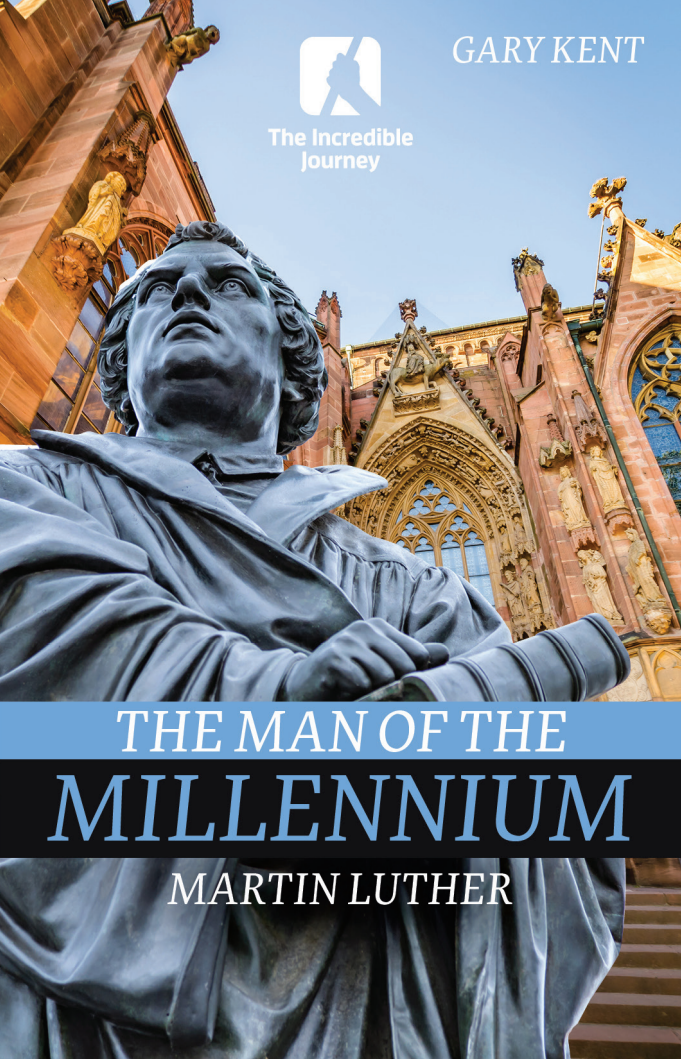




GARY KENT

The Incredible
Journey



THE MAN OF THE MILLENNIUM

MARTIN LUTHER

THE MAN OF THE MILLENNIUM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Feeding Your Soul.....	2
Desert Revelation	25

FEEDING YOUR SOUL

The room was tense. Hearts were beating furiously, and every eye was on the German monk who had dared to challenge the world. How was he going to answer?

"Luther, you have not answered the question put to you. You are required to give a clear and precise answer. Will you, or will you not, retract?"

The short interval between the question must have seemed like an eternity to the people who were there. And the words that came out of Martin Luther's mouth reignited a passion in the Christian world that had been buried for a long, long time:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by the clearest reasoning, unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me." ¹

"*Scripture*" said Jesus Christ, "*cannot be broken.*" John 10:35

And the apostle Paul said:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
2 Timothy 3:16, 17

Several centuries ago, when Martin

¹ E.G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 160.

Luther stood before the Council in the city of Worms, he reminded the Christian world that we have at our disposal an inspired source of authority for living. There is one Book that has all the keys you need for a successful life, and that same Book will carry you through to eternity. And even though it has come under constant attack since it has been placed in the hands of God's people, it has stood the test of time, and it is still as relevant and meaningful today as it was when it was first written.

It literally has the power to breathe new life into your day-to-day existence. In fact, the apostle Peter wrote that we are changed by the Word of God – by the same power that first brought the universe into existence. Even Jesus Himself, who was God in human flesh, directed people's attention to the Bible – or at least the part of the Bible that existed in His day.

In the book of Luke, we read about a couple of men who were depressed and dejected because their Master had been cruelly executed on a Roman cross. As far as they could see, all hope was gone. And then the resurrected Jesus appeared to them on the road to Emmaus, and He pointed them to the Word of God:

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24:27

Now think about this: here was Jesus, in the flesh, in person – but even though He was physically present with these two men, and He could have simply revealed Himself, He still chose to send these men straight to the Bible. Now that has to tell us something about this Book. It's not like other books. It isn't just one among thousands; it's different – because it has the power of a Creator.

God breathed into it a power that can turn your whole life around.

So, you'd think that in the centuries since Luther reminded us of the importance of God's inspired Word, we would have made a lot of progress in our devotion to it. And for a while, that was true. With the invention of the printing press, Luther's work spread like wildfire around Europe, and people who had been spiritually starved for centuries found new hope. The Bible became a centerpiece in Christian homes everywhere.

But then something changed. The enlightenment taught us to reason for ourselves, which was a good thing – but we took it a step further than we should have. We started to take everything we had learned in the field of critical thinking and sit in judgment on the biblical text. We began to decide what the writers of the Bible meant, what they said and what they didn't. We

began to challenge the notion that this Book was inspired in the first place.

So, what's wrong with that? Are we supposed to use our brains for every other area of life but view it differently when it comes to reading the Bible? Of course not. There's nothing that demands more clear analytical thinking than an hour spent in serious Bible study. That's not the issue.

There are just some things you're going to have to try before you really understand them. Those who come down hardest on the reliability of the Bible are usually those who have never given it an honest chance. They find some little hook to hang their doubts on, and from that point, they begin to clip away at the Bible with their intellectual scissors until there's absolutely nothing left.

The American founding father, Thomas Jefferson, actually did this with the four

gospels. He decided that he would read through the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and decide whether or not each passage was authentic. In the end, he was left with what we call the “Jefferson Bible” – a book that barely resembles the original because it’s one man’s opinion of what God should have said.

You know, some people are understandably horrified when they discover what Jefferson did with the New Testament, but to be honest, a lot of us have been doing the same thing with our Bibles – just in a different way. Instead of clipping and pasting our Bibles into a new format that suits us better, we take our personal agendas for the day and relegate the time we spend in God’s Word to somewhere between brushing our teeth and falling asleep. We push God’s influence – His private time with us – down our to-do list until it falls in with all of the other

not-so-important activities of life.

Let's be honest. In the twenty-first century, we're no longer the spiritual giants our forefathers used to be. Wander into a used bookstore some time and pick up a volume of sermons written by the great Christian preachers of yesterday. I think you'll notice something interesting – they were exceptionally biblically literate. They knew the Word of God inside and out. They could quote it from memory, and they still understood the irresistible attraction that made Luther willing to risk so much for this Book.

But that passion for the Word of God has been lost for most of us. Our devotional life is remarkably shallow, and we can't really say that the Bible is a guiding influence in our lives, because we just haven't read enough of it for that to be true. We spend more time reading books about the Bible than reading the Bible itself!

And sometimes that happens because we find other books so much easier to read. Maybe you've tried to make more time for the Bible, but you don't seem to get all that much out of it. Or maybe you'll read a whole page and suddenly realize you don't remember a word of it because your mind has been drifting off onto other subjects.

I want to give you some practical principles that will help you get back on track, and restore the Bible to its rightful place in your life. Because I'm a firm believer that you can't spend too much time learning to study

God's Word, I will emphasize a few principles that will make your devotional life better. If you take solid biblical principles and apply them to your study of the Bible itself, you can have a new vibrancy in your devotional life that will make you as passionate about God's word as Luther was at the Council of Worms five hundred years ago.

1. GREAT THINGS START SMALL

The **first principle** in breathing new life into your Bible study is: don't try to accomplish too much, especially as you're getting started. A lot of people suddenly decide that they're going to read through the Bible over the next year, and they start a reading marathon that drops off somewhere in the middle of the book of Leviticus. It is much better to pick a few verses and meditate on them than to leap over massive passages of scripture in a single bound.

My wife and I used to try and plow through whole chapters and even books of the Bible in a single sitting, but what we discovered is that when you try to accomplish too much, you spend more time thinking about your reading goals than the actual words of the Bible. We would read for an hour and come away having learned very little.

Now we do things a little smarter, and it's made all the difference in the world. Each night, before we head off to bed, we read just a few verses together, and then we discuss what we've read and we pray about it. It's a lot better to meditate on a few verses and apply them to your life than to read the whole Bible in a single sitting, even though that's a good idea too.

A few verses carefully thought through and applied to your life are going to make you love reading the Bible more. Day by day, you're going to see what a difference God's Word can make in your life. When you discover that God's promises are true for your life, you're going to want to read more of them. When you discover that the moral and ethical principles laid out in the Bible produce positive results in your life, you're going to find yourself eager to discover more of them. And when you start to see Jesus behind every

chapter, every verse, and every word, you're going to find yourself hungry for more. Eventually, you're going to find that a few verses just aren't enough, and you'll keep on reading because you can't wait to see what else God has in store for you.

2. APPLY VERSES THAT YOU'VE READ TO YOUR LIFE

And that brings me to **my second principle:** try to find a real way to apply what you're reading to your life. Take the verse and make use of it in your life. Let's suppose, for example, that you're reading this little passage from the book of Proverbs:

Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. Proverbs 6:6-8

When you're done reading those few

verses, ask yourself what principle is being taught. Well, to start with, these verses point out that the ant is hardworking, that it lays plans for the future, and that it doesn't need an overseer to be productive. So, you can take those characteristics of the ant and compare them to your own life. Ask yourself, "Am I hard working, or do I kind of slack off on the job? Do I make wise plans for the future, or do I just kind of live for the moment and make decisions based on gut instinct? And finally: am I really a self-starter who gets things done without being asked, or do I need constant supervision to be productive?"

Those are all really good questions, and that all came out of just one verse! I'm convinced, if we would spend more time reading just a few lines and finding a way to apply them to our own experience, our lives would improve a thousand percent in pretty short order.

Our job, as we examine a passage of scripture, is to look over our lives for that day and see where we can constructively apply the principles being taught. Pick just one thing and make a positive change. Maybe when you get to work today, it's time to uninstall that game of solitaire from your computer so that you're not tempted to waste productive time. Or maybe, when you have an opportunity, you could do something profitable for the company without first being asked. Whatever it is, take just one principle from your time in the Bible and create a strategy for implementing it that very same day.

And what you'll find is that reading the Bible becomes a lot of fun, because you're becoming a better person as you do it. Now, there's no doubt that you're going to misunderstand the odd thing that you read, or that it can take some time before you actually see the benefits of making changes. However,

in the long haul, you'll never be sorry you allowed the Word of God to chart your course through life.

If you just take what you're reading and find a way to apply it to your life, the Bible will become a living Book for you, because it's being lived out in your life!

3. FIND THE CROSS IN EVERYTHING YOU READ

The **third principle** is this: find the cross in everything you read. There is a scarlet thread that ties the whole Bible together, and that's the blood of Christ. If you read carefully, you will find the story of Jesus and the plan of salvation in absolutely everything you read.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Right in the beginning of the Bible, in the book of Genesis, we read that Adam and Eve found themselves naked after they had sinned, so they made themselves garments out of fig leaves. Now I don't know if you've ever tried to

stitch together a coat out of leaves, but one thing's for sure: it's not going to last very long.

And that's kind of a picture of what happens when we try to solve our own sin problem. Man's righteousness is like a flimsy garment made out of leaves, and in no time it falls apart, leaving us as miserable as ever. What we need is a solid covering.

And in the book of Genesis, God provides that very thing for Adam and Eve. Genesis chapter three says:

Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.
Genesis 3:21

When man couldn't find a decent solution to his nakedness, God provided something better. He gave Adam and Eve coats made out of animal skins, which would shelter them from the elements. But those skins came at a high price. Obviously, an animal had to die in order

for Adam to be clothed. And it's right there that the cross of Christ rises to the surface of the story. Thousands of years before the crucifixion, the human race was sheltered by a sacrifice, pointing us to the day when the Son of God would give His life so that we could wear a robe of righteousness.

Let me give you one more quick example of how the cross is found in nearly every story. Later on, in the book of Genesis, Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his only son. The parallel to God sacrificing His only begotten Son is pretty obvious, but the more you dig into this story, the more the cross rises to the surface.

Consider, for example, the fact that Abraham took his son to the "land of Moriah", which was in the region of Jerusalem. The temple was actually built on Mount Moriah, and Jesus was crucified nearby. That means the whole story of Abraham sacrificing

Isaac actually took place in the very spot where God's only Son would be sacrificed for the whole human race.

We read in Genesis:

So Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. Genesis 22:6

I hope you noticed something really interesting. It says that Isaac carried his own wood up to the sacrifice, and that's exactly what happened to Jesus, too. At the crucifixion, He was forced to carry His own cross.

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, used to say that no matter where he started in his Bible, he always made a beeline for the cross. Every page, every chapter, and every verse is a revelation of Jesus Christ. Without the context of the cross and the plan of salvation, you will never find the biggest treasures in

the Word of God, and you will never come to the truth on almost any subject.

Prayerfully search for the cross as you study, and you'll be absolutely surprised by how often its shadow falls across your path – and that's true for both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the cross is foreshadowed and predicted, and in the New Testament, you find it revealed.

4. TAKE NOTES AS YOU STUDY

A good **fourth principle** is to take serious notes as you study. A lot of people tell me that they have trouble getting anything out of their Bible study. "Pastor, some of these passages are just so long and boring!"

If you've ever suffered from that problem, try using a notebook to jot down your observations as you read. When you have questions, or something doesn't make sense, make a note of it.

I think you'll be surprised at how often the long, boring passages hold the key to answering your most important questions. Even the genealogies become really important, and eventually, you'll find that an hour a day just isn't enough anymore.

And if you're going to use a notebook, try something else. Try reading your Bible doctrinally. What do I mean by that?

In my office I have a bunch of three-ring binders with dividers. Each of those dividers represents a fundamental doctrine of the Bible, like "salvation," or "prayer," or "the Second Coming." As I read through the Bible, I jot down important passages of scripture in the appropriate section of the binder, and by the end of the year, I've built a personal concordance to the whole Bible. I can't tell you how helpful that can be.

Sometimes, as I look at a section at the end of the year, I discover that I've

had to change my mind about certain subjects more than once, because my pre-conceived notions didn't match what the Bible says over a wide range of passages.

5. ALWAYS LET THE BIBLE CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

When you're studying, assume that you're in a court of law where you have to prove to the jury that some fundamental principle of the Bible is true. This will force you to read the Bible from a new perspective, and will make you more prepared to share your Christian faith with other people.

In recent years, I've encountered an alarming number of Christians who seem to be somewhat embarrassed by their faith. I believe, that to a large degree, this is because they have never actually taken the time to prove the Christian faith to themselves from the

words of the Bible. They hesitate to share their faith because they don't really know what they believe. But if you study the Bible systematically and doctrinally every day, that kind of insecurity and embarrassment will vanish in the overwhelming beauty and consistency of what we believe.

There's another reason to study doctrinally, and it's this: a lot of us are quite sure of what we believe, but sometimes what we believe is nothing more than a thinly disguised paraphrase of our own opinion. We just use the Bible as a garnish for what we think, rather than letting it be the standard for what we believe – and that's a dangerous position to take.

Really, the only way to grow is to be humble enough to challenge your assumptions from the pages of the Bible, and adjust your thought patterns as you discover deeper deeper truths about the God we serve and love.

With a few basic principles and a time set aside to ponder the Word of God, I think you're going to discover where Martin Luther's courage came from. The Bible simply isn't like other books. It has a vibrant quality that God has breathed into it. If you start reading and studying it prayerfully, it will change your life for good.

DESERT REVELATION

The famous artist Holman Hunt once told his friends that he was planning to paint a picture of Jesus Christ. His friends told him it was impossible. "Listen, Holman," they said, "A real artist can only paint something he can see - so obviously you can't paint Jesus, because you've never seen Him."

"But you don't understand," the artist said. "I am going to see Him. I will work by His side in the carpenter's shop. I will walk with Him over the hills of Galilee. I will go with Him among the poor, the blind, the naked, and the lepers. I will travel with Him to Calvary and climb the cross with Him, until I see Him and know Him, and then I will paint Him."

And those who have seen Holman Hunt's painting know that he really did see something. He found a way to see Jesus when Jesus wasn't physically visible: he studied His life in the words of the Bible. And today, millions of people still find Jesus in the pages of this Book – but what if you lived thousands of years before the gospels were written? How would you see Jesus then? How would you get to know Him?

That's a pretty important question, because the Bible stresses that Jesus is the only path to the kingdom of heaven. No one, says the Bible, can come to the Father except through Him.² So what happens to all those people who lived thousands of years before Christ?

Well, for starters, Christ's existence didn't start when He was born in Bethlehem. He has always been there. The Bible says that He was "set up"

² John 14:6

from everlasting, and He was there all through the Old Testament. He can be found on every page, in every story. So, it's a little inaccurate to say that people who lived in Old Testament times didn't have access to Jesus. It's just that their access was a little different – they were looking forward in faith to the day when Messiah would come to solve the sin problem. They claimed the promise that God made to Adam right after the fall – that one day, the seed of the woman would come to crush the serpent.³

And so, in the Old Testament, God's people were saved exactly the same way that people are saved today – through faith in Christ. Now, there have been those who have suggested that in the Old Testament, people were saved by their obedience to God's law, and in the New Testament, there was a dramatic shift to salvation by grace through faith.

³ Genesis 3:15

But nothing could be further from the truth, according to the Bible.

You know, Martin Luther is famed for rediscovering the principle of righteousness by faith, and, as the story is told, he rediscovered that principle in a verse found in the book of Romans:

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith".
Romans 1:17

That one discovery changed Luther forever. He went from trying to please God with good behaviour and self-imposed punishment to someone who placed his faith entirely in what Jesus was able to do for him. He discovered "righteousness by faith."

But this was not a New Testament concept. In fact, you'll notice that when Paul said "*the just shall live by faith*," he was actually quoting the Old Testament. He was quoting the Old Testament book

of Habbakuk, chapter 2:

Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith. Habakkuk 2:4

Righteousness by faith, you see, is an Old Testament concept. The people who lived before the birth of Christ were looking forward to His arrival through the ceremonies and rituals that took place in the sanctuary. They followed His presence across the desert, they worshiped Him in the sanctuary, and they offered their sacrifices as a symbol of faith in what Messiah would do for them.

A CLEAR PICTURE OF JESUS - BEFORE HE WAS BORN

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the Israelites already had a clear picture of Him. The earthly tabernacle was carefully designed by God, not only to replicate a sanctuary in heaven (as the book of Hebrews

tells us), but also to vividly portray what Messiah would accomplish when He came. Let's take a look at it. The earthly sanctuary had two compartments – the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place, which was the innermost room, housed the Ark of the Covenant. This was where the glory of God's presence would rest when the Israelites pitched camp, and God actually spoke to Moses from between the two angels on top of the Ark of the Covenant. Here's how the Bible describes it:

And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat (which was the name for the lid on the Ark), from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel. Exodus 25:22

The Most Holy Place was actually a replica – a scaled down model – of the throne room in heaven’s sanctuary. The book of Revelation (Revelation 11:19) reveals that there is also an ark in heaven. Repeatedly throughout the Bible, God is referred to as One who “dwells between the cherubim.” ⁴

In His overwhelming desire to dwell with His people, God created a sanctuary where His presence could dwell without destroying the sinful Israelites.

Now, the Holy Place, or the first compartment, was separated from the Most Holy Place by a thick embroidered veil, and it had three articles of furniture inside: a seven-branched candlestick, a table for the shewbread, and an altar for burned incense. Each of these objects

⁴ See, for example, 1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2, 2 Kings 19:15, Psalm 80:1, Psalm 99:1, Isaiah 37:16, etc.

was specifically designed to teach God's people something important about His Son. They were an object lesson in the character of God, whose presence was manifested above the ark, just on the other side of the veil.

When you first walked into the Holy Place (or at least, when the priest did, because you and I wouldn't actually be allowed in there), there was a large golden candlestick immediately to your left. It stood almost five feet high and its branches, holding seven candles, spread out nearly three and a half feet.⁵

It was made entirely of pure beaten gold, and would have weighed almost 200 pounds, if you can imagine it!

This candlestick, with its seven branches, was the only source of light

⁵ F.C. Gilbert, *Practical Lessons from the Experience of Israel*, (South Lancaster, Mass.: South Lancaster Printing Company, 1902), p. 189.

inside the sanctuary. On top of each branch was a little oil lamp, and it was the responsibility of the priests to keep these lamps lit at all times.

It was a powerful symbol of the Messiah. So, what did it mean? The Old Testament prophet Zechariah gives us some important clues. In a dramatic vision, he was shown the candlestick being supplied with olive oil to keep it burning. He asked the angel what it meant, and this is what he was told:

...This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.
Zechariah 4:6

The olive oil that filled the seven lamps was symbolic of the power of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead. And when Jesus began His public ministry in the Jordan River, the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit fell on Him in the form of a dove, and a voice from

heaven declared Him to be God's Son. He was the light that came to a dark world and in the gospel of John, Jesus said this:

... I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life. John 8:12

There is no question, as you sort through the evidence in the Bible, that the light of the candlestick represents Jesus Christ.

Listen to what John says at the beginning of his gospel:

That (speaking of Jesus) was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. John 1:9

The candlestick pointed forward to Jesus Christ, the light of the world. When Jesus came to this planet after thousands of years of spiritual darkness, it was as if all the lights suddenly came on. Fallen angels had been lying to

people about the nature and character of God for years, but now people could see for themselves what God was really like.

And there was no mistaking it. You could see Jesus with your own eyes and hear Him with your own ears. When people spent time with Him, their hearts were opened, and many of them could see the light of truth for the very first time. They could sense, as Never in human history has there been a brighter light than Jesus. His teachings were pure truth, and His character was a vivid picture of our Heavenly Father. On one occasion, one of His disciples begged Him, "Lord, just show us the Father, and we'll be happy with that." ⁶ And Jesus answered him by saying:

...He who has seen Me has seen the Father... John 14:9

⁶ John 14:8

I've often tried to imagine the shock that Jesus must have been to the system after so many centuries of superstition and tradition that had been heaped on a religion that was once pure and focused on the presence of God in the sanctuary. It must have been tough for darkened eyes to get used to the light.

And sure enough, the Bible tells us that when Jesus threw on all the lights by coming in person, a lot of people had trouble with it. Here's what John said:

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. John 1:4,5

For the longest time, even those who were closest to Jesus had trouble understanding Him. John the Baptist had trouble understanding why he was rotting in prison if Jesus was the Messiah. Some of the people who followed Jesus had trouble understanding His mission,

and many of them walked away after they heard Jesus explain it. Judas had trouble with the fact that Jesus didn't want an earthly kingdom. The list goes on and on – but over time, especially after the cross, the disciples became used to the light, and were able to write about it for us in the Bible. And that's why today, you and I have access to unbelievable amounts of spiritual light in the pages of God's Book.

In that sense, the light didn't go out when Jesus returned to heaven. We still have access to it in the Bible, and through the influence of the Holy Spirit. And more than that – we have the promise that Jesus will be with His church until the end of time.

Years after the ascension of Christ, the disciple John saw Him in vision, dressed like a priest, standing in the middle of seven candlesticks.

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.
Revelation 1:12,13

A lot of years have gone by, and John is an old man, exiled to the island of Patmos. Suddenly, he sees Jesus in vision, and the Master is standing in the midst of seven candles. We're told specifically that the seven candles represent seven churches,⁷ which in turn represent seven periods of church history between the ascension of Christ and His return.

What is Jesus telling us? It's simple. His promise, in Hebrews 13:5, is that He will never leave us nor forsake us – and no matter what has happened over

⁷ Revelation 1:20

the centuries, Jesus has always been there with His people. The light of the gospel will never be extinguished, and the light of God's love will always be with His church.

Even though Jesus went back to heaven, He has never really left us - not even for a moment. He's still here, and what's more, He asks us to take the light of His love to a very dark world. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said this:

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

According to the Bible, the world ought to be able to see God's light in our actions. The things we say and the things we do should be like throwing on a bright light in a dark place so that everyone can see what God is really like.

And that's not the only lesson in the candlestick. The Bible says it was made of a single slab of pure gold, beaten into shape by a master craftsman. As the hammer fell on the gold, blow after blow, the echoes spoke of another Light who would be beaten – for the sins of the human race. Isaiah wrote these words, looking forward to the Messiah:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. Isaiah 53:4,5

You see, the light that came into the world did not come easily or cheaply. Jesus had to endure unspeakable cruelties and live an unbearably hard life to bring us the light of God's love. He was crushed under the weight of our sins as He wrestled for our salvation in

the Garden of Gethsemane. The Bible says that great drops of blood fell from His forehead as He agonized over your salvation. The blows of Roman soldiers fell on His back as He was mercilessly beaten with a crude leather whip embedded with steel bits - but worse than that, the blows of our sins fell on Him over and over, and He ultimately poured out His life on the cross for you. Jesus endured the hammer of affliction until He bought our salvation at the highest possible price. And that is the ultimate lesson of the candlestick.

Well, the next article of furniture in the Holy Place was the table of shewbread, which sat directly across from the candlestick, on the right-hand side of the room. It was a wooden table overlaid with gold, a little more than two feet high and three feet long. There were twelve loaves of bread on top of the table, one loaf for every tribe in Israel.

And just like the candlestick, this bread also pointed to Jesus, who called Himself the Bread of Life:

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.. John 6:35, 51

When Jesus chose bread as a symbol for His body, He chose something that everybody can relate to. Virtually every culture on earth has bread of some sort, and that's because bread has become one of the most important life-giving staples in history. Bread is not just important, it's completely indispensable – the same way the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is not just important; it's indispensable for our survival. Without

that sacrifice, we would be completely lost in our sins.

Just think about how important bread really is. When people gather for a meal, we sometimes say they “broke bread together.” The English word “companion” actually comes from two Latin words that mean “bread” and “together,” so a “companion” is literally someone you share bread with. Someone who works for a living is called a “breadwinner,” because bread is such a basic necessity of life, and during the last century, “bread” even became slang for money – because we all know you can’t live without it.

When Jesus compared His body to bread, He was trying to tell us that we need Him desperately. The cross is not a frivolous extra. It’s not icing on a cake. It’s the very source of our eternal life, and without the broken body of Christ on the cross, there would be no salvation for anyone, just like without

bread, entire civilizations have starved to death. Jesus Christ is not a religious luxury; He is a staple that we can't live without.

There was a third article of furniture in the Holy Place, right up against the veil: The Altar of Burned Incense. It was much smaller than the Altar of Sacrifice out in the courtyard: it was only about 91cm high and 69cm square. The High Priest burned a special compound of spices here, which produced a very sweet-smelling smoke. And the smoke would rise up from the altar and go over the veil into the Most Holy Place, right into the presence of God.

Now that incense was made from a very special formula, and the only place it was ever used was on the Altar of Burned Incense. If anybody tried to duplicate it for any other purpose, he was immediately and permanently evicted from the camp of Israel. And no fire could be used to burn the incense

except for fire that came from the Altar of Sacrifice outside.

So, what did it represent? Well, the Bible makes it clear in the book of Revelation, as John describes the altar of burned incense in heaven's sanctuary:

Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Revelation 8:3,4

What does it mean? Our prayers, by themselves, can't save us. Our prayers are so tainted by sin and selfishness that they simply can't be allowed into the courts of heaven, or the presence of God. But the Bible teaches that Jesus mixes our prayers with heavenly incense to make them acceptable. He is

the only Person who ever lived a perfect life and whose prayers are completely unblemished by sin. And now, the Bible teaches, He is serving as our great High Priest in the courts of heaven. As our prayers rise up to the throne of God, He blends them with His own righteousness, and makes them 100% acceptable.

As we stammer out our imperfect prayers, Jesus mingles His own prayers with them, making it all smell sweet before God. That's why you couldn't use any fire except that which came from the Altar of Sacrifice to burn the incense, because the only thing that makes us acceptable before the throne of God is the sacrifice of Jesus.

This whole sanctuary – every bit of it – pointed to something that Jesus would do for His people. And still today, if you study it carefully, you will discover remarkable things about a God whose greatest desire is to dwell with His

people. We do not need the sacrifices and the animals anymore, but we still need the lessons they taught us.

If you look carefully, you'll find Jesus hidden in the symbols of the sanctuary, and it paints a picture of a God who would do anything to make sure you made it into the kingdom of heaven. It's a path to the throne of God, paid for with the blood of Christ. How are you going to respond to the invitation of the sanctuary?

NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary-ruled notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

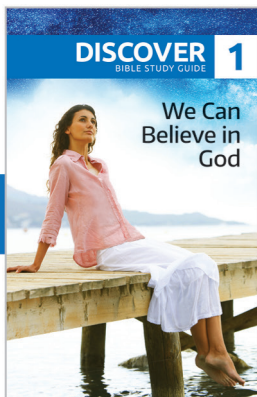
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Martin Luther lived in a tumultuous age. He stood firm on the promise of God's Word, and he ignited the Protestant reformation. Hundreds of years ago he called for the reformation in the theology and practices and that call still stands today.

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Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for The Incredible Journey ministry. He holds a B.A. in Theology, M.A. in Ancient History & Archaeology, and M. in Divinity. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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