



The Character of God

eNewsletter

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**Character
Fireworks**

by **Floyd Phillips**

What I am packing into my mind, what I am choosing to dwell on, are determining what will be displayed when the fireworks ignite.

The chemical content packed into them during assembly determines what colors will be released when they are fired. Various chemicals and combinations produce different colors when they are burned. Of course, there are also physical functions built into the shells to cause the fireworks to perform in certain acrobatic ways to entertain the

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crowds. But the colors are determined by the specific chemicals that reliably produce certain burns

Fireworks and the Gospel

As I think about this in relation to the gospel, it becomes clear that our lives are being packed with elements and beliefs that, when ignited, will reliably produce signature colors associated with how we view the God we believe in. I have long observed that people act like the God in which they believe. It is not necessarily the profession about God that they talk about in church, though that will have an effect on it. Rather, it is their deep, internal, gut beliefs about how God treats them, feels about them, and His intentions for them, that forms their conception of Him and that will be exposed when an intense crisis in their life suddenly ignites the 'belief chemicals' packed inside.

To extend the analogy a bit further, there is a vast difference between explosives intended for mass destruction such as military shells intended to blow up and kill as many as possible, and fireworks munitions which also use similar explosive ingredients but are intended to entertain and dazzle rather than to destroy. And while they are both dangerous and must be handled with great caution, the intended results and the displayed effects of these two types of munitions are significantly different.

So, what does this have to do with our lives and our beliefs about God? I am starting to see that it may have far more impact on our

testimony about God than most of us ever suspect. When I consider the statements of some of the apostles when they spoke of God counting them worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus, their words make much more sense when I first understand why Jesus suffered and died in the first place. Otherwise, based on the skewed and distorted notions circulating among Christians today about why Jesus had to die, the suffering of His disciples can likewise take on all sorts of confusing implications. It is not until we get to the bottom of why Jesus came to this earth in the first place, why He suffered and died, and particularly the truth about the nature and character of God, that we can begin to appreciate and be attracted to Him through the suffering of His loyal followers.



Suffering

The Bible makes clear that suffering, in and of itself, is not something that has some sort of merit that can earn credits for our salvation. And although there is a sense in which godly suffering does produce natural rewards, in no way should this be confused with the counterfeit reward/punishment system that is so familiar to us on this earth. Despite

the insistence of millions of adherents and “opposers” alike, God's government is not operated on the reward/punishment system that is so often attributed to Him. God's government is based on *principles* that define and govern reality, that have natural cause/effect relationships with which all life needs to synchronize in order to thrive and live in harmony.

The kingdom of heaven, which Jesus came to reveal to this world, is not at all patterned on how the kingdoms of this world operate, but that is where we often make a terrible mistake by assuming that it is. The methods of this world are founded on the false principles displayed in the philosophy and sophistries from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which infects our thinking and distorts our core nature when Adam and Eve chose that option long ago. Ever since then our minds make wrong assumptions about what God is like, while myriads of Satanic lies control and intimidate us in both our relationships with God and with those around us. This is what Jesus came to expose and to show us that God is not like what He has been made out to be in the confusing and dark ideas from religion, philosophy, and the doctrines of demons.

Jesus' disciples had been confused by the false ideas about God that they saw everywhere in their world. They belonged to a system of religion that had been given the privilege of knowing the most about God but had so perverted it and contaminated it with human ideas that the resulting amalgamation produced

horrific concepts of God that were nearly opposite of the truth. Because of this tragic state of affairs, God sent His own Son, the perfect reflection and exact image of His own character, to reveal to all the universe the real truth about what He is like.

Why Jesus Came

But here is where the important part comes into display. For it is very difficult if not impossible to determine just what a person really believes by merely observing their daily life or examining their profession, as helpful as that might be. What really exposes what is at the deepest level of a person's belief system and reveals what they are really made of is when extreme pressure is put on them and their gut reactions are exposed by circumstances involving pain and suffering. It is then, when their true character is ignited by the extreme heat of injustice, that their true colors will be exposed. The nature of their real character will always be revealed by the 'colors' of their attitude, their responses, their knee-jerk reactions as they are exposed to abuse and extreme pain.

This is precisely the reason for the cross. The sufferings of Jesus were in no way an appeasement of an angry Father's wrath against sinners as too many Christians assume. God forbid! The sufferings of Jesus had everything to do with the ignition of His life, His heart, the core of His being by the wrath of sinners to expose what picture of God lay at the deepest level of Jesus' being.

His claims about what God was like during His life were outrageous enough. Religious leaders found them scandalous at best and repeatedly accused Him of heresy and blasphemy. Jesus regularly offended the teachers of the law by sometimes deliberately violating specific provisions of the Mosaic code in order to display the compassion of God toward victims of sin and sickness. This brought great confusion into the church of His day and aroused increasing hatred against Him because of His teachings and His behavior undermining centuries of established religious tradition. His presence and actions were destroying the influence of leaders who were professed experts on God, and this strange new kingdom



threatened every kingdom of this world with the subversive infection of His radical views of God.

But everyone knew—Jews and Romans alike—that the best way to expose what a person believes and is really like at their core was to overwhelm them with injustice, abuse, and extreme pain. Every person without exception who had ever been exposed to such treatment had sooner or later reacted in anger, bitterness, despair, or any other num-

ber of negative emotions. Jesus' claims about a purely loving, non-violent God were so radically opposite of the stern, dark views of God shared by religious leaders that they knew the only hope they had to defend their beliefs was to ignite this man by the fires of intense persecution and torture to prove to everyone that at His deepest core He really harbored the same beliefs about God that they promoted. Of course, the Roman government, founded on force that had conquered every other empire on earth and that currently occupied Palestine, was more than willing to participate in this process.

Ignited By the Fires

When we view the sufferings of Jesus from this perspective it takes on a completely different meaning than what religion typically portrays. In essence, the character of Jesus was lit on fire like the igniting of a fireworks shell to expose what was really inside. The people around Jesus became so enraged at Him that they stopped at nothing to try to elicit from Him even one confirmation of their own dark views about God. They wanted vindication of their own beliefs, their own nature, their own oppressive religion by forcing Jesus to react with anger, with resentment, with desires for retaliation, with anything that might prove that God does take offense and wants to get even and settle a score. What was really taking place at the cross of Jesus was a desperate attempt by humans and demons alike to vindicate the world's fundamental system of rewards and punishments, good and evil. This system permeates nearly every belief and interaction that

takes place on this planet. Thus it was imperative to prove once and for all that God really was not as different from us as what Jesus made Him out to be.

Peter, the disciple that had a rather high saturation of the principles of reward and punishment in his mind-set up to that time, later reported the stunning results of this 'ignition' of the heart of Jesus under the most extreme "baptism by fire."

"God called you to endure suffering because Christ suffered for you. He left you an example so that you could follow in his footsteps. Christ never committed any sin. He never spoke deceitfully. Christ never verbally abused those who verbally abused him. When he suffered, he didn't make any threats but left everything to the one who judges fairly. Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross so that freed from our sins, we could live a life that has God's approval. His wounds have healed you" (1 Peter 2:21-24, GW).

The purpose of Jesus' suffering was to expose to every thinking, feeling intelligence anywhere the clear truth about what God is really like. Only under the most extreme circumstances can the true character be revealed, which is why Jesus necessarily became a human so that He could become vulnerable and exposed to all the abuse, threats, shame and torture that could be heaped on Him. And the purpose for all of this was an attempt to get Him to react as we would react. If Jesus could be induced to even have a thought of revenge or retaliation in kind, that would instantly vindicate and justify our deep cravings to

do the same and would prove that God really does have a dark side, as Satan has accused all along.

But Jesus disproved that overwhelmingly at the cross. *"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross"* (Colossians 2:15 NIV).

With this context clearly in place, suddenly the stories of Peter and John, of Paul and Silas rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name (reputation) of Jesus takes on dramatic new implications. Their 'worthiness' had nothing to do with any merit or righteousness they had earned or were even earning through suffering. Rather they



were deeply humbled that God would give them the honor of trusting them, counting them trustworthy, to let His character be displayed in their lives just as it had been displayed in the life and death of Jesus. The 'colors' of the kingdom began to be seen even more as the true followers of Jesus displayed His same colors as they were also ignited by the fires of persecution.

Some Personal Thoughts

I shudder at what colors might be exposed if I were to meet a similar situation right now. I'm very afraid, in spite of all of that my head is em-

bracing about the truth of God's character, that my heart is still so infected with dark, fearful, angry pictures of God that I would dishonor His name if I were to come under pressure even less than what many others have endured. I know that my head beliefs, as important as those may be, are nowhere near the preparation that I need to be trusted to display the colors of the true kingdom when fire is applied to my life. I am all too aware of what might come out, and I don't want any of that ugliness to be exposed. What I long for is for my own heart to experience a far deeper healing, a more radical transformation, a complete renewal so that what will be exposed under pressure will be reflective of what I am now learning about God.

I don't know why my healing is taking so long. But I suspect that the content that I sometimes allow into my head, the entertainment I indulge in, the news that I sometimes watch addictively or the books that I choose to read—all are storing inside of me the 'chemical signatures' that will produce their distinct colors when a burn is ignited. The ideas I infuse into my heart about God, as well as all the ones already packed in there from a lifetime of experiences and teachings, all have to be transformed through the renewing of my mind as Paul puts it in Romans 12:2.

The reason that Jesus reacted the way He did under pressure was because His picture of God at the deepest levels of His being were exactly what was displayed in His reactions toward those who were abusing, insulting, and torturing Him. What they saw and forced out

of Him was what God is really like and will always be like. And this is vital for us to understand if we are to have our own minds filled with the same mind of Jesus. To say that God and Jesus acted one way at the cross but intends to get even and wreak vengeance on His enemies at a future date is to completely undermine the message of the cross and go back to the dark views of God that prompted the Jews to kill Jesus.

What is starting to become plain to me is that when we harbor beliefs about an angry God, a vengeful God, a violent God or a God who in any way reflects any part of our fallen nature or desires, then those beliefs will always result in our reacting likewise when we come under extreme pressure. The reason Jesus could forgive without condition, love without reservation and refuse to ever take offense at anything that was hurled at Him was because His gut-level, heart reflection of His Father as well as His mental beliefs about God were exactly reflected in how He reacted. Jesus came as our example in that He only reflected what He saw in His Father. Likewise we will reflect what we see in Jesus and in the Father when we come under similar treatment if these truths become embedded into the deepest levels of our heart. But if in any respect we cling to false ideas about God then those very contaminates will glow in dazzling colors of bitterness, anger, reactions of violence, or whatever it is we think God would do.

Jesus Reflects the Father

This is why it is so vital to get our heads and our hearts straight about

the true character of God. It is not just an issue of who's opinions or doctrines are best. This is not a competition between an Old Testament view of God and Jesus' view. The Bible says that everything outside of Jesus has some darkness mingled into it. *Only* Jesus is the authentic, express reflection of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). And if Jesus is the only perfect reflection of the truth about God, then every other reflection must be compared to Him as the standard and not the other way around.



Father, I am terrified to think of the ugly colors and even the explosive damage that might occur if I were to be ignited right now. Thank-you for protecting me from such ignition while You continue to replace my own bitterness, anger, fears, shame, and confusion about You with daily revelations of what You are really like. But why is it taking so long for the truth about You to soak into my heart? Why do I still keep indulging in things of sin that keep contaminating and re-infecting my heart with false views about You?

I love what I am learning about You, but at the same time I find a force within me that keeps getting me to feed my lower nature and keeps fighting against everything You are trying to do in me. Who will deliver me from this law of sin and death!? I can only trust that Jesus is strong enough to overcome all the power inherent in my sinful desires and will restore the true image of God all the way into the deepest levels of my soul.

Father, I want to have a new heart, a right spirit so that when I am ignited by irritations, attacked by angry people, abused by injustice or provoked by violence that the reactions elicited from me will be Your reactions and not mine. Have Your way in my life in spite of me – for Your reputation's sake.



You may read more from Floyd Phillips at:

<http://deeperword.blogspot.com/>

A book of the Bible is spotlighted here. Floyd just finished the book of John and is now starting in Luke.

<http://biblicalconcepts.blogspot.com/>

This highlights other topics not related to the one listed above.

<http://surpriseending.blogspot.com/>

Here Floyd blogs his thoughts on hell and the “surprise ending” God has in mind for us. He plans to return to that site and re-write much of that material soon.

“Come Let Us Reason”

Fireside Chats on the Character of God

with Kevin Straub



Permissive Paradigm—Part V

Coming down to God's commands to Israel in the use of the sword, at last, we find that it was not God's will that He should have led His people to the conquest of Canaan by their use of the sword. His deliverance would have taken the "purer" form, if I may use that term, of "giving over," instead of permissive paradigm. (In reality, however, the permissive paradigm is also "giving over" in that God, winking at ignorance, meets men where they are in their thinking even giving instruction within an errant mode of governance; even in His instructions to them to destroy their enemies with the use of carnal weapons.)

Moses thought God was going to work by military means.

He, supposing that they were to obtain their freedom by force of arms, expected to lead the Hebrew host against the armies of Egypt... (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 245, par. 2).

Moses later understood that this was not God's way and became the meekest man who ever lived (Numbers 12:3). But not so with the general body. So God, in giving over to their paradigm, did not forsake them when He saw them pick up weaponry from the bodies of the Egyptian soldiers washed up on the shore.

As morning broke it revealed to the multitudes of Israel all that remained of their mighty foes—the mail-clad bodies cast upon the shore (*Ibid.*, p. 288, par. 4).

They came out of Egypt "unarmed and unaccustomed to war" (*Ibid.*, p. 282) and there was no other way for them to have obtained weapons.

There are no direct records confirming that they did rush down and take the armor from the Egyptians. But all the evidence points strongly in that direction. Here are the facts. They approached, crossed, and emerged

from the Red Sea without implements of war. Shortly after leaving the Red Sea, they engaged in warfare against the Amalekites in which they did not use sticks and stones. As there were no swordsmiths between the Red Sea and the location of this battle, the only way they could have become equipped was by salvaging the weaponry washed ashore (*As He Is*, 4th Angel Publications, Kevin Straub, Compiler, 2nd Ed., p. 242).

This taking up of the sword reveals that they intended to fight their enemies their way. God never intended for it.

The Lord had never commanded them to "go up and fight." It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 392, par. 3).

I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.

And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee.

I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee.

By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.



And I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee (Ex. 23:27-31).

God intended that they would drive out the inhabitants of the land merely by advancing at His direction. They would take over the land by multiplying on the borders of the heathen habitations and moving in as they moved out. It would definitely not be military conquest, by bathing their sword in blood and taking by force what did not belong to them. The heathen would have been forced to retreat under perilous circumstances, by things of a pestilential or disastrous nature. They could have been reduced by war amongst themselves or with other nations. All of these things would descend upon their heads because God was not with them, protecting and sustaining them. But Israel wanted to do the work of driving them out by the sword. Therefore, God worked with them in their own modality, for as long as they still had not entirely cast Him off, He was able to stay in their picture to a greater degree than He could for the heathen nations. The hands of Deity were tied, so to speak. It was God working with their own choice. He instructed them in the terrible work they must therefore do if they were to stay alive and have a place. Conquest by war and bloodshed is never God's way. Not only is war the way of force, but of deception, as the waging of war is done utilizing methods of intrigue and lies; feigning, espionage, and misinformation. Satan is the father of lies.

Although God wills to work in the modality of human hard-heartedness, permissive paradigm is not the place to remain. In the end the results are still death—it just takes longer to get there. God intends to bring His people up and out of permissive will, to the point where He no longer has to make accommodations to their weaknesses, trying to get them through it with a minimum of casualties, but leading them from strength to strength, by the power of His name, His character of love. He would have taken them under His wing, but they would not. That is why they rejected Christ. They wanted a military deliverer who would thrust through



the Roman oppressor with the sword of slaughter. This is why Jesus told Peter to put up his sword; that the way of the sword ends in violence. And so they were desolated. "God" destroyed them by giving them over to their choice, "His blood be on us and our children; we have no king but Caesar."

In conclusion, it is quite easy to believe in a non-violent God when we just look to Christ, but when coming to terms with the Bible language, with God's setting

up human kingdoms, and with God's commands to ancient Israel we have to study many hours, carefully comparing line upon line in the Scriptures and in history to settle into the new paradigm without throwing away the Bible. This is why we receive the accusations of rewriting the Scriptures, creating loopholes, and such things. As we gather together all of the evidences for the "new views...of the character and attributes of God" we are richly rewarded as "hidden treasures are discovered" (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 444, par. 2).

I believe that we have to *want* to believe in a consistently gentle and non-violent God as depicted in Christ, in order to actually see Him in this way at last. We have to pray without ceasing to overcome our hard-heartedness and desire for revenge—for eye-for-eye justice. It is true that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. If we want to retain the idea that God gave us—humanity—violence as a way of dealing with our enemies we will not see otherwise, no matter how many careful studies are produced to the contrary.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9).

[**Note:** For this entire five-part series in one document, please inquire to straub@direct.ca. For further treatment of the subject of permissive will, there are a number of chapters in our book, *As He Is that cover it*. See <http://www.teachservices.com/as-he-is-4th-angel-publications/> or write to straub@direct.ca.]

The Gospel of God (Pt. 2)

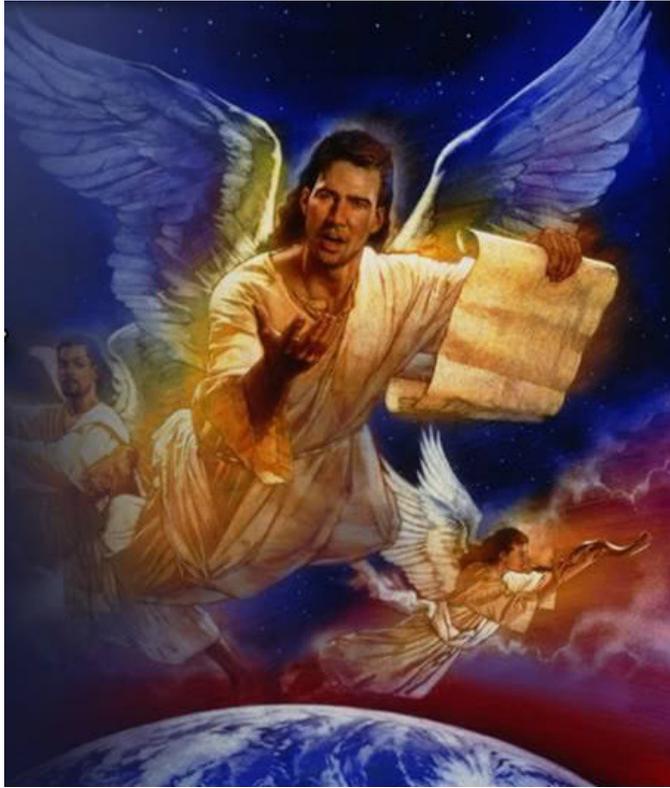
By Terry Campbell

“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God. . . .’” (Revelation 14:6, 7*).

Last time we examined the first words of the first angel of Revelation 14—“Fear God.” We reviewed stories and characters throughout the Bible, where people had fear for God. The first such story where, unequivocally, a person is identified as fearing God, is that of Abraham. Isaac has been prepared for sacrifice and just as his father brings the knife to bear, a Voice from heaven commands him to stop—and then commends him, because “Now I know that you *fear God*, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:12, emphasis supplied).

And what had convinced Abraham that, despite the command of God to sacrifice his son, Isaac was in no danger? He knew God had promised that Isaac would have children. “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name

Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and with his descendants after him*” (Genesis 17:19, emphasis supplied).



Abraham, David, Peter and others stand as examples of those who made decisions contrary to common sense, because God had given them a promise. They slew giants, evaded death penalties, achieved miraculous cures, all because they believed in the power

contained in the words of God. Fearing God, as these men and women of faith demonstrated, means living life entirely within the words of God to you.

But obedience to those promises, significant in itself, opens the door to a far greater realm. 2 Peter 1:3, 4 says, “As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.” Might we expect, then, to learn something about entering that greater realm, about partaking of the divine nature, as the first angel continues his onward flight?

“And give glory to Him. . . .”

What does that mean, to give glory to God? If we discovered that “fear God” was more than singing hymns and listening to sermons, should not we expect that to “give glory” also means more than vain “God is great, God is good,” recitations?

We found examples in the Bible of fear that led us to our understanding. Let us now look for those examples which describe giving God glory.

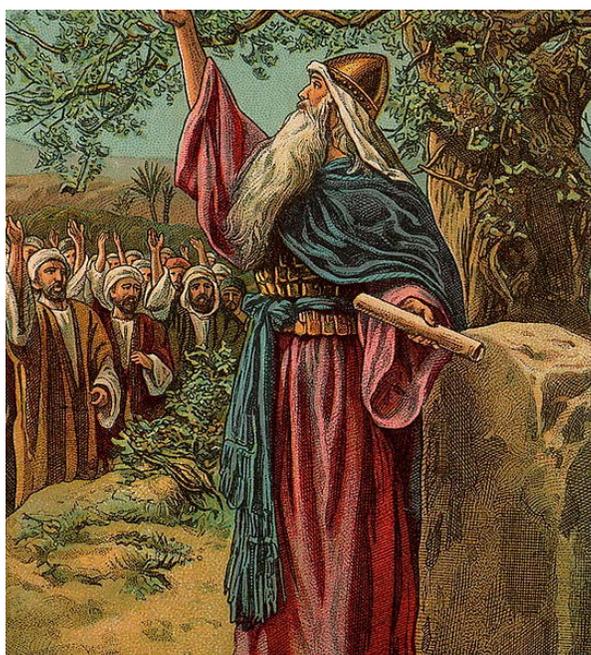
Jericho and Ai

In Joshua 6, the walls of Jericho fell down in obedience to God’s

command. A portion of the wall containing the home of Rahab remained standing, a testament that no ordinary earthquake had shaken those stones. Flush with victory, Joshua sets out on his own to defeat Ai, only to be himself defeated. Chastised, and recognizing the consequences of his actions, Joshua pleads with God saying, “O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the

camp would once again be pure.

First tribes, then families, then households and finally a man named Achan and his family were identified and brought before Joshua. “Now Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, I beg you, *give glory to the LORD God of Israel*, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me’” (Joshua 7:19, emphasis supplied).



This is the first time “give glory to God” occurs in Scripture, and the words are tied very closely with “make confession to Him” as though confessing our sins has something to do with giving glory to God. Achan does confess, and he and his family are then stoned to death and their bodies burned. Why might God have demanded such a terrible result when it appears that Achan did as Joshua suggested and gave God

Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?” (Joshua 7:8, 9).

Someone in the camp had sinned. The Lord could no longer live among the people because someone had deliberately disregarded the words of God. The sin needed eradication and the Lord gave Joshua specific and involved instructions to ferret out the culprit and when he was found, to stone and then burn him and his family and all their possessions so the .

the glory? Does Achan’s horrific demise serve as an example for us in our understanding of giving God glory?

The context of Achan’s confession implies that he did not repent of the deed; he only regretted having been caught. God might have been very direct with Joshua, informing him of the identity of the culprit. Instead the process was slow and involved. Joshua makes a proclamation of how God will determine the guilty party. Israel has all night to think about it. Then, in the morning, twelve rep-

resentatives from the tribes gather to cast lots, and they identify the tribe of Judah. Then representatives of all the families of Judah are brought forward. On and on it goes, possibly hours pass, as each representative is found, gathered together and the choice is made. It is as though God has engineered the slowest form of determination to allow the culprit to come forward freely. Instead, Achan only declares his sin after he stands alone. With so much time for contemplation during the process, his confession after being found out rings hollow, as do the word of his family, who also stood silent, though the freshly turned earth beneath their tent reveals their own culpability and greed.

Achan’s motives in confession are suspect. His forgiveness by God is doubtful. But we can at least say, from the quotation in question, that something in the act of confession would give glory to God.



Achan’s Sin

The Blind Man

Centuries later, the temple rulers felt the same way when they demanded that a man recently cured of blind-

ness, declare that Jesus was a sinner. On the Sabbath day Jesus healed a man who had been born blind and did it in a way that would not allow the man to know who healed him. The Pharisees, hearing about the miracle, have the man brought to them for questioning.

First he tells them that he does not know who healed him, which is the truth, but he speculates that the man must be a prophet. This answer maddens the Pharisees who turn to the man's parents and demand that they tell them that it was Jesus who healed their son on the Sabbath day. "His parents answered them and said, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself.' His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, 'Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner'" (John 9:20-24).

The Pharisees felt that by declaring that Jesus was a sinner, the man born blind would be giving glory to God. Instead, having never seen Jesus, only experiencing the miracle of his eyesight, the man works out logically that he could only have been healed by the Son of God declaring, "Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do noth-

ing" (John 9:32, 33). Then when Jesus faces him and reveals Himself, the Bible tells us, "Then he said, 'Lord I believe!' And he worshipped Him" (John 9:38). Like every sinner whose eyes have been opened to salvation since Jesus return to heaven, the unknown Miracle Worker was declared the Son of God by the man blind from birth prior to his being able to look upon the face of the One who healed him. Ironically, the Pharisees got what they demanded, but not the answer they desired.



The Lepers

Some times, even the people who saw Jesus do the healing failed to express their gratitude. Luke tells a story of ten lepers, who call out to Jesus and ask for healing. Jesus tells them to present themselves to the priests and while they are walking away all ten are healed. Nine continue onward and one returns to Jesus. "One of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, 'Were

there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to *give glory to God* except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well'" (Luke 17:15-19, emphasis supplied).

Curiously, the nine who hurried on to the priest, even though they obeyed Jesus words, did not glorify God. And technically, their faith had made them well too. The only difference was the Samaritan's gratitude to and acknowledgement of Jesus.

Herod

Acknowledgement may have played a role in the death of Herod as well. After Peter's miraculous escape from prison, Herod ordered that the guards who had been watching the apostle be put to death, even though the soldiers themselves recognized its unexplainable nature. "As soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death" (Acts 12:18-19).

With the escape of Peter, Herod had now been presented evidence that the world he knew was much more than he imagined. Yet, his life continued much as before. From Jerusalem he traveled to Caesarea where he met a delegation from Tyre and Sidon who came to him asking for peace. "So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because *he did not give glory to God*. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:21-23, emphasis supplied).

Was Peter's escape also to be a sign to Herod? Was Herod's unchanged attitude in the light of God's power the final act of willful disobedience for the king? If he had acknowledged Peter's deliverance, and listened to that voice of God, how might things have changed? Was that the glorifying that God required of him? Or if Herod had merely acknowledged that God had rescued Peter but continued his merciless dealings with the delegation from Tyre and Sidon, would that have been just enough glory to save his life? Can someone glorify God yet refuse to serve him? Strangely, the Bible records an example of people glorifying God by sending Him away.

The Philistines

The Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines. For seven months it had been passed from city to city and everywhere it

stopped, peculiar things had happened. Now the leaders were eager to return it to Israel. They gathered together to plan how to accomplish this task. "So they said, 'If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but by all means return *it* to Him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.' Then they said, 'What is the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?' They answered, 'Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall *give glory to the God of Israel*; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from

your land. . . . Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him *as* a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go. And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us—it happened to us by chance'" (1 Samuel 6:3-9, emphasis supplied).

The five Philistine kings had no desire to serve the God of Israel but they were willing to give glory to Him. They considered that God had been behind the diseases that had struck each of the cities and they prepared a demonstration of His power. Like Gideon, who tested God with a



fleece, the Philistines sought a way to demonstrate the existence, and power of God and thereby glorify Him, even as they were attempting to rid themselves of Him. When the cows set off without stopping to graze, the enemies of Israel accepted and acknowledged that God had been present and active within their lives and the lives of their people.

Gideon

As God prepared to save the Israelites from the Midianites, making sure who got the glory was part of His strategy. “And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me’” (Judges 7:2). Gideon had just completed two tests in order to prove God. Now God devised two tests for Gideon. “Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever *is* fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.’ And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained. But the LORD said to Gideon, ‘The people are still too many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, that of whom

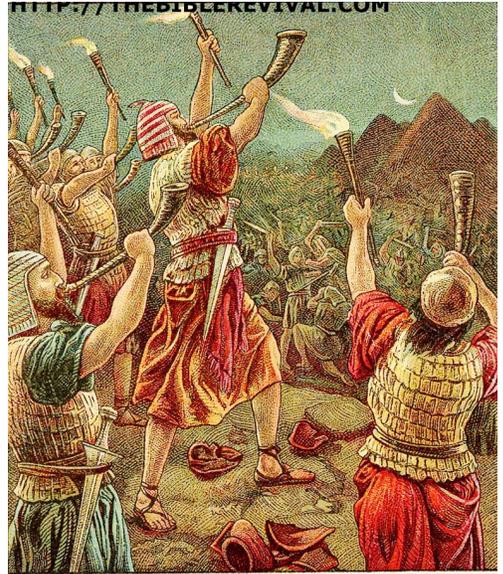


I say to you, “This one shall go with you,” the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, “This one shall not go with you,” the same shall not go.’ So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, ‘Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink.’ And the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. Then the LORD said to Gideon, ‘By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the other people go, every man to his place’ (Judges 7:3-7). God was not looking for a few good men that day. He did not need three hundred soldiers for the victory. But He could use three hundred prophets to praise the works of God.

He had a valid reason to be concerned that people would not give Him glory. From the Midianite treasure, plundered by the Israelites after the battle, Gideon commissioned a golden ephod. Over the years the God of deliverance was forsaken and forgotten by the people who instead worshipped the commemorative ephod. “Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house” (Judges 8:27).

An Attitude of Gratitude

But all of these incidents feel incomplete as explanations. They ask for an expression of praise to the great provider of blessings. They are reminiscent of a parent telling a child, “What do we say?” when the ice cream is handed out. Certainly, an attitude of praise and thankfulness



GIDEON AND HIS THREE HUNDRED

is the definition of being a child of God. “. . . my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever” (Psalms 30:11-12). But what glory do I have to sing praises to God? My glory certainly is no worthwhile thing compared to God’s. And God is very jealous regarding His glory. “I am the LORD, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images” (Isaiah 42:8).

Interestingly, where God is so jealous, Satan was more than willing to hand out glory—under certain conditions. “Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, ‘All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours’” (Luke 4:5-7). Jesus, turned that glory down saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the

LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve ” (Luke 4:8).

There is something about the glory of God that is different from the glory of men, cities, kingdoms, Satan and all the rest. It is unique to God and no one else has ever had it. So how exactly is it given?

Perhaps, if mankind has made such a disaster of following God, we need to look to the rest of God’s creation to help us. “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. There *is* no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). Notice that the heavens declare the glory *of* God, not the glory *to* God or some other variation. The stories of Achan, Herod, Gideon and the rest, never spoke of the glory of God. Only about giving glory to God.

So what can the natural world tell us of the glory of God? “But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; And the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you; And the fish of the sea will explain to you. Who among all these does not know That the hand of the LORD has done this, In whose hand is the life of every living thing” (Job 12:7-10).

Since the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* over one hundred fifty years ago, many have questioned that hand. And yet they stand in awe of a little orange and black creature no bigger than a post

card made of rice paper—the Monarch butterfly. Every year hundreds of thousands of the beautiful insects travel as much as twenty-five hundred miles from their winter quarters in Mexico to feeding grounds in Canada and the northern United States. They live and breed through the summer and return in the fall to the same trees in Mexico that nurtured them in the previous year. But more incredibly, the eggs they have laid over the course of their travels have turned into caterpillars and metamorphosed into new butterflies, which also make the migration in the fall. These insects, without the aid of having



ever seen the trail or its destination, also arrive in Mexico at the same trees and at the same time as their parents.

How do they do it? How do they know? Their brains are no bigger than pinheads. They have no calendar to tell them when to start. They have no GPS to tell them the direction or the distance. Science has not found the explanation, but even if it could, the explanation itself would bring a

sense of awe. But what have we done with our amazement? “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God” (Romans 1:20-21).

The little Monarch butterfly is only one small part of a huge natural world that shows us the invisible God. God is displayed wherever we look and all the while we refer to it as nature, content, even amongst Christians, to abide by the notion that once the world was set in motion God lets things drift along for themselves when really, “The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth” (Psalm 29:9).

But if the miracle that is nature stands as the glory *of* God, His eternal power and Godhead, all of the miracles we have examined reveal the same thing. If the Monarch butterfly accomplishes an impossible task, that miracle is no less a miracle than Peter walking out of the arms of prison guards, or Gideon and three hundred men armed only with flashlights routing the Midianites. They both speak to the power, nature and glory of God. So, just exactly how are these wonders accomplished? What is the mechanism of a miracle?

Lazarus

Lazarus was dead. Jesus had been slow to arrive. Now he stood before the tomb with Martha. “Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see *the glory of God?*’ Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up

His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me' (John 11:40-42).

Jesus said that Martha was about to see the glory of God and asked the Father to hear Him in order that people would believe that Jesus was from God. Jesus then called for Lazarus to come forth and the Father made that happen. The purpose of the miracle centered, not on Lazarus, but on the belief of the audience. The Father fulfilled the request of Jesus so that Jesus might be glorified.



The Father lives to glorify Jesus; it must be His favorite thing to do. Just before His death Jesus tells those around Him, "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify *it* again.' Therefore the people who stood by and heard it

said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake'" (John 12:27-30). The Father made the miracle so those gathered around would be in awe of Jesus.

Jesus lives to glorify the Father; it must be His favorite thing to do. During the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He

who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him" (John 7:16-18). As He proclaims often, Jesus does nothing except what the Father asks of Him in order that the Father may be glorified.

The Father and the Son live to glorify one another. It must be Their favorite thing to do. During Jesus last supper with his disciples, He prays, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:4, 5).

Even after Jesus ascension He does not assume glory but the Father gives it to him. "So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You'" (Hebrews 5:5). In the verse, "He" is the Father, and "Him" is Jesus; therefore, the Father is telling Jesus, as He did at Jesus' baptism and also at His transfiguration, that Jesus is accepted.

But once again, the purpose of giving glory to Jesus is for our benefit. "Who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Peter 1:21). The Father raised Jesus and gave Him glory so that we would see and believe in the Father.

So far, God's requirement of never giving His glory is satisfied as the only recipient of glory has been either the Father or the Son. But at the last supper Jesus prays a specific prayer announcing something new. "[T]he glory which You gave Me I have given them" (John 17:20-23).

The glory given by the Father to Jesus is going to be given to me? Impossible! God Himself says He does not give his glory to another. But the whole point of miracles is to do the impossible. This time the impossible is accomplished through the Holy Spirit. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and

declare *it* to you” (John 16:13-15).

The Holy Spirit will glorify Jesus by telling us what Jesus wants us to know. We are connected to Jesus by the Holy Spirit and Jesus is glorified because of it. The Father gives the glory, the Holy Spirit tells us, and because Jesus lives within us, Jesus is the one glorified.

So even though we have no glory of our own to give to God, we share of the glory of the Godhead. This is demonstrated in different ways in Scripture. After Jesus’ ascension, miracles continued to be performed, just as Jesus had done them and for the same purpose. When Peter and John prayed that a lame man would walk again, a large crowd gathered and Peter began to preach. “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. . . . And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (Acts 3:12-16).

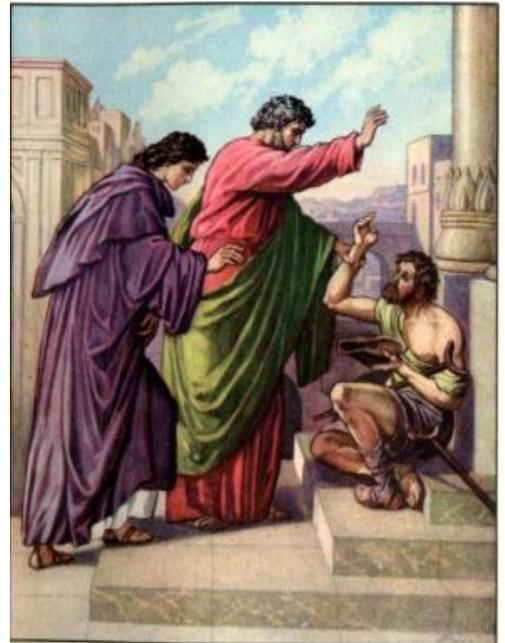
So, according to Peter, who has no glory of his own, the Father provided the miracle in order to glorify the Son so that those watching would believe that Jesus was not some criminal hung on a cross but, really, the Son of God. By acting as the catalyst for the miracle, Peter and John have now become the

conduit by which the Father can glorify the Son. And according to Philippians 1:11, we are also the conduit by which the Son can glorify the Father. “[B]eing filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Jesus fills our character with His righteousness and this change in our behavior brings glory to God.

When that change in our character comes, we let people know what Jesus has done in our life. This must bring a smile to the face of the Father to hear Jesus spoken of in this way because, “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 Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11). What greater miracle exists than the personal transformation of the sinner who gives his life over to Christ. The Father is glorified by the sinner declaring that Jesus is Lord and the Son is glorified when the Father receives that sinner back.

In all of these actions, the Holy Spirit plays a critical role. Our own minds are unable to know how to act. “The heart *is* deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10). Instead, the Holy Spirit speaks to us of what we should say, how we should act, and for what we should pray. Directed by Christ,

He speaks to us at the unconscious level, searches our hearts and knows what we need. Paul describes it like this: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27).



Often people misrepresent the Holy Spirit here and say that He simply presents our prayers to the Father in some sort of heavenly language. But it is Jesus that makes intercession, and this view fails to take that into account.

Others have said they can duplicate the language of heaven as though they themselves were taking on the role of the Holy Spirit in a blasphemous utterance. But once the Holy Spirit is placed in His proper role, as the Teacher, Comforter, and the Spirit of Truth, the miracle of giving glory to

God is made clear. Jesus tests our heart and determines what our actions ought to be. He informs the Spirit who impresses on our minds the action that needs to be taken. This might be a realization of sinfulness and guilt for someone who has turned away from God. It might be a sudden remembrance of a long forgotten deed in the life of a Christian. It might be an urge to hand your lunch money to a stranger or an impression to pray for someone you have just met. For Peter and John, it meant that, on one particular day, a lame man needed to be healed.

Once the impression comes, the action must follow. We invoke Jesus name, recognizing the Source of what is good in our life and ask that the Father let Jesus' will be done. Jesus intercedes before the Father and the Father creates the miracle. The Father gives glory to Jesus by acknowledging and activating our petition, and the Son gives glory to the Father by using our lives to fulfill the Father's mission on earth which is, "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (John 17:23).

The decree to *give God the glory* is a cry to enter into this symbiotic relationship. Jesus illustrated it by saying, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser" (John 15:1). Jesus died so that you and I could live as the branches of this Vine. Our response to the Holy Spirit determines if our branch bears fruit. The Vinedresser desires that the Vine bears fruit and is waiting to give us that fruit, if we respond to

the Spirit. The Vine desires to bear much fruit in honor of the Vinedresser and urges us to respond to the Spirit. The fruit of the Vine then, will give glory to both Vine and Vinedresser.

The first words of the first angel of Revelation 14 urge us to live a life fully invested in the promises of God. To *fear God* is to accept God's words as truth even when your senses, experiences or community tells you otherwise. The God's words become a document for living—a blueprint for life. Now the cry is a call to action. To *give glory to Him* places you at the center of the battle between Christ and Satan, because through your action, Jesus advances the Father's desire to see His Son revealed to the world. It is a call to



be open and ready for the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is a call to say the impossible, do the impossible, and live the impossible when the Spirit of God calls on you so that anyone watching can only see the miracle that is Jesus in your life.

"[A]s [Jesus] divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in

the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3, 4). Jesus calls us through the beauty of His promises to partake of the divine nature and be the means by which the Godhead is revealed. But because the Godhead is revealed through miracles, what Jesus asks is for us, like the Monarch butterfly, to be miraculous.

Next Time

With the angel's next word there is a change. The first two instructions have discussed how to live and what to do but now God focuses on the question of why. A question we will consider next time.

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"As the gospel is proclaimed in its purity, men will be called from the plow and from the common commercial business vocations that largely occupy the mind and will be educated in connection with men of experience. As they learn to labor effectively, they will proclaim the truth with power. Through most wonderful workings of divine providence mountains of difficulty will be removed and cast into the sea. The message that means so much to the dwellers upon the earth will be heard and understood. Men will know what is truth. Onward and still onward the work will advance until the whole earth shall have been warned, and then shall the end come" (*Prophets & Kings*, 223-4).

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The Project

Much is happening in the world of character of God promotions, but unfortunately I can't tell you about it/them now. We expect that these projects will have come to fruition in time for the next newsletter. But for now, keep waiting and praying and it will shortly come to pass.