

# Solid Ground

Enhanced

A Foundation for Building Ambassadors

Celebrating 20 Years of Ministry

March/April 2015

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### MISQUOTING GOD: VERSES COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD, MISCHARACTERIZED, OR MALIGNED PART II

In this issue of *Solid Ground*, I show you how to focus on the flow. I use passages routinely misunderstood to demonstrate the power of following the train of thought of an author through the passage to unlock its intended meaning. It's the second installment of "Misquoting God: Verses Commonly Misunderstood, Mischaracterized, or Maligned."

God promised that His Word would not return void (Is. 55:11), but that only applies when His word is used as *He intended it to be used*. Learn from this month's *Solid Ground* how to follow the flow, and you'll ensure that your efforts in God's Word will not return void to you.

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Thank you,

*Greg Kousser*





March 1, 2015

Dear Friend,

“What does it mean in the Greek?” is a question you’ll hear in disputes over the interpretation of words in controversial passages. Usually the Greek won’t help much, though. Here’s why.

Definitions—even in the original languages—can only tell you the range of meaning under normal circumstances. They can never tell you how a word is being used in a particular instance or if the literal meaning is being leveraged as a figure of speech.

Dictionary definitions might get you started if a word is foreign to you, but you need more. You need to “go with the flow.” Being alert to the flow of thought or line of argument of the biblical writer is always much more important than thumbing through a Greek word study.

In this issue of *Solid Ground*, I show you how to focus on the flow. I use passages routinely misunderstood to demonstrate the power of following the train of thought of an author through the passage to unlock its intended meaning. It’s the second installment of “Misquoting God: Verses Commonly Misunderstood, Mischaracterized, or Maligned.”

God promised that His Word would not return void (Is. 55:11), but that only applies when His word is used as *He intended it to be used*. Learn from this month’s *Solid Ground* how to follow the flow, and you’ll ensure that your efforts in God’s Word will not return void to you.

When you have a clear—and correct—understanding of God’s Word, you’ll be properly grounded to advance the truth claims of Scripture in the public square. Equipping you to do that is our mission.

Your gift this month will help us train you and other Christian Ambassadors to think more clearly about the faith—and to graciously defend it with understanding.

To that end, will you provide a gift of any amount today?

Thanks for your generous partnership which allows us to continue to grow together in God’s Word.

Faithful to the Word,

Gregory Koukl





# MISQUOTING GOD: VERSES COMMONLY MISUNDERSTOOD, MISCHARACTERIZED, OR MALIGNED PART II

By Greg Koukl

I would like to rescue you from a mistake virtually every Christian makes now and then when they go to the Bible that prevents you from knowing what God is saying to you personally in His Word. You may not thank me, though, because some of what I have to say will probably irritate you.

In the last issue of *Solid Ground*,<sup>1</sup> I explained why the question “How does *this verse* apply to my life?” is often the wrong one to ask when studying Scripture. The reason is that, in most cases, God did not give verses of the Bible as discrete, individual pieces of information meant to be on their own— isolated from the larger narrative—are meant to be applied piecemeal to our lives.

Instead, there is a flow of thought tied to—and therefore critical to—the meaning of each part. “Going with the flow” of the broader passage is key to accurately determining how the text’s particulars apply to our individual lives. That “flow” includes not just the paragraph, the chapter, or even an entire book, but sometimes also involves (as we’ll see later) where the writing is positioned in the flow of history—the flow of the biblical storyline—as God’s promises and purposes are worked out through Israel, and later through the church.

If you miss this flow of thought, you’ll likely miss the meaning. If you miss the meaning, you’ll miss what God is actually saying in the text. If you miss that, well, you’ve missed everything. Worse, you might be doing yourself and others harm by passing on as God’s lesson something He had nothing to do with.

Sometimes this concept is better caught than taught, so let’s explore a few examples to make the point clearer.

## A Thousand-Year Day

On occasion in the age of the Earth controversy, proponents of an ancient universe press into service a verse from 2 Peter to bolster their view that Genesis 1 allows for a long passage of time. Their reason: “...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years...” (2 Pet. 3:8). Days don’t always mean days, they conclude. They could mean millennia.

Regardless of the validity of that particular point regarding the use of the word “day,” this is not what Peter had in mind. He gives a simple simile: “a day is *like* a thousand years.” He then reverses himself (a point often missed in this discussion), “...and a thousand years *like* one day.” Why the turnaround?

A closer look at Peter’s flow of thought (v. 3-8) clears up the confusion. In the last days, he says, mockers will come challenging the promise of Christ’s return (v. 3-4). Nothing’s happened for so long, they maintain, nothing’s *ever* going to happen.

Peter reminds them that dramatic interventions by God *have* taken place, and there’s more to come. God’s plan is surely unfolding, *but at His pace* (v. 5-7). Peter’s apparently conflicting statements are meant to instruct us that God’s personal *experience* of time is nothing like ours. Ask a child to wait a week for something special and it seems like an eternity, but for adults “the years fly by.”

Peter is not giving any instruction on calculating time here. Rather, he’s reminding us that the psychological *sense* of time’s beat is subjective. He’s warning us not to be seduced by the *feeling* of tardiness. The passage of a day or even a thousand years is nothing *to God* (v. 8). To us He may



seem slow—“as *some* [humans] count slowness.” For God, though, there is no sluggishness, only patience. He is slow to visit wrath, but He is quick to extend mercy (v. 9).

### Making Metaphors

These next passages are pastors’ favorites since they make popular fodder for sermons. Jesus stills the storm. Peter walks (momentarily) on water. We find a record of the tempest in Matt. 8:23-27, Mk. 4:36-41, and Lk. 8:22-25, and of Peter’s attempt in Matt. 14:30-33. The sermon take-away: Jesus can “still the storms” in your life. “Keep your eyes on Jesus” and you won’t “sink.”

Notice the temptation when teaching from the Gospels (or any narrative, for that matter) to make metaphors of historical events in the text that, as it turns out, were included in the account to make entirely different points.

Certainly, if Jesus can command the forces of nature He is fully *capable* of quieting the tempests in our lives. That doesn’t mean He *will*, of course. He might, rather, walk us *through* them—which is more often the case in actual practice. (As one of my early mentors pointed out, Jesus is not the bridge *over* troubled waters, but He can pull you *through* the troubled waters if you can stand the tow.<sup>2</sup>)

Regardless, Jesus’ help in time of trial is not why this account is in the narrative. At best that’s a secondary—and therefore less important—application. The writers were making a different point. Why did the inspired authors include this event in the record? What conclusions did *they* want us to draw from it?

In this case, there’s no mystery since the account itself provides the answer—easy to see if you follow the flow. Note the authors’ virtually identical application at the end of each version: “They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, ‘*Who then is this*, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?’” (Lk. 8:25)<sup>3</sup> and

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WE ARE IN THE CARE OF THE VERY  
MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE. WE ARE SAFE  
BECAUSE JESUS IS GOD.

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“Those who were in the boat *worshiped* Him, saying, ‘*You are certainly God’s Son!*’” (Matt. 14:32-33).

When Jesus works these wonders, the authors do not reduce the events to metaphors. They offer no counsel about keeping our eyes on Jesus who will quell the conflicts in our lives. They include these events not so much to comfort us with Jesus’ *capabilities* as to instruct us on Jesus’ *identity*. This is about Him, not us, about the person of Christ, not our personal woes.

Clearly, there is a lesson about trust in the midst of difficulties in these accounts (weak faith is upbraided in each of them), but that instruction is grounded in a more central point: We are in the care of the very Master of the universe. We are safe because Jesus is God.

Do not make metaphors out of historical events in the text. Do not make a secondary application into the primary one and miss the very point the original writers were making in the first place. Instead ask, “What does the *writer* mean to communicate by including this event in his account? What is *his* point?” Then look to the flow for the answer and draw your lessons from that.

### Everything’s Good

One of the most magnificent promises in the Bible is one that’s almost universally misunderstood, at least in part. It’s [Roman’s 8:28](#), loosely quoted, “All things work for good.”

The fact is, though, all things don’t work out “good.” Some things work out very bad, even for Christians. This can be incredibly disheartening when Romans 8:28 is your fallback verse in hard times, yet conditions don’t appear to improve.

The problem is not in the promise, but in people’s reading of the promise. First, the passage: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).







## GOD'S PROMISE: NONE OF IT WILL BE WASTED

Notice first there are confidence phrases in this promise and there's a qualifier. "We *know*," "God *causes*," and "*all* things" are the confidence builders. Some readers miss the qualifier, though: "to those *who love God*, to those who are *called according to His purpose*."

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AND THAT IS AS "GOOD" AS IT CAN GET—  
BECOMING LIKE JESUS. NOTHING BETTER.

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Everything doesn't work out well for everyone. For the individuals afflicted by it, most of the world's misery is wasted. Only the one who loves God—the genuine Christian, in Paul's meaning ("called according to His purpose")—can rest on Paul's assurance.

Even so, a gnawing doubt remains: "But don't good, godly, faithful Christians often find themselves enduring intractable difficulties that some grapple with even to their graves? Where's the 'good' in that? Whatever happened to 'God doesn't close a door, but He opens up a window'?"

Here's the problem. We often take "work together for good" to mean that whatever loss we suffer in life will be repaid with interest later on in life. We

suffer relational heartbreak, only to later marry a much more suitable person than the one we lost. Romans 8:28. We lose our job, only to secure a more lucrative position down the line. Romans 8:28.

And sometimes that happens. Testimonies abound. But that's not what this verse promises.

Paul has something entirely different in mind. You'll find it when you follow the flow to the next verse: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become conformed to the image of His Son*" (Rom. 8:29).

When hard times assault us, we claim Romans 8:28 with one "good" in mind, yet God has an different "good" in store: For the committed

Christian, God pledges to use every hardship, disappointment, trouble, or affliction *to make us more like Jesus*—"conformed to the image of His Son."

Maybe you lose the girl and then remain single—like Jesus—the rest of your life. Maybe your stock options fall through and you remain poor—like Jesus—the rest of your life. Maybe you're convicted of a crime you did not commit and you suffer unjustly—like Jesus—the rest of your life.

God's promise: None of it will be wasted. That is the assurance of Romans 8:28-29. And that is as "good" as it can get—becoming like Jesus. Nothing better.

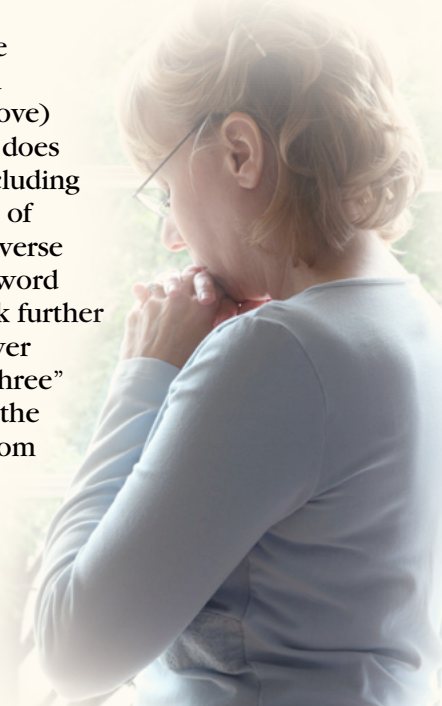
### Two or Three Gathering

This next passage is usually cited to build confidence for group prayer. "Jesus is right here with us," we're told, "since after all, 'Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst'" ([Matt. 18:20](#)).

I have often wondered if anyone using the verse this way ever asked themselves where Jesus was when they were praying alone in private, or when the group consisted of four or more.<sup>4</sup> No, something else is going on here. Once again, the flow tells the story.

The preposition "for" at the beginning of our verse (often dropped when recited, as above) is our first clue this sentence does not stand alone, but is a concluding statement at the end of a line of reasoning. It alerts us to the verse before it that starts with the word "again," alerting us to go back further still. When we do, we discover that the concept of "two or three" is repeated multiple times in the section, a notion Jesus lifts from [Deut. 19:15](#).

The flow reveals that verses 15-20 form a unit instructing in church discipline that's sandwiched between two other lessons on repentance,



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The case for the pro-life position—that elective abortion unjustly takes the life of a defenseless human being—is extremely solid. Science, philosophy, and moral common sense all testify to the soundness of the pro-life argument. But keeping track of the details in the face of the opposition’s flawed reasoning and emotional appeals can sometimes be difficult. That’s where this quick-reference guide comes in.

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### Naturalism: Bumping into Reality, Gregory Koukl – \$8.95 \*NEW\*

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The common worldview among most scientists today has a name—actually, a couple of names. It is variously called “physicalism,” “materialism,” or “naturalism,” since the basic concept asserts that reality consists of nothing but the physical, material world governed by nothing but natural law. Thus, C.S. Lewis called it the “nothing buttery” view.

However it’s characterized, it’s a significant obstacle keeping many skeptics from taking the Christian account of reality seriously. In this presentation, Greg offers a critique of naturalism, developing three solid lines of reasoning to show naturalism’s inadequacy and Christianity’s superior “explanatory power” as a reliable guide to understanding the world.

### Taking God at His Word, Kevin DeYoung – \$17.99

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forgiveness, and restoration.<sup>5</sup> Jesus' lesson is governed by a common-sense notion from the Law, "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (v. 16), technical legal language requiring multiple attestation to affirm a charge of misconduct.

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IT'S A PROMISE OF DIVINE SANCTION  
OF A PROCEDURE, NOT DIVINE PRESENCE  
IN GROUP PRAYER.

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Here is Jesus' point in verse 20: When the church follows the specific procedure He outlines to resolve the issue of sin in the Christian community, then the leadership can rest assured He is "with them" in their decision. Indeed, Jesus is "there in their midst" conferring His authority to the process. It's a promise of divine sanction of a procedure, not divine presence in group prayer.

Ironically, plenty of groups cite this promise to assure themselves of Jesus' presence in prayer, while precious few apply the lesson of church discipline that Jesus had in mind in the first place.

### Prosperity, Welfare, and Hope

Our next passage is among the most cherished passages in Scripture of late, yet is also the most abused. [Jeremiah 29:11](#) simply reads, "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'

This verse shows up everywhere—on bookmarks, bumper stickers, posters, graduation cards, signature lines in emails, even cross-stitched onto pillows—cited as God's personal promise to every believer who finds himself in severe straits.

Here's our question: Is this a proper Christian promise? We deal with that question like we've dealt with the rest—by going with the flow. In this case, though, the flow takes us beyond the verse, beyond the chapter, and even beyond the book of Jeremiah itself.

To get started, let's look at the entire promise, not just that portion commonly quoted.

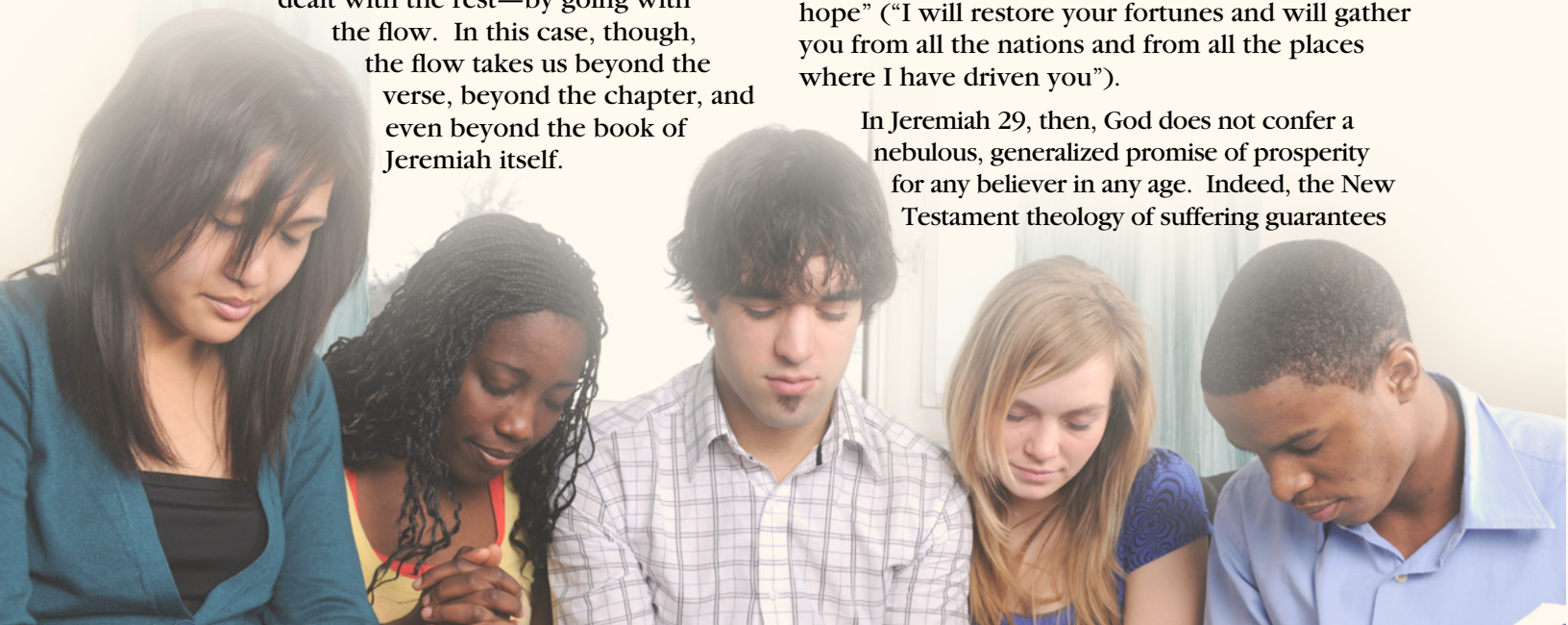
*"When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you," declares the Lord, "and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile." (Jer. 29:10-14)*

Notice that this promise is directed to a specific group of people ("I will visit you") in a peculiar set of circumstances (Babylonian exile), details already provided in the opening verse of the chapter:

*Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (29:1)*

Follow the flow and you'll discover more boundaries the author places on the promise. Verses 2-7 show God's intention to limit the promise to a precise set of circumstances in Judah's history. Verse 10 identifies the exact time of the promise's fulfillment ("When seventy years have been completed"). And verse 14 gives the specific content of the "plans for welfare" and the "future... hope" ("I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you").

In Jeremiah 29, then, God does not confer a nebulous, generalized promise of prosperity for any believer in any age. Indeed, the New Testament theology of suffering guarantees





just the opposite for us.<sup>6</sup> Instead, God gives a *specific* assurance of *particular* benefit to a *distinct* group of people at a *precise* time. This is exactly how Daniel understood Jeremiah 70 years later when he read this passage, then humbled himself in confession and repentance on behalf of the nation to trigger the pledged restoration ([Dan. 9:1ff](#)).

More problematic for the one tempted to individualize Jeremiah’s promise for himself, not even the letter’s recipients could do that. Jeremiah’s word was not for those *individual* captives—the elders,

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IT WAS A PROMISE OF FUTURE WELFARE FOR  
THE NATION, NOT OF PROSPERITY FOR  
ANY PARTICULAR PERSON.

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the priests, the prophets, the people—since virtually none would be alive long enough to cash it in. It was a promise of future welfare for the *nation*, not of prosperity for any particular *person*.

There’s something else I want you to notice: two predictions in this chapter for God’s people, not just one. The first is the familiar one, the encouraging promise of restoration, welfare, a future, and a hope. The second also gives an assurance, but of an entirely different kind:

*Behold, I am sending upon them the sword, famine and pestilence, and I will make them like split-open figs that cannot be eaten due to rottenness. I will pursue them with the sword, with famine and with pestilence, and I will make them a terror to all the kingdoms of*

*the earth, to be a curse and a horror and a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them. (Jer. 29:17-18)<sup>7</sup>*

Who wants to stitch *that* on a pillow? The “them” of this ominous word are also Jews—the ones who refused to obey Jeremiah and join those in exile, but instead followed the lead of the false prophets and stayed in Jerusalem.

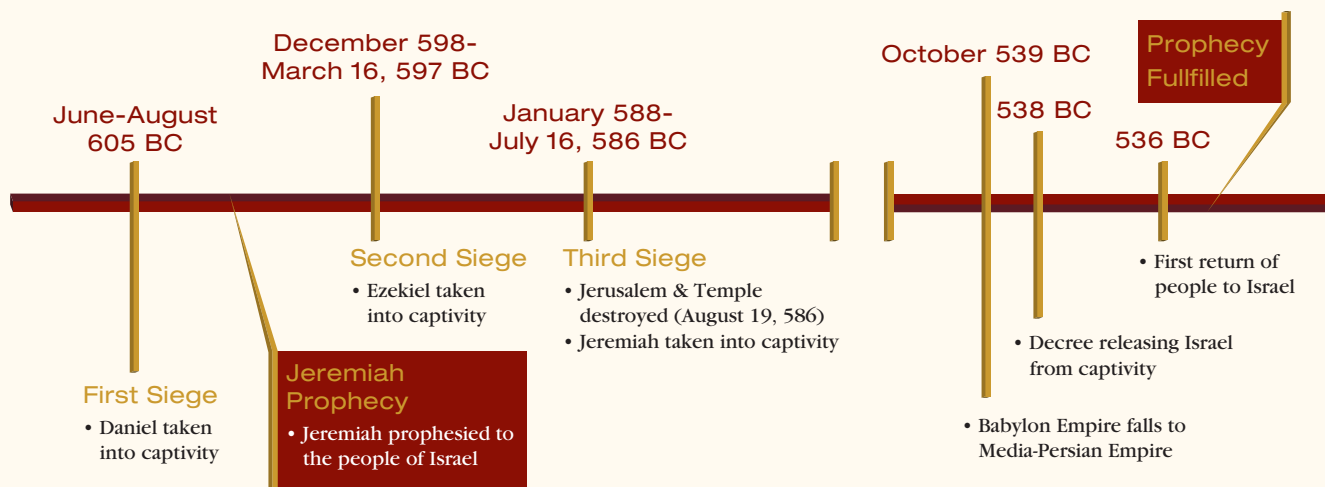
Jeremiah 29, then, records two distinct and opposite plans for God’s people: one for welfare and not calamity, the other for calamity and not welfare. For those looking for personal promises in this passage, which of these two applies to them? Fortunately, this passage

does not predict calamity for you or me. But neither does it predict welfare. Both predictions in this passage are for the tribe of Judah and for Judah alone.

There’s one final “flow” you must not miss governing the meaning of this chapter: the larger flow of God’s covenantal dealings with Israel. It’s right there at the beginning of the promise, but you might have missed it:

*When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans that I have for you...*

Sounds a bit like these plans God has in mind are actually designs He’s mentioned before—not something new, but a reaffirmation of a prior promise. As it turns out, it is.





Keep in mind there are two covenants in play here at this point in history with the Jews. The first is the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant ([Gen. 12:1-3](#)) where God promises protection for Abraham's seed who will ultimately bring blessing to all the nations of the earth.<sup>8</sup> The second is the conditional Mosaic Covenant (Leviticus, Deuteronomy) promising prosperity for obedience and cursing for disobedience.<sup>9</sup>

Jeremiah is writing to warn a nation in disobedience that they are about to suffer the consequences previously promised ([Mosaic Covenant](#)), but also to remind God's people of His pledge of ultimate restoration ([Abrahamic covenant](#)).<sup>10</sup> Both blessing *and* cursing are in store for Jeremiah's audience, then, precisely what God promised nearly a thousand years before:

*So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, **the blessing and the curse** which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, **and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.** ([Deut. 30:1-3](#)).*

Notice the highlighted phrases that almost word for word repeat what we find in the promise of Jer. 29:12-14.<sup>11</sup> There's really nothing new here. God simply reaffirms His covenant faithfulness to His chosen people during a time of extreme chastisement. There are short-term plans for discipline, but long-term plans for prosperity. Both are completely consistent with the covenants God had already pledged for Israel.

Neither plan has anything directly to do with New Testament Christians. The church must take its promises from other passages.<sup>12</sup>

## WDJD—What Did Jesus Do?

When Jesus confronted the Sadducees on the question of resurrection, what did Jesus do? Jesus corrected them: "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures" ([Matt. 22:29](#)).

Two things are immediately obvious from this statement. First, in Jesus' mind there were right and wrong answers to theological questions, and in this case the Sadducees got it wrong. Second, they faltered, in part, because they did not understand the text.

God promises His Word will not return void, that is, it will succeed in the matter *for which He sent it* ([Is. 55:11](#)). If you use God's words in a way other than what God intended, though, it will do you no good. *Your efforts will return void.* Instead, follow the flow and you'll be much less likely to miss the powerful things God is saying to you personally in His Word.

## Your Support Makes a Difference

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Our mission—no, our passion—at Stand to Reason is to help you develop as a Christian Ambassador who can handle the Word of God carefully, communicate its knowledge clearly, and defend it graciously. This is possible because faithful friends like you support STR's efforts prayerfully and financially. Your gift today helps ensure that STR continues equipping followers of Christ to promote "Christianity worth thinking about."



## Stand to Reason Speakers Near You



### Greg Koukl

#### March

[13](#) Summit Ministries Retreat, Glen Eyrie, CO [Contact](#)

[20-22](#) First Baptist Church, Paducah, KY [Contact](#)

#### April

[9 & 11](#) Olive Baptist Church with Biola Apologetics, Pensacola, FL [Contact](#)

[16](#) Crossroads Pregnancy Center, Hanford, CA [Contact](#)

[24-25](#) Emmanuel Church, Barrie, ON, Canada [Contact](#)



### Alan Shlemon

#### March

[1](#) Faith Beyond Belief Apologetics Conference, Calgary, Canada [Contact](#)

[3, 10](#) North Coast Church, Vista, CA Time: 4-5 p.m.  
Topics: "Never Read a Bible Verse" [Contact](#)

[10, 17](#) North Coast Church, Vista, CA Time: 4-5 p.m.  
Topics: "Never Read a Bible Verse" [Contact](#)

[15](#) DaySpring Christian Church, Gardena, CA Time: 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Topics: "The Case for Intelligent Design" [Contact](#)

[23-24](#) Oregon Right to Life, Portland, OR Topics: "Making Abortion Unthinkable", "Stem Cell Research & Cloning" [Contact](#)

[28](#) Church Everyday, Northridge, CA Topics: "Ambassadors for Christ", "Tactics in Defending the Faith" [Contact](#)

#### April

[10-11](#) Prepare the Way Ministries, Portland, OR  
Topics: "Tactics in Defending the Faith", "Homosexuality: Truth & Compassion" [Contact](#)

[18](#) Crossroads Community Church, Valencia, CA  
Time: 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Topics: "Homosexuality: Truth & Compassion", "Making Abortion Unthinkable", "The Case for Intelligent Design", "A Closer Look at Islam" [Contact](#)



### Brett Kunkle

#### March

[1](#) Faith Beyond Belief Apologetics Conference, Calgary, Canada [Contact](#)

[8](#) Chino Valley Community Church, Chino, CA Time: TBD  
Topic: "TBD" [Contact](#)

[12-14](#) Great Homeschool Convention, Greenville, SC  
Time: TBD Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[18](#) Church Everyday, Northridge, CA Time: 7pm  
Topics: "Mormonism 101" [Contact](#)

[21-22](#) Desert Springs Community Church, Goodyear, AZ  
Topics: "Mormonism 101" [Contact](#)

[24](#) Orange Lutheran High School, Orange, CA  
Time: 9:00 a.m. Topics: "The Atheist Challenge"—Private event

[29](#) Grace Christian Fellowship, Costa Mesa, CA  
Time: 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Topic: "Does God Exist?" [Contact](#)

[30-31](#) Christian Heritage School, Trumbull, CT Time: TBD  
Topic: TBD [Contact](#)

#### April

[1](#) Christian Heritage School, Trumbull, CT Time: TBD  
Topic: TBD [Contact](#)

[9-11](#) Great Homeschool Convention, Cincinnati, OH Time: TBD  
Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[18-26](#) Thinking Matters, New Zealand [Contact](#)

[19](#) Grace Christian Fellowship, Costa Mesa, CA  
Time: 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Topic: "Can We Be Good Without God?" [Contact](#)

[29](#) Church Everyday, Northridge, CA Time: 7pm  
Topics: "Mormonism 101" [Contact](#)

To get information about inviting an STR speaker to your church, email [Dawnielle@str.org](mailto:Dawnielle@str.org) for Alan or Brett, or [Melinda@str.org](mailto:Melinda@str.org) for Greg.



## Putting This *Solid Ground* into Action

- Keep in mind, the Bible was not meant to provide individual pieces of information to be applied to our lives apart from the larger narrative.
- It is important to always follow the flow of thought. “Going with the flow” is key to accurately determine the meaning of a particular text and how it applies to our lives today.
- Be careful to not make a secondary application into the primary one and miss the very point the original writers were making. Instead ask, “What does the writer mean to communicate by including this event? What is his point?”
- Remember God’s Word will not return void, and if you use God’s words in a way other than what He intended it will do you no good.

### Endnotes

1. *Solid Ground* “Misquoting Jesus,” January 2015
2. I owe this insight to Tom Brewer.
3. Cf. Mark 4:41, Matt. 8:27.
4. Of course, Jesus *is* with us whenever we pray, wherever we pray, but that’s not what this passage is about.
5. Cf. v. 12-14 and v. 21-35.
6. The NT is filled with references, but for starters read through 1 Peter, especially 1:6-7, 2:19-21, 4:1, 4:12-19, and 5:8-10.
7. Verses 15-32 give the entire prophecy.
8. A promise fulfilled in its ultimate sense through Jesus and the New Covenant.
9. Find those details in Deut. 28-30.
10. Find the covenantal promise of the land in Gen. 15:18-21.
11. See also Deut. 4:24-31.
12. E.g., “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb. 13:5), etc.

**Greg Koukl** is available to schedule to teach for your church service, youth group, or conference. Contact STR today for information about Greg and STR’s other speakers.


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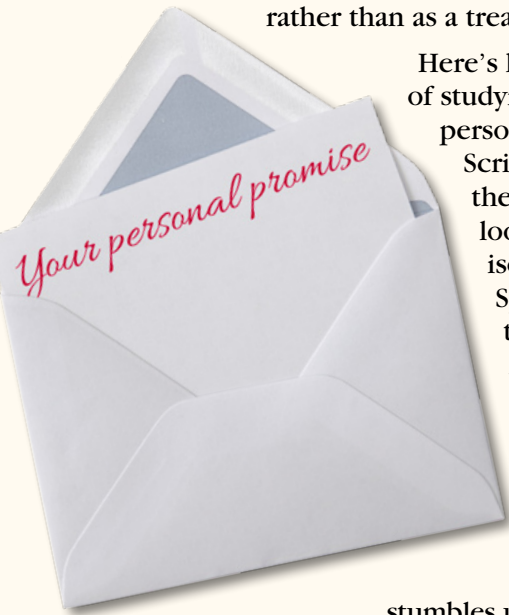


EXPERIENCES LIKE THESE ARE POWERFUL  
BECAUSE THEY SEEM PERSONAL.  
BUT THERE'S A PROBLEM:  
ACTS 16:31 IS NOT HER PROMISE.

## Silly-putty Bible Study

By Greg Koukl

Some Evangelicals have developed a dangerous habit: They use the Bible to find a personal “promise” or “word” of guidance from the Spirit unrelated to the text’s original meaning rather than as a treasure of truth of all.



Here’s how it works. Instead of studying to find legitimate personal application of Scripture to their lives, they read the Bible looking for verses or isolated phrases the Spirit “impresses” on them with personal messages foreign to the context.

For example, a Christian woman who has been praying for her family’s conversion stumbles upon Acts 16 during her quiet time. Her eyes settle on Paul’s response to the Philippian jailer who asked, “What must I do to be saved?” “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved,” Paul answered, then added “you and your household” (v. 29-31).

Encouraged by these words, the woman begins to claim the “promise” that her own household will be saved, with the justification that “The Holy Spirit gave me this verse.”

Why would she use wording like that? Because the verse wasn’t hers to begin with. Rather, she believes, under the Spirit’s influence there is a mystical transformation that takes place causing the meanings of the words to change for her, conveying a private message not intended for anyone else.

Notice, her confidence is not based on the objective meaning of the text, but on the unique subjective meaning given to her by the Spirit in the moment. I or any other Christian, for that matter, could not claim that verse for myself unless the Holy Spirit “gave” the verse to me, too.

Experiences like these are powerful because they seem intensely personal. But there’s a problem: Acts 16:31 is not her promise. It’s the Philippian jailer’s promise, if it’s a promise at all. This is an abuse of God’s Word. It’s also deeply relativistic.

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