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287 Beulah Road; Dripping Springs, TX 78620

Dear supporters and friends,

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem sits on a hill at nearly 2,500 feet above sea level, and is surrounded by valleys. The so called “Songs of Ascent” found in Psalms 120-134 (sometimes referred to as the “Psalms of Degrees”) is a group of fifteen Psalms that many scholars believe were sung by Jews on their pilgrimages from the lower elevations of the Bible lands, quite literally, up to Jerusalem. Others believe the “ascending” is a musical reference referring to the notes which rose in degrees. Another tradition suggests that these psalms were sung by the Levites at the dedication of Solomon's temple during the night of the fifteenth of the month Tishri. There is also a tradition found in the *Mishnah* that these fifteen psalms were sung on the fifteen steps in the court of the women—steps which, in the temple, led up to the court of Israel. Whatever their original intent, Psalms 10-134 were undoubtedly meant to honor God by helping worshippers approach the temple mount with reverence and gratitude.

When I read the Psalms of Ascent, I am filled with gratitude. Not only because of the great God we serve, but because of the people we get to meet along life's journey, you, our supporters, and friends. We are also filled with gratitude because of the projects and assignments with which we are tasked. Many of our regular tasks such as writing, Carla's podcast, teaching and preaching appointments, etc. continue to keep us busy. In addition, we have been blessed to continue working on the Temple Project. We've just completed the first two episodes and are prayerful that the entire series will reach its completion by fall. It was decided that we should wait until all five episodes have been completed before we release any of the episodes for public viewing. Mat Cain and Patrick Hammack continue to do an excellent job on the video and graphic illustrations and we are indebted to World Video Bible School for all of their support and help on this massive project. When it is completed, we believe it will be of great benefit to the brotherhood, and for reaching souls with the gospel. Here are the opening lines for Part IV, called “Beyond the Barrier.”

“Two-thousand years ago, a pilgrimage to the grand temple built by King Herod the Great would have been mesmerizing. It was one of the great wonders of the world and was four times



Bear Valley's 2023 graduation class!



John with some of the 2023 BVBI grads: Daniel Besterwich, Justus Bobo, and Garrett Akin



Destiny Jimenez (between Lauralee Simmons and Shelby Polk) recently obeyed the gospel. The initial seeds were planted by John's mother when Destiny was her caregiver.



A fun visit to the Ark Encounter in Kentucky

bigger than the acropolis in Athens. Entering through its gates and walking among its porticoes was awe-inspiring, but at the temple’s epicenter a highly emotional and dramatic experience awaited the Jewish worshipper. But why? What was so significant about crossing through barrier and into court of the women? What occurred in the court of Israel, and what distinctive furnishings and sacred adornments were present within the holiest place on earth?”

Each episode is designed to capture a different aspect of the temple, it's history, importance, and relevance. Please continue to pray for this effort as it involves a lot of moving pieces and people that can only give attention to it as time allows with our other projects as well as those of Mat and Patrick.

Finally, the last month has given us some greatly needed time at home to work on other projects both related to our ministry and to our home. This time at home has allowed me to write a manuscript for the Bear Valley Lectureship, write articles for brotherhood publications,

provide counseling for others, and to help where we can in the local congregation in Dripping Springs. We’ve also really enjoyed just being at home for a few weeks and having the opportunity to prepare for other upcoming speaking engagements and activities. Because of you we have been able to work in the present, but also prepare for the future. Thank you so very much for all your love and support. Your partnership in our work is critical to what we do. God bless you and yours.

John

Alumni Highlight

Matthew and Haley Hite (and Kaylynn!)

Matthew and Haley Hite graduated from Bear Valley Bible Institute in May of 2020 and are now involved in an excellent work at the Jersey Village Church of Christ near Houston, Texas. Haley serves as the church secretary, and Matthew as the Youth Minister. They began working at Jersey Village in October 2020 and have taken on many other responsibilities in the congregation beyond youth ministry. Their sweet daughter, Kaylynn, was born in November of 2022. Matthew is an excellent student of the word, preacher, and writer. He and Haley have a great future ahead of them in ministry and both come from families with a legacy of great works in the Kingdom. We are blessed to have had a small part in their training, but above all we are thrilled at all the good they are doing throughout Houston and the brotherhood.



**2023
Schedule:**

- May thru July
WVBS Temple Project
Looking Up Podcast
Area Summer Series
Lessons
- August-October 2023
Bear Valley Bible Institute
August 16-24, 2023
(J&C) Polishing the Pulpit
- September 7-9, 2023
(C) CFYC retreat
Madill, OK
- September 22-24
(J&C) Marriage Seminar
Tilton, NH
- October 12-27, 2023
(J&C) Discovering the Bible
by Sea - Mediterranean
Cruise/Study Tour
- November-December 2023
WVBS and other TX
projects

Carla's Comments

Dear friends,

Recently I received a text from a young friend who is searching for the truth about God. She is struggling in her understanding of who God is, and has some sad misconceptions about His expectations in our lives. Her feeling is that God is manipulative and aloof, telling us that we are lost without Him and allowing His children to suffer unnecessarily. I was so glad that she reached out to me and was honest about her feelings! Not long ago she metaphorically “went...into a distant country” apart from God. Sometimes I find it hard to know how to handle a situation like this, not wanting to say or do anything that might show approval when someone is living in a sinful situation, and as a result I end up saying and doing nothing to attempt to bring them back from that distant country. I know that is not helpful at all.

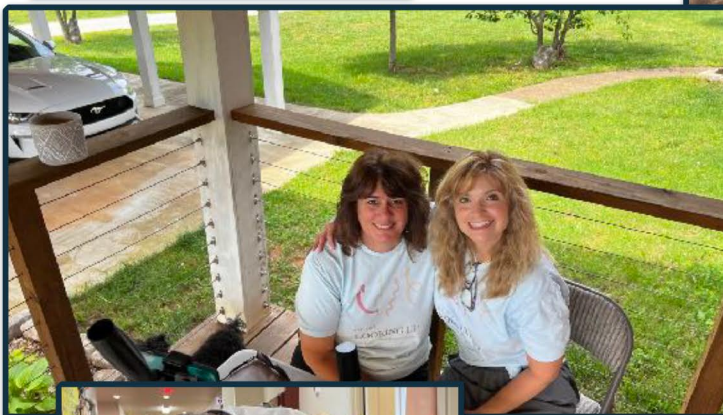
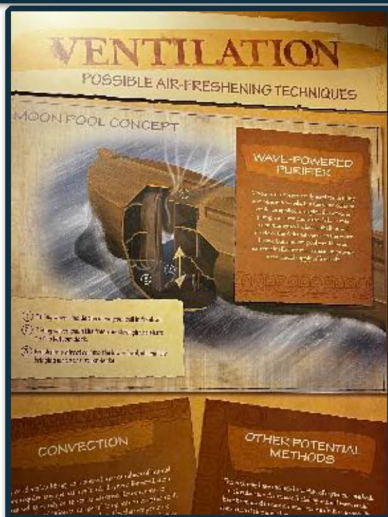
I love this young woman so much. I ache for her. It hurts me to know that she has such a skewed perspective of God, the very one who formed and fashioned her and loves her and is always looking down the road for her return! She was raised knowing truth, but the world stepped in and, ironically, sadly, manipulated her. It makes me so angry that the devil never stops looking for someone to completely destroy! So I will do my best to stay in contact with her and demonstrate to her who God truly is. Yes, we are completely lost without God. Not because God has turned His back on us, but because He is the Light that saves and defends us and illuminates our path (Psalm 18:28; 27:1). Here is part of my reply to my friend. Please pray for me to be able to say the right things in the right way to help her know God again!

“I think your perspective is skewed. It’s not a vengeful or vindictive “you’re lost without me...etc” it’s just a statement of fact. We are lost without him. If you can imagine a small child (I think of my grandchildren) in the middle of a crowded city street, alone. They are lost and in terrible danger without me (or their parents, but stick with me). I know how to rescue them and take care of them. I know where we are. I know how to get where we want to go. But they would be completely, utterly LOST without me there. Being immature and stubborn, they may THINK they know where they’re going or where they are, but there would be so many terrible people just waiting for the chance to snatch them up and hurt them, which just absolutely tears my heart out! I would do anything to save them from that. Obviously we can’t let children have a choice like that. ****I**** would reach down and grab them and hold them and carry them to safety. But God, in creating humans with the ability to choose (and would you rather NOT be able to choose?) It’s because of his love for us that he allows us to choose. He’s not going to *make* us choose him. He *wants* us to choose him. He’s done everything to help us make that choice. But we still have to make it ourselves. The Bible tells us over and over how he reaches out to us and calls us back to him.”

Shifting gears: May and June were two very different months. May involved houseguests (the Petrillos, here for Focal Point), preparing for a number of lessons including Focal Point and a ladies day in Richmond, KY, several flights, car rentals, a visit with our good friends Neal and Kathy (and a trip with them to see the Ark Encounter!), Bear Valley graduation activities, helping to babysit grandchildren, a big Moore family fishing trip, several podcast recordings, and more! June involved far less. We’ve loved being home and working on projects, seeing Mom, getting exercise clearing cedar from our property, riding our bikes again, and sleeping in our own bed! We love you all and are more appreciative than we can express that your love, prayers, financial support, and encouragement keeps us going! THANK YOU!!! Love, *Carla*



(L-R): I spent 45 minutes in the airport with Jake, after which we went our separate ways!...Naomi Racine (center) is an amazing woman from Panama who will graduate from Bear Valley in December (though she “walked” during the May graduation ceremony) and was excited for her mother to visit during graduation weekend...Emmy, Clara and Jackson, how we love them!...I was so proud of Katy Ballance, a Bear Valley graduate who spoke at Focal Point!



Mar/Apr (l-r): Some "A-roll" footage of the Temple Project... John speaking for the Gabriel Oaks congregation's summer series...one of the fascinating displays at the Ark Encounter that explained how the ark might have functioned... John with some of the men at the Richmond, KY church of Christ...Carla with Elsie, a young woman who is involved in writing scripture... Carla and Kathy Pollard preparing to record an episode of their "Looking Up" podcast... "Pa" with our precious Turner...Pa and sweet Alivia...with Wayne and "Weezie" Burger at the Bear Valley graduation banquet. Wayne and Weezie are preparing to move to New Hampshire to plant a church there.