



# *Bible Study Guide*

## *No. 30*

(September 2005)

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## What time is it?

By Joseph Tkach and Neil Earle

**H**ow many times a day do we ask the question, "What time is it?" Sounds like a simple enough matter until we take the time to think about it. Then we realize it isn't so simple at all.

Consider this: Before the 1800s, time keeping was a local event. In Medieval Europe the town clockmaker was the key man. He would set official time geared to whenever the sun reached its zenith each day. This was hardly precise. When we advanced to pocket watches, people travelling between cities often had to adjust their clock, literally, from time to time.

Then came the railways in the 1800s. Because of scheduling issues, concern over freight rates and critical delivery of perishables, time issues became much more crucial. In 1878, a Canadian, Sandford Fleming, became a national hero by dividing the world into the 24 time zones we use today.

So, the United States has nine time zones spanning from Maine to Guam, and we are all familiar with Pacific, Mountain, Central and Eastern time. The former Soviet Union had 12 time zones! Even today, all of giant, sprawling Russia is on permanent Daylight Savings Time, and each region is an hour ahead of the actual time on record.

Pretty complicated stuff, eh?

### God's time

It took the Standard Time Act of 1918 for the U.S. Congress to make our four time zones mandatory. Otherwise the wheels of commerce would quickly grind to a halt. Time is even more important to God, and the biblical approach to time is a little more delightfully complicated than it at first seems. Richard Kromer aptly summarized the biblical approach to time: "History has a beginning in God, it has its centre in Christ and its end in the final consummation and the Last Judgment."

Right. The Bible has a lot of respect for time. God is working out his purposes across time. On the other hand, God is not strictly bound by time, either.

Looked at one way, time is a created entity. One day is the amount of time the earth rotates on its axis.

One year is the measurement of its orbit around the sun. But it is different on Mars or Venus. Thus time, in this sense, is a material, relative entity. But this is only one way of reckoning time.

In the Greek New Testament many words allude to time. One is *chronos*, from which we get our word *chronology*. This is the kind of time we are familiar

with—the ticking of the clock, the realm of time and space we all inhabit.

The Bible pays attention to this linear way of measuring. "Teach us to number our days aright," sang Moses, "that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). And Jesus asked: "Are there not twelve hours of daylight?" (John 11:9).

But another altogether different word for time is also used in the New Testament. That word is *kairos*. (One more, *ainos*, refers to duration, but *kairos* will be our focus in this article.)

*Kairos* is the "fullness of time," God's time zone.

*Kairos* time conveys notions of unboundness, of fluidity, of God's purposes intersecting and overruling this finite world of chronological time.

*Kairos* thus refers to opportunity, as Carl Henry writes in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. It represents "the arena of man's decision on his way to an eternal destiny" (page 1096).

### The kairos moment

*Kairos* thus conveys a more exciting concept than simple *chronos*. *Kairos* refers to specially selected periods of divine determination. It operates within profane human time but mainly as the focus of the fulfilment of God's ultimate purposes.

When Jesus came the first time it was a definite *kairos* moment—a time of fulfilment, a time of judgment and a time for God's promises to become operative (Mark 1:15; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

Note this from the book of Titus: "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect ... which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time [Greek *chronon* from "chronos"] and at his appointed season [*kairos*] he brought his word to light" (Titus 1:1-3).

God created time, and in his sovereign *kairos* time he interacts and enters into *chronos* time according to his perfect will. This is one reason life with God is so exciting—we are not predetermined, the future is open to us and we are open to it.

New Testament writers related *kairos* to two cardinal events. These were times of repentance and times of God's choosing to accomplish his mighty purpose. Once again, *kairos* refers to decisive turning points within the larger sweep of chronological time.

This concept of decisive moments has its roots in Old Testament thought. In the book of Daniel, the prophet appealed to vain King Nebuchadnezzar to get busy changing his ways right now to avoid future punishment (Daniel 4:27).

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This sense of a divine turning point—"now is the time, now is the hour"—is central to kairos time. It helps us understand Paul's earnest appeal to the wise men of Athens: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). That "but now" is kairos time.

Kairos thus conveys expectation and excitement, times of decision, as stated by the author of Hebrews, quoting the psalmist: "Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8). The kairos theme is reiterated in the next chapter: "Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts'" (Hebrews 4:7).

### The central kairos

Germans speak of *Der Tag*—a specially appointed time calling for decision. In World War Two we had June 6, 1944, D-Day, a chronological date on the calendar but also much, much more. D-Day conveys urgency, importance, a call for momentous things to occur.

In that connection, note Carl Henry's words: "While the New Testament gives prominent scope to the future... its central kairos is the life and death and resurrection of the incarnate Christ, which is decisively significant for the kingdom of God. The terms, 'day [of the Lord]' and 'hour,' 'now' and 'today' gain dramatic significance in the New Testament context whenever the eternal order impinges upon the sweep of ordinary events" (*EDT*, page 1095).

Thus kairos helps clarify another theme of Scripture, the fact that in the view of biblical writers the end time had already begun with the appearance and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice Hebrews 1:1-2, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken unto us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things."

Now consider the implications of what we have been saying. Here are four.

First, in God's divine time schedule where kairos intersects kronos, the decisive moment has already come. Jesus has already appeared bringing salvation and healing to all who will accept him "Today"!

This was the inspired Peter's plea that momentous Day of Pentecost: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40). Or as Paul put it: "Now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world

with justice by this man he has appointed" (Acts 17:30-31).

How true! The commission to the Christian church is to point people to that central kairos event already manifested: the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. Accepting that ransom made for us means we enter kairos time here and now, already, and thus secure a better future.

A second point is to remind us why so many prophetic time schemes and prophecy charts based on chronological reckonings of the 1260 days, the 2520 days or even the three days and nights (Matthew 12:40) break down. These schemes are rooted only in chronological time, whereas kairos time can be any time God chooses.

When the Ninevites repented, God intervened and changed the future. Once again kairos intersected with chronos just as it did for those 3,000 converts who heard Peter's sermon (Acts 2:41).

Yet you and I know of people who try to predetermine and pre-empt God's sovereign freedom by choosing a date on a calendar when God *has* to intervene—maybe 1844 or 1917 or 1975 or 2000. How futile to try to pin down our Sovereign God that way!

Third, Israel lived mainly in chronos time as evidenced by the Sabbaths, festivals, set feasts and appointed times and seasons (Leviticus 23). The Hebrew calendar was lunar-solar, rooted to this world, this physical time and space system. But the gospel proclaims this thrilling truth—"if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The Christ-event changed everything. Radically. Christians celebrate their faith in kairos time regardless of the day of the week or a date on the calendar. This is the force of Acts 2:47, speaking of the early church: "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

### Step into eternity

Fourth, all authentic Christians live in two time zones—the temporal and the eternal. Eternity is one of those grand intangibles such as love and devotion, a can't-see-it, can't-touch-it concept that nevertheless looms large in the Christian life, especially as we near the end of our individual journeys.

"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness," Paul testified, "which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). Paul is speaking here of kairos time over chronos time, one reason

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Christians were not to know the day or hour of their Lord's appearing (Acts 1:7).  
So, what time is it?  
Time to call men and women to repentance, time for us all to turn more devotedly to God and accept that

the centre of history lies in the past in a kairos moment called Calvary. And by so doing we help affect eternity.

*By Joseph Tkach and Neil Earle  
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### Window on the World God's Transforming Work in Fiji



Introduction by Randal Dick

*Ratu Epeli Kanaimawi, our WCG pastor in Fiji, was invited to participate with more than 1,000 international Christian leaders in the inauguration of Transform World, conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, in May.*

*Kanaimawi, because of his service to the government of Fiji, was asked to be a member of the Governance Group. I would like to share excerpts from his firsthand report on God's intervention, healing and blessing of the nation of Fiji over the last half decade. Kanaimawi's role as vice president of the Association of Christian Churches in Fiji gives him an inside view of the remarkable transformation of this island nation.*

*I remember as a boy one day when a man in the congregation who had been in a wheelchair, crippled from polio, was healed and walked out of church that day. He went on to be one of my professors, robust, healthy, standing tall.*

*It is so encouraging and gratifying to see how God is so merciful and cares so much that he would intervene for an entire nation that is crying out to him in travail. Here is Ratu Epeli's report.*

*"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked man rules, the people groan" (NKJV).*

**T**hat pronouncement made by God in Proverbs 29:2 is as true for Fiji as it is true for any country in the world. Fiji has two major races. Indians make up 43 percent of the population, and the indigenous Fijians 52 percent.

The Fijians are 99 percent Christians. The Indians are predominantly Hindu with a small minority of Muslims and Sikhs. With the vast cultural and religious differences between the two races, an ethnic divide has always existed between the two people groups. Political pronouncements tend to aggravate the situation rather than mend it.

#### **Elections and coups**

During the national general election of 1986, the Indian dominated Labour Party won the election and formed a government for the first time.

This did not sit well with the Fijians, who felt that their rights to rule their country had been taken

away. They quickly used their military power to overthrow the Indian-led government. This military takeover heightened racial feelings of animosity in the nation. Although the coup was bloodless, it tore the country apart and set back progress toward harmonious relationships more than a decade.

While the nation was still recovering from the first coup, the general election of 1999 brought a second coup in its wake. The

Indian-dominated Labour Party again won that election. The president of Fiji swore in Fiji's first Indian prime minister.



Epeli Kanaimawi

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His term in office was short-lived because a coup led by Ilikimi Naitini, a young Fijian, took the prime minister and his cabinet hostage in the Parliament House for 56 days. Some 19 people were killed, and many were injured and brutalized. The country was in greater agony and pain than even that experienced in 1987.

At this lowest time in Fiji's modern history, the largely Christian Fijian population began crying out to God. They used 2 Chronicles 7:14 as their theme in approaching God. The prayer efforts started from the highest echelon of Fiji's society, right down to the individual in the village. Fiji has remained, to this day, a nation of prayer.

- The president and his staff rise before dawn each morning to pray. The churches also organize two formal prayer breakfasts at the Government House each year for the president.
- The prime minister and many of his cabinet ministers also turned to God in prayer. The prime minister has two formal prayer breakfasts each year. These take place in different parts of the country.
- The church leaders and members of their congregations turned to God in prayer. The civil service through its network formed their various prayer groups. The traditional leaders and chiefs encouraged their communities to turn to God in prayer. The women and youth organizations also have prayer programs. The whole nation of believers turned to God in prayer.

They all drew strength from 2 Chronicles 7:14, which says: "If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (NIV).

The spiritual leaders of Fiji put aside their differences and recognized what Christ was telling them in John 10:16: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen [flock]. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (NIV).

By May 2001, some 14 church leaders heeded the call and met with the president of the Methodist Church in Fiji to discuss ways of working together as an Assembly of Churches. Doctrinal differences had kept the churches apart from the beginning. The coup of May 2000 provided just the right atmosphere for the churches to come together and for God to once again do the impossible.

President Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda in Suva officially launched the ACCF, July 8, 2001. Since then, many wonderful things have happened. The ACCF mission statement contains four simple but significant parts.

1. All Flocks to Unite
2. Living His Way of Love
3. Establishing God-Fearing Leaders
4. Reconciling Fiji for Peace and Prosperity

If peace and prosperity are to come, it is important that people are reconciled to God and also to one another. "All this is from God," says 2 Corinthians 5:18, "who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting man's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (NIV).

Answering the prayers of his people, God gave Fiji a new government and a crop of new leaders. When God's people humbled themselves and turned to God in prayer, God answered them. A four-month old political party was established quickly and won a landslide victory during the 2001 general election. All the former political leaders were swept away overnight, and a new crop of leaders under Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase took over the running of the nation.

### Government Leaders Lead by Example

It was heartening to see the government leaders, beginning with the president and prime minister, humbling themselves and repenting of their ways. In a public prayer meeting at Albert Park in 2001, Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase publicly asked for God's forgiveness.

George Otis Junior's transformation video "Let the Sea Resound" has beautifully captured the sentiments of his confessions and repentance. God was true to his promise! He heard these prayers and moved quickly to heal our land.

### A New Ministry of National Reconciliation and Unity Is Established

Immediately after Laisenia Qarase was sworn in as prime minister in 2001, he moved quickly to establish a Ministry of National Reconciliation and Unity. This ministry became the conduit through which all reconciliation and unity efforts flowed. The churches found it important to liaise closely with this ministry.

The prime minister has also created a Council for National Reconciliation and Unity, where other religious organizations and the private sector can meet with church and government representatives.

### The President Lit the Torch of Reconciliation

On July 8, 2001, President Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda and First Lady Adi Salaseini Kavu Uluivuda lit the torch of reconciliation at Albert

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Park. That occasion also marked the launching of the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji.

This event had a major significance in transforming the nation. God's people recognized the significance of the torch as symbolic of the work of the Holy Spirit among them.

Church ministers and the young people of Fiji took the torch to the four administrative divisions of the country. The church young people, in a weeklong procession, took the torch on foot around the island of Vitilevu. Townships and villages took delight in receiving the torch and joined in the foot procession to its next destination. All those communities who received the torch tell wonderful stories of how God had brought blessings to their communities.

### **Government Leaders Were Dedicated to God**

On Oct. 14, 2001, a dedication church service took place at the National Stadium in Suva. The prime minister and his cabinet ministers, along with most senators and their office staff, were dedicated to God at a special ceremony led by a former president of the Methodist Church. Church leaders laid hands on and commissioned these government leaders for their responsibilities.

### **The Oasis of Loving Motherhood Was Born**

To look after the interests of church mothers and children, the Oasis of Loving Motherhood was formed and launched by First Lady Adi Salaseini Uluivuda.

### **Unity Through the Healing of the Land Program**

The healing of the land program started only three years ago in a small way, but as time went by, the news of reconciliation, unity and miracles started to spread, and demands grew quickly. This program is being promoted strongly in Fiji.

In the *Explorers Report* of April 13, sent out worldwide by the Sentinel Group

([www.sentinelgroup.org](http://www.sentinelgroup.org)), was this report on Fiji: "In many cases, God has used the Healing of the Land team to bring villages to repentance. Their pattern is to go into villages where they have been invited by the chiefs and starting the two-week process with a week of fasting and teaching the Scriptures.

"The second week they normally visit individual families and lead them into reconciliation with their family members. In many cases, an outstanding miracle has taken place on the last day of the team's ministry in the village.

"As the meetings continued in Savusavu, Healing the Land team leader Savenaca Nakauyaca, son of a key revival leader, Vuniani Nakauyaca, gave an amazing update. 'What God is doing here is beyond imagination. The place is fully packed every night as

people from other villages are there to witness what God is doing. And you know what, three lame or crippled people were healed right in the meeting and people were amazed. God's favour is indeed on the young people who are leading the process. The team prayed over these three crippled people and they went home walking on their feet. Praise God!

"Nakauyaca says, 'Instead of going to the hospital, the people from the surrounding villages are coming to where the Healing of the Land team is camping to receive their healing. The news of this has spread all over the region and the other villagers and their chiefs are negotiating with the team as to who will host the team next.' Some 26 other villages have opened their doors for ministry."

Since the coup of May 2000, much growth has been experienced. These are but a few examples: Jobs have returned and unemployment is decreasing. The building industry is booming with new and more elaborate construction projects undertaken. Tourism is booming. The hotels are full and they don't have enough room to meet increasing demands.

A number of new five and six star hotels are being built to cater to current demands and future growth. The political front is stable in the hands of a God-fearing prime minister.

God-fearing leaders have emerged in the nation, and the people are happy. Smiles have returned to the faces of women and children in the streets.

International confidence in Fiji has returned and foreign investments are beginning to grow.

Law and order has been restored. What a wonderful God we serve!

### **Prime minister's prayer**

Here is an excerpt from Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase's prayer and confession.

*"As prime minister of Fiji, I am conscious of the great responsibilities you have placed on my shoulders to look after your sons and daughters and to love them as you have loved me; to also be a wise steward of all the resources you have given to this nation.*

*"Before I can ask forgiveness of others, I first confess my sins and weaknesses before you.*

*"Father in heaven, I stand before you now, not as prime minister of this nation, but as Laisenia Qarase, humbly seeking your forgiveness for my household and for me personally. Human as we are, we have many times taken our focus away from you as our only true God. We have been guilty of relying on our own capabilities, our own resources and our own human thoughts.*

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*“We realize that man’s wisdom is foolishness to you and that our thoughts are not your thoughts and our ways are not your ways, for your thoughts and your ways are far above ours.*

*“I ask Father for your forgiveness. Please help us to look to you and to rely on you at all times so that in whatever we do and in whatever we say, we are able to honour and to glorify your great name. Amen.*

*“I now seek the forgiveness of the churches in our country.*

*“I know that the churches form the body of Christ, and their work is kingdom work; and for their fine work, this government is most grateful. But this does not exonerate government from its lack of commitment in helping out with kingdom work in our country.*

*“Government has rationalized this situation by saying that there are just not enough*

*resources in the country to take care of all important work that needs to be done. Although this may sound plausible, we have in the process failed to realize that all resources come from God in the first place and that resources need to be channelled for kingdom work.*

*“In the policy framework of government, we have not done enough to seek divine guidance from the spiritual leaders of our community. We are happy to see the coming together of the Fiji Council of Churches and the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji, as the body of Christ.*

*“We however lack the will to seek out the creative thoughts of God through the churches. We seek your forgiveness and ask that we continue to build on the good work achieved so far.”*

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### **'I'm a Christian. Get me out of here!'**

(First published in The Plain Truth, April/May 2004 English edition)



*Christ Church at Brockham Green, Surrey, with its steeple, clock and Lychgate, surrounded by tombstones and yew trees on the edge of the village green is an almost stereotypical English parish church. And an unlikely epicentre for what looks like being a realistic survey of what is wrong with the church in England.*

**T**he Vicar of Brockham, Jonathan Willans is concerned with the decline of the church's influence. Last year, he and a team of individuals drawn from several mainstream denominations organised a survey to find out what ordinary people had to say about what churches were doing wrong. To date, there have been over 3,000 responses, and they do not make comfortable reading.

People have said how much they appreciated being able to say what is on their minds. The Book of Proverbs (27:6) reminds us that “Faithful are the wounds of a friend”. Most of the responses are not

from people looking for an opportunity to insult or ridicule the church. Most are-or were-church goers, who do not want to see it fail. You might find these comments from the survey team interesting.

The response has taken us all by surprise. At the time of writing (6th February 2004) literally hundreds of letters and emails are coming in every week. Many people are grateful at seeing the survey in their local press and for having the opportunity to make their voice heard. They say that after years of frustration they now have a channel through which they can give their views. A complete analysis of the results will not be available for some months, but we are already seeing some trends.

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A weakness of surveys conducted in the past on this subject has been that only church congregations have been assessed. This survey, in contrast, has reached many non-church goers and those who have stopped going to church.

It is quite clear that some churches in the mainstream denominations are growing, so it is not all doom and gloom. It will be worthwhile looking at these to see what they are doing right.

The massive response, especially from those who have stopped church going, shows they still have a very genuine interest in church matters. So maybe it is not too late to get them back.

It is clear that England has not rejected Christianity. The vast majority of people simply do not seem to know enough about it to either accept it or reject it. There is a tremendous ignorance of Christian teaching. Our respondents are telling us that churches are failing to promote the Christian message, and because of this they are becoming irrelevant, even to those who have not actually rejected Christianity.

Many replies complain that worship sometimes borders on entertainment. There is a lack of awe and reverence. God is sometimes presented as no more than a Father Christmas figure in the sky. There is no understanding of the solemn nature of the cross and God actually requiring something from us in our personal lives. The message is often just "God loves you no matter what so why bother to change"? God is presented as a God who can be ignored. There were many complaints that sermons do not relate Bible stories to modern times. People want more sermons explaining why believing makes sense (not just why believing in God makes sense but why the Christian faith makes sense, for example from archaeological evidence, fulfilled prophetic evidence. Time and again respondents complained that the church had failed to realise we live in a secular age where people have genuine questions and the church is failing to argue with sufficient vehemence the case for Christianity. It is clear that many of the people who write in are well educated and regard this as a critical failing. If the church cannot explain why belief in God and belief in the Bible makes some sort of logical sense, then the whole thing becomes irrelevant.

It is interesting to notice that churches that are growing often show how science and religion are compatible with each other and are not afraid to say so. Growing churches robustly promote the idea that

religious belief and science do not contradict each other.

People bitterly complain at the lack of clear moral teaching. They are crying out for guidance on what is right and what is wrong. Likewise, many are confused when they see the Bible say one thing and the church another on such topics as co-habiting, divorce, homosexuality and abortion. As one person said "many clergy do not even teach the simple A-B-C of Christianity".

Many letters show tremendous anger at the church for failing to be the conscience of the nation and the guardian of its moral welfare. One elderly couple told us that they refuse to attend church any longer but take communion at home every week.

One person described how his vicar preached his farewell sermon. The churchwarden came to the vestry afterwards and said it was the best sermon he had ever heard him preach. The Vicar replied, "I don't believe a word of it anyway". If a minister of religion has not got faith himself how can he draw others to it?

Some people complain of clergy with 'closed minds', unwilling to accept that the virgin birth and resurrection might be literally true. They even look down on people who accept these facts as intellectually inferior.

A chief complaint is that the clergy no longer visit. The traditional role of clergy visiting people in their homes has gradually died away and apparently many feel this is a major factor in why people no longer go to church. The relationships that were once built up by such visiting between priest and people are no longer there. One analogy drawn was that just as the police now go around in cars rather than "do the beat", so the clergy travel around in their cars from one committee to another but never actually visit. It is interesting that growing churches are nearly always ones where the clergy actively go out and visit. It is also interesting that time and again people say that having lay-people visiting them or pastoral teams of lay-people visiting are not what they want. Again and again, they say they want the clergy. Holy Orders and Ordination is still regarded as significant when it comes to visiting.

People constantly refer to clergy spending too much time on committees, being bogged down by bureaucracy and being spread too thin by having too many parishes to look after.

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Time and again, people spoke of the importance of a welcoming atmosphere. One person (C of E) said that when she arrived five minutes late to a service, a sidesman shoved a book into her hand and tut-tutted at her being late. Another attended a mid-week service and was approached by a member of the congregation and was told "it's no wonder that young people don't attend this service when middle-aged women like you come along".

Nonetheless the prize showing the shallowness of some people's understanding must go to the following incident. When a member of the congregation (C of E) was asked how she enjoyed the Christmas services, she said that the services were lovely but the atmosphere had been somewhat spoilt by the fact that the straw in the crib set was disproportionate in size to the crib figures.

We have received many complaints from people who said they felt they were not missed if or when they stopped going to church. There were also many of the usual kind of complaints about a minister refusing to marry or baptise. It certainly appears from complaints that a closed policy on baptism does not work...with the best will in the world.

The responses clearly show that if some fairly basic problems were addressed in a significant way, then the decline in church could be halted and perhaps even reversed. Gimmicks won't work. The problems are far more profound than many realise. Other churches grow and have dealt with these issues. Now the mainstream churches must do the same.

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## The Trial of Job

*Have you experienced pain and suffering? Then you have shared Job's anguish and perhaps his wonderment. Like Job, you also may find God near to you.*

**T**he book of Job in the Bible is the story of a devout man who lived thousands of years ago. But tragedy hovers over this most righteous man. When the book opens, we notice Job is about to lose everything – children, property and wealth, good name and even his health. Why will Job suffer such tragedies? Because, of all things, God is about to challenge the devil with Job's obedience and faith.

### The big dare

The prologue or introduction to the book of Job tells us, the readers, the background of God's challenge and Job's suffering.

Scene 1 invites us behind the curtain to the universe-ruling throne of God. Angelic beings are delivering reports on their activities. Satan is among them. The Evil One has been roaming the earth, surveying his domain (Job 1:6-7; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9). Job's troubles begin because God presents him to Satan the devil as a paragon of virtue. "Have you considered my servant Job?" God asks Satan. "There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8).

Yet God will soon allow Satan to afflict Job. Obviously, God is not punishing Job for sin. God himself says Job is "blameless and upright." Job suffers because he is the best of men, not because he is the worst.

Satan rejects God's view of Job's pious character. He implies that Job has an ulterior motive, a cynical reason for obeying and trusting God (verses 9-22). "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan asks. Satan insinuates that Job is simply out for what he can get from God. Job is only a fair-weather friend, Satan insists.

"Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?" Satan argues. "You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land."

### Satan's challenge

Satan sneers at God's pride and joy — the man Job, who is unlike any other. He doesn't love you, Satan implies. Take away Job's many blessings and you'll find that he's no friend of yours. Satan tries to make a bet with God. "Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has," Satan dares God, "and he will surely curse you to your face."

Really? Does Job love God only for selfish reasons? Well — let's see, is God's reply. He tells Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

With God's permission, Satan immediately grabs a handful of dirty tricks from his bag of suffering. He flings them at Job, and the world caves in on this innocent man. Job's herds and property are either carried off by raiders or destroyed by natural disasters.

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But Satan is proven wrong. After these terrible tragedies strike Job, he tears his robe and shaves his head. He falls to the ground in worship, saying, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

The author of the book of Job is careful to point out, "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

### The second dare

Time elapses. One day, another angelic briefing takes place in heaven. God reaffirms to Satan his contention that Job truly loves God and his ways (Job 2:1-7). Satan again scoffs at Job's faith in God. "A man will give all he has for his *own* life," jibes Satan. "But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face."

God again expresses confidence in Job. "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life," God instructs Satan.

The devil immediately strikes poor Job with putrid sores over his entire body. The fall of the house of Job is complete. It appears he has become — without his knowledge or permission — the collateral in one of history's greatest tests.

Job is now on trial. He must answer a vital question. How will he, who had faithfully trusted God for help and protection, react to suffering that seems senseless and unjust? Will righteous Job reject God or maintain his faith?

So far, Satan has lost every round. He has been proven wrong about Job's faithful relationship with God. But can Job endure? Will he continue to trust in God as the seemingly endless suffering rolls on, with only pain and death in sight? Will Job persevere though God seems to have forsaken him? That is the real issue at stake.

Job can be seen, then, as a metaphor of the suffering Christian. How Job reacts to God's test says something about how we should react to trials. The book asks us to consider *our* faith. Would we continue to trust God, to love God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37-38) — even while suffering for reasons we don't understand?

### On the ash heap

Scene 2 of Job, takes place on an ash heap in the land of Uz, here on earth (Job 2:8). Job is suffering pain and anxiety. He is emotionally alone, tormented, confused, and angry. His three friends who came to comfort him are instead emotionally and verbally persecuting him.

The human actors in the drama have no idea God is deeply involved in Job's life at this precise moment. They have no understanding of what God is trying to

accomplish or why Job is suffering so terribly. Nor do they grasp that a cosmic issue is at stake.

Job himself does not understand why this evil is happening to someone who has faith in God. Why has a good God allowed such terrible things to happen to a, if not perfect, at least decent, God-fearing human being? Job, in short, is asking, "Why me, Lord?"

On the ash heap, the issues are very human, confused and not completely understood. The principal human characters are all plagued by incomplete and distorted knowledge. They make partial or even incorrect judgments about God's activities. Or they misapply general observations to Job's specific situation.

The prologue has given us a sneak preview of the heavenly perspective on Job. We know God is much pleased with and concerned about him. No matter that God has temporarily suspended Job's protected condition. There is a reason.

Job is not a victim of time and chance but a part of God's orchestrated purpose. Job has no inkling he is the star actor in a God-directed morality play on earth. As far as Job knows, God has disappeared from his life.

### Job's primal scream

Job desperately tries to solve the mystery behind his suffering. He struggles on his own, looking for clues. None appear.

Job prays expectantly. God will surely speedily intervene in his life — heal him of his disease explain to him what in the world is going on. But nothing happens. The horribly painful disease saps Job's strength. He grows weaker and weaker. He becomes more confused.

Job's language sometimes borders on the irrational and incoherent. At times he appears almost delirious. Opposing attitudes clash in his speeches. Job appeals to God to act before it is too late. At times he even challenges God. Please help me, he cries. Come to me quickly. "I will soon lie down in the dust," Job cries out, "you will search for me, but I will be no more" (Job 7:21).

Through his agony Job becomes increasingly confused, perplexed, discouraged, without hope. In his worst nightmare, Job sees death careening around the corner of his life, ready to run him down. Job knows he is finished — through. He sees himself doomed to die a broken, lonely, hated and despised person. Job's hopelessness is painted with poignant strokes throughout the book. In one place he moans, "My spirit is broken, my days are cut short, the grave awaits me" (Job 17:1).

Even though Job has done nothing wrong and pleads desperately for help, God still chooses to stay

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hidden. "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer," Job wails (Job 30:20).

Job's tragic circumstances challenge and contradict everything he has always believed about God as a rewarder of the good. Life has gone crazy for Job, and he has been locked up in the padded cell of his own mind.

### Wrestling with God

Job can only assume God is persecuting him hiding from him. He lashes out at God in pain and anguish. "If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target?" Job complains (Job 7:20).

We should not mistake Job's terrible discouragement, his lashing out at God, for disbelief. God's existence is not in question. Job knows that somewhere in the universe God must be alive.

"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him," Job cries out in despairing belief (Job 13:15). Still trusting in God as his Advocate, Job insists, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25).

Meanwhile, Job's friends are shocked at his outbursts against God. Surely, the comforters think, the fire of God is about to burn up this man. They are afraid to admit that no cause-and-effect reason exists for Job's painful trial. That would imply they live in a senseless world. How could God be just and strike Job unjustly?

### Blame the victim

Their answer, Job obviously must have sinned grievously against God. Yes, that's it — Job's sins are the cause of his suffering. God is off the hook. The friends put forth the old "if you are suffering you must be sinning" answer to suffering. It is blame-the-victim time. Although at first the came to console Job, they end up attacking him relentlessly as a hideous sinner.

Eliphaz pontificates: "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?" (Job 22:5). He and the other two friends completely misread Job's spiritual condition and God's purpose. They, too, try to find the perpetrator of the crime — the cause of Job's terrible suffering. But they accuse the wrong person — innocent Job.

Part of what the friends say about the relationship of sin and cursing, virtue and reward is true. Sin does have a penalty (Romans 6:23), We do reap what we sow (Psalm 1; Galatians 6:7). But Job's friends misapply their remarks in Job's case. They take a general principle and nail it to a specific person — Job — and the specific trial he is undergoing. They will soon be shocked to discover how wrong they are (Job 42:7-8).

On the ash heap, all the drama's actors, especially Job, have been asking questions of God and imputing motives to him. Job has already prosecuted God. The friends have been, let us say, mistaken witnesses against Job.

### From the storm

In scene 3, God storms into Job's presence. Now, it's my turn, he says. I will cross-examine you.

Throughout the dialogues between Job and his friends, Job especially, had claimed vast knowledge of the way things work — or should work — in this world. Job said of a hoped-for encounter with God, "I have prepared my case, I know I will be vindicated" (Job 13:18).

Now, out of the raging storm, God begins to challenge Job's claim to understanding: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2).

From the whirlwind, God demands of Job, "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?" (Job 40:2). God tells Job he doesn't know what he's talking about when he questions God's fairness.

He isn't going to answer any of Job's "Why?" questions. God has come to cross-examine. "I will question you, and you shall answer me," he tells Job twice (Job 38:3; 40:7).

How does God answer Job? He sidesteps every question Job had. Instead, God gives Job a wilderness appreciation tour, recounting the majesties of nature from hail to horses (Job 38:22; 39:19). Is this relevant? Indeed, it is.

God's point to Job, Philip Yancey wrote in *Disappointment With God*, is this: "Until you know a little more about running the physical universe, Job, don't tell me how to run the moral universe." Aaagh! How stupid I was, thinks Job. He smacks his brow and puts his hand to his mouth. Job finally understands the error of his hasty conclusion (Job 40:4). He grasps that his position is built on ignorance. He realizes God is quite capable of running the universe correctly.

### A bigger God

Job now knows that whatever has happened to him — in some way he can't fully understand — will work out for his benefit, for everyone's benefit (see Romans 8:28). Job can say to God, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2).

Job is now convinced of God's infinite wisdom in dealing with him as he sees fit. Job now knows there is a purpose for his suffering — God's purpose. That is quite enough for him. The mighty voice of God thundering out of the whirlwind puts everything into

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perspective for Job. It says: God is alive; God is here; God cares; God is capable.

Job has been given an answer, not the one he expected, but one much more important. No matter that he had not been given a chance to present his own case. When God appears, Job's questions melt away precisely because God has now revealed himself.

Surprisingly, God does not condemn Job for railing against him and accusing him. God only corrects Job's misconception about his ability to rule the creation.

To be sure, God reprimands Job because Job condemned him for injustice. Out of the storm, God batters Job with these questions: "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Job 40:8). But God does not accuse Job of sin. God neither calls him self-righteous nor a blasphemer.

### God won't condemn

Does this mean that we might also dare express our frustration, our anger — even call God to account in our ignorance and confusion — without being condemned by God? Shocking though it may be — yes, we can.

In Philip Yancey's words: "One bold message in the Book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw at him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your bitterness, your betrayal, your disappointment — he can absorb them all". God is much bigger than we are.

Job also recognizes how big, how great, God is. After hearing God's argument, Job says, "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). But repent of what? Repent of some specific sin? Not quite. Job explains, "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (verse 3).

It wasn't that Job had to overcome a specific sin, but rather that he had to grow in understanding. Job had

been too hasty in concluding God was unjust or inept.

Job now had a deeper, clearer perception of his Creator. But this new awareness was only a by-product of the real purpose of Job's suffering — the testing of his faith and love. In this case, God needed to know something about Job, and Job needed to know something about himself and about God.

### The why of suffering

The book of Job, then, teaches us that suffering may occur for reasons we don't understand unless or until God reveals them to us (see John 9:1-7, for example). Trials may come because God needs to know something about a faithful servant (Genesis 22:1-12) Job's suffering had such an intent — to prove whether he would love God in spite of everything.

This message of Job has deep implications for the Christian's relationship with God. Trials and suffering provide spiritual enrichment and build a relationship between us and God (2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Hebrews 12:4-12; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 4:12-19).

Job also tells us no ironclad relationship exists between suffering and sin. Just because Christians suffer trials or tragedies does not mean God is punishing them for some sin.

The book of Job is about much more than suffering or God's justice. Job affirmed that God was still God — no matter what — and always worthy of our love, reverence and worship. That was the test on Job, and he passed it. He vindicated both himself and God by remaining faithful. Job proved it is possible for humans to love God unconditionally.

Suffering had been an expansive, faith-demonstrating opportunity for Job. God had grown much bigger; Job had become smaller.

*Paul Kroll*

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## A Priest Like Melchizedek

A Study of Hebrews 7

The New Testament often quotes the Old Testament. One of the most commonly quoted verses is Psalm 110:1: "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" The Gospels tell us that Jesus quoted this verse as a scripture about the Messiah.

If we read further in this psalm, we will come to verse 4, which has a thought found nowhere else in the Old Testament. This Lord is to be a priest—not a Levitical priest, but a different kind of priest.

The book of Hebrews tells us that this verse of the psalm is also about Jesus. It briefly mentions this in chapter 5, and then again at the end of chapter 6, telling us that Jesus "has become a high priest

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forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” Chapter 7 then explains this in more detail.

### A priest without genealogy

It begins with a quick summary of the story in Genesis 14: “This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything” (Heb. 7:1-2).

First, the unusual name is explained. The Hebrew word *melek* means king, and *tsedek* means righteousness, so his name is explained as meaning “king of righteousness.” And since *shalom* means peace, he was also the “king of peace” (v. 2). These titles are significant because Melchizedek prefigures Jesus Christ.

Then we are told that Melchizedek was “without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever” (v. 3).

From the grammar, it is not clear whether Melchizedek is like the Son in every respect, or just in being a perpetual priest. We know that Jesus had a Father, a mother, a genealogy, a birth and a death, so he was different in these respects. Scripture does not say that Melchizedek was the Son of God—just that he was “like” the Son. Hebrews 1:1-2 implies that the Son of God did not speak to the patriarchs. However, Melchizedek had no parents that are mentioned in Scripture. His position as priest did not depend on his parents or his genealogy (unlike the Levitical priests). His priesthood was a different kind, a different order. Similarly, Scripture says nothing about his birth or death (unlike the patriarchs, who are carefully chronicled). He did not create a dynasty of priests, each dying and passing the priesthood to a son.

We might say today that he came out of nowhere, and then disappeared. Nevertheless, he remains known as a priest even today. “He remains a priest forever... is declared to be living” (vv. 3, 8). (A similar thought may be in Luke 20:37-38—the patriarchs are among “the living.”) This mysterious Melchizedek is the prototype of Jesus Christ. Psalm 110 predicted that the Lord would be a priest in the same way: not according to genealogy, but by special appointment. This order of priests was significant in several ways: 1) it was more important than the Levitical priesthood; 2) it implied that the Levitical priesthood was temporary and 3) the new order was permanent.

### Greater than Levi

Although little is known about Melchizedek, we can discern that he was very important. Abraham gave

him 10 percent of the spoils of war (v. 4). The old covenant required the Israelites to give 10 percent to the Levites, but Abraham gave 10 percent to Melchizedek even though Melchizedek was not a Levite (vs. 5-6). He was getting priestly honours before Levi was even born.

From this, the author constructs a hypothetical argument: “One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor” (vs. 9-10). The author knows that Levi didn’t actually pay tithes to Melchizedek, but in a figure of speech he did. The point is that Abraham is greater than Levi, since Abraham is Levi’s ancestor, and Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, since Abraham paid tithes to him, so Melchizedek is greater than Levi.

Verses 6-7 emphasize Melchizedek’s greatness: He not only received a tithe, he also blessed Abraham. “And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.” Abraham is the lesser person—but the real point of comparison being made is with Levi. Since Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, he is also greater than Levi, and – most important for the book of Hebrews – his priesthood is more important than the Levitical priesthood. The Levitical priests die, but Jesus has been made a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, a priesthood that is more important for our salvation.

### New priesthood implies a new law

Now the author observes that, “if perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come – one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?” (v.11).

Note in the middle of verse 11 that the law was given on the basis of the priesthood. The law was designed with the Levitical priesthood in mind—the law and the priesthood went together. But neither the law nor the priests could bring people to perfection. That is why Psalm 110 spoke of another priesthood. A better priesthood, and a better priest would replace the descendants of Aaron—and that has enormous consequences: “For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law” (v. 12). What law is changed? The law that said only Levites could be priests. Which law said that? The old covenant law. This will become clearer later in this chapter, and in the next few chapters.

But first, the author wants to make certain basic facts clear. “He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe” (v. 13). We are speaking about Jesus, of whom it is said that he is a priest after the order of Melchizedek—but Jesus was

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not a Levite. He belonged to the tribe of Judah, and no one from that tribe was ever a priest, and Moses did not authorize anyone from Judah to be a priest (v. 14).

“And what we have said”—that is, that the law has been changed—“is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life” (vs. 15-16).

Jesus was appointed as priest not by a law that focused on genealogy, but because he lives forever at God’s right hand. From this fact alone, we can see that the Law of Moses is no longer in force.

“The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God” (vs. 18-19). The law that restricted the priesthood to Levites was ineffective.

How much was “set aside”? Certainly, it was the regulation restricting the priesthood. But no one expected that restriction to produce perfection, anyway. There is more involved than just one regulation. It is “the law” as a whole that is under discussion here. The Law of Moses did not have the power to make anyone perfect. The best that the old covenant could offer was not good enough.

Instead of the law, we are given a better hope, and since we have something better than the law, we are now able to draw near to God in a way that was not possible under the Law of Moses.

### **Guaranteed by an oath**

The author then uses a small detail from Psalm 110 to emphasize the importance of Jesus’ appointment as priest. God himself makes an oath to appoint Jesus as high priest (v. 20). The descendants of Aaron became priests without any oath, but Jesus became priest by a special oath.

The old covenant was given by God, but here is a new word from God—not just an oath but also a promise of permanence: “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever”

(v. 21). The old priesthood is obsolete. The old regulation was set aside. A new and better hope is given to bring people to a perfection that the law could not give.

“Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant” (v. 22). Here the word covenant is used for the first time in this letter, almost casually. It will be picked up again in the next three chapters for more detailed comment, but even here it is implied to be a replacement for the inferior, ineffective law of Moses. The discussion is not just about a minor priestly regulation but a covenant, which includes many laws.

The author then contrasts the mortality of the Levitical priests with the immortality of Jesus Christ: “Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood” (vs. 23-24). So the fact that there were many Levitical priests is actually an illustration of their weakness, not of their effectiveness. The genealogy that validated them also testified to the weakness of the entire system. Each high priest held office only temporarily, and the entire priesthood itself was temporary.

In contrast, because Jesus lives forever, he will forever continue to be our High Priest, because his priesthood is effective in bringing us to perfection: “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (v. 25).

“Such a high priest meets our need,” the author says (v. 26). Jesus is exactly what we need. He was human, so he knows our needs (2:14-18), and he is now in heaven, in power, so he can effectively intercede for us. We can therefore be confident that we can approach God through him (4:14-16). He gives us access to God in a way that the Levitical priests could only symbolize.

Written by Michael Morrison;  
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## Lessons from the Bible

# A Lesson About Satan

### Lesson 22: Mark 4:1-15

*He taught them many things by parables... The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seeds along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them (Mark 4:1-15).*

**T**he parable of the sower is the first parable given in the book of Mark. In it, Jesus compares the ways people receive the gospel with the ways sown seeds grow. His first example is that of freshly sown seeds being devoured by birds before they have time to take root. Just as birds eat some of the seeds, so Satan comes to take away the word of truth that some people have received.

#### **A few things to note.**

First, Satan doesn't come to take the truth away from everyone who receives it. Second, we are not told why Satan comes to some and not others. Third, people are not actually seeds and Satan is not actually a bird; it's only an analogy. The fact that Satan takes away the truth one time doesn't mean he can do it every time.

It is important to know that Satan is not all he's cracked up to be. He's definitely more powerful than us humans, but he is no match for Jesus Christ.

#### **God vs. Satan**

Have you ever seen a gospel tract depicting a battle between Satan and God for the souls of humans? Sometimes they are in comic book form, showing a demon sitting on one shoulder of a person and an angel on the other shoulder. All rests on the person's decision, and the two spirits do all they can to sway the person to their side. It belongs in a comic book, because it is a parody of the truth. Satan is not on a par with God, as though he has the power to prevent God from his redemptive purpose for humanity. In other words, there is no battle between God and Satan for your soul. That battle, such as it was, was won before the foundation of the world and was made plain to the world in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

When a person is the best at doing something, you might say, "She could do that in her sleep." Well, Jesus not only could defeat Satan in his sleep, he defeated him in his death. Satan is a lame duck ruler. His days as corrupt, bully "prince of this world"

(John 12:31) are numbered. He doesn't have the last word; Jesus does. And Jesus' word for humans is "Yes."

Satan is our enemy, to be sure. Peter tells us that he "prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). We are no match for a lion roaring or not, and we are no match for the devil. But Jesus is. Jesus has already de-fanged and de-clawed this "lion." So Peter goes on to say, "Resist him [the devil], standing firm in the faith..." (Verse 9).

Peter is talking about faith in the Son of God. When we stand with Jesus, trusting him, we stand also in his victory over the devil.

#### **Not a quitter**

"As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them" (Mark 4:15). But what happens next? Does Jesus throw up his hands, sigh heavily and shake his head in defeat? Does he say, "Well, you got me on that one, Satan." In the parable, Satan takes away the word that was planted in the person. We are not told in the parable what the sower does about that. But we are told in the Bible that God does not change in his covenant faithfulness to redeem lost humans. "I the Lord do not change," he told Israel, "so you, O descendants of Jacob are not destroyed" (Malachi 3:6).

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17).

Jesus is a sower who does not give up. The fact that Satan might take away the word from a person doesn't mean that Jesus won't sow in that place again. Sometimes, in fact, he might sow in such a place through you.

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