

Encouragement Amid a Hostile Culture

When the Jews were released from exile, some of the situations they faced parallel some we face as our culture grows more hostile to Christians.

by Heath Robertson

When ancient kings conquered a nation, they would often displace the people and force them to live in other areas of their territory. After Assyria conquered Israel, they sent foreigners into the land. Babylon also did this to Judah. Some of these foreigners were taught about Israel's God but worshiped Him as one of many gods (**2 Kings 17:34**). As the Jews returned and began rebuilding the temple, some of these foreigners wanted to join in on rebuilding saying, "we, like you, seek your God" (**Ezra 4:2**). Maybe you're thinking, "That sounds great!" But the Jews knew they did not truly understand and serve God as He wanted. Among other things, they would likely try to corrupt the temple as its being rebuilt. So, the

Jews essentially told them, "No you are not like us!" (**Ezra 4:3**).

Sometimes being faithful to God requires telling people that, as much as they might claim to serve God, their actions show they truly don't.

When God's people don't bow to the world's desires, the world tries to shut us up or stamp us out. "The people of the land discouraged... and frightened [the Jews] from building" (**Ezra 4:4**). They will often go to great lengths in their attacks against God's people. These people "hired counselors" against them (**Ezra 4:5**). God sent Haggai and Zechariah to encourage God's people to finish the work on the Temple. Let us encourage one another to be strong and courageous in the Lord and not back down from the work He has given us!



Jason Liu - Doctoral degree Cameron Abernathy Alaina Barham Michael Bassie	Graduates Taylor Bethea Morgan Cavender Jordan Corneil Haley Gay	Sara Lail Hayden Phillips Julian Reid Rachel Tolliver
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Lisa Carter (Luke's mother)	Jesse Godwin (Troy's father)	Nell Holcomb (Ben's grandmother, Joannetta's aunt)	Louise Pack (Anna and Christopher's grandmother)
Gloria Detmer and Carol Dickerson (Toni Herd's Sisters)	Don Lanier (Father of Greg Lanier)	David Hartsell (Holly and Brad's Father)	Ruth Addison (gmom of April and Julie)
Madeline Morton (Greg Lanier's g'daughter)	Anna Price	Betty Bradford	Reba Patterson (Heath Fowler's mom)
Jean Buchanan (Abbie Harrison's grandmother)	Tina Atnip (Orie's cousin)	Danny Weldon (Rusty Weldon's brother)	William Smith (Ken Sullivan's brother)
Gerald White (Christopher, Anna and Wesley's Father)	Arabelle Rich (Joannetta's aunt)	Jane Hunt (Chuck's mother)	Charles Hunt, (Chuck Hunt's dad)
Gay Ulrich (Emma's mom)	Toni Herd	Taina Acuff (Anna's aunt)	John Duke (Jared Johnson's cousin)

- August Birthdays**
- 1-Trinity Jerkins
 - 2-Emma Miller
 - 6-Allyson Houlton
 - 6-Sandra Chason
 - 8-Alli Luther
 - 9-Elliot Weldon
 - 9-Troy Swenson
 - 10-David Hartsell
 - 11-Walker Davis
 - 12-Jon Coleman
 - 13-Ariel Ramsey
 - 13-Amanda Bertoldi
 - 15-Kalee Reid
 - 15-Everleigh Crawford
 - 16-Sharon Edwards
 - 18-Heidi Abell
 - 18-Chris Britnell
 - 21-Matt Cavender
 - 22-Case O'Dell
 - 23-Jordan Holliday
 - 23-Colton Miller
 - 24-Sophie Hall
 - 26-Payton Davis
 - 27-Chip Freeman
 - 28-Larry Rouse

News and Notes

- ☒ - Shawn Lauderdale continues to make improvements in rehab in TX!
- ☒ - Emma Ulrich's mom, Gay, is in the hospital for cellulitis and is to have the bone marrow transplant in 6-8 weeks.
- ☒ - Please continue to pray for Abbie Harrison as she recovers from her knee surgery.
- ☒ - Please pray for Matt Cavender as he is due to be deployed in October.
- ☒ - Please pray for our expectant mothers: Paula Davis, Xiang Li, Mallory Randolph and Suzanne Stagner .
- ☒ - We welcome new members Stan and Tammy Tolliver! Also Tyler and Ashlyn Crawford and children Camden, Everleigh, Jax and Elsie!
- ☒ - Shawn Lauderdale continues to make progress in rehab in TX.
- ☒ - We welcome new members Joel and Chandler Sullivan and daughter, Emersyn!
- ☒ - Please begin using the grass when possible for parking to make spaces for our visitors!
- ☒ - Let us look out for our frequent visitors and get to know them! Also encourage filling out a visitor's card.

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (**Matthew 5:16**)

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The Value of Doubt

By Larry Rouse



Thoughts to Ponder

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (**Acts 17:11**)

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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES
Sunday
 Bible Class9:30 AM
 Worship10:20 AM
 Evening Worship 6:00 PM
Wednesday
 Bible Classes.....7:00 PM
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Larry Rouse
 Evangelist and Editor

Late in his ministry John the Baptist sent two disciples to Jesus with this startling question: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (**Luke 7:19-20**) To the careful Bible student this question makes no sense when you first consider it. John appears to have doubt about a matter that he had earlier expressed great confidence in. Jesus described John as being the greatest of the prophets (**Luke 7:28**)? How can this happen with such a man of faith?

Consider the earlier experiences and statements of John the Baptist. He had witnessed the Holy Spirit come down upon Jesus as a dove and had heard the voice of God from heaven proclaim: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (**Mt 3:17**)" Shortly after these events, John boldly proclaimed this eyewitness account to his own disciples. It is from these very men that Jesus would later choose his 12 disciples. Listen to the bold, confident proclamation from John as to the identity of Jesus Christ. "And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." ³⁵Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. ³⁶And

Men threatened me, others ridiculed me, and others gave me "easy answers" thinking that I would swallow them and end my struggle. None of these men helped me to find what I found after a lengthy, painful struggle – a faith upon which I could stand and defend to myself and to others.

looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (**John 1:32-36**)

Possible Causes of John's Doubt

The bulk of John's ministry consisted of his strong preaching to the multitudes in the wilderness. He was an outdoors man described as being clothed in camel hair, and eating wild locusts and honey (**Mt 3:4**). He was arrested and imprisoned for boldly and accurately teaching the will of God. His stand of faith was exactly the stand God wanted him to make. But now he is isolated and soon would be killed. This sudden change of lifestyle would cause any man great pain. It is at this time that a man of faith would step forward and review the very foundations of his faith.

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Another possible cause of doubt would be John's lack of knowledge of the details and timetable of the execution of God's plan. He preached boldly of the power of the Messiah and how He would purge Israel of the chaff of unbelievers (**Mt 3:7-12**). John was like every other prophet that came before him in that he was given a specific, accurate message to deliver, but he was not given all the details. We are told of how both the prophets that spoke of Christ and even the angels from heaven desired to know "the rest of the story" but were not allowed (**1 Peter 1:10-12**). Did John have a mistaken view of the kingdom as Jesus' own disciples did? Was he expecting a physical, earthly kingdom? From the outlook of the fleshly eye, the ministry of Christ would appear to be going nowhere.

Is Doubt a Threat to Faith?

Whatever the cause of John's doubt, we see in his request to Jesus the exact response that a man of faith would have in a moment of doubt --- he brought his doubt to the Lord! Doubt, by itself, is not a threat, but instead, it is an opportunity! The man of faith has learned that when doubt comes, a man is to seek out answers. These answers are not often easily found and will require great energy and suffering. When one runs from his doubts and tries to bury his doubts he is in reality running from a stronger faith. Jesus taught in such a way to make men think, struggle and doubt in order that they might reach the truth of God. When Jesus challenged a man to believe in His ability to free his child from demon possession, the man honestly and tearfully said: "'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!' (**Mark 9:23-24**)"

Jesus Response to John's Doubt

Jesus gave John the very evidence he needed to erase his doubt. "And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that *the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.* (**Luke 7:21-23**)"

Can you imagine John hearing the eyewitness testimony of his disciples about the miracles and teaching of Jesus? John knew the prophecies of Christ, given both to the O. T. prophets and also to him. Can you see him as he reviews again this evidence and, as a result, saying: "Yes, Jesus is the Coming One!"?

Did Jesus rebuke and show disappointment in John because of his doubt? No, rather in this very setting Jesus gives John the highest of praise. "When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John:This is *he* of whom it is written: '*Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.*' For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. (**Luke 7:24-28**)"

What About Your Doubt?

What questions about God's will do you have? Do you have a reasonable foundation to know that Jesus is the son of God and the Bible is His complete revelation (**1 Peter 3:15**)? Are you running from doubts about the application of God's will in the local church where you are a member?

Sadly, many churches have taught their members to run from their doubts and to run from an honest examination of the evidence found in the word of God on a multitude of possible questions one may have. This approach will not lead to a stronger faith.

I will never forget the reactions that I received as I studied my way out of denominationalism and later out of a local church that had made some serious compromises. Men threatened me, others ridiculed me, and others gave me "easy answers" thinking that I would swallow them and end my struggle. None of these men helped me to find what I found after a lengthy, painful struggle -- a faith upon which I could stand and defend to myself and to others.

From my experience, I have found some who have the weakest faith are the very ones who try to project the greatest confidence. From the Pharisee who scoffed at how anyone could disagree with him, to the one who loudly proclaims God's grace but lives in sin, these all have one thing in common -- they will not open their hearts and test the doubts that actually exist in their hearts with an open Bible. They will, however, try to silence those whom they may disagree with by using their tongues to attack or other forms of intimidation.

My prayer for you is that you begin this struggle for a stronger faith and that you will not abandon the struggle. Do not let men enslave you in fear and doubt. "But without faith *it is impossible to please Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

(**Hebrews 11:6**)



Is Jesus a Bad Teacher?

By Jeremy Crump

Have you ever had a teacher that just wouldn't give you a straight answer? I remember a math teacher I had in high school who I'd ask for help and instead of solving the problem for me, she'd give me some hints then send me back to my seat to work on it by myself. I've even had Bible class teachers do the same thing--I'd go to them seeking their input or their conclusion on a particular matter, and instead of telling me their opinion they'd list some options or point me to some passages to consider, but for some reason they wouldn't tell me exactly what they thought. That can be frustrating.

From this perspective, it seems to me that Jesus must have been a frustrating teacher. For instance, on several occasions we see Jesus returning a question with a question. A lawyer asks Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" and Jesus responds, "What is written in the law? How does it read to you?" (**Luke 10:25-26**). The chief priests and elders ask Jesus, "By what authority do you do these things?" A good question. But rather than answer it, Jesus asks another: "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" (**Matthew 21:23-25**).

An equally frustrating response must have been felt by the Pharisees, who wanted to know why Jesus was eating with the tax collectors and sinners. To this Jesus charged them, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice'" (**Matthew 9:13**). And then, of course, Jesus had this "annoying" habit of always speaking in parables so no one could really understand what he meant. His disciples didn't understand why Jesus did this either (**Matthew 13:10**); why did Jesus seemingly avoid speaking clearly in some instances? Was Jesus simply a bad teacher?

Obviously the answer to the above question is 'no.' As frustrating as these kinds of teachers can be at times--turns out, they're usually the most effective teachers. They give you the tools and they show you where to look but they never lay out the answers for you too

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easily. They encourage you to think for yourself.

Have you ever thought about the fact that God wants us not only to arrive at the right answers but to arrive at those answers honestly? To think and struggle with His Word? Yet many of us are content to let others simply hand us the right answer. Often we just accept what the preacher says without evaluating his statements at all. The Bible is God's personal communication to each one of us. Why would we ever be content to let someone else explain every-

thing in it to us?

That doesn't mean that we don't need help and guidance with God's Word. Certainly we do. But sometimes shortcuts to an answer are no answer at all. I can turn in someone else's math test with my name on it, but that is no representation of what I've learned. Similarly, you're never going to be convicted of God's teachings unless you study them on your own.

Sometimes what He tells us might be difficult to understand. At times we may be tempted to react to God's words just like the disciples did on one occasion: "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" (**John 6:60**). This is to be expected. God's wisdom is beyond our own, and understanding Him is not going to come naturally. If we really want a relationship with God, we have to exercise a little effort to understand what He's trying to tell us.

I think struggling to understand God's Word is part of the point. We don't look to God to confirm everything we already know or believe but so that our thinking will be challenged. Consider the parable of the persistent friend in **Luke 11:5-8**. The moral of the story is not that God is unwilling to answer our prayers, but that he wants us to be persistent. We may not find all the answers immediately and we may not at first want to hear the answers we find. But if we keep searching, if we - like Jacob in **Genesis 32** - hold on to God and not let go until we receive an answer, we will find clarity. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (**Luke 11:9**).

