:33, 34; Isaiah 14:7.

The permission of evil now abroad throughout the world will have been a useless torment unless mankind is given an opportunity in the future to use their experiences to make positive choices under the benevolent reign of Christ. This time is coming! "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory... The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace..." (Haggai 2:6-9) Then, all the troubles and tribulations of the past and present, instead of being useless sufferings, will be valuable guides toward righteousness, health and happiness. Revelation 20:6 Moffatt translation; Psalm 96:13

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