FIRST AND SECOND TIMOTHY

**NOT Two Guys Named Tim**

If you were here last month, and weren’t totally freaked by our Q&A on “the Rapture” and “Second Coming of Christ,” you’re a survivor! Congrats. Welcome back for more of the biblical “X Files.”

Last month we waded, perhaps over your head *and* mine, into what the Bible says about Christ’s return for His true followers, followed by a 7-year period, “the Tribulation,” during which anti-Christ is revealed -- and which ends with the real war-to-end-all-wars-and-worlds, known as Armageddon.

Glen Ethier emailed me a Valley Girl’s definition: “**K**armageddon is like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the Earth explodes, and it's like a serious bummer.” Thanks, Rev. Glen!

# Finding Ground Zero

Civilization’s best-read book can loom pretty daunting without a road map. That’s where these lunches come in. Think of them as God’s little Triple-A, where we’re asking, “How can such an *old* Book matter to us literate, hip studs here in the wired world of ‘99?”

The Bible opens with the Old Testament (OT) describing Earth’s creation and its first humans -- no, they *aren’t* Bob and Libby Dole. With history, poetry and prophecy, the OT’s 39 books trace the Jews’ bumpy ride up to 400 years before Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem.

The New Testament’s (NT) 27 books describe the life and teachings of Jesus, God’s only Son, while He lived on earth. Next, the Acts of the Apostles relates the infancy of the Christian faith. Then a string of letters, most written by Paul, God’s first missionary to the Gentiles. The OT concludes with Revelation, the biblical Star Wars.

It took 1,400 years for some 40 authors, all directly inspired by God, to write the Bible. The OT was written in Hebrew and Aramaic. The NT in Greek. Yet, with so much diversity spanning many centuries, it tells *one* story -- **God loves us so much that He wants us to live *with* Him forever.**

But wait, the Bible is just *one* of *many* approaches to God, right?

At http://www.leaderu.com/cl-institute/openforum/index.html

Mike Metzger sheds light on tectonic sliding in our “culture plates.”

He believes “an underground shift has taken place in the way Americans make assumptions about life and faith. … our basic outlook on life has morphed into … a new set of assumptions labeled *postmodernism*.”

 “… Most visibly, it has created a "cult of niceness" where everyone wants to be in a ‘sensible center.’” This niceness insists that everyone can define and experience “the God they *want*,” not “the God Who *is*.” Postmoderns don’t want to be handcuffed to *any*body’s dogma, certainly not the Bible’s! Let’s just “make nice.”

If there’s one agenda behind these lunches, it’s this:

**Reality is what *God* says it is. Re who we are, how we got here, what God is like, what do we do about our sin condition, and what’s next -- all the reality God says we *need* to know has been written and preserved in His love letter to us, His Manufacturer’s tutorial, the Bible.**

During these lunches we hope to get better acquainted with that Manual, learning how to face reality, then what to do about it.

Paul writes, **“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on *human* tradition and the basic principles of this *world* rather than on *Christ*.”** (Colossians 2:6-8):

Competing belief systems want you even more desperately than do New York smile-and-dial stock peddlers. It’s easy to be lured from Christ’s teachings into Bogusville.

# Taking A Spiritual Compliance Check

Like deer in the headlights, some people are frozen in their tracks, opting to do nothing about Y2K ……… yet. This is also often how one reacts upon first hearing the Gospel.

Maybe it goes like this ….. Out of the blue you accept some media guy’s invitation to have lunch in Nordy’s boardroom, and, boom, …

**… you read in the Bible that Jesus literally came to earth 2,000 years ago and died on a cross -- in your place -- so that God the Father might, in His justice and mercy, forgive you of *all* your sins. Jesus, in effect, paid *in full* -- with His life -- the price that was on your head.**

**You hear that this forgiveness makes you totally clean in God’s sight, that it’s your ticket to spend life-after-death with God *in heaven* instead of turning on a spit in a place the Bible calls *hell*. Hey, this kind of news could change a guy’s future forever!**

**You hear that to be forgiven, you don’t *pay* anything, *stop* doing anything, *start* doing anything -- you just:**

**(a) Agree with God that you’re a sinner -- not that you’ve *ever* committed one …. we were just *born* that way! Next …**

 **(b) With childlike faith you invite Christ to take charge in your life, even in your current, not-ready-for-prime-time state. Jesus becomes Da Man for you. And ….**

1. **You start taking baby steps to "follow Christ,” whatever *that* means.**

# Whoa, That’s a Big Gulp. Hit The Pause Button!

Does this splash of the Bible’s version of reality freeze you in your tracks? Do you feel stuck in these headlights? If so, why?

#  “On the Road” with Paul

Ron Grossman wrote in *The Seattle Times* 12-25-98: “… wherever (the Roman Empire’s) legions went, they laid down roads -- 53,638 miles of main highway stretching from Palestine to England, from North Africa to Germany.” Paul covered many of those miles, commuting between Palestine and southern Mediterranean countries, then concluding his hall-of-fame tour in Rome where he was beheaded for simply preaching about Jesus.

Born about 3 A.D. to Jewish parents in the (now Turkish) city of Tarsus, Paul is first named Saul, like the Jews’ first king. He takes formal rabinnical training in Jerusalem. In his zeal to protect the Jewish faith against the early Christians’ assertions that Jesus was their longed-for Messiah, he rabidly tortures them.

Saul is an accessory to the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Then Saul hears Christ’s voice en route to Damascus and does a 180 to follow Him, *becoming Paul* whom God taps to tell the world that He no longer holds our sins against us, that we can have a guilt-free, Father/son relationship with Him that’s a *gift* from God, *not* something we work to *earn*.

Paul insists that one’s walk with Jesus Christ does not begin with something *we* do; it begins with what He *did* at the cross where He paid the debt that erased our sins once and for all!

Delivering this radical message often resulted in Paul’s being stoned, jailed, shipwrecked and then killed by a Roman executioner.

At least NT 13 books were written by Paul, most to specific churches he’d founded on his three missionary treks about 48-56 A.D. when he taught in some 30 cities, in several languages. These “churches” met in homes since church buildings were not erected ‘til Roman ruler Constantine the Great who himself in 312 A.D. embraced the Christian faith. A year later, with co-emperor Licinius, he ends Rome’s persecution of Christians. Later he rebuilds Constantinople (now Istanbul) as “the new Rome.”

From 56-60 A.D. Paul is tied up in Roman courts, arrested for preaching about Jesus whom the Empire regarded as a political threat. 60-61 A.D. Paul is held in house arrest in Rome, then released 62-67 A.D. Now he drops off two brilliant understudies to pastor two key start-up churches -- Timothy in Ephesus (now western Turkey) and Titus on the island of Crete. Later he writes each a letter (the NT books of I Timothy and Titus) about 63-66 A.D. Recaptured and locked in a dungeon in Rome for the rest of his days, Paul writes Timothy a second letter in about 67 A.D. when he’s 64. It’s his last NT letter.

**Who’s On First, Timothy?**

If you’ve ever turned over your job to a successor, you know how scary it is to let go and trust somebody to build on what you started. This is where Paul is in writing I Timothy to a young pastor, about age 30, beginning his pastoral career in Ephesus, a city consumed with worshipping the pagan deity Diana, the Greeks’ love goddess.

Paul meets Tim on his first missionary trip to Lystra (southern Turkey). Tim’s about 16, and when he first hears Paul tell about Jesus Christ, he believes him. Now, years later, Paul is assigning a key pulpit to Tim, and he writes him about (a) what the Christian church *really* is -- and (b) what real Christian love is. From the git-go Paul instructs Tim to oppose *false* teaching. Let’s read ch. 1:1-20.

With wicked Nero torching Christians for kicks, Paul urges Tim to pray for *every*body, even our national leaders. Let’s read ch. 2: 1-7.

Paul urges young Tim to *not* concentrate on pulling doctrinal weeds from his church’s garden; just bear down on (a) preaching God’s Truth and (b) setting a godly example himself. Let’s read ch. 4:1-16.

Since you may not run across Paul’s slant on wealth in a Wade Cook seminar, let’s check it out in ch. 6:6-21.

**Got a Second, Timothy?**

Author Oscar Wilde died in 1900 in a drab Paris hotel. His last words are said to be, “Either that wallpaper goes, or I do.”

As a rule, one’s dying words are some of his most profound. In 1995 at my Mother’s bedside, knowing that her brain was flooded with cancer, I said, “Mom, if I could, I’d trade places with you.” She replied, in one of the last coherent things she ever said to me, “No, son, God has a lot left for you to do.” I’m assuming she was right.

Stuck in a dank prison cell about 20 feet in diameter, awaiting one last appeal to Nero, ditched by most of his friends who feared Rome’s wrath toward Christians, Paul writes his final NT letter, his second letter to Timothy, who’s now about 35, in far-away Ephesus across the Aegean and Adriatic Seas.

The evil Empire that dominated that first century was in moral decay, even paralyzed by a Nero Basketball Association (NBA) lockout. In this letter Paul bequeaths his final wisdom to Tim, i.e., “how to remain strong in the midst of a collapsing civilization.”

Paul’s counsel to Tim, and us: (a) guard the Truth, (b) find your strength in God, (c) avoid life’s traps and (d) don’t be ashamed to speak up -- and live -- for God. Let’s read ch. 1:1-18.

The victim mentality is in today. Here’s a man who lived large but understands there’s a cost to be paid for hanging out with Christ. But Paul knows the price is well worth the value-add. Let’s read ch. 2:1-15 and ch. 3:1-17.

Paul’s final challenge to Tim is a motivational masterpiece in light of his condition, i.e., chained deep in Rome’s infamous Mammertine Prison. Just think -- Nero, a tyrant, famous ‘round the world. And Paul, languishing, innocent, in a dungeon. Yet 20 centuries later, parents still name their son Paul --- and their dog Nero. Let’s read 4:1-22.

His Deal

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