

Elisha, the Young Men, and the She-Bears

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Publisher: Church of God, Bismarck, Darwin & Laura Lee, **Editor:** Laura Lee, **Assistant Editor:** Darwin Lee We do not necessarily agree with all contributors, or their works submitted and printed in this newsletter. It is up to you to get out your Bible and see whether these things are true. Iron sharpens Iron

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“So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.” (II Kings 2:24)

In the story recounted in I Kings 19:19-21, Elisha showed his commitment to God by walking away from his family, wealth, and the good life as a farm owner to serve as the eventual successor to God’s prophet, the well-respected Elijah. People know Elisha for his humble and tireless service over six decades and for performing more miracles than his mentor, Elijah. These miracles—healings, works of providence, and even a resurrection—touched the lives of many and were fondly remembered.

But some contend his record contains a dark blot. Because of what II Kings 2:23-24 records—an incident in which a pair of female bears mauled more than forty youths at Elisha’s instigation—some think that, early in his service to God, he acted cruelly and viciously, placing a black mark on his life and record as a servant of God.

We need to examine these two verses to see what they actually tell us. Some Bible students make unfounded assumptions about specific details in the narrative, leading to gross misunderstanding. We will find that the prophet is not guilty of cruelty and child abuse, as his critics contend.

Elisha’s Early Miracles

In II Kings 2:11, Elisha watches a whirlwind take his master Elijah away in a chariot of fire. Once the former prophet disappears from view, the younger man collects the very mantle Elijah had thrown over Elisha’s shoulders when he was supervising the plowing of his father’s fields. At the time, a cloak like this signified the wearer as God’s prophet.

Elisha’s first miracle occurs when he strikes the Jordan River with the mantle, and the waters part as they had for Elijah, allowing him to cross back to the western bank. These actions, observed by numerous eyewitnesses, verify and establish him as the true successor to the prophet Elijah (II Kings 2:7, 16).

Elisha immediately establishes the character of his ministry by helping the people of Jericho, where the water was undrinkable. He threw a bowl of salt into the water source, saying, “Thus says the LORD: ‘I have healed this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness’” (II Kings 2:21). God then performs a miracle of purification. As Scripture says, “So the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke” (II Kings 2:22).

The text continues:

Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, “Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!”

So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. (II Kings 2:23-24)

Critics of Elisha—and by extension, God—point to this account as an example of what they deem to be his violent and uncaring nature. They ask, “How could he punish these young children in such an extreme way?”

At first reading, one could conclude that Elisha was a short-tempered man who, with little provocation, cursed a group of toddlers in God’s name, calling on bears to emerge from the woods and rip the children apart. Such a biased recap of the story gives ammunition to God-haters who say, “See, God is heartless.” Such criticism fuels anti-Christian sentiment.

Examining these two verses more closely will determine whether these claims have merit or if the critics have misunderstood and misinterpreted them.

Who Were These “Youths”?

Anytime we study difficult or misunderstood scriptures—and these verses are good examples—we must widen our viewpoint and even look beyond our English translations to investigate what is really happening in the text. For instance, we must consider how this minor event fits within the larger scheme of the biblical narrative. In addition, we need to ask if the Hebrew text has been mistranslated because of bias, tradition, or even the evolution of a word’s meaning over time (called “semantic drift”).

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As this vignette begins, we find Elisha traveling up from Jericho to Bethel, a climb of a few thousand feet. Bethel was a city with a long history as a place to honor God, as Jacob stopped there on his way to Haran and had his vision of a ladder rising to heaven. It had a fine reputation until Jeroboam rebelled against King Rehoboam, taking ten tribes from the line of David.

I Kings 12:26-30 narrates how Jeroboam made two golden calves, placing one as an object of worship in Bethel in the southern part of the new Kingdom of Israel and the other in Dan in the north. Jeroboam also replaced the Levitical priesthood and changed the holy days, inaugurating a new religion. These golden calves stood as symbols of Israel's idolatry and rebellion against God, and Bethel and Dan soon became focal points of Israelite apostasy.

By the time of Elisha, Bethel had become a center of idolatry and rebellion. It is no surprise to find the city's young people adopting a disrespectful attitude toward a prophet of the true God, most of whose followers lived in the rival kingdom of Judah. Such biased young people “came from the city and mocked him” (II Kings 2:23).

Some translations render the Hebrew term underlying “youths” as “little children” or “little boys,” causing critics to ask, “Why would God kill innocent little children?” The simple answer is that God did nothing of the sort.

That Hebrew term is *na'ar* (*Strong's #5288*), which is variously translated as “boy,” “lad,” “servant,” “youth,” or “retainer.” It has a broad range of application, denoting anyone from a baby (e.g., Moses in Exodus 2:6) to a fully-grown man (e.g., Absalom in II Samuel 14:21). In Genesis 22:5, when traveling to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son, Abraham uses the term to refer to Isaac. The Jewish tradition is that Isaac was a grown man at the time, and the church has speculated that “the lad” may have been as old as 33 years.

Na'ar is also used to designate an armor-bearer (Judges 9:54) and a king's servants (II Kings 19:6). In I Kings 3:7, Solomon refers to himself as *na'ar* at the time he became king of Israel in his early twenties.

We can conclude that these “youths” in II Kings 2:23 were not what we would consider little or prepubescent children. They were likely older teenagers or young adults and were accountable for their actions. The *A Faithful Version* translation paints a more precise picture of the situation in verse 23: “A gang of youths came out from the city and mocked him.” They were certainly not a gang of toddlers.

“Go up, you baldhead!”

Undoubtedly, the “youths” who came out of Bethel were not children but a group of immoral young men comparable to a modern street gang. It was a large gang, too. Scripture tells us that the bears mauled forty-two of them, making one wonder how many escaped, frightened but unharmed. It seems not out of the realm of possibility to think that Elisha may have been facing a mob of fifty, sixty, or more young, violent men.

Such numerous adversaries posed a genuine threat to the life of God's prophet, and he recognized that he was in significant danger. Some commentators speculate that the young men may have been preparing to stone him, but nothing in Scripture indicates this specifically.

However, the end of verse 23 informs us they “mocked him and said to him, ‘Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!’” Their mocking is described by a Hebrew word meaning “to ridicule, scoff, or scorn.” We must not underestimate their actions, as holding God's prophet in contempt was a serious offense. The young men were doing their best to demean Elisha, influenced by living in an area in rebellion against God.

They called Elisha “baldhead” or “baldy,” a contemptuous term. The prophet may have suffered premature balding, as he was not an old man. He was probably not much older than most of those mocking him, likely between 25 and 35 years old. The age difference was probably not more than a decade.

Another possibility why they used the term connects to the practice of lepers and slaves shaving their heads. Calling God's prophet “baldhead” or “baldy” implies that these young men considered Elisha as equally abominable, a detestable outcast.

What did they intend by taunting him to “go up”? We can presume that the youths were attempting to prevent Elisha from

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entering Bethel since they obviously did not want a man of God there. So, telling him, “Go up,” does not mean they wanted him to continue walking toward the city.

The Hebrew verb means “to go up,” “to ascend,” or “to climb up.” Context helps us to identify which of these is best. Remember that the bulk of II Kings 2 deals with Elijah’s “going up” into heaven. When God whisked him away in a chariot of fire, He did not do it in secret (verses 11-12). Word of the spectacular miracle had reached Bethel, and the youths used the incident to taunt Elisha.

No doubt they recognized him from the distinctive mantle he wore. They knew it as Elijah’s mantle, as he had recently visited the city (verses 2-3). So, the young gang members decided to insult the newly appointed and young prophet of God, insinuating that he was, as we might say, a greenhorn or wet behind the ears. Their heckling words challenged Elisha’s claim to be a prophet. Their taunt amounted to, “Show us what a powerful man of God you are! Go up as Elijah did!”

They ultimately aimed to drive him away. Thus, what they shouted at him was tantamount to, “Quit bothering us! Leave as Elijah did! Get out of here!”

God Is Not Mocked

Most importantly, we must remember that Elisha was not the only one being mocked and ridiculed. The youths’ insults reached beyond the prophet to God Himself. They showed blasphemous disrespect for God and His authority. Notice II Kings 2:24 again:

So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.

Elisha was sensitive to God’s honor, and as his story in Scripture reveals many times, he was not one to back down. He stood his ground against this mob, looked at them with what must have been righteous indignation, and rebuked them, cursing them for their irreverence.

Note that the text does not say that Elisha asked or prayed for any specific type of punishment. Scripture says he “pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD.” He warned them that harm would fall on them for their blatant disrespect and evil intentions, leaving the precise manner of God’s vengeance unsaid. God would determine their punishment.

The author of II Kings does not leave us to wonder about His decision. As Elisha continued to the city, God directed the she-bears to attack them as His judgment on this irreverent gang of young people. Protective mother bears are more prone to attack, given that they will do anything to protect their young. So, there may have been cubs nearby. However, as their Creator, God did not need the presence of cubs to command the bears to attack. By mocking this man of God, these young men revealed their actual attitudes toward God Himself. Such contempt for Almighty God was punishable by death, showing that He takes the sin of disrespect seriously. The law in Leviticus 24:15-16 reads:

Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: “Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death.

In Leviticus 26:21-22, God warns the Israelites of the consequences of continual disobedience, one of which is attacks by wild animals:

Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins. I will also let loose among you the animals of the field . . .

God describes in Hosea 13:8 how He will react to the Israelites’ unending iniquities against Him: “I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs; I will tear open their rib cage and devour them like a lion. The wild beast shall tear them.”

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Due respect and honor for parents, the elderly, and God’s servants are also important to Him, which the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12) covers either in the letter or in principle. God does not tolerate disrespect because, once it begins, it has a way of increasing and expanding. We must be careful not to disrespect those God has allowed to be placed in authority, whether they are national, business, community, or church leaders (Romans 13:1-2).

Similar Societal Disrespect

Consider also that these youths’ parents bore great responsibility, as they had played a significant role in instilling their children’s rebellious and disrespectful attitudes toward God and His prophet. Having raised these young men with no fear of God, the parents paid the penalty in grief and horror after the two she-bears mauled their sons.

Our society today is not much different; it, too, is anti-God and full of iniquities and rebellion. So many mass shootings and other acts of violence reported on the news are perpetrated by young adults. It is almost out of control.

The story of Elisha and these young men imparts a sobering lesson. God will not be mocked, as Paul says in Galatians 6:7, “for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” These young men sowed contempt and disrespect, and they reaped the consequences: The bears showed contempt and disrespect for them. What lies ahead for our disrespectful and irreverent society?

In 1 Peter 2:15-17, the apostle Peter reminds us of the honor and respect God expects and what we should teach our children:

For this is the will of God, that by doing well you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for wickedness, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

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Doctrine of Repentance
(Copyright) by Warren Zehrung (Little Rock, Arkansas)

“God loves you just as you are, come as you are and give your heart to the Lord.” This is a common refrain among many evangelicals. The problem is this: Our Savior taught exactly the opposite. Jesus said that “just as you are” is the way that leads to death (Proverbs 14:12). He said that our hearts are dreadfully deceitful, and He certainly does not want that. God says that the innermost thoughts of our hearts are not to be trusted. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9) “The human mind is in opposition against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.” (Romans 8:7)

What Jesus actually said was, “Repent, or perish” (Luke 13:5). He meant that we are to turn around, change our ways and think differently, and not remain “just as you are.” The only way to be acceptable to Jesus Christ is to leave our past sinful conduct behind us and separate ourselves from this world’s impure ways. Then and only then will Jesus receive us (2Corinthians 6:17). Satan’s desire is that we remain “just as we are,” but Jesus requires that we be repenting and changing. “Become ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

Here is what we have to understand. All men are sinners, and it is not God’s intent that we remain sinful. Jesus died to eradicate sin and its consequences. He in no way approves of sinful behavior. “Everyone has sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23, 1John 1:8) What is sin? God has a perfect system in place, but “sin” is wrongdoing against that perfect order. “Sin is the transgression of the law.” Whoever violates God’s right way of living is a sinner who will die (1John 3:4).

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God does not wish for us to choose eternal death. His intention is that we choose eternal life: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life.” God then asks, “Cast away from you all your transgressions [sins], whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will you die?” ([Ezekiel 18:31](#))

That is the sure fate of sinners – they will die the eternal death. That is, unless somehow, they are saved from that fateful death. That is why Jesus is called, “The Savior;” He saves sinners from death. “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” ([Romans 6:23](#)) How can we receive His gift? Jesus has definite conditions that are to be met before He saves anyone. The very first requirement is repentance towards God for sinning against Him, then faith towards Jesus as our personal Savior ([Acts 20:21](#)). The sinner must repent – there is no other way. He must stop lying, stealing, fighting, dishonoring parents, or breaking any of God’s commandments, because sin leads to death. We change our lives by repenting from dead works and having faith toward God ([Hebrews 6:1](#)). Through repentance and baptism sin can be forgiven and pardoned, and the penalty of sin can be removed. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” ([Acts 2:38](#))

When we sin, we cause a rift between God and ourselves ([Isaiah 59:2](#)). As enemies of God, we bring an extreme penalty on our heads - “The wages of sin is death.” ([Romans 6:23](#)) That sentence and penalty for our sins has to be paid, and retribution made. But we are totally incapable of repairing the damage our sins have caused. However, with genuine repentance toward God, our sins can be forgiven by faith in Jesus.

Instead of having to pay our own death penalty, as we deserve, faith in Jesus means we believe that He paid our debt for us with the sacrifice of His life. “When we were enemies, we were reconciled [made to be at peace with] God by the death of his Son.” ([Romans 5:10](#)) God the Father, in His mercy for us, accepts Jesus’ death in place of our own death.

The first thing that we must do to repair the breach between God and us is to repent. There must be Godly sorrow for the harm that we have caused. “Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation.” ([2Corinthians 7:10](#)) A sinner must admit to himself, “I killed Jesus Christ.” You may wish to lessen your part in Jesus’ death by saying to yourself, “No, Jesus died for the whole world – I’m only one of many.” If you alone had sinned – Jesus would have gone through His torment and death just for you alone!

Repentance takes place when the sinner turns his thought process around and reconsiders how his life has been spent. He then turns his entire life around and leaves his past ungodly thoughts and actions behind. He chooses Godly conduct and begins to live a life of Christian principles and service. He comes to hate the “old man of sin,” and even wants to bury him. “We are buried with [Jesus] by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” ([Romans 6:4](#))

Therefore, repentance leads the believer to seek baptism and receive God’s Holy Spirit. The lifelong repentance process brings about a moral revolution and complete conversion of the sinner thru the guidance and indwelling of God’s Spirit. “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 fullness of Christ.” ([Ephesians 4:13](#))

You may ask, “How do I work-up the motivation to repent and ask God’s forgiveness?” The answer is: You don’t. It is impossible to bring about Godly repentance on our own. Sure, we can work up some worldly sorrow when we get caught in sin, or when we fear punishment, but Scripture says that is a deadly sorrow ([2Corinthians 7:10](#)). It is God the Father who grants repentance to sinners when He begins to call them ([2Timothy 2:25](#)). “Do you despise the riches of God’s goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” ([Romans 2:4](#)) It is God who opens the eyes so that a sinner can see the error of his ways.

Sin separates us from God, but righteousness makes fellowship with God attainable. ([Isaiah 59:2](#)). “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” ([Isaiah 64:6](#)) Our own righteousness is nothing. Of our own accord, we could never work our way back into God’s good graces. God the Father, in His love for us, imputes the righteousness of Jesus Christ to us – making our relationship with Him possible ([Romans 3:22](#)).

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However, repentance causes us to change the way we think and to put God's will before our own. We thought Sunday and Easter were right days to worship God – now we know better than that. God calls us to His truth. In true repentance, we surrender our wills in total obedience to the will of God. In living according to His will, we begin to put on God's character, and to think like He thinks (1Corinthians 2:16). Without God's Spirit working in us, it is not possible to put God's way first.

If God has touched your heart (Acts 2:37), hear the instructions that Peter gave to those brethren who made up the New Testament congregations. "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Then with the very life of God's Spirit empowering you to grow in grace and knowledge, change your life to be useful to God. Notice what Jesus says we must do to demonstrate Godly repentance: "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." (Matthew 3:8)

We are called the people of God, the children of God, the Church of God. Notice God's words to us. "If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and repent from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin." (2Chronicles 7:14) Jesus said, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)

Summary

The first step in becoming a true Christian is to respond to God's call to repentance. Everyone who truly repents of their sins, yields to God in total compliance with His laws, accepts Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and receives forgiveness of their sins. Then, in baptism, the new convert symbolically buries the old sinner in a watery grave and is raised with Jesus Christ, walking in the newness of life, justified. Justification means that past sins are forgiven, making the convert righteous, guiltless and innocent before God. This pardoned and sinless state makes possible, for the first time, a personal relationship with God (Romans 5:9-11). We are justified by the faith of Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16). After baptism, the new convert is made an essential part of the Body of Christ with the laying on of hands, in which God the Father imparts His Spirit to the new Christian, making him or her literally a child of God (1John 3:2). Only through the empowerment of God's Spirit can we remain justified and in personal contact with God (Romans 8:5).

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How to Read and Understand Proverbs

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In ancient Israel, there were people who spent time studying wisdom and writing and learning lessons of wisdom. They were called "wise men" and often had the title of a counselor (see **1 Chronicles 27:32**; **Ecclesiastes 2:16**). There were also "wise women" (see **2 Samuel 20:16**; **Proverbs 14:1**).

Those with wisdom who were good counselors often occupied a position in the government of Israel similar to that of a priest or prophet. See **Jeremiah 18:18**.

What is wisdom? Biblically speaking it is "the ability to make godly choices in life." And we achieve this goal by applying a truth of God's word to our lives. Sounds simple and straight forward but the problem often arises from misunderstanding and misapplication of Scripture.

The book of Proverbs is written mostly in Hebrew poetry. You need to know that Hebrew poetry does not rhyme. It consists of statements that are parallel either synonymous as in **Proverbs 7:4**. Or opposites as in **Proverbs 10:1**.

Or a forecast such as in **Proverbs 21:16**. Some Proverbs are in the form of an acrostic -- meaning using each line in alphabetical order with a different Hebrew letter. See **Proverbs 31:10-31**.

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Those who taught wisdom were often regarded in place of a parent. Thus, you have many proverbs addressing people as "my son" (or daughter).

Good parents want their children to be **happy**, to be **socially acceptable**, included, and **not lonely, or rejected**. They want them to be **law-abiding and moral**. They want them to be **prosperous** and to have a certain level of **success** -- including social acceptance, **moral uprightness**, and **freedom from poverty and want**.

The short, pithy statements in Proverbs are designed to help the reader to do just what parents really want for their children. But they make no guarantee that life will always go well for young people or people of any age. Life has its ups and downs. But all other things being equal, the person who understands Proverbs and follows the principles of practical wisdom is bound to be much better off than those who don't.

Again, remember that skill in wisdom does not guarantee that it will be properly used. Ahithophel gave good advice to Absalom, but it was intended for evil (**2 Sam. 16:20 -17:4**). Solomon turned from God in his later years (**1 Kings 11:4-6**).

Proverbs presents a contrast between the life of Folly and the life of Wisdom as if they were two women. The life of Folly is characterized by violent crime (chapters. (1:10-19; 4:14-19); dishonesty (6:12-15); sexual sins (2:16-19; 5:3-20; 6:23-35; 7:4-27; 9:13-18; 23:26-28); laziness (6:7-11); careless promising or pledging (6:1-5).

Proverbs does point out proper social and godly behaviors such as: caring for the poor (2:22,27) respect for government leaders (23:1-3; 24:21-22) the importance of disciplining children (**Prov. 23:13-14**).

But people forgot that Hebrew poetry cannot always be taken literally, and no sound-minded person thinks that beating a child with a rod or board is proper. Take a look at an exaggeration used in **Prov. 17:10** A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than **a hundred blows** into a fool. (NAU).

Nowhere in God's law is it permitted to hit someone 100 blows. Even beating a criminal was limited to 40 blows and the Jews made it 39 to be sure they didn't violate that law (**Deuteronomy 25:1-3**).

A proverb does not state everything about the truth but mostly points to it. We have many pithy statements in English that we use frequently. But though they carry a certain truth, they don't cover every situation. "Strike while the iron is hot." It has an application but suppose the iron is hot and you decide you don't need to use it. Must you strike then?

"Look before you leap." But it doesn't say where you plan to leap. Look at what? This statement is to be taken symbolically not literally. It means "before you commit to something you can't reverse, be sure you have examined all issues.

Let's examine this Proverb: **Prov. 6:27-32** Can a man take fire in his bosom And his clothes not be burned? 28 Or can a man walk on hot coals And his feet not be scorched? 29 So is the one who goes into his neighbor's wife; **Whoever touches her will not go unpunished.**

30 Men do not despise a thief if he steals To satisfy himself when he is hungry; 31 But when he is found, he must repay sevenfold; He must give all the substance of his house. 32 The one who commits adultery with a woman lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. (NAU)

"Burned" is a metaphor that means "arousal" or "sexually stimulate." "Touches" is a word used to mean that he has sexual contact with his neighbor's wife. You shouldn't take these words literally or when your next-door neighbor introduces you to his wife and she holds out her hand to shake yours you will be "touching" her. And will your clothing literally be aflame?

In **Prov. 9:13-18** Folly is depicted as a harlot who seduces the fool who is fascinated by her ungodly pleasures. The end result of a life of Folly is not generally a long and happy life but a life of many mistakes, problems, and the way of death.

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Does Proverbs 16:3 promise success in any business adventure if you commit that venture to God? Here it is in several translations:

Prov. 16:3 3 Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established. (NAU)

CJB **Proverbs 16:3** If you entrust all you do to *ADONAI*, your plans will achieve success. (CJB)

NJB **Proverbs 16:3** Commend what you do to Yahweh, and what you plan will be achieved (NJB)

CEB **Proverbs 16:3** Commit your work to the LORD, **and your plans will succeed.**)

Too many people misinterpret this Proverb. They don't realize that proverbs are inexact statements pointing to a truth in a figurative way. They misapply the words and believe that this is a direct promise from God that if they dedicate their business or other plans to God they will be successful.

They say, "I will dedicate my business and promise to give God 10% or more and God will prosper me." Some, therefore, dedicate idiotic or stupid, or selfish business ideas to God. If it succeeds for a little while, they believe God blessed it. If it fails, they wonder why God didn't keep His promise.

I have seen people do this with a hasty marriage, with a not well-thought-out business plan, and with a poorly planned or thought-out move to a different place.

How do you interpret this proverb in various translations:

Prov. 29:12 12 If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, All his ministers *become* wicked.

CJB **Proverbs 29:12** If a ruler listens to lies, all his officials will be wicked.

ERV **Proverbs 29:12** If a ruler hearkeneth to falsehood, all his servants are wicked.

GWN **Proverbs 29:12** If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked.

JPS **Proverbs 29:12** If a ruler hearkeneth to falsehood, all his servants are wicked.

KJV **Proverbs 29:12** If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants *are* wicked.

NAS **Proverbs 29:12** If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, All his ministers *become* wicked.

If you take that literally then you as a servant have no choice but to become wicked if the ruler listens to lies and falsehood. No! That is not the right interpretation. What it means is that when the boss or ruler or leader is willing to listen to lies, there will be a tendency for all his servants or attendants to use falsehood. But it does not automatically happen that they will become wicked.

Keep in mind that the Proverbs are not legal guarantees of success and a life without any problems. Remember that Job and Ecclesiastes are also a part of the wisdom books of the Bible. Remember: "Time and chance happen to all."

Here are some *GENERAL AND SPECIFIC RULES REGARDING THE PROVERBS*:

1. Proverbs are often figurative parables couched in Hebrew poetry looking to the future.
2. Proverbs are intensely practical, not in theory or theology.
3. Proverbs are worded to be memorable not always technically precise or accurate.
4. Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior but often just the opposite.
5. Proverbs reflect an ancient culture and need to be sensibly translated or interpreted for our present day, so we get their correct meaning.
6. Proverbs are not guarantees from God but guidelines in poetry for wise actions.

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7. Proverbs may use very specific words or exaggerations in various literary techniques or forms to make a point.
8. Proverbs give good advice for wise approaches to a number of specific aspects of life but are not covering every issue that we encounter in life.
9. If we use the proverbs wrongly, we may end up with crass, materialistic, extremist behaviors. Rightly used they provide good and logical advice for our life behaviors.
10. Used wrongly, we may expect guarantees from God that were never intended, and it may hurt our faith.

Now with these guidelines and with the examples I have given --you can read the Proverbs and profit from their wisdom.

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A Matter of Trust

(Copyright 2023) by Joseph B. Baity (Charlotte, North Carolina)



Of late, “artificial intelligence” (AI) is dominating the news. With the recent rollout of ChatGPT (one of the most potent and advanced forms of AI), anyone with a computing device and an Internet connection can directly interface and “converse” with the chatbot—much as with another human—and hundreds of millions already have.

In the past few decades, the concept of AI has grown from a scientific curiosity and a favorite topic of science fiction writers into a critical tool for scientific and medical research, large-scale data analysis, advanced human interfacing, cutting-edge weaponry, and what tech experts call “machine learning.” The Internet overflows with headlines, deep dives, and what will probably be an endless series of debates over AI’s development, potential, and inevitable impact—both positive and negative—upon society.

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As popular as ChatGPT is, AI is far more than a sophisticated chatbot. According to a May 7, 2023, [article](#) from the *Washington Post* entitled “A curious person’s guide to artificial intelligence,”

Artificial intelligence is an umbrella term for a vast array of technology. There is no single definition, and even researchers disagree. Generally, AI is a field of computer science that focuses on [creating and training machines](#) to perform intelligent tasks, “something that, if a person was doing it, we would call it intelligence,” said Larry Birnbaum, a professor of computer science at Northwestern University.

As technology advances, AI is becoming a part of everyday life for many, if not most, humans. AI is essential to developing smartphones and so-called “smart” devices. With computerized personal assistants, facial recognition, satellite navigation, enhanced or virtual reality, predictive medical diagnosis, the Internet of Things (IoT), and now ChatGPT, AI transforms how we interact with the physical world.

As ubiquitous as AI is in our global society and as many benefits as it provides mankind, many are skeptical of its disruptive nature. In fact, many would compare its troublemaking potential today to that of the Internet in the 1990s. According to experts, AI will transform the workplace, with the potential to eliminate up to 80% of all current human jobs. The potential cost to society is difficult to measure or comprehend.

Elon Musk, whose companies have helped to develop AI—and put it to use—recently called for a six-month moratorium on further development while calling for much more regulatory oversight. He fears that most of us, especially our elected leaders, have little idea of the technology’s capacity or potential dangers. The Tesla and Twitter owner posted on social media that “ChatGPT is scary good. We are not far from dangerously strong AI.” He later posted: “There is no regulatory oversight of AI, which is a *major* problem. I’ve been calling for AI safety regulation for over a decade!” And Jack Clark, co-founder of the AI company, Anthropic, claimed his current number-one concern is that “AI systems can do more than their creators know they can do.”

Only a few weeks ago, Dr. Geoffrey Hinton, commonly known as the godfather of AI, retired from his position at Google as head of AI development. From a May 2, 2023, [article](#) published in *The Guardian*:

Hinton, 75, said he quit to speak freely about the dangers of AI and, in part, regrets his contribution to the field. He was brought on by Google [a decade ago](#) to help develop the company’s AI technology, and the approach he pioneered led the way for current systems such as ChatGPT. . . .

Hinton’s concern in the short term is something that has already become a reality—people will not be able to discern what is true anymore with AI-generated photos, videos, and text flooding the Internet.

Indeed, what is known as “deepfake” technology also frightens the former head of British cybersecurity. Professor Ciaran Martin [warns](#):

AI is now making it much easier to fake things, much easier to spoof voices, much easier to look like genuine information, much easier to put that out at scale. So having a sense of what is true and reliable, it’s going to become much more difficult. And that’s something that risks undermining the fabric of our society.

While claims that AI will eventually develop sentience or consciousness, known as artificial general intelligence (AGI), are dubious at best, there are those whose beliefs, fantasies, and goals are directed toward some form of AI governance, attributing an almost god-like level of ability to the technology.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, whose company is responsible for ChatGPT, recently [posted](#) the following on social media:

Here is an alternative path for society: ignore the culture war. Ignore the attention war. Make safe AGI. Make fusion. Make people smarter and healthier. Make 20 other things of that magnitude. Start radical growth, inclusivity, and optimism. Expand throughout the universe. AI is the tech the world has always wanted.

Altman’s almost deranged sense of optimism for a utopian world dominated by AI is also frighteningly naïve. Still, such beliefs could easily play into the hands of bad actors with nefarious plans.

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Currently, members of the World Economic Forum (WEF) and leaders within the United Nations (UN) are devoting much energy toward the “Great Reset,” the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the “Shared Economy,” intending to expand AI’s influence over our daily lives significantly with the eventual creation of a hybrid AI that would be capable of managing a one-world form of government. However, this dystopic dream would struggle to get off the ground without widespread acceptance of AI’s “superior” abilities to govern our lives.

While we can easily predict many remarkable—even unfathomable—advances in AI technology, the prudent, faithful, and watchful Christian will be aware of this effort to ultimately displace our Creator with “great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24). Therefore, “Take heed that no one deceives you” (Matthew 24:4). Quite simply, it is a matter of trust.

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Outline of Strategy for Church of God Co-operation

Version 2.1 Draft

(Copyright) by Craig M. White (Australia)

Introduction

In the 1990s I produced a strategy for Church of God co-operation, and it is probably in a box somewhere. Based on what I can recall of it and with further thought, I have produced the summary below.

In the first instance, **it should be acknowledged that this strategy outline is not about merging groups** in the main but cooperating in some way to try and stop and reverse their decline.

The basic thesis for this short outline is that we, in the various Church of God groups, should be regarding each other as brethren, recognizing each other despite minor differences and working together which is essential in these days. I call ourselves the ‘Church of God family.’

For the groups have attempted outreach/evangelism on a major scale but have never been able to attain to a level that is necessary for a multiplicity of reasons that can be discussed in another article in the future.

The various groups, it is assumed, would probably work toward co-operation at different levels and speeds dependent on attitude, minor doctrinal differences, and governance structure.

Their decline and lack of growth is self-inflicted and not of God Who will not force them to do this or that to ensure growth. It is His desire that they prosper and grow and if they do not, that is based on their decision-making. In other words, they need to quit blaming God for the disunity and lack of outreach. Soul-searching and admitting to their failures is paramount.

In the meantime, what can be done to increase outreach?

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Strategy Outline

In developing a strategy, one must come to an understanding of the groups and their differences; and their desires for cooperation, which, dependent upon such criteria will determine their level of interest.

Levels of interest from the Church of God groups could probably fall into these categories:

- Unification
- Federation
- Confederation
- Friends
- Not interested

NB: for instance, those groups that decide to federate with each other, could confederate with others. Or groups that merge, may federate or confederate with other groups. It is not an either/or strategy.

The table below attempts to capture the various aspects of the strategy and summarise them.

Strategy in Table Format

Type of Interest	Reasons	Strategy (short version)	Organisation
Unification (full merger with a single head office)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close in administrative structure • Close in Fundamental doctrines • Close in secondary level doctrines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openly discuss with all the congregations • Step-by-step approach and trial congregational mergers • Initial unified annual ministerial conferences • Single logo and policies for all regions and congregations • Single website • Legal unification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xxxxx • xxxxx • xxxxx
Federation (head office with representation from regions based on agreed criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close in doctrine • Historical differences in administrative structure • Suspicions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openly discuss with all the congregations • Step-by-step approach and trial congregational mergers • Initial unified annual ministerial conferences • Single logo • Single website • Similar policies for all regions and congregations • Legal agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xxxxx • xxxxx • xxxxx

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<p>Confederation (loose association & congregational independence)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic doctrinal agreement (but not in detail) • Desire for congregational independence • Suspicions • Past hurts • May evolve into a federation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openly discuss with all the congregations • Step-by-step approach and trial congregational cooperation • Initial annual ministerial conferences • Joint socials • Joint projects • Link websites • Documented governance approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xxxxx • xxxxx • xxxxx
<p>Friends (recognition and cooperation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g., may not observe Feast Days or other critical doctrines, but willing to be friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders visit each other • All ministers speak well of each other’s groups • Occasional preaching in each other’s groups • Joint projects • Joint socials • Share books in each other’s central or congregational libraries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xxxxx • xxxxx • xxxxx
<p>Not interested</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership differences • Extremism • Past hurts • Spirit of competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite the negative approach, still let them know that they are considered a part of the Church of God family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • xxxxx • xxxxx • xxxxx

The following will be generic to each category above, with the exception of the final one:

- In Church services make announcements about other groups including prayer requests,
- Ministers speak at each other’s Sabbath services and Feast sites as they are able,
- Hold Feast sites in close proximity so that members can visit each other’s sites with ease,
- Not stand in the way of members wishing to visit other groups,
- Hold annual BBQs of the ministry to break down barriers and foster friendships,
- Apologies where there have been past hurts,
- Link websites and share literature,
- Permit ministerial observers from other groups to sit in on meetings such as general conferences in a non-voting capacity.

Concluding Remarks

I think that in most cases various Church of God groups would be interested in a level of cooperation (Federation or Confederation) rather than full unity at this time due to differences in governance structure and doctrine.

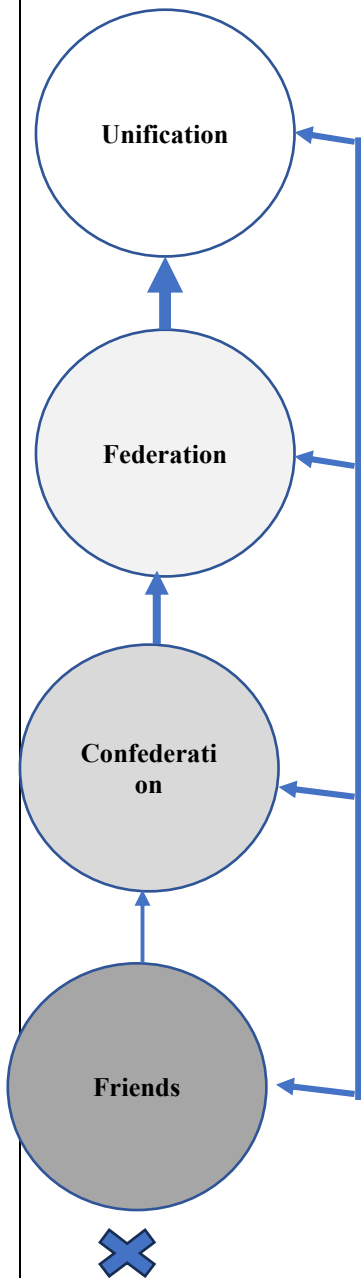
The foreseen fruits of these suggested efforts would be:

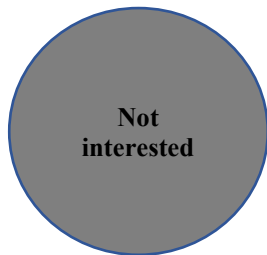
1. A greater Work/outreach. And because success beckons success, there will be growth. “If you build, they will come,”

2. Happier churches,
3. Demonstrating brotherly love to the world,
4. And most of all, please and glorify God.

The aforementioned is not difficult to accomplish at all, it just needs a full strategy with a step-by-step, project management approach. And associated policies that 'plug in' to the overall plan.

Schematic of Types of Interest





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Iron Sharpening Iron

New American Standard Bible (Proverbs 27:17)
As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

In regard to: Back to the Nephilim

Article by Laura Lee
Comments by Darwin Lee (Bismarck, North Dakota)

This link is related to your article about giants.

www.westernjournal.com/scientists-pushing-us-past-point-no-return-genetically-engineered-fruit-flies/?ff_source=Email&ff_medium=newsletter-C50&ff_campaign=dailyam&ff_content=conservative-50

Letters

Letter from William P. Goff (July 29, 2023)

Greetings Brethren,

I received the following letter from Nehemiah today, he's asking me to pass it on to others. :

"Shalom Brethren, it's my hope and trust you are doing well over there. I'm writing to let you know some of the challenges we are facing in our different groups of worship.

Being a time of high cost living in our country where prices of commodities has gone high. In most of our groups the number of church attendees is reducing each week due to starvation.

After church services in some groups like Rigo, Rongo and boarder group and others I hear such and such in the community passed on due to starvation. Some of ours even while in church they faint, when rushed to hospital it's discovered it from hunger. It has become a major problem to us. I happened to visit some in their homes, what i saw made me shed tears. Some take hot water mixed with tea leaves and sugar as their dinner once in a day. We do thank the donations that come in, but the need is so great.

I humbly request others to join hands with us in praying and supporting these desperate people, even if it means for them to be provided one meal in a day it can help greatly. They will appreciate so much.

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In Nehemiah's Daily Bread ministry I'm trying to teach these children who come to the gate during meal time. The food meant for known orphans is shared among other needy children. The number is adding each day. But it's a big opportunity for me to get time and share the word of God with them.

I request if they can be provided one meal each more so in the evenings (dinner). Be blessed hoping others will join hands with us and help.

*With kind regards,
Nehemiah."*

Brethren, I know that many of you have been helping our impoverished Brethren for a long time. My hope is that others will hear of the need, and also join in with us to help. If possible, please let others know of the dire need.

Bill Goff.

Website: <http://www.khofh.org>

E-mail: goffb50@aol.com

Phone: 843-447-0140

Announcements

Announcement from Zac Poonen (July 29, 2023)

MESSAGES

The Two "Rests" that Christ Offers Us

<https://www.cfcindia.com/sermon/the-two-rests-that-christ-offers-us>

Are You Seeking God's Approval Or God's Blessing?

<https://www.cfcindia.com/sermon/are-you-seeking-gods-approval-or-gods-blessing>

Dying to Self and Doing God's Will

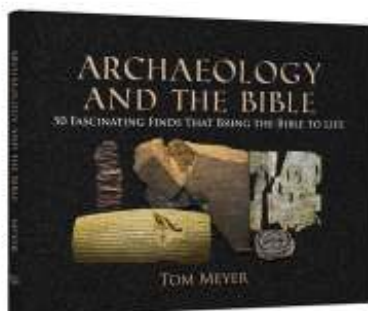
<https://www.cfcindia.com/sermon/dying-to-self-and-doing-gods-will>

CFC Bangalore

<https://cfcindia.com>

Ads

Ad from Institute for Creation Research (July 28, 2023)



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NEW RESOURCE!

The Bible has been God’s Word to His people for millennia, but most people today question whether the events it records are actual history. Every time the Bible’s claims can be tested, however, they stand up to scrutiny.

In ***Archaeology and the Bible: 50 Fascinating Facts That Bring the Bible to Life***, Professor Tom Meyer covers over 2,000 years of biblical history, demonstrating that the Bible’s people and places really did exist and the events it reports really did happen.

[LEARN MORE & GET YOUR COPY](#)

Holy Days 2023

Passover – April 6, 2023 (Observed at Sunset the Evening Before)

Passover/Unleavened Bread – April 6-12, 2023

Pentecost – May 26, 2023

Trumpets - September 16, 2023

Atonement – September 25, 2023

Tabernacles –September 30, 2023 to October 6, 2023

Last Great Day – October 7, 2023

Notes

Notes