# The Arise Shine

"ARISE, shine; for thy light is come,
and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 60:1)

A Publication of The Church of God

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# *From the Desk of…*
# *James C. Nabors, General Overseer*

**Happy New Year 2024!** What a Wonderful Mighty God that we serve! Let us, together, believe God for a successful, happy and victorious year in the work of Christ and His Church. May His peace, His joy and His love keep us and help to direct us forward onto perfection.

**"Let us walk the walk and let us talk the talk"**—(A quote from Bishop Robert J. Pruitt). "Our perfection depends on it: *"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:15, 16). The hour is late and the time is short. We must walk the walk in order to be heard when we talk the talk. The prophecy of the perfection of the Church is as certain as was the prophecy of the Christ being born of a virgin in Bethlehem. The time is short, dear ones, so that we must move toward perfection rapidly, "*He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked*" (1 John 2:6).

**Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!** We welcome those to the fold of The Church of God. All new members, as well as the other sheep, who are asking their way to Zion. Praise the Lord for His faithfulness.

**117th General Assembly**: As we reflect back to this glorious time of fellowship; one with another and in His Spirit, our hearts are filled with the excitement of this year's theme for The Church of God: **"REFLECTIONS OF OUR PAST...SECURES US IN OUR FUTURE!!"** As we together, as His body, thrust ourselves into this challenge, let us believe God for miracle after miracle in this new church year.

**Auxiliaries:** Our auxiliary coordinators are doing a wonderful job promoting and directing their particular work. They are giving valuable and inspirational support to the work of the Lord and His Church. Let us strive to have each auxiliary in full working order in each local church.

**General Assembly:** The dates are set for the 118th General Assembly of The Church of God – August 31, September1, 2024. It is not too early to make plans to be in attendance. It will again be conducted in Cleveland TN.

**There is too much "sour holiness"** as Bishop A. J. Tomlinson would say, the need to mix in prayer for sweetness is a daily necessity. Let us together pray as never before, fast often and see the Glory and Power of God fall. Bishop A. J. Tomlinson stated, **"Every member a worker, and a special work for everyone."** Let us put this motto into practice and watch God work. What is Christ asking of you?

The Scripture is clear, *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might…(Ecclesiastes 9:10a)."*

**James C. Nabors, General Overseer**
**P. O. Box 4578, Cleveland, TN 37320 ● (423) 339-9876**
**www.thechurchofgod.net● www.la-iglesiadedios.net●www.the-churchofgod.org**

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# REFLECTIONS OF OUR PAST… SECURES US IN OUR FUTURE!!

(James C. Nabors, General Overseer of The Church of God **ANNUAL ADDRESS To the 117th General Assembly of The Church of God 2023 Part 2)**

## THE ONE FAITH

Covenant: *"Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses that you will accept this Bible as the Word of God – believe and practice its teachings rightly divided – the New Testament as your rule of faith and practice, government and discipline, and walk in the light to the best of your knowledge and ability?"*

"To be assembled here in this 117th General Assembly to do business for Him should certainly be considered a high honor, conferred upon each of us individually, as well as The Church of God. Yes, we have come to be encouraged, strengthened and blessed; and certainly, we have already enjoyed His divine presence, but our purpose and work is of a far greater magnitude and challenge than what we might be able to contemplate or even comprehend. Because of the responsibilities that are laid upon us as His Church, we are making necessary arrangements and preparations for His soon return as well as listening to His voice…..

The Early Church discussed questions, because Jesus had ascended back to the Father and to help prevent apostasy, we, today, discuss questions to bring us back to the pattern of the Early Church to usher in His return and to bring us back from apostasy. It is interesting to note what the Scripture has stated; *"…that they without us should not be made perfect"* (Hebrews 11:40). The former generations of The Church of God began the work and we are to finish it (the Church) for presentation to Him without spot or wrinkle. The work will be finished. We will walk in perfect unity and fellowship before the Lord comes back.

Paul stated; *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens (companions, brothers, sisters, one of another by covenant) with the saints, and of the household of God;"* (Ephesians 2:19). We are one of another, truly blood brothers and sisters. We who are members of His Church, the One Faith, have been, *"…by one Spirit…baptized into one body…"* (1 Corinthians 12:13) through that covenant relationship. By this covenant relationship, it brings us into that One Faith.

**Covenant: *"Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses that you will accept this Bible as the Word of God – believe and practice its teachings rightly divided – the New Testament as your rule of faith and practice, government and discipline, and walk in the light to the best of your knowledge and ability?"***

….We, as the Church, cannot get away from our responsibility…

It has been mandated to The Church of God.
It has been entrusted to The Church of God.
It has been given to generation after generation.

**TO KEEP and GUARD…THE FAITH, THE ONE FAITH!!!

It is our time!
It is our responsibility!

This generation, this last day's generation of 2023 is to defend and guard The Faith!!! No matter the cost; no matter the trials, no matter the hardships or persecutions.

Paul said, *"…that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;"* (Philippians 1:27). (AA 103 GA JCN)

"In ONE FAITH…and my friend this is, the One Faith!

Very few people today have what is termed "intestinal fortitude." Few have the courage to think big. To believe God for anything. To trust God completely. Especially so when it comes to the One Faith.

But we in The Church of God, choose life. **We** choose breath. **We** choose the warmth and touch of the Holy Ghost. **We** choose that direction from the Head of The Church of God.

**We're not ashamed of our heritage.**
**We're not ashamed of our past.**
**We're not ashamed of our doctrine.**
**We're not ashamed of the exclusivity of the Bride.**
**We're not ashamed of our forefathers crawling on sawdust floors to uncover what we have today.**

In fact, we honor this position. We honor His choosing us. We gladly embrace His presence upon this body and are humbled by His call. We gladly stand for all the book, not watered down versions of the Book, but all that the Lord says, we will do!

Listen, for the body to remain the body, for the body to stay alive, the body must go, must go where the Head takes her. It may be a barren land with obstacles, trials and tests, but for The Church of God, we have grown too accustomed to breathing

the breath of the Holy Ghost to now accept man's word over God's breathed Word. This Book (The Bible) is God-breathed. **It's** perfect. **It's** without mistake. **It's** inerrant. **It's** alive. In fact, **It** reads you as you read **It**.

I am speaking to a group of men and women today that know the Book. You have felt the breath of the Holy Ghost, the deliverance of the Divine, and can no longer be tied to the things of the past….

We may not fully be able to contemplate or comprehend all that is set before this generation of The Church of God, but be assured, we will meet our goal, and we will accomplish our task… We are committed to embrace all that is in the Book. I know that you have been disappointed, disenchanted and yes, even lied to by those you highly respected and revered, but these giants seated around us today have kept the faith. They have helped to preserve it for you and let me say it loud and clear. **We took "IT" and we will KEEP "IT" The Church of God!!!**

To keep this One Faith, in The Faith, we knew that we could not go along with, or embrace something less than we had covenanted to. You see our previous generation and then their previous generations were not wrong, and for a group of people to now come along and embrace a doctrine of "new revelation" that contradicts the Word of God are blatantly and belligerently wrong… We refuse to embrace something less than what we had covenanted to. We refused the spirit of error! We refused the walking away from Theocracy! We refused to abandon Unanimous Agreement. We refused the thought of no respect for our elders. We refused to be silenced on the call for less Holy Ghost power being manifested and less anointing. In fact, we need more Holy Ghost power, **More Holy Ghost anointing**, **More Holy Ghost leading, More respect for our elders, More, More, More.**

Yes, this One Faith, has put ourselves in the same place that Israel found themselves when it was stated: "What mean these Jews?" They were misunderstood, and we today may be misunderstood, but for you and me, let me say it loud and clear. Once again, we took "**IT**" and we will keep "**IT**" The Church of God!!!

Bishop Pruitt stated; "We are instructed in the Holy Word to be of "one mind," "in one accord," "of the same judgment," "of one heart and one soul," "striving together for the faith of the gospel." If God tells us we ARE to do it, then we CAN do it by His power and grace. We will take no detour, short cut, alternate route, or path of least resistance. We will do as He told us…" (AM 89th GA, 1994 p 26)

May I again say; what people of faith, these people called The Church of God who have walked through these stormy trials and tests to maintain and preserve The Church of God, The Faith! We may have been stunned for a moment, but now after these years, the shock is beginning to wear off, knocked to our knees, but that's where He restored our souls and now we are "STANDING." Ah, we may not look like much to the world but in my eyes and in God's eyes, The Church of God is standing tall!

We have learned through patience and comfort of the Scripture. *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:35-39). (AA 103 GA JCN)

## REFLECTIONS OF OUR PAST… SECURES US IN OUR FUTURE!!

## "BY HIS SPIRIT…WE SHALL BE ONE!" To The Saint's, The Faithful

Little did any of us know that when we decided to make our stand with The Church of God that we would be bombarded with an all-out attack from the enemy. These attacks were vehement and fierce. Never before in the history of The Church of God has the enemy unleashed such tactics against God's Church. These attacks came suddenly seemingly out of nowhere, waves came crashing in, and high winds of opposition blew fierce emotional trials of our soul. The storms of our life seemed to be all but unending. Those that we had trusted were gone. Sheep that we had labored with and for were destitute. The enemy flooded our minds with retreat and abandonment. These attacks came on us so suddenly that many of you were ill prepared with a defense for the battle. Just as quickly as the enemy had attacked God's Church; you soon found your bearings, footing and bravery set in and then the battle was in earnest, "it was on."

The faithful words found in Corinthians begin to echo in your ears; *"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity"* (1 Corinthians 16:13, 14). As a military guard, be on the alert, stay awake, "stand fast" by adhering to the faith "quit you" have your being under control, take hold of yourself, act manly, "be strong" be strengthened. These five imperatives are critical for our survival and ultimate victory. Be as a sentinel, ever alert. When under attack, stand fast in the faith and yield not, not even an inch. In time of heated battle, take the hero's role. Now, be strong and fight the enemy Church of God. This is the key; this is paramount that we must fight the enemy and not one another.

*"Let all your things be done with charity"* (1 Corinthians 16:14). The apostle Paul gets to the heart of the matter and

changes his metaphor. It does not matter the attacks from the outside from the enemy of our souls. The Christian soldier must stand with all courage and boldness against the onslaught, but to these within The Church, there must be a camaraderie, a closeness, a love that passes all understanding, a love that never retreats and a love so sublime that it will never fail. Church of God, we must guard this place at all cost and fully realize that we are comrades in arms against our common enemy, not enemies one of another. The battles may rage the blasts from the enemy severe, and at times it seems that we are winning the battle and at other times surrender is near. You that have been on the front lines this year know perfectly what I am saying. When it seems that we have made it to the top, victory is in sight, the enemy recruits his forces and attacks from another strong hold, but praise be to the Living God, you never gave up and you never gave in!

The story is told that the great Napoleon who had never tasted defeat was one day fighting a losing battle. He sent a message to the drummer boy to beat a retreat, but no retreat was beaten. He sent a second message, but still no retreat. Finally, Napoleon himself went, shook the boy by the shoulder roughly and cried, "Didn't I tell you to beat a retreat?" The boy looked up at the general, that he loved, through tear-filled eyes and said, "Yes, general, you commanded a retreat; I received both of your messages, but I didn't beat a retreat for I don't know how. When my father taught me to beat the drum, he didn't teach me to beat a retreat. But general, I'll tell you what I can do, I can beat a charge."

A smile broke across the face of the general and as he patted the boy on the shoulder he said, "All right, sonny, then you beat the charge."

The boy did beat the charge. The discouraged, defeated soldiers hearing it, thought reinforcements had come. They went out with new courage and zeal; they turned the tide; they won the battle; because one little boy said, "I don't know how to beat a retreat, but I can beat a charge." *(George M. Calloway "Holiness, The Dynamic of Evangelism")*

The Church of God is not in this fight to retreat. The fight is ours to win.

Be assured, saint of God, God has given this battle to "The Faithful." He, is even now depending upon us to lead in the charge. Can you hear the drum beat? Jesus Christ Himself is leading the way. Prophecy time has come! This is the day! This is the hour! This is the moment in history that we STAND and FIGHT! This battle falls on us, The Church of God, to fulfill all prophecy. We are that same building that was "*…built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"* (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Men may sound the alarm of retreat. Men may fear, quake and tremble, but I believe that to "The Faithful" in this hour, we will stand our ground and proclaim **"By His Spirit… We Shall Be One!"** This Church shall fulfill all prophecy. *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it"* (Isaiah 2:2).

The *"mountain of the LORD'S house,"* His Church, has been established as prophesied in Psalms; *"There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth"* (Psalms 72:16).

Not only are we established, but The Church of God is flourishing. The enemy cannot defeat "The Faithful" of The Church of God! These that are trying to destroy the Lord's House, God knows exactly how to handle them. *"As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison"* (Acts 8:3). Havock – He destroyed the Church, he laid waste the Church, and attempted to put down everything that Christ died for! God abased Paul on the road to Damascus and Jesus Himself asked Saul the question; *"…Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"* (Acts 9:4). Saul's response back to God was one of a repentant man. All pride was gone. All self-glory was gone. All better than thou attitudes were gone.

Saul then became Paul, the humble man, the small man. No more arrogance in him and he states; *"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;"* (Ephesians 3:8). You see, this man that made havock of The Church of God was changed. Wouldn't this be wonderful if and when it happens to other enemies of Christ and His Church? Paul then went on to write many books of the New Testament and in the book of Ephesians he states; *"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 1:1, 2). He writes to the saints, the Faithful.

Allow me to share with you, there have been saints in the past, but I also believe that there are saints today! You do not have to wait until you are dead to be canonized, as some teach. There are living saints in The Church of God. There are praying saints in The Church of God, and there are working saints in The Church of God. Saint means separated from the life of sin and consecrated to God. A saint is holy.

In the midst of sin, lewdness and degradation that were going on in the city of Ephesus, there was a group of people still walking around who were saints of God. They were faithful unto that high calling. Paul called them saints, Faithful saints. What made them saints of God? Quite simply, it is the love of God. You fall on your face before God asking Him to forgive you of your sins. His love then floods your soul and you love

everyone. It is love. You can do all the outward mechanics and not be a saint. You can live the doctrine and not be a saint if you are void of LOVE. It just becomes routine. Love for the Father brings us to the place of being a saint. Love helps us to endure faithfully. Love helps us to stand faithfully. Love helps us to be established faithfully. Love helps us to be anchored faithfully. You see the love of God makes us Christ-like. The Bible says that we are a "peculiar people." That simply means that we are "exclusive individuals."

Let denominations do as they will. Let them profess that sin is alright. Let them lower the standard, but the Body of Christ must be exclusive individuals, peculiar, belonging exclusively unto Him. **"By His Spirit…**[working on the inside of us, we shall be Faithful and] **We Shall Be One!"** (AA 105th GA JCN)

## REFLECTIONS OF OUR PAST… SECURES US IN OUR FUTURE!!

## THE CHURCH OF GOD

Are you The Church of God? Are you The Church of God? ARE YOU THE CHURCH OF GOD?

Many have asked this question down through the centuries; but, possibly, not as often as it has been asked of late. Many of these with questions are honest-hearted, wanting to know the truth, wanting to know our beliefs, wanting to know our doctrine and teachings. To the honest-hearted, (these seekers of truth), the Spirit is able to confirm to them what is truth and what is error. Sometimes, however, especially if you look at all the internet websites, of all of those who claim to be The Church of God; to the nominal Christians, it can become quite confusing. The spiritual do not dwell on surface issues and are not content with flippant answers or ten-second sound bites that have all fluff with no real substance.

If all of us who are gathered here this morning will be painfully honest and recall a little voice (maybe not audibly) speaking to us somewhere around June 2006 and again in September 2009 and quite possibly for some, even after this time, we would recall statements:

This can't be The Church of God!
This is not The Church of God!
This just couldn't happen in The Church of God!
This can't be it!
Where is the Church?

The sad thing is that we may have even been tempted to believe what was being sold to us. It looked dark, bleak and cold all around us. Some may have even gotten so discouraged that you hoped no one even knew where you went to Church. We all know where this voice originated from, Amen. Accusations and slanderous talk being belched out seemingly everywhere, trying it's best to destroy the very elect. Allow me to share with you the words of Bishop A. J. Tomlinson from one of his addresses when facing similar circumstances. Quite a few parallels are common to our day and time and the Church then. "That this is the Church of God has been proven over and over so many times by a great cloud of witnesses that there can scarcely be any room for doubts among those who have traced its history carefully from the date of the first Assembly until now… Some have fallen overboard and are trying to build up a little craft of their own, but this big ship sails on…

"You need not talk to me about looking elsewhere for The Church of God of the last days to fulfill prophecy. This is it and the one great evidence of the fact is the machine guns of opposition that are turned against it." Did He not tell His followers that they might expect trouble as long as they followed in His steps? Did not the Early Church suffer persecutions from those without, and were they not tormented by false brethren within? Did not Paul declare that grievous wolves should enter in among us, not sparing the flock. And did he not also say that from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them? Is it strange that men from our own ranks will try to set themselves up as leaders and oppose the Church and cry it down every way they can? What else could be expected when the disposition of men is ever the same? Wolves among us and men to draw away disciples after them – that's The Church of God because it is demonstrated before our eyes. Where else could you look for The Church of God except where there is trouble and wolves, and men who want to be leaders and take the place of the God-appointed leaders and those chosen for specific purposes?

Would you acknowledge that you are so little informed in prophecy and the Bible that you would look for the Church of God where there is no trouble, no false brethren, no wolves in sheep's clothing, no men who want to start up something of their own and draw off followers after them from the Church? Ah, beloved, if you. are in doubt and scarcely know where to find The Church of God and are looking for it honestly and earnestly – you may find it in the thickest of the fight and no other place. You find the institution surrounded by war material of all kinds firing hot shells and bombs at it from every side, and having its internal troubles besides, and you will scarcely miss it if you declare that institution The Church of God."

Go to the top of Mount Carmel and see God answer by fire to vindicate Elijah. What about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who were delivered from the fiery furnace. Daniel was protected in the lion's den. If He did this for the patriarchs of old, be assured He will do this for His Bride, The Church of God! We know The Church of God is right no matter how fierce she may be opposed."

*"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*" (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17)

You see, He will have a chaste Bride! We are heading toward a Wedding! "The wedding of the Bride united with Jesus Christ, the Groom." You can rest easy; the Holy Ghost will make sure that the Bride will be exactly what she is supposed to be, look like she is supposed to look, walk like she is supposed to walk and talk like she is supposed to talk.

Individuals may stray from the Church, but the Church, as a whole, will sail on. The call from the laity today is for Godly Concerned Leadership. The Church needs strong leadership that knows how to find God, who are able to reach down and pull others up by the bootstraps with encouragement. This heritage, that we have been given will continue on and the continuance of the brilliance and glow of the Church rest squarely upon this generation's shoulders.

We are no longer bound by denominationalism with all of its divisiveness, division and chaos. The present condition of Christianity where each group is divided by doctrinal differences into thousands of denominations is not God's standard, nor will it ever be. He is calling for one holy nation, who will see eye to eye and believe the same thing.

Autonomy, self-rule and the lack of obedience, is a denominational characteristic and a complete opposite to the theocratic leading of the Lord. As leadership in The Church of God, we must hold fast to our biblical standards. The Church must have steadfast leaders who are spiritual men, men of integrity, vision and full of the Holy Ghost and not in competition with the Holy Ghost. We need leadership that will assume their rightful positions as men and women of God; who will stand their ground on the things of God. You see communion with Him gives insight into truth, attainable in no other way.

The Apostle Peter's description of the Church is, *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy* (1Peter 2:9, 10).

This was not a generic term or a generic description that could fit just any ole thing out there. It was not in denominational language; it was not just a generation; it was not just a priesthood; it was not just a nation; it was not just a people; but he was descriptive, he was precise and he was unique.

The Apostle Peter said, but ye are a chosen generation out of all others, a royal priesthood connected by Jesus' own blood, a holy nation that is righteous, Godly and pure. Ye are a peculiar people above all others; exclusively handpicked, belonging to God! You and I are handpicked by the Lord for this hour. We must stand as His Church at all cost! We humbly accept the challenge to "take it" and "keep it" The Church of God!! (AA 102 GA JCN)

**WHY!! BECAUSE THE…**

## REFLECTIONS OF OUR PAST… SECURES US IN OUR FUTURE!!

Every generation, of The Church of God has had men and women who have risen to the challenge, to be The Church of God. They were moved by a Holy zeal and an anointing to persevere. Yet, equally, there has been denomination after denomination, independent group after independent group to rise and fall, claiming to be the One; first embracing His Spirit and His Power and then later assuming a more docile role with less vibrancy and real power. It was stated by John Wesley (one of the founders of the Methodist church) "I am not afraid that the people called Methodist will ever cease to exist, but I am afraid less they should exist without the Spirit and Power of an Almighty God."

My friend, this can never be a reality in The Church of God. We must ever be on guard lest we, too, exist without this Holy Ghost Power. When other groups are calling for less Holy Ghost power, less Holy Ghost demonstration, either verbally or through a non-committal attitude's, we must forever be found at the feet of Jesus desiring and wanting more of His Spirit. We need to be drenched in His Power, the Power of the Holy Ghost.

We, as The Church of God, have not yet reached that standard of perfect unity and perfect harmony, perfect love and perfect understanding; but our quest is somewhat different from the masses. Our challenge and resolve is to reach perfect harmony, perfect love, perfect understanding, perfect liberty and perfect obedience. *"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:"* (Ephesians 4:13).

We are much closer to perfection today than any other group of people have ever been since the Church fell into apostasy. It is in this Church that His government rests. Great responsibility has been laid upon us, but by His Spirit, we are more than conquerors. By His Spirit, we are warriors in His fight.

## REFLECTIONS OF OUR PAST… SECURES US IN OUR FUTURE!!

# Who's Important in the Church of God?

Ashley A. Pope, General Women's Missionary Band Coordinator

Happy New Year from the WMB department! I hope this finds you all having a great start to the new year. I would like to kick off the new year with a question for all of you. Who is important in The Church of God? We all know the most important one is God, but who else is important?

*"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." (Psalms 139:13-16)*

Here is where David declares that God knows everything about him, his actions, his thoughts, and his words. He also affirms that God is always with him, surrounding him and protecting him. He praises God for creating him and knowing his destiny. He asks God to search his heart and lead him in the right way.

How many times this past year have we thanked God for creating us? It is so easy to feel all alone and to feel like no one cares about us. We also find ourselves sometimes feeling insignificant, but let me reassure us all; we are not insignificant to God. God knows everything about us, He loves us and chose us to be here right now, to work and grow The Church of God.

*"But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God:" (Luke 12:7-8)*

The Bible says, "*But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." (Luke 12:7)*

This verse is part of a passage where Jesus is teaching His disciples about the importance of trusting in God and not worrying about their lives. Isn't it comforting to know that He knows all about us, every detail, every thought, every fear, everything all the way to how many hairs we have on our head. I know with getting older my hair is coming out, but God knows everything about us and loves us anyway. The second scripture there says:

*"Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God:" (Luke 12:8)*

Which means to publicly acknowledge the Lord and to live before men as His servant; to serve God; to share His love with everyone.

With everyone? Wow! That's a BIG TASK; share the gospel with the whole world, with everyone, confessing what God has done for us letting the whole world know! I am sure you are asking, "How are we going to do that?" I know sometimes when my children come in like a hurricane from church or being gone somewhere, we have clothes everywhere, toys in the floor, shoes piled by the door, and let's not forget the laundry. We don't get it all clean by jumping around doing everything all at once. You start by doing one thing at time until it's all done. If not, you will get overwhelmed and go for pizza instead.

So how are we going to get the work done in The Church of God? By doing one thing at a time and sharing the load with each other. I know our overseers' shoulders get awful heavy sometimes. They have a big job that never ends and the hours are long, but we know God's got help on the way, and God has a very important person who can offer so much to The Church of God; they just don't know it yet. Do you know who it is? That's right. It's you! It's us! It's all of us! We are very important. We are important in The Church of God. God called us to be in The Church of God, and we are very important. This year I just want to remind us that we are important to God and The Church of God. Thank you for all you do for missions.

# Ready or Not, Here I Come

Amy R. Hatton, General ABM/VLB Coordinator

(Part II of the ABM Message preached at the 117th General Assembly)

In the Jewish wedding, the bridegroom is the focus. He is the honored one. Why? He did all the work! He was the one that paid the price! Remember the 9 steps the groom fulfilled.

1 GROOM'S FATHER SELECTS THE BRIDE
2 NEGOTIATED DOWRY
3 AGREED IN FRONT OF 2 WITNESSED
4 COVENANT TAKEN
5 WINE DRANK TO SHOW COVENANT WAS ACCEPTED
6 DOWRY PAID: JESUS GAVE HIS OWN LIFE
7 WENT BACK TO FATHER'S HOUSE TO PREPARE A HOME
8 BRIDE HAS MADE HERSELF READY
9 THE GROOM RETURNS WHEN THE FATHER DECIDES IT IS TIME

*"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3)*

The bride knows approximately when the groom will come. However, she does not know the exact time of his return. So much has taken place, with so much at stake. The bride and groom have waited so long to be reunited. It is such a big deal. Surely everyone would be ready. Right? Wrong!
*"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." (Matthew 25:1)*

The virgins represent the untouched, pure, innocent, and holy. They all had lamps that looked the same, a vessel to light the way. They all went forth with one purpose, to meet the bridegroom. They put forth a conscious effort to meet the groom when he returned.

All ten virgins here represent Christians. As Christians, we are called to be virgins: untouched by the world, pure, innocent, and holy. As Christians, we each have a lamp to shine. Our job is to show forth that light until Jesus comes.

*"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)*

The Church is to be a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden. The virgins went forth to meet the bridegroom. We must go forth to meet the Bridegroom. Each of us must put forth a conscious effort to meet Jesus, either by way of death or by way of the rapture.

*"And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Five were foolish. We do not have to be foolish "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:2-4)*

*"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)*

Once we have studied, we do not have to be ashamed. Just because we make sure that we are not foolish, it does not mean that we will appear that way to the world. There are those that will never respect or accept the wisdom of God.

We must rightly divide the word of truth. We do not get to pick and choose scriptures to fit our agenda. The 1974 Burger King Campaign was "Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce, special orders, don't upset us." It is not Burger King have it your way.

*"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Timothy 4:12)*

Let no man despise thy youth. How? Be an example in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity. I was called to preach when I was 13. Sister Ashley was preaching when she was a VLB. Brother Scott had his first pastorate when he was a VLB. There is plenty of work in the Church for young people to do.

We were all young. We were not the most experienced, but that did not matter. Not as long as we were an example in word, conversation, charity, spirit, faith, and purity. Let no man despise thy youth! The youth is not The Church of God of tomorrow. The Youth is The Church of God of today! God has a place for the VLBs and the JOYs. (And just plain OLDs.) You are not too young or too old for God to have a work for you to do. Amen?

All ten were virgins. All ten had lamps, and all ten went forth to meet the bridegroom. So what made 5 wise and 5 foolish?

*"They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." (Mathew 25:3-4)*

Outwardly, they looked exactly the same. They were carrying the same lamps. Inwardly, those lamps were different. It is what is on the inside that counts.

What was the difference? Extra oil. The wise took oil with them. While the foolish had no extra oil, the wise had extra oil. The five foolish had a lamp with some oil in it, but they did not have anything more than was in their lamp at the moment to sustain them. They had no extra oil! They had just enough for right now. Just enough to get them "through the day". No plan in case the groom tarried. No plan in case they had to face a trial. Nothing extra!

Have you ever known anyone who seemed to struggle with being a Christian every day? They never had enough victory to make it through. Why? Because they needed more oil, more anointing, and more power!

The five wise had more than a lamp with a little bit of oil. They had an extra vessel of oil to sustain them. They had enough for right now and enough for later. They had a vision. They knew they might have to do more than just make it "through the day." If the groom tarried, if they had to face trials or hardships, they were prepared with extra oil. Just in case.

All ten virgins have lamps with some oil at this point. The oil represents the Spirit of God: Salvation. If any of them died at this moment, they would have made it to heaven. If the groom would have returned at this moment, they would have made it to the wedding, but that is not what happened.

The Bible says: *"While the bridegroom tarried…" (Mathew 25:5)*

If we died the day we got saved, or if the Lord came back for us on the day we got saved, we would all make it to heaven, but that is not what God wants from us. God wants people willing to serve Him every day of their life, until He is ready to call us home. This commitment is so important to Him that if someone served Him for fifty years, and backslid right before they died, that person would go to hell. We will only make it into heaven if we are saved when our life ends.

*"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13).* We must be determined to hold out to the end!

It is sad to think that there are some people who are serving the Lord today who will not be willing to hold out to the end, and their souls will be lost. It is not once saved, always saved. What matters is how you finish the race. So what do we need? EXTRA OIL!

*"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." (2 Kings 2:9)*

Go ahead and ask for a double portion. Elisha did not say "That's impossible." Elisha answered *"thou has asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me."* Go ahead and ask for a double portion. God is not saying "That's impossible." God's answering, *"thou has asked a hard thing: nevertheless if thou see me."*

You might be asking a hard thing, but I truly believe that God has some nevertheless for His people! Nevertheless means in spite of that, even so, be that as it may, and regardless! Nevertheless, if you see me. God is looking for a people who will open up their eyes and truly see Him and truly see The Church of God!

"Reflections of our past" is our theme. If you cannot see God like you used to, if you cannot see The Church of God like you used to *"… anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." (Revelation 3:18b)*

*"In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people," (Isaiah 28:5).* It is easy to see us as nothing in comparison to what we used to be. It is easy to see us as the residue, not even a cup of coffee worth. We are just the residue after you pour the coffee out!

*"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Haggai 2:3)*

Reflections of our past. *"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?"* Secures us in our future, *"and how do ye see it now?"*

*"Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." (Haggai 2:4-5)*

Reflections of our past, we are covenanted. Remember the words that we said in the past, remember our covenant! "Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses that you will accept this Bible as the Word of God—believe and practice its teachings rightly divided—the New Testament as your rule of faith and practice, government and discipline, and walk in the light to the best of your knowledge and ability?" This is a "perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

Perpetual: everlasting, eternal, unchanging, forever, permanent, and endless. This is binding and final. Reflections of our past, secures us in our future

*"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, saith the LORD of hosts." (Haggai 2:6-7)*

Shake all nations. To quote Jerry Lee Lewis, "There is a Whole Lotta' Shakin' Goin' On!" I feel some shaking going on, how about you?

The desire of all nations shall come. If the United States of America is not interested, I will tell you one thing, the nations are. They are ready. They are hungry

Reflections of our past, Secures us in our future.
*"I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts."*

But how are we going to do it? We do not have enough people. We do not have enough finances.

*"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. 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, saith the LORD of hosts." (Haggai 2:8-9)*

Reflections of our past, secures us in our future. You know what I see? I see a banner!

*"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" (Song of Solomon 6:10)*

There is a saying that always bothered me. "Some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good." We need MORE of God's anointing. We need a double portion. This might be a hard thing, nevertheless!!! Nevertheless I see! I do not just see a residue; I see the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, so cover me with your anointing! Cover me with your oil! I want to be covered in God's oil and God's anointing!

*"It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;" (Psalms 133:2)*

*"While the bridegroom tarried…" (Mathew 25:5)* The groom tarried. He was delayed

Why do you think the Bridegroom is waiting? Why does Jesus tarry? Because Jesus is coming back for a church that hath made herself ready. The Church still has work to do. There are spots and wrinkles and blemishes that need to be removed, and He will not return for His bride until she is perfect. He did the work on the cross. He paid His price. Now it is our turn to put in the work. Amen?

All thought that He would have returned by now, but it is not based on our time; it is based on God's time. Behold, I come as a thief. *"Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." (Revelations 16:15)*

We have lost enough people throughout the years. Make sure that you are not a spot wrinkle or a blemish. "Keepeth your garment!"

How many people thought that the Lord would have already returned? *"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:" (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

*"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)*

*"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." (Matthew 25:5)*

All slumbered and slept. Do not be Lulled to sleep by the cares of the world.

*"Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean." (Isaiah 52:1)*

*"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." (Romans 13:11)*

*"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." (Matthew 25:6)*

Midnight is when it is the darkest and bleakest. Midnight is when most people are sleeping. It is good to know that God does not sleep! I serve a God of earthquakes and weddings at the midnight hour!

*"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." (Acts 16:25-26)*

*"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." (Matthew 25:6)*

One commentary that I read said that the bridegroom announced his own arrival, but I do not see it that way. Because it does not say, "Behold, I am here, come ye out to meet me."

It says, *"Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."* Someone else is doing the announcing.

I think this is the fulfillment of Revelations: *"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (22:17)*

*"And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly:" (Isaiah 5:26)*

*"I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased." (Zechariah 10:8)*

*"I will hiss."* He will whistle for them like a shepherd gathering his sheep with a whistle. Lift up an ensign to the nations from far. Hiss unto them from the end of the earth. He is calling them out. Calling them out from the countries! Calling them out from the spiritual state! Calling them out from their conditions! They shall come with speed swiftly!

*"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant." (Jeremiah 50:5)*

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# Let's all go to Sunday School!

The Church of God

Greetings from the Sunday school department of The Church of God! I want to praise God for what He has given us in the past year. As I've heard someone say one time, "God gets gooder and Gooder and gooder every day." As we come into the new year, it's my prayers that God will pour out His blessings upon each and everyone. Poured out, shaken and pressed down until the cup is overflowing. As we go forward in this new year, I pray that God will make us more than conquers, and He will give us the desire to be more like the disciples, and become fishers of men/ And when we face those challenges that puts us into the middle of the storm, that we don't only pray, "Lord help us through the storm", but "Holy Ghost, teach me how to dance in the rain!" So, this year if you want to put a theme on Sunday school, it will be "**More Than Conquers As We Become Fishers of Men"**. May God richly bless each and everyone.

-Jeff A. Williamson, General Sunday School Coordinator

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# Daniel

K. Scott Hatton, Administrative Coordinator, Regional Overseer of the Southeast Central Region

*"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god." (Daniel 1:1-2)*

This was the greatest tragedy that the Israelites ever experienced. God allowed foreign invaders to come and take the Northern Kingdom and now the last stronghold of God's people, the Southern Kingdom was taken over. King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon in his first year of reign, besieged Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was king of Judah at the time, and instead of destroying the kingdom completely, Nebuchadnezzar left Jehoiakim still in charge but under the Babylonian Empire. This was a common practice because it was more lucrative to leave some of the people there to pay tribute to the conquering empire. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not leave the kingdom completely intact. He took what he pleased and whom he pleased. He took some of the vessels out of the house of God to Babylon and put them in the temple of his god, and he also took the best children and the best young men back to Babylon. People have speculated why he did this. Some believe that he took the children so that the parents would not rise up against the Babylonians knowing that their children were held captive. Others think that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to weaken Israel further by not having young men to fight against Babylon. Or perhaps he simply wanted to have a greater work force in Babylon as slaves and servants. For whatever reason, God allowed this to happen and God's young men were in captivity

through no fault of their own. Israel and especially the young people were being punished because of the sins of the older generation. The young people were in a foreign land with a different language and different beliefs.

I cannot help but see the similarity to us. Ask yourself the question, "Am I home right now, or am I in captivity?" I am not talking about the physical building that you live in. Where is home for us? Is not it in a land far away? I hope that you are thinking about Heaven right now because this earth should not be our home. Our home is a place where we cannot get to right now. In a sense, we are being held captive in a foreign land, and God has allowed it to happen. We can only go home when God allows us to go home. The language is different here and the culture is different. **The question is are we going to allow this foreign land to change us from who we are and what we have been taught?**

*"And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans." (Daniel 1:3-4)*

The king asked the eunuchs to choose the best looking and the most intelligent of those young people that had been taken captive from Israel. Spiritually, I believe that we have some tonight that do not have a blemish in their spirit. I believe that we have some that are skillful in wisdom and cunning in knowledge. **Realize this that the prince of this world, Satan, wants you! Young people, Satan wants you! Satan wants you to use your ability for the world not for God. God has placed you in this test to see if you remain true to Him.**

King Nebachadnezzar was going to try to change who they were on the inside. He was going to try to get rid of the Hebrew tongue and teach them the tongue of the Chaldeans. A person's language is who they are. Language shapes thought. If a person talks different, then they will think different. For instance: languages with more color terms tend to have finer-grained distinctions in color perception. Every day, Satan is trying to teach us a different language. He is trying to change our language to a language of acceptance, not an acceptance of people, we should always accept people, but an acceptance of sinful lifestyles. Are you going to be affected by this language? Hold on to what you have been taught. Hold onto what you have been raised in.

*"And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king." (Daniel 1:5)*

That sounds pretty good. It sounds like that they were taken well care of. The ones that were chosen by the king probably had it better than they had it back in Jerusalem. You will make an impression on a person that is starving if you feed them. I am sure many of the chosen Israelites enjoyed their captivity. They had the best food, the best education with comfortable surroundings. I am sure many became so comfortable in Babylon that they forsook all they knew in their hearts and accepted the Babylonian way of life. How many good Christians do the same? They start experiencing the good life. They get a taste of the pleasures of this world and become friends with it and falsely believe that their capture is not as bad as they had thought. Once they do that then they forsake all that God has taught them.

*"Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:" (Daniel 1:6)*

There were four that were different. As with most Israelites, each one of them had godly names. The name Daniel means God is my judge. Hananiah means the grace of the Lord. Mishael means He that is the strong God, and Azariah is interpreted, the Lord is my help. They had wonderful names that reminded them of who they were so in order for them to further be converted to the Babylonian way of life, these names had to go.

*"Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego." (Daniel 1:7)*

Listen to what their new names mean. Belteshazzar signifies the keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel. Shadrach translates to the inspiration of the sun (they worshiped the sun). Meshach, of the goddess Shach (Venus was worshipped). Abednego means the servant of the shinning fire. They worshipped that too. Can you imagine your name being changed to something that glorified an idol? For the four of them, it did not matter. They may have taken them away from home; they may have changed their language, and they may have changed their name, but they could not change their heart.

*"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." (Daniel 1:8)*

Daniel purposed that no matter what they were going to do, he was still going to serve God in this far off land, and that is the resolve that we must get. No matter where we are or what people do to us, we are going to serve God anyway. And to the young people, you are going to face a time when you will be offered the king's meat. That will be the beliefs, doctrines, false knowledge of this world. You will hear it at school. You will hear it on tv or in the news. You will hear it on the job, and when you are offered that meat, I implore you to remain faithful to what is in this scripture. Remain faithful to God and His

Word. If Satan offered you all the wealth and the power of this world, you must not succumb to that temptation. Even if everyone around you was not serving God and you were all alone, you must serve God. That is what Daniel did. He was still going to serve God even though those around him were not. We have to be concerned about the attitude of apathy or lukewarmness that a lot of Christians have. Even if other people around us are serving God half-way, still love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. It does not outright say why Daniel thought it would be defiling himself to eat the king's meat and drink the king's wine. Perhaps he thought some of it might contain swine's flesh. Maybe he thought it was first offered in sacrifice to an idol, or blessed in the name of an idol, or maybe he was in mourning for Israel. What we need to realize is that Daniel stood on his convictions.

*"Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs." (Daniel 1:9)*

Sometimes we think that the world will always hate us because of our love for God, but many times, we will find favor with people because they will see something in us that they like. When they do, then that will be the Lord working through us. Just like Joseph found favor with the prison guard so Daniel found favor with the prince of the eunuchs.

*"And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king." (Daniel 1:10)*

The New Testament teaches that no food or drink is unclean except alcoholic beverages but science has shown that in order to be healthier, we need to eat less processed foods, less sugar and more fruits and vegetables in our diet. If we do that then we will have more energy, be stronger, and have fewer diseases. God had specific things that the Israelites could not eat because He wanted them to multiply in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. There were certain things that Daniel knew that God would not want him to eat. The Babylonians believe that Daniel would be healthier by eating the king's meat and the eunuch was worried that Daniel would not be healthy by following God's diet.

*"Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants." (Daniel 1:11-13)*

Daniel was confident that God's way was the best, so he asked for an experiment. If Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are healthier after ten days by eating pulse, which is believed to be herbs, fruits, parched peas or lentils, and just water to drink, then they will be able to continue with that for the three years.

*"So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse." (Daniel 1:14-16)*

If we follow God's principles in life, then we will prosper without God intervening because He set up the laws of nature in the first place. God's principals build up. God's ways protect and strengthen. A sinner can follow the Bible in how they live their life, and they will be better for it. If they follow the laws of God, then they will experience some of the natural blessings even if they are not right in their heart. For instance, if a man or a woman remains faithful in their marriage, they will not experience the pain and suffering that unfaithfulness brings. If a person does not drink alcohol, then they will not experience the ill effects of alcohol or the problems that often accompany drinking alcohol. Sin has many ill effects that have nothing to do with God's judgment. So how much more blessed are we if we submit ourselves to God, if we become new Creatures in Christ and turn away from sin and follow His precepts?

*"As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." (Daniel 1:17)*

God intervened for them spiritually for their faithfulness. Because of their integrity, God rewarded them spiritually. He will do the same for us. Be obedient to Him, and you will be blessed.

*"Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus." (Daniel 1:18-21)*

Serve God in all your ways and you will prosper even if the world says you will not. Church, let us be like Daniel and the three Hebrew children. Let us not let ourselves be defiled by the captivity of this world. Do not let its language become your language or its lifestyle become your lifestyle. Do not fall in love with its pleasures, its wealth or its entertainment. This world is not your home. Our home is heaven and one day we will be able to go home if we remain true to God.