

BACK TO BASICS!

Gerrie Malan



We visited the town of Knysna a few years ago and on one of the beaches I photographed the scene above. I noticed the sign reading “This is a water stressed area – Join the Knysna Water Wise Campaign” and could not help smiling at the irony, for right behind the sign lay the vast ocean and its abundance of water as far as the eye could see. The message the town council or regional authority was trying to convey, of course, was that it was a fresh water stressed area.

Another picture also came to mind from this scene and it was in the words of a song from my childhood days: “Water, water everywhere; not a drop to drink”. Just think, lost at sea in a small boat you can die of thirst despite all that water around you.

When we move our attention to the Bible we are presented with God’s truth in the pages of this wonderful Book, given to us by some 40 writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit over a period of almost 1500 years, in three languages and on three continents. Sadly, All over the world sincere people are relying on Bible teachers and preachers, and authors to teach them the biblical truths. They all read the same Bible, but having fallen into the trap of various man made traditions dressed up in biblical terminology, they all too often present a potpourri of differing teachings to those who are trusting their knowledge and insight to correctly teach the truth. The fact that there are some 40 000 denominations is ample testimony to this sad position. Yes, there is an ‘ocean’ of teaching around us, but we live in a truth-stressed area.

Many readers will be aware of the Great Disappointment that the late Dr. Harold Camping and his followers experienced in 2011 after his second prophecy of the world’s end ended up exposed once again as a lie and false prophecy. He previously pulled a similar stunt in 1994. There is a reason, of course, for this gullibility among Christians to all the Left Behind fiction and hype, for they have been prepared generation after generation by much of the church at large with unfortunate Second Coming doctrines (leading to more than 40 failed predictions only in my lifetime). While I cannot deal with the doctrines in all their aspects in this limited space, I do deal with relevant aspects in various articles and our books which are downloadable from our website (www.hoseaconnection.org).

A number of emails my wife, Martie, and I have been receiving over the years often have some connection with end-times theology in one way or another. Some have been about visions and different prophetic statements emanating from different parts of the world. We are concerned by the unquestioned credibility some of these visions seem to enjoy in Christian media. It is not that we do not believe in the reality and place of dreams and visions in our faith walk - it is described in the Bible after all. When it is contrary to the Bible, however, it needs to be pointed out, even if the source is a big name in some way in Christendom.

How glad we all need to be that it is the heart of the person that has fellowship with our heavenly Father and the Son of His Love that matters. If the words we speak and the understandings we build on were to be the non negotiable conditions of acceptance in the Father heart of God, most of us, if not all, would be in deep trouble!

When I differ from others in our understanding of the Scriptures, I honestly try to address the issue at hand, and never the person. My approach is best described in the words of Ephraim Currier in his 1841 plea to readers of his book on the Second Coming of Christ doctrines:

"All I ask of the community is, that they will give my views an impartial investigation, and if they are agreeable to the word of God, embrace them, if not reject them. One thing in particular I have to request of the clergy, as well as of all others, and that is, not to pass by the work now offered for their consideration, without notice; but let it be closely scrutinized, and if it cannot be refuted in a spirit of fairnes(s), and in a satisfactory manner, to admit it is truth. But if, on the other hand, any man can show in a satisfactory manner that my views are unscriptural, let him do it, the sooner the better. When this is done, I pledge myself frankly and unreservedly to acknowledge my errors. But long cherished opinions, and all history not found in the word of God, must be left entirely out of the question. I have nothing to expect from the sympathies of any sect of religionists now in existence, for I know well that all their strength will be arrayed against me. But from candid and sober argument I have nothing to fear. If my sentiments are unscriptural, it is a pity if it cannot be shown in a spirit of fairness and good feeling".ⁱ

I have never had the privilege to learn the Hebrew and Greek languages. Fortunately our modern technology puts at least the ability to understand the critical principles and characteristics needed to study the Scriptures **within their true and intended context** in one's grasp. This is much more important, in my mind, than the ability to read the language. To be able to do the latter is not equal to understanding the contextual background of the original writings. There are good materials available to us to research the meanings of words in Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek – as long as we remember that context is crucial for accurate understanding.

The term "End of Days," for example, has always been taken in Hebraic understanding as a reference to the messianic era. In other words, the people within whose cultural, historical, geographical, literary and theological context the books of the Old Testament had been written have always understood the end of days to be a coming together of times in the arrival of the long awaited Messiah. If we then believe that Jesus of Nazareth was and is that Messiah, on what grounds can we now redefine the meaning of expressions such as the end of days, or latter days, or the end of the age (Matt 24)? In addition, it is also crucial to identify translation errors or translation subjectivities in Bible versions.

Not only have I seen preachers of Afrikaner upbringing who read English well completely miss the meaning of what they have read, but I have heard preachers of Jewish upbringing, who are fluent in the Hebrew language, preach end-times error. In fact, I was raised in a church denomination whose theological students were put through several years' of study of the Hebrew and Greek languages. Yet they have been teaching the denomination's doctrines that may be in error without blinking an eye. It seemed that another main subject they studied, Philosophy, played a far greater role in forming their polluted understanding of the Scriptures than they would be willing to acknowledge. It simply underlines the strength of man-made traditions, especially when they become synod directives!

It is little wonder then to find one A.N. Wilson writing in the year 2000 that (in his view), when all the mythologies of religion have been discarded and all the false theories of Christianity have been exposed by patient and honest scholars, men and women of a reflective turn of mind will remain convinced that there is underlying this universe a deep moral purpose. Such men and women will then find that there is a religion that satisfies this deep human need for a moral code without mythology. It is not Christianity he said. This religion which Wilson proposes will replace Christianity is Islam. In the process he implied the Christian habit of continually adapting the Scriptures to justify both contemporary viewpoints and moral decline was an inherent weakness and flaw in Christian teaching.ⁱⁱ

The modern end-times theologies - and especially their trail of end-times disappointments and let downs - unfortunately continue to make a mockery of the biblical truth. Is it not ironic that when the achievements of a sports team declines, everybody seems to shout: Back to Basics!?! But not so with knowledge of the biblical record - back to the basics never seems to be an option! Instead, we continue to be confronted by more and more spiritual philosophising, or by some long drawn out argumentation on whether or not to accept and adopt some religious-political confession in order to promote formalised church unification.



If ever there was a need to return to the truth of God's Word in place of man's religious traditions, it is now! If godly leaders do not, the moral fibre of this nation (and others) will continue its current steep decline. Instead of publicly blessing irresponsible young politicians and so enhancing their already big egos, as some religious leaders have been doing, they should be returning to the basics here as well and call the young hotheads to order in godly

fashion and sense of responsibility.

May you all be blessed in your own search for the truth. Thank you that you remain our friends, even when you differ radically from our understanding. As always, we appreciate your input, even where you differ - especially if it is based on questions you have from a different understanding of the scriptures. Responses in such a spirit have been responsible for several articles or improvements to articles in the past.

18 October 2015.

ⁱ Currier, E. 1841. *The Second Coming Of Christ And The Resurrection*. Skowhegan. Digital version by Google Books.

ⁱⁱ Wilson, A.N. 2000. Christianity: The end is nigh. *Mail & Guardian*. 1 December 2000.
www.mg.co.za/articledirect.aspx?area=mg_flat&articleid=162801