

MAY - JUN 2020
RS 20/-

Vol. 22 No. 3
**CAMPUS
LINK**



Prepping for
THE PROMISE



Have not been Home

Have not been home
Now, almost months
Pictures of the City of Joy
Leads me into tears.

The picture that brought me tears,
Not the ones in my gallery
Rather the ones in media,
No! not the ones in sepia.

The very recent disaster,
Not known by many,
We're capable of devastating the
city
And breaking me down in agony.

The city lived through
countless massacres and immense
brutality.

Myriads of movements
Subjects to high mortality.

Protests and marches,
Famines and Rallies,
This city never gave up,
Thus, you will find history in each
alley.

The city that stood strong
Throughout for so long
Couldn't withstanding this storm,
After all the nature's norm.

Millions unsheltered and thousands
starving,
The roads no more look the same.
Water scarcity, lack of electricity
A huge number of life it claimed.

Park Street no-long feels the same
Esplanade and Howrah too lost to
this game
College now crying in shame,
When nature decides, nobody to
blame.

Today you would find
Destructed shopping mart and port
Today the city demands
Your prayers and support.

Have not been home
Now, almost months
City of joy
Lead me into tears.

Gracy Bhutia, I M.A., Jadhavpur University, Kolkata

PREPPERS FOR THE BEST!

The dream of any young man or woman to celebrate the D day in a grand manner have been shattered due to restrictions on social gathering. We hear about many wedding ceremonies of young people who got engaged for the promise of Gen. 2: 24, got either delayed or postponed due to COVID 19 lockdown. However, bereft you were of socializing on the D day, remember, my dear ones, the promise that is kept just for you two in the Scriptures can never be thwarted. Yes, the promise made in Genesis 2: 24 is just for you both, the newly wed and to be wed. UESI is one organization that teaches the importance of this promise in many of our fora. I thank the writers on the subject “Prepping for the promise” for their timely writings.

We could not resist the enthusiasm of some of our writers who wanted to focus on COVID 19, situation. So, you would read a lot about it in this issue. What do we as God’s people understand God’s activity on this earth at this point of time? We have been sincerely praying for God’s protection amidst the virus infection. There’s a new a perspective of life, death, value of life, value of money, employment, leadership, authority, power, rich and the poor. Need to pray for our country and for the whole earth to have a right perspective about the only true God.

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CAMPUSLINK VOL.22 NO.3

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Overseas:

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For permission to reprint articles, write to the Hon. Editor.

DEPOSITING SUBSCRIPTIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

A/c Name: **UESI Publication Trust**

A/c No: **0907101061471**

Bank: **Canara Bank, Kellys corner, Chennai - 600007**

IFS code: **CNRB0000907**

Inform details of deposit to **campus.link@uesi.in**

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A REAL-LIFE JIGSAW PUZZLE:
**GOD DESIGNED
MASTERPIECE**

As a little girl, I enjoyed solving jigsaw puzzles. I had sets which were colourful, vibrant, and beautiful. Every time I put the pieces together, it seemed as if the picture had popped up to life. I was thrilled with joy and satisfaction. With practice, time, and effort, I mastered this art. And, as goes with every game, at the end of the day all the pieces of the puzzle went back into the box, which was carefully put away in a cupboard. They were, indeed, a treasure.

Over the years, other games and activities replaced the jigsaw puzzle, and this particular art was soon forgotten. Before long, this little girl became a young woman, ready to face the game of life. To take up life's adventure and play it with her whole heart, soul and mind.

There was one game I had always anticipated playing, a mystery which often puzzled me. This was the real-life jigsaw puzzle called *Marriage!*

A game wherein I had to have a playmate, too. The one I had often dreamt about. The one who would look forward to playing with me, not just once or for one day, but over an entire lifetime.

After all, two are better than one

Yippee!... this is gonna be fun!

I spent a lot of time reading to prepare myself to face this real-life challenge. *"I cannot afford to make a mistake and have to give it my best"* I calmly reminded myself. *"Will this set have 50 pieces, or 500, or 5000?"* I often wondered.



Soon other questions flooded my mind: *“Will I be able to Pause, Rewind, or Fast forward? Once the pieces are out, they don’t go back into the box either, or do they?”* And it dawned on me one day that there was no final picture or pattern to follow, in marriage. Oh, my!! There was a sudden surge of fear. *“Will I be able to play well? Am I ready for it?”* I pondered.

With such questions on my mind, anticipation in my heart, and prayer on my lips, I was finally all set, I think, to meet this challenge head on, the real-life Jigsaw Puzzle.

In time, I identified who my playmate would be, a tall and handsome man who looked forward to solving this puzzle with me. Before we realized, we were handed our own set to play - a unique design that we had to figure out for ourselves. And, our special day was 4.4.16.

Wait. Did I just say a 4 times table? Did I get my math right? Was it to test my mental math? It was puzzling... Well, it was a fancy date of a different kind. The work of the Master manufacturer, the Grand Designer, who in his very own sense of humour wanted to hand it over to us in style!

On that special day my new playmate and I were exhilarated. *“This puzzle will be our very own, unique and one of a kind”*; we exclaimed. *“Will this be mind-boggling, stimulating, and exciting?”* we eagerly wondered.

With great anticipation, we carefully started unwrapping this gift, curious to know what’s in store for us. We

wanted to play fair and go by the rules. As we stood there admiring, we soon realized the pieces were already emerging piece by piece. Of course, they were in different shapes, sizes, and colour.

There were patterns similar and some unknown

We soon figured this was nothing but our very own

We enjoyed putting together, the pieces we knew so perfectly fit

But there were patterns in front of us, we didn’t comprehend a bit

Like every other game there were times of laughter, excitement and fun

A fair share of frustration, disappointment and despair, before the setting of sun

Can we really complete it? Wish we could take a break

But the game had to go on ‘coz there’s a picture to create

Wine gets better with time, as they say

And this would be a lifelong game to play

Before we realized, it did dawn -

A year together was happily gone!

And so, we entered the second year, with puzzles and questions as before. It was fun, challenging and at times overwhelming. It took time, effort, sacrifices, and a lot of forgiveness. We wanted to ask the Master-manufacturer for a glimpse of the final picture. After all, won’t

it make the game smoother and much easier?

We realized that marriage is a mystery to solve and this puzzle so unique to play. But, hey! Every piece in the jigsaw puzzle did have its own place to stay. So, with encouragement in our hearts, we continued the game enabled by faith, hope and love. Soon we did realize that we could realign, refit, and join pieces back, having the other's perspective in mind. Hurray!! there were some winning moments, but the game was nowhere close to the end. It had only begun!

Now, at the end of four years we see a picture slowly emerging. A real-life picture with colour, texture and pattern, making it so beautiful, meaningful, and true. We have learnt to look up to the Master-manufacturer before every move we make. For He's the Master-designer and the Perfect Matchmaker. He's got all the answers and the big picture in mind. We need His love and grace, patience to pursue and strength to run the race.

As we enter another year, this is our humble prayer: that He would continue to guide our every step and direct our life's game plan in the process of making it His handiwork: A Masterpiece, indeed!

A unique masterpiece, A priceless piece of art

A thing of beauty in which He's played the main part

A perfect blend of pattern, emotion, and soul

To serve the Master Designer with one common goal

A colourful and precious sight, to enjoy and behold

Spreading joy and love to others, bringing many into the fold.



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WHAT GOD WANTS THE CHURCH TO DO DURING CORONAVIRUS?

Nations across the world continue to witness unprecedented death, devastation and disruption barring no religion, class, gender or age due to Coronavirus. Coronavirus is not only killing people, it's devastating economies, crumbling businesses, crushing the poor and the vulnerable. The spiraling effect of this virus is going to have a long-term impact on how the world functions from now on.

Every rational human being including Christians are wondering looking at this catastrophe, searching for an answer to several questions swarming their minds.

What is God doing in this calamity? Are these the signs of end days? Is this God's punishment for the sins of mankind?

Many religions believe that calamities like Coronavirus are the wrath of 'God' on human beings. Seizing this helpless situation, some religious people are promoting various natural, physical and spiritual solutions to strengthen their following. However, we also should acknowledge that several religious groups are actively involved in helping the poor and vulnerable communities across the globe.

The church across the world is also affected, with congregations remaining inside their homes. As Sunday worship services had to go online, many preachers for the first time started reminding the congregations that the Church is not a 'building' but 'people'. The churches realized that God is present where two or three gather in His name¹. Many believe that this pandemic has changed the way churches and Christian organizations conduct their affairs.

Calamities like these pose innumerable challenges, as well as unique opportunities. Many people across the world are able to come out of their decades-old routine life, and are able to spend time with themselves, with God and their families along with rediscovering their talents as well as their passion. The churches were able to rediscover new ways of ministering to their congregations. Evangelists were able to find new ways of reaching out to communities. The church is slowly transforming itself, so that it becomes more relevant to today's digital world.

Amidst this commotion, we see occasional reflections on the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The signs and wonders in the Bible come to our thoughts. However, the Bible says that we should be alert 'ALWAYS' as we do not know of the day our Lord returns². Though it's not a bad idea to become closer to God during these turbulent times,

1. Matthew 18:20
2. Mathew 24:42

it is important to keep up the same spirit for the rest of our lives.

Most religions unanimously agree that God is Just and punishes 'sinners'. The Bible tells us that God is not only Just but He is merciful and compassionate. Jonah didn't like this unique character of God, and accused God for not sending calamity, but instead showing love and compassion³.

For the Jews of Jesus' time, suffering and sin are closely interrelated. Jesus refuted this argument and explained that 'Sin' is not the reason why a person is born blind, but it's for enabling the works of God⁴. Also when Lazarus died, Jesus told that it is for the glory of God⁵.

Bible does speak of human suffering because of the sins of humankind. During Noah's time, God punished the whole world and every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out⁶. However, it also speaks about how innocent people suffer as well, often through no fault of their own, like the most famous person, Job⁷. Not only Job, but his whole family and servants suffered for no reason.

God's plan for an individual is based on His 'sovereign will' and He will have mercy or compassion according to His will⁸. It is not based on man's effort, but entirely

3. Jonah 4:2,3

4. John 9:3

5. John 11:4

6. Genesis 7:23

7. Job 1:8

8. Romans 9:14-16



based on His will. Understanding God's sovereignty, His mercy and compassion humbles us and leads us to repentance.

The universal sinfulness of humanity started due to the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden⁹. Jesus calls us not just to repent for the universal sinfulness of humankind, but also for our individual sins so that we will not perish¹⁰. The Church, which is the body of Christ, leads this call for repentance¹¹.

In God's sovereignty, He made people, weak and strong, intelligent and simple minded, tall and short, and the like. This is God's diversity. This creates interdependence. There is also inequality in the world, which is made by humans. Human-made inequality creates anarchy. This interdependency needs to flow out of the Church to the community, and to the nations, so that God is glorified.

Globally, nationalism is sweeping every rich nation, who are increasingly obsessed with the interests of themselves, at the cost of others. They fail to realize that the all of humanity needs to progress together, as we are deeply interdependent. Here the church needs to show exemplary leadership in demonstrating God's plan for humanity in giving His life for them. The Holy Spirit empowers each Christian to be the salt and light for this world¹².

The Church should shine God's characters of Justice, Mercy and Compassion. Many churches are already engaged with the worst sufferers of this calamity, including-migrant laborers, daily wage workers, small business owners, the elderly and the singles. Not just helping them, but the Church also needs to speak up on behalf of the affected, who can't speak for themselves¹³.

Calamities should also motivate Christians to start sustainable response mechanisms. In the earlier days, Christians built hospitals, schools and other institutions in response to various crisis. Those mechanisms addressed the root causes of the crisis and served the communities for many years. In addition to immediate short-term response, the Church also needs to focus on the long-term response strategies.

In conclusion, calamities are opportunities to demonstrate God's Justice and Compassion over humankind. Through active leadership, the Church should respond at both local and global levels so that God's name is glorified.



Salathiel Nalli is a graduate from Hyderabad EGF, Suncity Zone. He lives with his wife Swarupa and two children Sauriya and Syahrul.

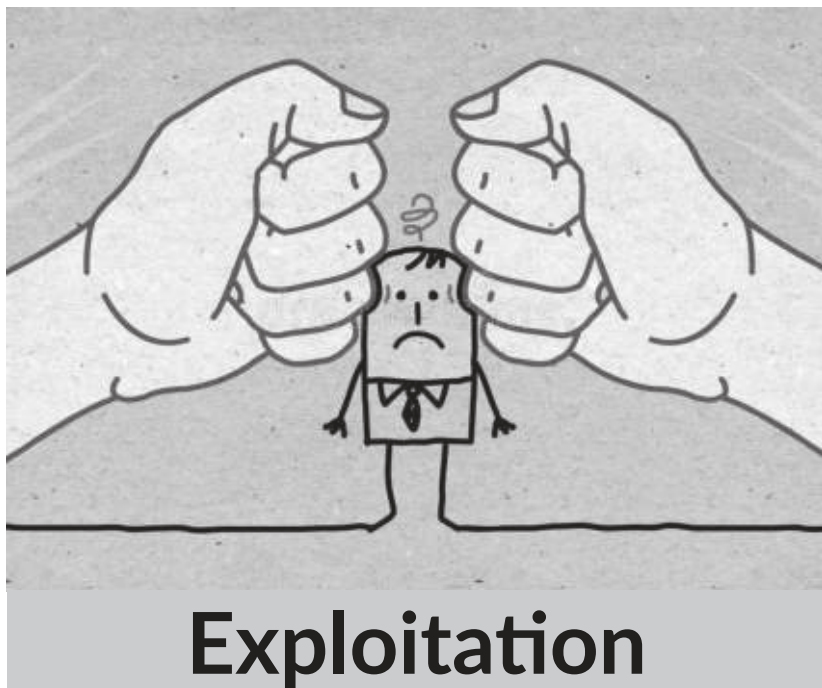
9. Romans 5:12

10. Luke 13:4,5

11. 2 Chronicles 7:14

12. Mathew 5:13,14

13. Proverbs 31:8-9



One of the common problems that I noticed in the recent years is a social menace called “**EXPLOITATION**”.

Dictionary meaning:

Merriam-Webster dictionary: ‘to make use of meanly or unfairly for one’s own advantage.’

Cambridge dictionary: ‘to use someone or something unfairly for your own advantage.’

Oxford dictionary: ‘make use of (a situation) in a way considered unfair or underhand.’

It is noteworthy that, “Unfair” is the common word used in all these definitions.

Description of exploitation:

It is necessary to see the areas in which exploitation has taken place. Let’s see a few explanations one by one:

- 1. Children are being exploited in school:** Children leave home for school early in the morning and spend the entire day in school till late evening (some schools tax children in the name of special classes; I still wonder what is so special about special classes when the same thing is being taught in working hours!). Now almost all schools work 7 days of the week. Children are overburdened by the luggage (school bag) they carry to school.



2. Teachers are being exploited:

A teacher's job was considered a noble profession once upon a time. They were treated with dignity then, now they are treated like slaves in corporate schools. No leave, no extra pay for overtime working hours, apart from teaching, teachers have to canvas for the school and bring at least 5-10 students in the next academic year to get their increment. Teachers too have to be available to work all the days of the week.

3. Staff members are being exploited:

Both secular and sacred institutions, public and private sectors exploit their staff members: maximum work-minimum pay. Leaders in organizations donot accept a "no" for an answer from their staff. Staff members are not respected, irrespective of their age, experience and qualification. Work time has increased from 8 hours to an alarming 14 hours.

4. Nature is being exploited:

Air, water and environment are polluted and exploited by human beings. Animals in the forests are hunted down, forests: shelter for birds and animals are destroyed for the use of human beings. Cruelty in every possible way has been carried out by human beings. Our cities and towns have become concrete jungles in the name of development. Thus there is

more deforestation in both rural and urban areas.

Message to mankind:

When man exploited fellow human beings and nature, the perfect reply has been given to human beings in the form of shutdown. Everyone who had money as their only goal and ran after it would realise, at this shutdown time, that money cannot buy many valuable things: love, peace, joy etc., And this time of shutdown also has given a relief to children, teachers, staffs in every sector, forests and the animals from being exploited. Hope human beings will learn a lesson and be humane to fellow human beings and nature.

Biblical message:

In the light of shutdown, let's examine what happened in the history of Israel. God blessed Israel as a nation. He protected the people and their land from enemies. He provided both during their wilderness journey and in the promised land. God was gracious and merciful in spite of their shortcomings from time to time. God gave them clear instructions and laws to follow. God also told them that the land would be desolate, people would be in captivity. The reasons for desolation and captivity are found in Jeremiah 25:3-7, Leviticus 25:1-7, 20-22; 26:33-35; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21. The reasons are as follows: 1. Disobedience to God's word, 2. Judah's sin: idolatry and evil doings,

3. Number of violations to God in regards to the observation of the seventh year rest. Israelites had been under captivity for 70 years. God in His sovereignty brought them back to their home-land after the 70 years were over.

Application:

Keeping the past incident and thinking of the present calamity we can learn the following lessons:

1. God is sovereign and He is in absolute control of the affairs of the world. He will not tolerate disobedience to His words.
2. God is zealous for His name. When He is challenged, He gives due reply exhibiting His power.
3. God is not blind to the violations of people in power, not deaf

to the poor and oppressed. He thwrats the plan of the wicked and oppressors, at the same time listens and answers to the oppressed in due time and wipes away their tears.

An unfair humanity is treated by fair God. May God help us to be sensible and sensitive to the responsibilities that He has entrusted with us.

Blessings!



Rev. G. Wesley, Anglican ordained priest, ministering the Rehoboth Bible Church and Principal of Grace Bible Institute, Erode. Member of Erode EGF since 2013.

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Hoop of Plague to Portal of Hope

Almost all countries of the world are in the grip of the crisis due to plague of corona virus. The outbreak of the virus known as covid-19 has spread all over. In absence of any remedy, thousands of lives are lost. In some countries, the death toll has exceeded more than a thousand in a single day. Every day, number of infected persons is on the rise. World health organisation has declared the outbreak as a pandemic. The whole world has plunged

into utter darkness. Never in this generation have such large number of casualties been recorded. In 1918, the last severe pandemic of influenza caused by H1N1 virus (Spanish flu) had claimed 50 million lives including about 12 millions in India.

As per report of world Health Organization (Early Report Feb 2020), the virus was first detected in three patients in a hospital in Wuhan province of China on 30

December 2019. The virus advanced its hoop all over the globe within 2-3 months. Alignment of the full-length genome sequence of the COVID-19 virus and other available genomes of Beta coronavirus showed the closest relationship with the bat SARS-like corona virus. As COVID-19 is a newly identified pathogen, there is no known pre-existing immunity in humans. Based on the epidemiologic characteristics observed so far, everyone is assumed to be susceptible, although there may be risk factors increasing susceptibility to infection. In the midst of controversy over the origin of virus, it is reported that first transfer of virus from sea food (bat/animal) market to human and thereafter human-human transmission and subsequent community transmission have extended the epidemic and rapidly assumed proportion of pandemic. There is no evidence yet whether virus commenced from animal or Lab. Medical Studies suggest that the threat of virus is not likely to end soon. Researchers in various countries are working on developing antibody to arrest the disease.

Measures are being taken to impede the magnitude of transmission of the epidemic. This unprecedented outbreak of plague has impacted human lives in many ways. Lockdown and sealing of infected hotspot areas and containment zones have brought our activities to a grinding halt. Factories are shut down. Farming

is restricted. Movement of people has been barred. Schools, colleges and educational institutions have been closed. Many students were given short notices to vacate the hostels. Examinations have been postponed. People are confined to their homes. Many employees have lost their jobs and daily workers their livelihood. Migrant workers and marginal labourers have been stranded at many points. A few have taken extreme steps of ending their lives. The pandemic has crushed us economically, devastated socially and jolted psychologically. Prolonged lockdown has created fear and insecurity in the minds of youth. Graduating students from reputed institutions, who had placement offers in their hands, were suddenly left in the lurch as companies withdrew the offers. Students looking for campus placement are disappointed as job offers will be scarce during recession period. Uncertainty of future is lurking at students preparing for final examinations. Destiny of lakhs of youths appearing in or waiting for results of competitive/ professional examinations hangs in balance. There is pall of gloom all over. Many question, "Why is life given to those with no future..." (Job 3:23)

In ancient times people of Israel were in bondage in Egypt for about 430 years. During their long sojourn there, they came across different plagues over the land. But no plague harmed the children of covenant. Finally, death of the firstborn came on Egypt. Children of Israel were told to stay indoors and



apply blood of the Passover lamb on the top and both sides of the door frame of their houses. In the night when the plague visited the land, the Lord saw the blood and did not permit the destroyer to enter their houses and strike them down. Lord Jesus became the passover Lamb of God and sacrificed His life on the cross once for all for sin, sickness and redemption of humanity, The blood of the living Lord is still available to claim for ourselves, family members and neighbours so that no plague or virus will strike us down. No external harm will penetrate through our doors and windows as we declare the blood of the Living Lamb of God. Now, it may be difficult to comprehend life down the road. It appears all is lost. Being in crisis situations, the psalmist believed in God and acknowledged with expectation, "My future is in your hands. . ." (Psa. 31:15). Prophet Jeremiah, while writing letter in exiles for long years, declared God's word saying, "For I know the plans I have for you", says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give a future and a hope." (Jer 29:11). God knows the future, and His plans for us are good and full of hope. As long as God, who knows the future, goes with us as we fulfil His purpose, we can have boundless hope. We may go through pain, suffering or hardship but God will see us through to a wonderful conclusion. Rather than murmurings during the lockdown period, we can devote time in a meaningful way.

Studying and meditating God's word, devoting extended time in intercessory prayers, completing important pending tasks, spending quality time with family, joining in online prayer groups, teaching or learning any course/skills/music online, providing guidance/counselling, volunteering in the church or NGOs for distribution of ration/food to the needy, reading good spiritual/motivational books and pursuing healthy hobby/activities etc are different options before us to keep ourselves occupied, active and spiritually forward. It lifts up our eyes from the problem of immobility and despair to God of hope and strength and exudes confidence in Him. Our distress is nothing compared to insurmountable problems faced by stressed-out health professionals working tirelessly in hospitals, caring for infected patients and running risk of their lives. One of the believing doctors in the epicentre of the virus sacrificially choose to disseminate awareness about the virus despite the risks to his health and life and continued to care for patients until he was infected himself and was promoted to glory leaving behind legacy and example of serving his Master with declaration "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:7). In an interview to the media on discharge from hospital, one believer, who was treated for covid-19 infection in agonising



isolation for days, witnessed that Jesus is my real and true friend and companion as she felt utterly lonely and deserted as none came near her and the word of God encouraged her all through.

As the nations pass through catastrophe, many doubt and question God's goodness. Some talk about signs of end times and others have lost hope of the way ahead. At this point of time, we can only turn to the Living God for the healing of nations in the midst of failures and helplessness. We are locked down but not knocked out. "We are hard pressed on all sides, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair." (2 Cor. 4:8). We know, "The Lord is my keeper; the Lord is my shade upon my right hand. The sun shall not smite by day, nor the moon by night (Psalm 121:5-6). "We believe that God promises to make something good out of the storms that bring devastation to our lives (Rom 8:28). " If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will

conquer you; no plague will come near your home" (Psalm 91:9-10). He is ready to set things right (Isa 46:13). We declare that despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. (Rom 8:37). We shall overcome the crisis. We will transform this breakdown into a breakthrough. God given wisdom will drive researchers for inventions of medicine/vaccine for the epidemic. The land will experience recovery. We will rise up. We will come out strong and resilient through critical times to face new emerging world order. Our cities and nation will bounce back to life and prosperity. Deserts shall bloom again. College/universities will buzz with academic activities. New vistas of opportunities will be opened up. God will transform the valley of trouble into a gateway of hope (Hosea 2:15 NLT).



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READERS' RESPONSE

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Hon. Editor



KING JOSIAH: BECAUSE HE HEARD . . . God also Heard



In 2nd Kings Chapter 22 we find the wonderful story of King Josiah's sensitivity to the Word of God. His sense of urgency to inquire from God, his reactions after at looking himself and his people in the light of God's Word, taking of corrective steps in his kingdom and his unique (23:25) return to the Lord stand out as inspiring.

Verse 11 says "When the king (Josiah) heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes." This was the sensitivity of King Josiah after he heard the Word of God. God takes note of all he does when he hears (verse 19: "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I also have heard you, declares the LORD."

The first part of above verse shows King Josiah HEARD God's word

and responded humbling himself, tearing his robes and weeping. There is no mention in this that Josiah "prayed" but this is how he expressed his feelings. Further, the same verse says "God also HEARD him." A visible expression of his feelings (tearing robes and weeping) were seen by God and taken as a plea for His mercy. The verse records a beautiful phrase "BECAUSE HE HEARD GOD ALSO HEARD." Our listening makes God listen to us. The act of listening here is on the sides of both God and Josiah and there is quick response also from both. God sent His message to Josiah through prophetess Huldah that he would die in peace and his eyes would not see disaster which would come upon the people.

He was now assured by the word of God that he would be spared from upcoming wrath of God. But

what about God's wrath on people? Chapter 23 gives a detailed account of his personal turning back to God and his leading of the people of Israel to turn back to God. He took the initiative to gather the people of Judah and Jerusalem and renew the covenant in presence of God. The articles made for Baal and Asherah were removed and burnt, quarters of male prostitutes were torn down, high places were desecrated. He removed all the shrines at the high places, slaughtered the idol worshiping priests of high places, cut down the Asherah poles, got rid of spiritists and mediums, and also ordered the people to celebrate the Passover which was not done for the past 18 years. These were the actions of Josiah after hearing God's word. Verse 25 records "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

We as believers often question why our prayers are not heard for long or complain that God is not looking at the troubles we face, etc. But many of us fail to reflect on self. There might be some things God is telling us since long, which we may be ignoring, or we may have been insensitive to God's past directions, God may not have noticed any changed behaviour in our lives. The clue to answered prayers is here. We

need to first listen to God and obey what God is telling.

Proverbs 28:9 says "If anyone turns a deaf ear to my instruction, even their prayers are detestable." John 9:31 says "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will." Isaiah 59:1-2 makes it more clear "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; you sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

Above verses clearly tells that our sins / disobedience / reluctant ears hinder the answers of our prayers. Our obedient life is crucial in bringing answers of our prayers.

Dear brothers and sisters, God surely watches us as well as feels our troubles and needs. God is looking at and hearing to our expressed or unexpressed feelings. Don't blame God for delayed/unanswered prayers. It is we and our sins that keep God from answering our prayers. Let us check "Is there one-sided listening?" Our obedience is God's pre-decided condition and one of the reasons for having our prayers answered.



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The Purpose of Marriage *and* **Choice of a Partner**

Even in this 21st century when ethical and moral values are decreasing rapidly, the importance of family as an institution cannot be denied. “Does a nation require a leader or a loyal person who has values?” questioned a professional editor. In another article published in The Week magazine the former election commissioner Shri TN Seshan who questioned ‘What constitutes a leader?’ ended up stating that it is moral values which make a person noble. Family is the first school, parents are the first teachers, and their life styles are text books. That’s why marriage is honourable in all, marriage is first institution of God even before the church and society.

In spite of sufficient doctrinal teachings we see and hear some of our believing graduates, who are knowingly making wrong choices and facing problems. As a result those who are active in ministry before their marriage have been inactive and ineffective later by this subtle trick of devil. Many times believers who were not obedient to the specific will of God in selecting the partner are getting into confusion about involvement in ministry.

The purpose of Marriage

Marriage is God's plan for man - not to be alone, (Gen. 2:18) but to replenish the earth and keep the human race going (Gen. 1:26) and to prevent fornication (1 Cor. 7:2,9). In this postmodern world, sadly, marriage is considered to be a contract between two individuals, whereas it has to be a life-long companionship – "till death do us part". . Marriage is the first institution created by God, even before the Church. Marriage is holy (Heb. 13:4) The Bible starts and ends with Marriage. First Miracle of Jesus was at a wedding, Marriage is an important and an irreversible decision.

The purpose of marriage is 1. ***Companionship*** : The affection, Love, and true companionship which grow out of a oneness of spirit as each partner models Christ's Unconditional love (Amos 3:3) 2. ***Enjoyment*** : The physical relationship is a reflection of the loyalty and affection shared among marriage partners who have become "one flesh" (Heb 13:4) 3. ***Fruitfulness*** : The blessing of children in a marriage allows that relationship to reproduce itself physically. It is the fruit of the oneness that results in a marriage (Gen1:28, I Pet 3:7) 4. ***Protection***: The husband protects his wife by laying down his life for her (Eph 5:25). The wife is to protect the home (Titus 2:4-5) and the parents together protect their children to raise up a godly seed (Malachi 2:15; Psalm 112:1-2) 5. ***Reflecting God's image*** – Trinitarian God, His Character are reflected in marriage.

Knowing the will of God regarding marriage partner

As a believer, share your convictions about Marriage with your parents. Inform your parents about importance of God's will in your decision making and convince them. If any proposal comes, inform to your Mentor for prayer and



advice. In general Prayer, Word of God, Elders' counselling, Circumstances are the four ways to know God's will. Prayer with burden, open mind and without any reservations about proposal to get peace of mind. Prayer changes things, Wait upon God for His time. In his time he makes all things beautiful.

Many youngsters and their parents set worldly criteria while looking for suitable partners - ABCDE; **A** for Age, **B** for Beauty, **C** for Caste, **D** for Dowry, **E** for Earning or Education, **F** for Family background (well settled). But as believers, we must let God be our Guide, not worldly. Otherwise, we will miss the Blessings of God and also become a bad role model to next generation.

The Process of Marriage

When both sides are clear about God's will, the families can come together for an engagement where the marriage is decided. The partners to be may communicate and correspond with each other but not behave in a manner that would bring reproach to the Lord's name or set a bad example for others. Behave with dignity and decency. The process of deciding about marriage can be in 3 stages: **1st Stage** - Before praying for the proposal, get to know about their testimony **2nd Stage** – Get to know God's will and the approval of mentors and parents. **3rd Stage** – For marriage arrangements, both side elders can meet together to finalise Venue, Date, Expenditure, etc **Conclusion**

Believers are to marry only believers. Your marriage is your right. Remember, marriage is a yoke, you shall not tie up an ox with a donkey (2 Cor. 6:14). Both old and new testaments condemned marriages with unbelievers. Marriage should be contemplated only after completion of your studies or after achieving some degree of financial independence in order to take care of the family. Last but not the least, consider the compatibility in age, mental and spiritual maturity and also vision about ministry. May the Lord help you to choose your mate not only with the sole purpose of meeting your needs but ultimately to bring glory to Him.



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Preparing for Marriage

Is your daughter's complexion dark or darker?" A highly "relevant" question asked by an educated Christian groom to my parents. My parents dropped that call by replying "our daughter is beautiful". My mother's tone changed and tears were waiting at the corner of her eyes to roll out after that call.

"People are ready for wedding but not for marriage" – this quote caught my attention as I was flipping through the pages of a magazine. Triggered by curiosity, I started exploring further as I was also into that phase of decision making. As I started expanding my boundaries, I understood how the definition of marriage varies from one person to another and how the definition plays a major

role in making this most important decision of a person's life. Finally, what made the person to ask the question to my parents?

Marriage is legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship, according to the Dictionary.

The Biblical Definition

Marriage is the beginning – beginning of a family. It is a lifelong commitment. More than a physical union, it is a spiritual and emotional union. This union mirrors the one between Christ and His Church. In reality, people are into marriage for different reasons, which might include social, economical, religious, or emotional. Understanding what the Bible says about marriage is very important.



The values and criteria for selecting a partner should be based on the Bible for a Christ Centered Marriage.

Belief System

India is a country with rich diversity; our culture changes for every 30 kilometers. As we are growing up in this society of varied cultures, the belief system being formed in an individual is based on the people they meet and incidents that happen in their life. We live through stories, myths, folktales, films and other experiences. Our beliefs, customs, practices are molded by these. They will emerge and evolve over time. When we enter into a proposal with our belief system, there are chances that we may miss other important criteria that should be considered.

I am from a society where marrying a boy from other castes is believed to bring shame to the family and the marriage will turn unsuccessful. During an LTC session, I came to know that caste should not be considered in a marriage proposal. It was quiet shocking to me as throughout my life I was taught the importance of caste by my society. But thanks to God, I met a prayerful aunty at the right time. When I explained to her about my struggle, she asked me "Did you pray about this?" She also added, "no one can change others' hearts except God. Ask God to reveal the truth to you to change your perspective". I started doing that and eventually

not only me but my parents were also convinced that caste is not a criteria.

While searching for an ideal spouse, some believe in fair complexion, some in a 5-digit salary, some in family backgrounds, some in profession, some in church background, some in caste and some in beauty. They think that by marrying a person with these criteria, any marriage will be successful. The belief system varies from people to people, instead of criticizing them or judging them, it is the responsibility of the elders to understand the belief system of the individual and guide them in a Biblical way. There is nothing shameful in having a wrong belief system but after accepting Christ it is the responsibility of the individual to check always whether their belief system is aligned with the Word of God.

Importance of Choice

Another unique aspect in making this decision is to understand the responsibility God has given to make a choice. There are some things in our life we cannot choose, we cannot choose our place of birth, we cannot choose our father, mother, siblings, uncle or aunt. In fact, we cannot even choose our offspring. But God has given the freedom to make a choice or to choose the most important relationship in our lives. After salvation, the biggest decision we make is to decide with whom we are going to live out our

lives. This decision is not something we can revert or change; it is not something which is momentary, but it is an unchangeable lifelong commitment. Understanding the importance and uniqueness of this decision will help the individual to understand the importance of God given responsibility. God has given the freedom to choose this relationship and it is our responsibility to honor it.

Importance of Non-negotiable Criteria

A Criterion is a reference point against which other things can be evaluated. God has beautifully gifted His Word to be our reference point.

- The Bible clearly says, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14)”. If you marry an unbeliever, then expect the Devil to be your Father-in-law. So this is one uncompromisable criteria every child of God should have. Some people used to discuss with me that they will change the person after marriage in case they marry an unbeliever. I used to reply to them in a funny way – “You cannot even change the TV channel after marriage”. I have seen many youngsters who married unbelievers and left their life of faith.
- If you have a commitment to be involved in God’s work, consider it as a very important criteria

while making your decision. There are many youngsters who don’t take this seriously. Later they struggle to involve in ministry as a family. I have seen many young graduates actively involving in ministry but disappearing after marriage as their partner does not have the same commitment. If one wanted to serve God throughout their lifetime, this criteria should not be compromised.

The above two criteria should not be compromised at any cost. If anyone compromises this now, their life of faith and the walk with the Lord will be compromised later.

And the rest of all the criteria come into negotiable and it varies from person to person. These negotiable criteria should not be major factors in choosing your life partners.

God’s Will

Today’s generation is provided with a lot of information from the internet, social media etc., By reading and listening to various teachings they are exposed to many false doctrines. The most important among these teachings is God’s will in our life. It is very natural for any human being to accept a teaching which is very easy, and which does not need any effort to practice or to put into action. In a nutshell, listening to God’s voice and obeying His words need actions that are anchored in faith, but to follow a principle you don’t



need to listen to God's voice at all. Another interesting fact is, God's Will becomes a major topic during the time of marriage. Yes, it is true that God's Will is the most important factor in your marriage, but it is also applicable in every other area of life. If God's will is denied in one aspect of your life it is also denial of God's plan and purpose concerning the whole of your life.

Our God is not a God who just flows with incidents, but He is an active God who involves in every matter of our lives. He is the one who speaks, who listens and one who will not waste a single incident in our life to train us and to grow closer to Him. Also, He is not a God of random things, but He is a God of purpose and plans. We make thousands of decisions each day, most of them unconscious, but there are still several decisions that are significant enough to capture our attention in the course of each day. A deliberate acknowledgment of the presence of God during these times will carry us far in making God's Will a way of life rather than a crisis experience.

The fabric of our lives is woven out of the threads of such minor choices, so it is wise to form the habit of being conscious of God while making them. This habit of taking God seriously in small decisions will make major decisions like marriage less traumatic. Making the decision by listening to God's voice is very important in marriage. God is ready

to reveal His Will always, are you ready to listen and obey by faith?

Waiting Time

God will accomplish His purpose for the individual in His own way and in His time. Waiting for the person of God's choice while facing rejection by others is not an easy thing. But with God's help we can pass through this valley too. Sometimes rejection brings discouragement and doubt but God is Faithful and will accomplish the things in His children's life at the right time, neither late nor early. Through this waiting period, God will mould the individual to depend on Him and tune them to accomplish His will. Regular walk with the Lord, being part of a fellowship, having a mentor and active involvement in the ministry will help to go through this waiting period joyfully. Indeed, waiting time is not a wasted time in God's plan, it's a preparation time for the greater things. In fact, I have waited for 6 years to marry the person of God's choice. It is not very easy to take a tough stand at home. My parents were not happy sometimes when I told them that I wanted to marry someone who is involving in the ministry. During these 6 years, God helped to change my perspective towards marriage and to learn a lesson from every "No" I have received. Getting "no" as answer is not rejection, it's God way of (protecting) keeping you for the best. But at the end, it was worth the waiting and I have entered the

marriage with confidence that it is from God. God has given me the person who has also grown up in the UESI ministry and actively involving in the ministry.

Conclusion

People are ready for the wedding – the wedding gown, pre wedding, post wedding shoots; candid photos – these are just the beginning of a wedding. To be a part of marriage ordained by God, an individual should make the decision by depending on God and His guidance. One has to evaluate the alignment of their belief system with the word of God,

understanding the importance of decision making in their life. When the Lord accomplishes His plan in an individual's life, it will be an occasion for Christian witness and the world will come to know that our God can be trusted at any time irrespective of circumstances and situations. Are you ready for wedding or marriage?



Mrs. Jesintha Robin.

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have considered ministering students with UESI as the specific call for them.

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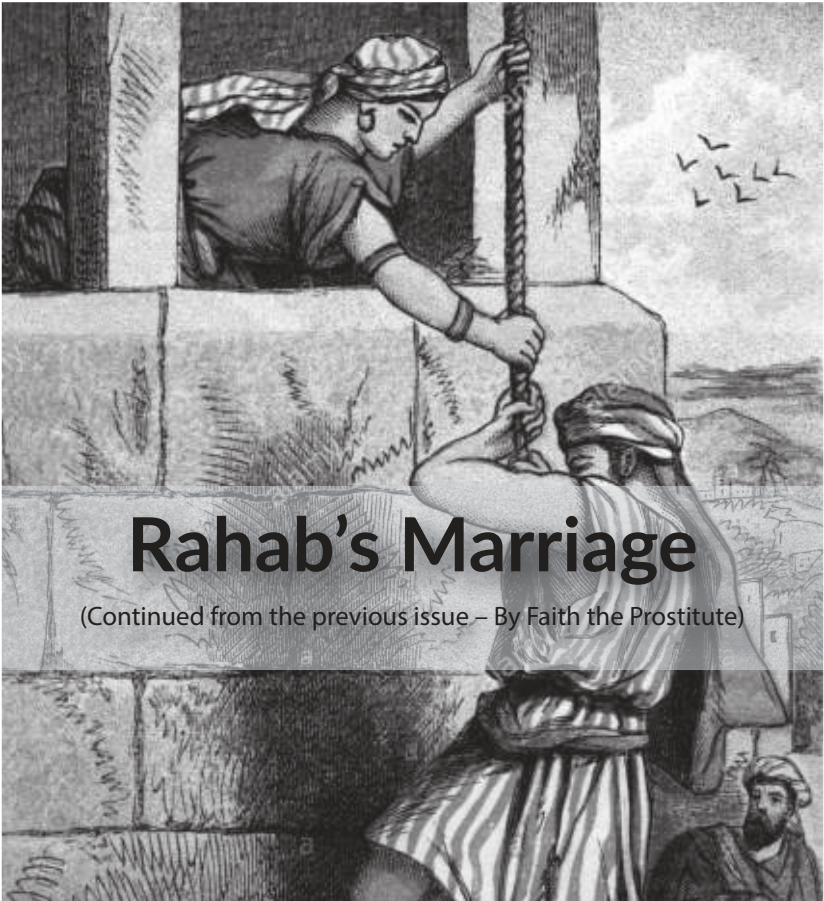
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Rahab's Marriage

(Continued from the previous issue – By Faith the Prostitute)

All around in Jericho was destruction and fire ... But Salmon came in, and embraced me. . . understanding all the emotions that had enveloped me into tears.

“You are safe” he comforted me. I felt understood – probably for the first time in my life! I realized I was more than a body – a person with emotions – a soul; and a person who could put her faith in God – a spirit. I had no clue of what would happen next, but I knew that I was now safe in the shadow of the Almighty.

Salmon didn't take long to propose marrying me. “Be my wife, Rahab!” Salmon said.

“Wife! You mean you would marry me?” I couldn't believe my ears.

“Yes, I would spend the rest of my life with you” he looked into my eyes and smiled.

“How can you! I have been a prostitute. Don’t you know that?” I asked in utter astonishment.

“Not anymore, now you will be my wife” was his simple reply of acceptance and love. “And I will take care of all your relatives too.” I saw the grace of the God of Israel in him.

I couldn’t have asked for more. After all the dirty business I had drowned into, I had not even dreamt of having a family of my own, or a home – and the joy of belonging to one man!

But how good is the God of Israel – I had given a friendly welcome to the spies only once, and He rewarded me with a lifetime of welcome into His fold! On the day the spies had come at my inn and I protected them, I knew nothing of the greatness that would follow. I am so glad I chose to fear Yahweh rather than my own king, or my gods. I had asked only to be spared – me and my family from destruction. But He bestowed upon me so many blessings – the beautiful life-long bond of marriage-love with Salmon, and many more followed. What a wonderful Saviour is He!

He gave Salmon and me a son – Boaz. I was a joyful mother in Israel. He blessed us with rich land in Canaan that yielded crops bountifully. We worshipped the God of Israel all the days of our lives. And that is what our son Boaz also learnt along with us – to love God, and follow His commandments. Caring for the poor and the foreigners is what he practiced as a true Israelite. As he grew up and heard about my non-Israelite roots, it was not easy for him. Boaz was often turned down by those who remembered my old-time profession. They failed to recognize the change that God had brought in me. So many people labelled me based on what I did in my past when I did not know God. Probably that’s why they were not willing to give their daughters in marriage to my son.

‘If God has accepted me and blessed me, why do His people not? Why do they remember what even God forgives and forgets?’ I used to ask Salmon.



But it so turned out, that God brought a lovely young woman for him, another non-Israelite from far away Moab. Boaz didn't take long to accept Ruth as his wife (the widow of the son of Elimelech, Salmon's cousin).

"It doesn't matter which place you come from, or what happened to you before," Boaz told Ruth, "as long as you come to Yahweh, and become His." Salmon and I were so proud of him that day... he had understood us more than our words could have explained. My cup overflowed with joy. He blessed Boaz and Ruth with a son, Obed. The Lord is so good!

I am a witness to His grace that extends to everyone who takes refuge in Him.

With Love,

Rahab Salmon

Note: Rahab was the great great grandmother of king David. Her story didn't end in the Old Testament. She has been mentioned several times in the New Testament as well –

1. Right in the first chapter of Matthew's gospel, Rahab is mentioned with only 4 other women named in the genealogy of Jesus, the Son of God!
2. In Hebrews 11, Rahab is listed among the great stalwarts of faith, one of only two women named there.
3. In James 2, she is mentioned as an example of justification by works and faith, along with Abraham.

The Lord's blessings never end. Oh! How vast is His love and forgiveness! Let us share with others from the abundance of mercy and grace we have received in Christ, by accepting and loving others into His fold, forgiving and forgetting their past, and seeing them as God sees them – His own children.



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WHY I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL?

Apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation [from His wrath and punishment] to everyone who believes [in Christ as Saviour], to the Jew first and also to the Greek". - Romans 1:16 (Amp)

What is the Gospel of Christ?

Apostle Paul, who was separated by God, from his mother's womb and called through His grace, to preach His Son among the Gentiles, reminds the Corinthian Christians of the gospel he has preached to them in 1 Cor. 15:3, 4. The gospel is that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that God provided the way for man to be freed from His wrath and punishment ((Jn. 3:16-18, 36; Romans 6:23).

According to Titus 2:11-14, Apostle Paul explains not only what God has done for the whole world through His grace i.e. Jesus Christ, but also why He has done it. Christ gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. Jesus Christ also instructs His



believers to hate sin and live a holy life in this evil world, eagerly looking for His second coming,

Why I am not ashamed of the gospel of Lord Jesus Christ?

1. Gospel of Christ Jesus is the power of God to save anyone who believes Him. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the *power* of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

2. Only Jesus Christ has authority to forgive anyone's sins (Acts 4:12). He is the only way to heaven (John 14:6).

3. Lord Jesus is going to be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7,8)

4. Even a single soul (a person) is more valuable and precious than all the riches and wealth of the whole world. There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And it is also my obligation to preach the gospel (Mk. 8:36, 37; Lk. 15:10; 1 Cor. 9:16).

5. Jesus has warned that whoever is ashamed of Him and His words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him He will also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels (Mk. 8:38)

6. I am chosen by the Almighty God to be a royal priest, a citizen of the holy nation and God's special, so that I proclaim Jesus Christ, who called me out of darkness into His marvellous light, to the unsaved ones (1Peter 2:9).

7. I have been empowered by the Holy Spirit so as to proclaim the gospel with great audacity and boldness (Acts 1:8; 4:31)

8. Jesus has called me to be His disciple, with His promise of using me as an instrument to lead souls to His kingdom (Matt 4:19). 11.

9. The love of Christ compels me to share His good news with others (2 Cor 5:14).

10. I always wear the readiness to announce the Good News of peace as shoes, that I may be able to [successfully]

stand up against all the schemes and the strategies and the deceptions of the devil (Eph. 6:15,11 Amp)

11. If I don't share the gospel with those who are perishing in sin, God will hold me responsible for their death in sin (Eze. 33:8).

12. I want to be wise by capturing and winning souls for God (Pro. 11:30 Amp).

13. In God's eternal kingdom, I want to shine like stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:3).

14. In the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming, I want to have souls as my hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing. They will be my glory and joy (1 Thess. 2:19, 20).

15. I am not discouraged or disappointed if people reject or oppose the Gospel of Christ Jesus, because a day is coming, when at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that my Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philip 2:10, 11)

God's Promise:

These are the words of the Holy One, the True One, He who has the key [to the house] of David, He who opens and no one will [be able to] shut, and He who shuts and no one opens: 'I know your deeds. See, I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut, for you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not renounced or denied My name. (Rev 3:7, 8 Amp)

Dear reader, Let us proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ without fear for any man or authorities, when the time is right and even when it is not [keep your sense of urgency, whether the opportunity seems favourable or unfavourable, whether convenient or inconvenient, whether welcome or unwelcome] and quicken the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (Lk 12:4, 5; 2 Tim. 4:2a Amp; Matt. 24:3, 14).



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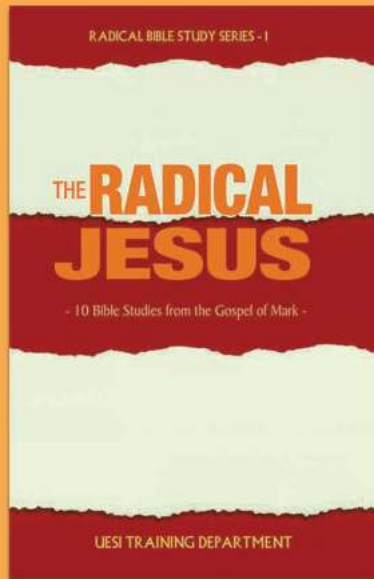
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Radical Jesus



“Being Radical” is a challenging concept. A radical is one who practices fundamentalism and known for having extreme political or religious ideas or one who is different in his or her thinking and action from others. Being radical means being misunderstood and rejected by others. But it always has the positive connotation of bringing about drastic changes to the existing lifestyle and value system of individuals and society. Hence, to be radical means, to be willing to take risks and dare to be different!

The first Bible study guide in this series is ‘The Radical Jesus’, which consists of 10 Bible studies from the Gospel of Mark. These studies help us to understand the radical nature of the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus of the gospels is very different from Jesus as commonly understood today. Today’s Jesus is more a figment of our imaginations than the Jesus who walked the streets of Galilee two thousand years ago. The Radical Jesus helps us discover the real Jesus for ourselves.

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UESI PUBLICATION TRUST

Published by Mr. Saji Easo & Printed by Mr. D. Devavaram on behalf of UESI PUBLICATION TRUST.
Printed at Meipporul Achakam, No.278, Konnur High Road, Ayanavaram, Chennai 600 023.
Published from New No. 19, Old No. 10, Millers Road, Kilpauk, Chennai 600 010.