



Summer 2026

The Gospel Gleaner

For the Lord, His Word, and His Church



In this Issue...

- 3 *Elijah on Mount Carmel*
Andy Erwin
- 6 *Ransomed by the Blood*
Johnny O. Trail
- 9 "Who's Gonna Fill Their Shoes?"
Raymond Elliott
- 10 *The Tragedy of "Almost"*
Jackson Erwin
- 12 *What Must I Do to be Saved?*
Cole Walker
- 17 MCOB Update: Future Plans
- 18 *The Question from the Cross*
Mike Kiser

THE GOSPEL GLEANER

The first issue of the *Gospel Gleaner* was published in the spring of 1985. Much has changed in the world since then, but the mission and values of the *Gleaner* remain the same. Through the medium of electronic subscriptions, the *Gospel Gleaner* is more accessible than ever. Past issues can also be found on our website: www.gospelgleaner.com.

Manuscripts to be considered can be emailed to the editor at:
andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com

Editor: Andy Erwin (Fayetteville, TN)



Elijah on Mount Carmel

Andy Erwin

Our text is taken from 1 Kings 18:17-40. The biblical narrative of Elijah's life has been building up to this point. In the previous chapter, we saw that God had been preparing Elijah for this day. Elijah has seen the providential and miraculous power of God at work.

Ahab's wickedness brought temporary prosperity to Israel, but it led to punishment from God in the form of drought and famine. Here was a king who was more concerned with the welfare of his horses and mules than the people he governed (v.5). Here was a king governed by rage and hatred for God. Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord (v.4). Ahab hunted Elijah through every kingdom of the earth (v.10). Ahab would not be satisfied until the name of God was eradicated from his nation. He had the nerve to accuse Elijah of being the "troubler of Israel" (v.17). Ahab would have completely convinced the people of Baal and Ashtoreth if not for Elijah. Elijah caused them to doubt, to "falter between two opinions."

In truth, Elijah was not dividing Israel. Sin was dividing Israel. Wherever division exists, sin came before. You will find this to be true in nations, churches, and families. Neither God nor His truth is to blame for division. God's divine truth is controversial to those not governed by it. Sin is a transgression of His law – His truth (1 John 5:17). Anyone seeking to hold fast to error while acknowledging truth on some level will ultimately become double-minded and unstable in all his ways (James 1:8). Such was the case with Ahab.

Elijah's Reappearance

Elijah did not act without the word coming from the Lord (vv. 1-2). This is a good practice. How many times have we gotten ourselves into some kind of trouble because we did not wait "for word to come from the

Lord"? Life is much more blessed when we act and live according to the Lord's instructions.

"Go and present yourself to Ahab," was the command; "and I will send rain on the earth" was the promise (v.1). So many of God's promises are based upon conditions and commandments. God was willing to bless the land, but first, Elijah had to go. Compare this to the Great Commission. Elijah had to pass through a sin-cursed earth to obey the Lord (v.2). For us to carry out the Great Commission, we must pass through a sin-cursed earth. Our eyes will witness the devastating effects of sin just as did Elijah's. And such effects are enough to discourage any servant of the Lord. But we, like Elijah, must remain focused on our work and the destination, the goal, of the charge we have been given.

Obadiah's Fear

Along his journey, Elijah encountered one of Ahab's servants, a man named Obadiah. Obadiah greatly feared the Lord (v. 3). He did not abandon the teachings of his youth (v. 12). He hid and provided for 100 prophets of the Lord (vv. 4, 13). He respected Elijah as a true prophet of God (v.7). He did so while serving as ruler over Ahab's house.

Obadiah also feared what Ahab might do to him (v. 14). Despite this fear and his circumstances, Obadiah remained faithful to the Lord. Whether spoken aloud or not, a Christian can be found attempting to excuse himself by lamenting, "I could be more faithful to God, but you just don't understand my environment at work, school, and home."

Our conditions are, in essence, not very different from those of Elijah and Obadiah. We can see the

ravages of sin all around us. Governments continue with their attempts to pressure the faithful or even to eradicate the name of God. God's people must do as Elijah and act according to the word of the Lord. We must also do as Obadiah and not abandon the teaching of our youth. A showdown is coming between God and Baal/Ahab. God will win. We, too, are looking for one more showdown between God and the wickedness of men. God will win that one as well.

Mount Carmel

Mount Carmel (garden of God) – “Wherever we look there is some beauty to satisfy the eye, or some historical association to stir the heart” (William Taylor, *Elijah the Prophet*). Carmel has been described as the finest and most beautiful mountain in Palestine. The fate of nations had often been settled in the valley below. It was a symbol of fertility and everything that Asherah was believed to represent. It is the zenith of a six-mile mountain range extending toward the Mediterranean. It is adorned with a variety of colors from flowers and evergreens. The limestone peak rests at about 1600 ft.

Mt. Carmel is referenced most often as a symbol of beauty and fertility. Isaiah wrote of the "splendor of Carmel" (Isa 35:2). Solomon praised his beloved: "your head crowns you like Mount Carmel" (Song of Solomon 7:5).

A natural amphitheater rested just off the inner eastern side of the crest of the mountain. This spot is now known as El Muharakah “the sacrifice, or the burning.” The whole mountain is now called Mar Elias “the mountain of Elijah.” Under the ancient olive trees remains a round well of perennial water from which Elijah could fill the barrels he poured over the sacrifice. A more appropriate place could not have been selected.

However, at this time, the mountain, like the land, was resting under a curse. Why could not Asherah (the goddess of fertility) keep the land fertile?

Elijah's Challenge

Elijah issued a challenge to Ahab (v. 19). Ahab never thought to refuse the challenge or to arrest the prophet. He and 850 prophets and priests of Baal and Asherah were to be assembled before all of Israel. God was going to be there as well.

They were opposing God that day; Elijah was simply His representative. The world we live in does not oppose us; it opposes God. Like Elijah, we too are called to be God's representatives (2 Corinthians 5:20). Before all of Israel (v.20), Elijah asks, “How long will you falter between two opinions?” (v.21); they answered not a word. Elijah called the people to decide between two Gods. This decision must be made today.

The Conflict

The conflict between the false prophets and Elijah on Mount Carmel demonstrates the utter failure of false prophets, false religion, and false gods. The false prophets had the support of the powers that be – the king, the queen, and the people. They outnumbered Elijah in manpower. Their gods (the Baal family) were supposedly the gods over nature, power, etc. Surely, they could bring a little fire. They had ample time to call upon these gods – yet there was no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Through Elijah, God provided a victory for true prophets, true religion, and the one and only God. The conflict on Mount Carmel proves that true prophets seek only to glorify God. Elijah rebuilt the altar of the Lord “in the name of the Lord.” He did these things “at the word of the Lord.” The way of the false prophet was death, while the way of the true prophet was life.

Lessons to be Gleaned

Let us take a few moments and collect a few lessons for personal reflection and application. First, God had been preparing Elijah for this day. Has God been preparing you for such a day? When you stand for God,

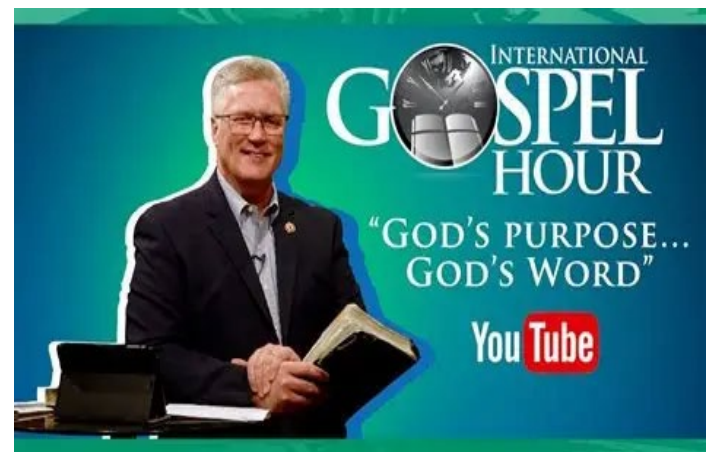
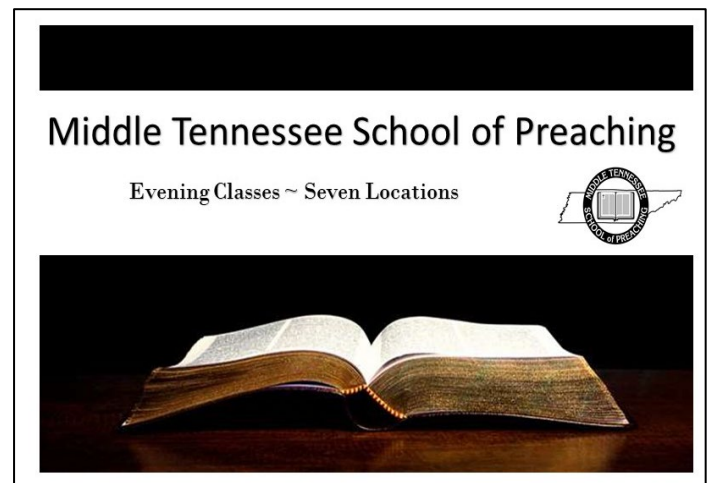
you will be opposed. Stand anyway. Even though you may appear to be outnumbered, you are never truly outnumbered when you are on the side of the Lord. Always stand for the glory of the Lord, in the name of the Lord, and at the word of the Lord.

Secondly, a lesson can be learned from the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Consider how they seemed to be sincere in believing that Baal would answer them – praying, dancing around, cutting themselves. But sincerity does not and has never proved the rightness of a cause. They were sincerely mistaken.

Thirdly, a lesson can also be learned from the people. Do we ever find ourselves faltering between two opinions? Our choice is between the world and God. Choose who you shall serve (Joshua 24:15). We cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). Friendship with the world is enmity with God (James 4:4).

Moreover, faith is the only victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). We must seek greater faith, pray for greater faith, and live for greater faith. You can never have enough faith. You can never be too obedient. You can never be too devoted to God.

A decision must be made by us – God or self; God or worldly pleasures. False prophets are persistent in their smooth speaking messages as they attempt to “allure us through the lusts of the flesh” (2 Peter 2:18). Peter tells us, “These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever” (v.17). The way of the false prophet will always result in death. The way of the true prophet and servant of God will always result in life (2 Timothy 4:6-8); it is an eternal life-or-death decision.



Ransomed by the Blood

Johnny O. Trail

By now, most people have heard about Savannah Guthrie's mother being kidnapped. At first, there were serious questions about her mother's cognitive acuity, but it appears that she was taken by people seeking bitcoin for ransom. One source says, "Nancy Guthrie, 84, was reported missing Sunday afternoon from her home outside Tucson, Arizona, after she did not show up at church...She was last seen around 9:45 p.m. the previous day, when family members dropped her off at home...The sheriff's department believes Guthrie was taken, 'possibly in the middle of the night, and that includes possible kidnapping or abduction.' The FBI is now involved in the investigation, which also includes about 100 detectives from the sheriff's office. President Donald Trump said Tuesday he would commit to sending more federal agents to assist."¹

When one talks about a ransom, we tend to understand what it means. A person, typically of great value, is held hostage until the person's family or loved ones pay enough money to secure the release of the one being held. This concept is even reflected in scripture. Proverbs 13:8 says, "The ransom of a man's life *is* his riches, but the poor does not hear rebuke."

We typically think of an enormously wealthy person being taken for ransom. In regard to spiritual considerations, our sins have separated us from God. Even so, a being that is holy and dwells in pure, unapproachable light was willing to pay a ransom for souls that are tainted by sin. Jesus says, in Matthew 20:28, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." The same concept is offered in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The idea of ransom paid for an individual is best explored in Hosea. The prophet Hosea is called upon by God to marry a prostitute. In compliance with God's command, Hosea does this very thing. Hosea 1:2-3a says, "When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: 'Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD.' So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim..."

It seems an incredible thing for God to request of the prophet. Who would consider seeking a harlot to be a wife and mother to his children? I had an uncle who used to say, "Son, if you're going to find a wife, find her in the church." His words were wise and correct. Nonetheless, God asks the prophet to marry a woman engaged in harlotry, and Hosea has three children by her—two sons and a daughter.

The names of these children are rather unfortunate in the translation. Notice what the prophet writes about his children in these passages. Hosea 1:3b-11 says, "...She conceived and bore him a son. Then the LORD said to him: 'Call his name Jezreel, for in a little while I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. It shall come to pass in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.' And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then *God* said to him: "Call her name Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, but I will utterly take them away. Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah, will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword or battle, by horses or horsemen.' Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then *God*

¹ Pilar Melendez, Pilar, Winter, Tom, and Kottke, Joe (2026). "Search for TODAY Co-Anchor Savannah Guthrie's Mom Stretches into Fourth Day," <https://www.nbcnews.com/>

said: 'Call his name Lo-Ammi, For you *are* not My people, And I will not be your *God*. "Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You *are* not My people,' *There* it shall be said to them, 'You *are* sons of the living God.' Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and appoint for themselves one head; And they shall come up out of the land, for great *will be* the day of Jezreel!"

Sadly, these calamities would be visited upon the Israelites due to their spiritual harlotry in seeking a false, pagan God.

After all of Gomer's adulterous behavior, she is placed on the auction block to be sold into slavery. Hosea is commanded to ransom her back. Hosea 3:1-2 says, "Then the LORD said to me, 'Go again, love a woman *who is* loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love *the* raisin cakes *of the pagans*.' So I bought her for myself for fifteen *shekels* of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley." The symbolism is likened to a husband who still loves his wife even though she is engaged in an adulterous relationship. By the same token, Israel was engaged in spiritual adultery with paganism and other nations, yet God still loved them and wanted His people to return to Him.

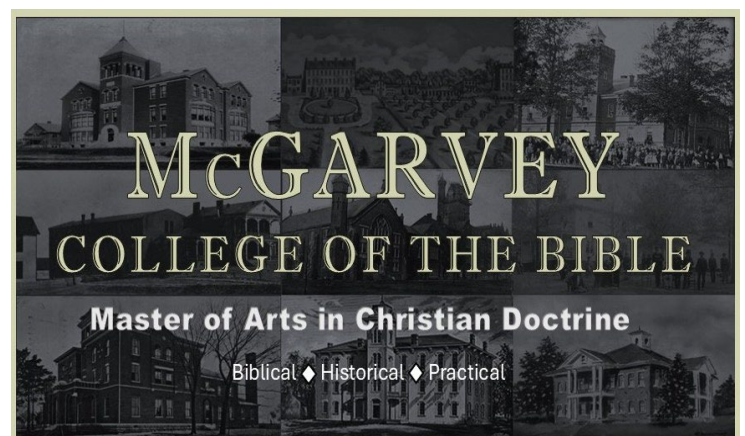
Hosea pays the ransom of one about to be sold into abject slavery, one who had engaged in harlotry prior to marriage, and one who had committed adultery after marrying Hosea. Who would expect one to be so loving and forgiving as Hosea seems to be in these passages? Parallel to this, who would expect God to be so loving and forgiving when the enormity of Israel's sins is measured?

Consequently, we see the same kind of love for those living under the new covenant. Our sins clothed us in unrighteousness, but the blood of Jesus reconciled us to God and paid the ransom for our

release from sin and death. Notice the words of Paul. Romans 5:6-11 says, "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Jesus gave Himself as a ransom so that all humankind might be saved. He loved us to that extent! 1 Timothy 2:3-6 says, "For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

Since Jesus has paid the ransom for your soul, would you not consider being His disciple? The most valuable thing you possess is your soul, and Jesus died so that you might live eternally with Him.



DO WE HAVE TO JOIN A Denomination?

—Why the First Century Church is Better



House to House Heart to Heart

One HUGE mailing. Three million homes.

HTH is inviting every church of Christ in the country to mail *House to House/Heart to Heart* this July. This theme will be “Do We Have to Join a Denomination? —Why the First Century Church is Better.” Reach homes in your community with a customized magazine for just 50 cents (which pays for customizing, printing, and mailing it for you). You pray and plan the follow up, and we take care of everything else. People are looking for truth. Let’s help them find it. Please respond by May 25.

Call Matt Wallin toll-free at **1-877-338-3397** or email **matt@housetohouse.com**.



GET.HOUSETOHOUSE.COM

House to House / Heart to Heart is a work of the East Ridge church of Christ.

“Who’s Gonna Fill Their Shoes?”

Raymond Elliott

I watched the video as George Jones’ motorhome arrived at the old station to fill up. The elderly man who owned the station came out and asked the driver if George Jones was in the motorhome. The driver told him to go to the door and call him, and he did. George Jones came walking out and spoke to the owner. The gentleman asked George to autograph his guitar, and George said he would. Then they walked into the old station, and George began to see the names of many outstanding, well-known country artists on the wall. He had already seen the signatures of these singers on the owner’s guitar. During this time, you could hear music playing softly in the background, and Jones began to sing “WHO’S GONNA FILL THEIR SHOES.” If you have ever heard George Jones sing, you know that when he sang a song, it was sung! Personally, I had sorrow in my heart because I knew that, with few exceptions, what we are hearing today is not ‘country’! Most of the singers whose names he saw on the wall had died, and George was wondering who was going to fill their shoes, that is, who among the young singers would be singing real country songs.

One of the reasons I was moved by this song was that I had been thinking of a group of devoted preachers whom I respect very much. Several are personal friends of mine whom I have known for many years. These men teach Bible classes, visit the sick, give comfort to the bereaved, speak at funerals, preach in gospel meetings, and on special occasions. We generally refer to them as ‘part-time gospel preachers.’ Some call them ‘occupational ministers.’ They make their living and support their families by working secularly. They generally preach for rural and small-town churches. Some travel several miles from their homes to the place where they preach. I have loved and admired many of these men and their families for a very long time. But these men are growing older, and some have died. My question is, ‘Whose gonna fill their shoes’?

The sad fact is, it seems that fewer young men want to become a ‘full-time preacher.’ How wonderful it would be if parents would encourage their sons to study the word of God and to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). There is the wonderful example of Lois and Eunice who taught Timothy in his “childhood” the “Holy Scriptures” (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14, 15). Parents should encourage their sons to participate in a training class conducted by the congregation where they are members, or perhaps the ‘Lads to Leaders’, not for competitive reasons but to be trained how to speak in public.

It is with sadness in my heart that so many of the churches where I served full-time and where I have preached in gospel meetings (for some 65 years) are no longer as numerically large as they were years ago. In fact, some rural churches where I preached no longer exist. Generations have passed away, and young people have moved to seek employment in cities. Even in the cities, some of the older congregations are much smaller, and some have stopped meeting because of the small number of members in attendance.

It is my personal opinion that one of the greatest needs we have presently, and especially in the future, in the church is ‘part-time preachers.’ There are scores of congregations that cannot afford a ‘full-time preacher.’ The smaller congregations cannot afford the high cost of health insurance for a preacher and his family. The elders and/or older brethren should encourage young men to consider teaching Bible classes and speaking when given the opportunity. Regardless of a young man’s profession/career, they would be able to help a church in the teaching of the scriptures. If we are not encouraging young men to become teachers of the word of God, the question remains, “Who’s Gonna Fill Their Shoes?”

The Tragedy of “Almost”

Jackson Erwin

Most of us have heard the saying, “Almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.” In both cases, you get credit for getting close. Yet such is not the case with Christianity. It is an “all or nothing” religion.

When we speak of the “tragedy of ‘almost,’” we are speaking of those who came so close to becoming a Christian but reached an obstacle/requirement they refused to overcome. The rich young ruler fell into this category (Mark 10:17–22). His wealth was an obstacle. The crowd following Jesus fell into the “almost” group (John 6:60–71). Jesus’s teachings were the obstacle. The example we will examine here is Herod Agrippa, before whom Paul gave a defense of the Christian faith.

The Context (Acts 21:15–25:22)

To understand what led to this encounter between Paul and the king, we must go back two years. Paul was at the temple in Jerusalem when a mob arose to kill him (Acts 21:26–32). The temple guard took Paul into custody to prevent the crowd from tearing him apart. However, when an assassination plot was uncovered, Paul was sent to Caesarea to ensure a fair trial and defend himself before the governor of Judea (Acts 23:23–30).

After defending the faith before Felix, he stayed in Herod the Great’s palace for two years (Acts 24:27). After this two-year period, Felix was replaced by Festus (Acts 25:1). It is here that we are introduced to Herod Agrippa and his sister Bernice (Acts 25:13). He comes to the palace built by his great-grandfather to congratulate Festus on his new position. However, he is soon told about Festus’s first problem—this Christian preacher who has been held in the palace for two years (Acts 25:14–22).

The Character (Acts 25:23)

Who exactly was Agrippa? He was the son of Herod Agrippa I (who killed James; Acts 12:1–2), the great-nephew of Herod Antipas (who killed John the Baptist and tried Jesus), and the great-grandson of Herod the Great (who sought to kill Jesus as a child). As King of Judea, Agrippa was raised to be an expert politician in Rome. He was trained to appease all sides to keep the peace and maintain his power. This quality proved useful in Judea, as there was a constant threat of Jewish rebellion.

To keep the peace with the Jews, he needed to know their laws, Scriptures, and customs. He also needed to be intimately involved in those customs and be esteemed as a practicing Jew. Thus, in his outward religion, he was Jewish, while in practice, he was Roman.

It is this man who, when he heard of Paul’s imprisonment, was piqued by curiosity and wished to hear him. Little did he know that this was a decision he would soon regret. Why? Because he was going to be confronted with something he had avoided his entire life, to make a decisive choice and pick a side. Paul would call on him to stop being a “middleman” who kept his feet in two worlds, and to become entirely and unequivocally a Christian.

The Confrontation (Acts 26:1–27)

It might seem strange to call a sermon a “confrontation,” but it is. It’s a confrontation with the truth! Paul begins with a testimony of his own conversion (Acts 26:2–21). He was a devout Jew who not only knew the Law but fervently practiced it (vv. 2–5). His message was not novel. Rather, he was preaching what the Scriptures had promised (vv. 6–8). While he previously persecuted the faith, now, he proclaimed it.

What led to such a radical change? He had an encounter with Jesus! The persecutor has now become the persecuted (vv. 9–21).

Paul then supports his claims with the testimony of Scripture, which Agrippa knew well (Acts 26:22–23). While Festus shouted that Paul was mad (vv. 24–25), Agrippa’s silence was louder than the insult. It is here that Paul turns to the king and confronts him with the obvious (vv. 25–27). While he pretended to be an ignorant third party, he knew much more about this movement than he let on, as the king of Judea (v. 26). Furthermore, his knowledge of the Scriptures led him to the same conclusion as Paul’s—that Jesus is the risen Christ (v. 27).

The Conclusion (Acts 26:28)

Despite this direct confrontation with the truth, Agrippa responds with sarcasm (Acts 26:28). We must recognize that this was nothing more than a defense mechanism, deflecting the direct call with humor. Felix deflected through delay (Acts 24:25). Festus deflected through insults (Acts 26:24). We often deflect in the same way today—anything to save us from the truth.

What kept the king from taking this logical step toward “truth and reason”? What kept him from acting upon his belief in the Scriptures? What led him to fall into the “tragedy of ‘almost’”? The primary reason

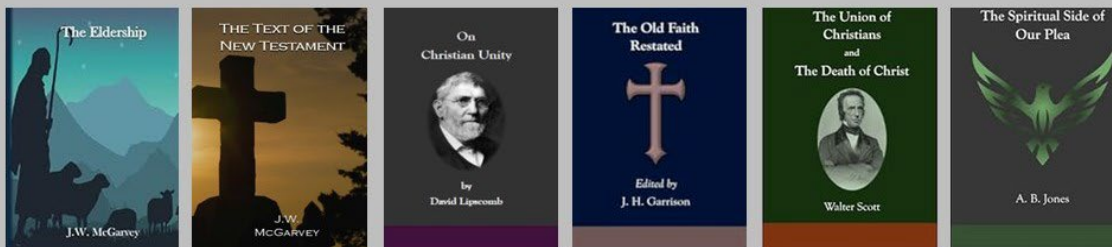
Agrippa rejected the gospel call was that he understood its great price. It required a decisive action that would remove him from his happy, comfortable place in the middle. It meant he would have to renounce the ways of his fathers, who despised and persecuted this faith. It meant he would have to give up his social and political ambitions. Both the Romans and Jews would be in an uproar. It meant he would have to change his way of life, which was filled with Rome’s sinful pleasures. In short, it meant he would have to give up everything! (Luke 14:33). Such a notion was unthinkable.

How many fall into the sad tragedy of “almost,” today! How many are confronted with the truth, witness their potential salvation, and yet reject Christ’s call because of its cost! What Agrippa failed to realize is that the sacrifice required is worth it. While he would likely have lost his earthly crown, he would have received a heavenly one.

Is there anything keeping you from becoming a Christian? What is keeping you in an “almost” state? Your family? Your ambitions? Your friends? Your sins?

The tragedy of Agrippa is that he chose a few years of pleasure and received an eternity of punishment. Don’t follow his error! Give your life to Christ, and you will soon discover that the price is worth it.

Reform & Restore Publishing



Available on Amazon

What Must I Do to be Saved?

Cole Walker

One of the most profound questions any person can ask is, “What must I do to be saved?” This question has been the crux of almost all denominations and differences of thought among those who have studied the

² The main issue with this doctrine is that the Bible neither condones nor promotes this view, especially not in the book of Acts, particularly in the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

Paul and Silas encounter a man in the depths of despair, both mentally and spiritually. In a response to salvation, they will necessitate the first step, “And they said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (Acts 16:31 KJV) Rather than stopping at this level of intellectual assent, they will further this by teaching him about the Lord, “And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” (Acts 16:32) This conversation will lead to immediate baptism at the same hour of the night. This account is one of many examples that show baptism is not optional, but essential. One would be left without a verse if they were to find an account of any one person saved in the new covenant without obedient baptism. The truth is, the gospel is God’s power to save (Rom 1:16), and He alone is allowed to set the terms for forgiveness of sins and admittance into eternal life.

In this article, two presuppositions will be imposed on the reader: that the Bible is the verbal, plenary, inerrant, inspired word of God, and that it has been passed down through the centuries through faithful

New and Old Testaments. At the forefront of these answers today is mere belief alone, resulting in a person’s eternal security, separate from the Lord’s operation of baptism.

translations so that we now have truth by which we can be sanctified (Matt 24:35, John 17:17)

Theological and Historical Background

Acts 16:12 places Paul and Silas in the Roman colony of Philippi, a leading city in Macedonia. There appears to be no synagogue here, which may be why Jews were praying by the river (Acts 16:13). If a synagogue had existed, Paul would likely have gone there, as was his custom (Acts 17:1–2). It would stand to reason that there would be a lack of familiarity with the Scriptures, and instead, an emphasis would be placed on Roman customs and pagan beliefs.

Paul and Silas cast out a demon from a slave girl who was being used for monetary gain, then they were falsely accused, beaten without trial, and thrown into prison stocks (Acts 16:16–24). Their situation reflects both injustice and the spiritual resistance that follows the proclamation of the gospel message. Despite this hardship, they will still proclaim the goodness of God even in jail.³ At midnight, a great earthquake would violently shake the prison, loosening the prisoners from their chains. Fearing the escape of the prisoners, the jailer would draw his sword to take his own life, but not before Paul could reassure him that they had no plans on escape (Acts 16:25–29).

² Anthony J. Johnson Jr., trans., “Faith Alone Is Essential for Salvation,” *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management* 13, no. 03 (March 2025): 23–60, <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijstrm/v13i03.th01>.

³ H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles, Gospel Advocate New Testament Commentary* (Gospel Advocate Company, 1989), 266.

This is the moment in which this guard will ask one of the most significant questions: “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). It seems that this question could be of physical fear, spiritual conviction, or both. Based on Paul and Silas’ response in the next verse, it is clear that he is concerned for his soul’s salvation. The jailer had seen the true power of God firsthand and the peace that came from Paul and Silas. This is not just a casual inquiry; it is a desperate plea from a condemned man with a background likely consisting of a pantheon of Roman gods. It just so happened that he was now face-to-face with something holy, pure, just, and even merciful. Paul would allow him to know that this is not something, it is someone: Jesus Christ, a Man approved, delivered, and raised by God (Acts 2:22–24), it was Him that Paul would preach (Acts 16:32)

Exegesis of Acts 16:30–34

The dialogue for the jailer’s conversion is concise yet significant. A careful study reveals that no doctrine of belief alone was taught here. The gospel system of the faith was preached to the jailer, and he believed the message and obeyed its commands to be saved. This will be shown through the following verses.

“And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). In verse thirty, the most direct statement regarding salvation in all of Scripture is uttered. The jailer, a Roman who was unfamiliar with Jewish messianic prophecy, had just witnessed a miracle and two men who were calm throughout the process. It has been stated that he might have asked this question fearing for his physical life, but again, it seems far more likely that this is a question regarding salvation. BDAG states the following for the word (saved) σωθῶ “be saved, attain salvation”.⁴ Importantly, the

question will also assume that action is required of him: “What must I do?”

“And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (Acts 16:31). Verse thirty-one is often used by the faith-only proponents, although there are two main issues with this. The first is that Scripture does not teach it. The second is that the only time “faith only” is mentioned in the Bible, it is used to clarify that it is not enough for salvation: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” (James 2:24)

In verse thirty-one however we see the word “believe” or Πίστευσον. The word in this context has been described as “to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence.”⁵ Again, Louw-Nida states this, “to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance”.⁶ This is in the aorist imperative; it is a command to begin the process of believing, but it does not specify what that belief consists of. In fact, in the next verse, Paul will speak to him of the Lord, seeing that the jailer had not yet heard of Jesus, His death, burial, or resurrection. As seen throughout the book of Acts (2:38, 8:12, 8:36–38, 22:16), belief is always accompanied by an obedient response of baptism, which washes away sins. The jailer, in this sense, is just beginning to learn who Jesus is, so he first needs to believe the message before he can obey it. This is how the gospel is preached.

“And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” (Acts 16:32) Verse thirty-two shows a critical point; if salvation came in verse 31, then this verse is unnecessary. Simply put, if the word of the Lord is only mental ascent and belief, then why mention it twice? Instead, Paul and Silas begin the process of explaining what exactly it means to believe in

⁴ William Arndt et al., in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 983.

⁵ William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 817.

⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996) 375.

the Lord Jesus, a process by which, if followed, will lead one to repentance and baptism (Acts 2:40–41, 2:47, 8:12, 8:35–38, 10:44–48, 18:8). The truth is, preaching Jesus includes baptism because Jesus demanded such to be preached, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:15–16)

“And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.” (Acts 16:33) Verse thirty-three destroys the idea that baptism is a symbol, optional, or in any way a subsequent act to one’s initial salvation.⁷ The jailor, at midnight, was immersed into Christ, not after a discipleship course, later in the morning, or at “baptism Sunday”. The reason for such immediacy in his response to hearing the words of Christ (vs. 32) is that he knew that the only way to have his sins washed away was through the waters of baptism (Acts 22:16).

H. Leo Boles said this on the matter, “The jailer had heard the gospel, he believed it, was penitent of his sins, and is now baptized; on these conditions and obedience to them, he could claim remission of sins. All who had heard the gospel in the jailer’s household, and all who believed it, were baptized. It is worthy of note that there was no delay in their being baptized; no one deferred baptism by the instruction of an inspired guide, but, on the other hand, in every case of their hearing, believing, and repenting of their sins, baptism was attended to immediately.”⁸

By extension, this also shows that repentance precedes baptism, as is taught in Acts 2:38 and demanded by Jesus Christ in Luke 13:3, even more evidence to

prove that the jailor could not have been saved by belief.

“And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.” (Acts 16:34) Verse thirty-four demonstrates the pattern of salvation which draws a line of redemption through the Bible.

Jeremiah 31:31–34 provides a clear indication that the new system will require an intimate relationship with God, not just a simple belief. As you go through the early acts of the apostles, you will notice that there are ten distinct conversion accounts (Acts 2:38, 8:12, 13, 35–38, 10:47–48, 16:14–15, 30–34, 18:8, 19:1–5, 22:16) which all included baptism. Not all the passages include belief, repentance, confession, or even faith; however, each one does include baptism. It is because without the obedience of water baptism, one is entirely lost, without a Savior, in a world of sin.

Peter would put it this way, “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 3:21).

Sola Fide

The doctrine commonly referred to as “faith alone” (*Sola Fide*) was first articulated by Martin Luther around 1517–1518.⁹ Luther had seen the Catholic church sell indulgences as works that could enact forgiveness, bind where the Bible had not bound, and loose where the Bible had not loosed. This, of course,

⁷ Gareth L. Reese, *New Testament History: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 8th ed. (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1991), 590–91.

⁸ H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles, Gospel Advocate New Testament Commentary* (Gospel Advocate Company, 1989), 270.

⁹ Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, “Martin Luther and *Sola Fide*,” *The Gospel Coalition*, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/martin-luther-sola-fide>.

distressed Luther, and he sought to correct this false teaching.

However, rather than standing for truth, he went too far and said that salvation was by faith alone. “We teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works, but are freely justified for Christ’s sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by His death has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God accounts as righteousness in His sight, Rom. 3 and 4.”¹⁰

His thought came out of error; in fact, how could such an erroneous claim come when there are passages like James 2:24 in the Bible? Being one of the pioneers in denying the saving power of the gospel through obedient water baptism, Luther led many astray.

Unfortunately, most denominations have fallen into this error of claiming that it only requires mental ascent to have salvation imputed to sinful man.¹¹ This effect has been widespread, leading to a departure from the faith and a reliance on feelings rather than facts.

Acts 16:30–31 is one of the leading passages quoted in support of this belief system, although the rest of the conversion is always left out. We must remember to read every passage, from the beginning, on a subject before we draw any conclusion, “Thy word is true from the beginning: And every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.” (Ps 119:160)

We can never form a doctrine around one verse; doing so would destroy much of what God has revealed. An example of taking a verse outside of its context would be found in Psalm 137:9, “Happy shall he be,

that taketh And dasheth thy little ones against the stones.” Without a proper examination and exegesis, one could take this as support for abortion and child murder. Of course, it would go against many other passages of Scripture, but this is precisely what much of the religious world does when they remove baptism from the gospel.

All will do well to remember that the gospel is God’s power to save, not man’s (Rom 1:16). As such, no one can add to, nor take away from the truth revealed through the Word of God (Rev 22:18–19). If anyone is to remove or add doctrine, they will quickly find themselves in a place of condemnation that will swiftly remove them from the book of life.

Guy N. Woods said, “To refuse to receive the “sayings” of Christ (his words) is to reject him—a significant fact in view of the disposition of much of the religious world today. It is by many taught today that one may “believe in Christ” and yet refuse to do what he says in reference to being baptized, wearing his name, and worshipping him as he directs; to all such Jesus says, “When you refuse to accept my teaching you refuse, in so doing, to accept me, and my word which you refuse will be that which will condemn you at the judgment.” True, Jesus will sit on the throne in the day of judgment, but only as the bearer of his word by which teaching the entire world will have its destiny determined. How important then it is that all of us should adhere tenaciously to this word! And, how vividly this points up the necessity of doing exactly what the Bible says without addition, without subtraction, without modification. The “last day” to which the Lord alludes is the day of final accounts when all the peoples of the

¹⁰ Augsburg Confession, art. IV, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 38.

¹¹ David M. VanDrunen, “The Nature of Justifying Faith,” Westminster Seminary California, August 1, 2011, accessed August 4, 2025, <https://www.wscal.edu/resource/the-nature-of-justifying-faith/>.

earth will appear for the determination of their final destiny.”¹²

Conclusion

The conversion account of the Philippian jailor provides a strong answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” This provides a rigid dichotomy between the error of salvation by faith alone and the gospel system of faith in Jesus Christ. Acts 16:30–34, in like manner as the rest of the New Testament, shows forth obedient faith that culminates in water baptism for the remission of sins, which is unto salvation. Belief, being wholly necessary, is not ample apart from submission to the gospel in water baptism.

¹³ The jailor decided, in the middle of the night, right after being explained the word of God, he was immersed, proving definitively that biblical faith is never detached from action (Jas 2:24, Gal 3:26–27). The

earnestness shown by the jailor solidifies baptism not being symbolic or adjacent to salvation but instead being the divinely instructed and appointed moment in which sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), and one is added to the body of saved Christians, the church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47).

Cole Walker is a student at McGarvey College of the Bible. He serves the Hillcrest church of Christ in Springfield, Tennessee, alongside Johnny Trail, one of our fine faculty members at MCOB.

**"AND BROUGHT THEM OUT AND SAID, SIR'S,
WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"**

WHAT - SOMETHING - MT. 7:21 ACTS 16:25-34
MUST - NOT MIGHT, CAN - ACTS 9:6
I - PERSONALLY - ROM. 14:12
DO - NOT GET, FEEL - JO. 15:14
TO BE SAVED? - 1TIM. 1:15

"BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.."
ACTS 16:31

HOW? - ROM. 10:13-17
"..SPAKE..WORD OF THE LORD.."
ACTS 16:32: MK.16:15: ACTS 11:12-14
NEEDED TO KNOW, BELIEVE, OBEY -
JO. 8:32: 6:45: 20:30, 31: 2TH. 2:10-12: 1:7-9

"..SET MEAT BEFORE THEM.. REJOICED, BELIEVING IN GOD WITH ALL HIS HOUSE."
ACTS 16:34: 8:35-39

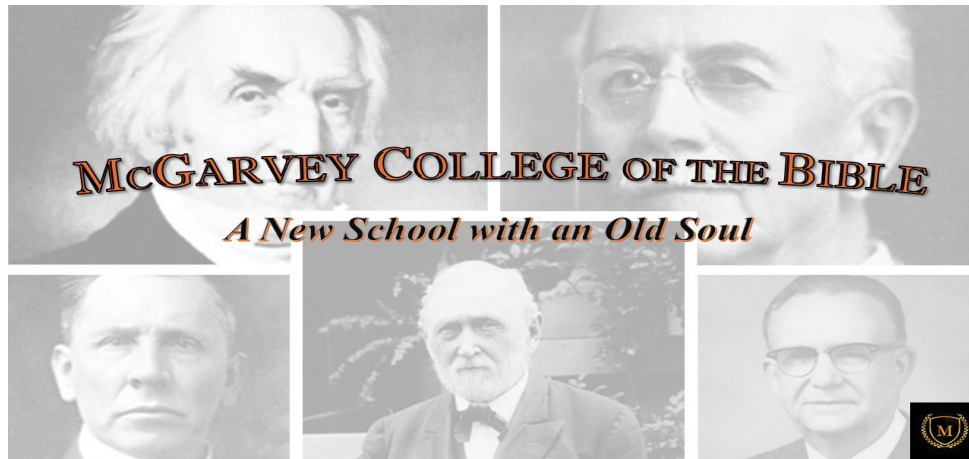
"..AND WAS BAPTIZED, HE AND ALL HIS, STRAIGHTWAY.."
ACTS 16:33: MK.16:16
ACTS 2:38: ROM. 6:3-5: GAL. 3:27

"AND HE TOOK THEM THE SAME HOUR.."
ACTS 16:33 & 24:25-26:28
"..WASHED THEIR STRIPES.."
ACTS 16:33
SHOWS REPENTANCE - LK. 13:3: ACTS 2:38: 17:30

SIMILAR QUESTIONS ASKED
"..WHAT SHALL WE DO?" - ACTS 2:36-38, 41
"LORD, WHAT WILT THOU HAVE ME TO DO?" - ACTS 9:1-6: 22:16

¹² Guy N. Woods, A Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Gospel Advocate New Testament Commentary (Gospel Advocate Company, 1989), 276.

¹³ The chart included in this article is from Flavel Nichols' collection of 'bed sheet' charts, which he preached so effectively for many years.



We have recently concluded our spring semester, with courses offered on the last things and the New Testament church. Our summer term is set to begin near the end of April, and courses will be offered in Old Testament and New Testament theology, respectively.

I am planning a trip to Africa for November 27 – December 15. I will be in four countries (Kenya, Ghana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa). I will be conducting lectures on preaching and graduation ceremonies with the students of McGarvey College of the Bible in each of these countries. This will be our first graduating class.

I am currently raising funds to cover the cost of airfare and other trip expenses, including meals for our events, lectureship costs, materials for the attendees, travel expenses while in these countries, and my meals and lodging. Your donation will help us avoid taking these funds from the school's account, which covers our daily operational expenses. If you would like to contribute to this effort, please note on your donation that this is for the mission trip so that we can keep these funds separate from our general account. Checks can be made and sent to:

McGarvey College of the Bible

PO Box 6

Fayetteville, TN 37334

We are also considering expanding the program in 2027 to offer courses on the biblical text to any interested student. Courses would be conducted online through the format and software we currently use. Before we begin expanding, we would like to gauge

prospective students' interest. Moreover, the online format would enable men currently considering entering a school of preaching to study from home without the expense of relocating or quitting their jobs.

MCOB is considering the following format for future programs:

Undergraduate – Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies (This degree program will focus only on the books of the Bible. The student will have thoroughly studied every passage of Holy Scripture upon completion. No time limit will be required to complete the program.)

Graduate – Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (This degree program will be offered to ministers who have graduated from the undergraduate program or have equivalent ministerial experience. It will offer courses specifically intended for the day-to-day work of the preacher.)
Master of Divinity – (This degree program will be an expansion of our current degree program and offer courses in biblical doctrines and languages.)

Post-Graduate – Doctor of Theology (This program will allow graduates of the Master of Divinity program to complete their classroom journey in biblical and theological studies.)

We look forward to receiving your feedback and hope to update you with more details as we near the expansion launch.

Andy Erwin

dr.andyerwin@mcgarveycollege.online

The Question from the Cross

Matthew 27:46

Introduction

1. During HIS personal ministry, Jesus was known to ask questions of people. Those questions were always thought-provoking. Another “why” question is found in Luke 6:46: “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”
2. The whole scene started the night before in the Garden of Gethsemane. We speak of HIS arrest and three separate trials. He was acquitted by the Roman ruler, who gave in to the people's callous hypocrisy. At the conclusion, he was immediately taken at 9 a.m. and nailed to the cross. There HE hung for 6 hours.
3. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Discussion

I. The Circumstances Surrounding This Question.

- A. What has already transpired:
 1. Prayed to the Father to forgive them.
 2. Committed the care of His mother to John.
 3. He pardoned the thief
- B. The time of the question is given. “The ninth hour.”
- C. The miracles that have occurred:
 1. The darkness. Amos 8:9 (6th till 9th hour.)
 2. The rending of the veil from top to bottom.

II. The Nature of This Question.

- A. The question seems most mysterious in the light of what was said previously.
 1. At His baptism. Matt. 3:17
 2. At His transfiguration.
 3. What Jesus said in His intercessory prayer. John 17:4, 24.
- B. What the question was not about:
 1. His trial before the High Priest, Herod, or Pilate.
 2. It was not about Peter's denial or Judas' betrayal.
 3. It was not about the conduct of the onlookers.
 4. But why was the sustaining power of the Father taken from HIM?
- C. Facts to be kept in mind regarding the crucifixion:
 1. It was not an accident, an unforeseen tragedy!
 2. He had informed HIS disciples that it was going to happen. Matt. 16:21; Luke 24:6, 7; Matt. 26:28
 3. It was a voluntary act on HIS part. John 10:17, 18; Matt. 26:53

III. The Biblical Answer to This Question.

- A. The quotation from Psalm 22.
 - 1. David is praying in great distress.
 - 2. David knew his mental and physical agony was because of sin. Psalm 38.
- B. But Jesus was sinless. And that is correct. John 6:46; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22.
- C. The answer to the question is not simple:
 - 1. Jesus is bearing the sins of the human family.
 - 2. God is holy and pure, and can have no part with sin. Isa. 59:1, 2.
 - 3. Jesus became our substitute. 2 Cor. 5:2; Isa. 53
 - 4. Our sin there met its punishment. (Consider this fact about hell. 2 Thes. 1:7-9- “from the presence.”)
 - 5. The last thing Jesus said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. After He said, “It is finished.”
 - 6. Justice is satisfied. Love has been demonstrated. Satisfaction has been found. Isa. 53:11

Conclusion

- 1. Have you been washed in the blood?
- 2. There must be “faith in the blood”, and that faith is shown in repentance and baptism. Rom. 6:1-6.

-Mike Kiser

COBB PUBLISHING

MAKING BOOKS WORTH READING

www.cobbpublishing.com

Gospel Gleaner



For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

www.gospelgleaner.com