

# **Collected Sunday School Lessons**



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*Cover photograph by Earle Neil Kinder.*

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*Soli Deo Gloria*

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## AN EVERLASTING POSSESSION

As we saw in our study of the life of Abraham, the Lord promised to give the entire land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. Now, if God had only mentioned that promise once and never spoke of it again, that would still have been enough to make His will clear. God never goes back on His word; when He promises something, whatever He promised will come to pass. In this case, though, the Lord didn't mention it just once; He actually *repeated* this promise on numerous occasions. God wanted to make it absolutely clear, beyond any possibility of doubt, that He was giving the land of Canaan to the Jews.

The first time God made this promise was when Abraham first arrived in Canaan:

**Genesis 12:5:** "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7 And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him."

As we can see in verse 7, the Lord promised to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. After God made this promise a famine arose and Abraham left Canaan and traveled to Egypt. When he finally left Egypt and returned to Canaan the Lord repeated the promise:

**Genesis 13:14:** "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed **for ever**."

As He had done before, the Lord promised to give all of the land of Canaan – including all of the land that Abraham could see – to Abraham and to his descendants *forever*. No conditions were placed on this promise; Abraham did not have to do anything in order to keep the land. It was an unconditional promise. God was going to give the land to him *and* to his descendants, and it would belong to them forever. This promise could not be annulled or forfeited.

Some time later, after Abraham defeated the kings that had kidnapped his nephew Lot, the Lord once again repeated this promise:

**Genesis 15:18:** "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:"

This is the third time that God said that He was giving the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. That is not the last time, however. Shortly before Isaac was born, God promised the land to Abraham yet again:



**Genesis 17:4:** “As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

As you can see, God promised to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites a total of *four times*. The Lord said on two separate occasions that the land would be theirs **forever**: once in Genesis 13:14, where He said that the land would be theirs “for ever”, and again in Genesis 17:8, where He said the land would be their “everlasting possession”. No conditions were placed on this promise; the Israelites did not have to do anything in order to keep the land. The Lord was giving it to them freely and it was their land forever, and they could never lose their right to it. It was a permanent, irrevocable gift.

Now, it's true that during the time of Moses the Lord said that if the Israelites disobeyed Him He would evict them from the land. However, that eviction would be temporary and they would not lose their title to the land. Even if they were not living in the land it would remain theirs. We find this in the book of Deuteronomy:

**Deuteronomy 29:24:** “Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger?”

25 Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt:

26 For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them:

27 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book:

28 And the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.”

The Lord made it clear that if the Israelites forsook Him He would curse them and root them out of the land. However, the loss of the land would not be permanent. If they repented He would bring them back:

**Deuteronomy 30:1:** “And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee,  
2 And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with

all thy soul;

3 That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.

4 If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee:

5 And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers."

While disobedience could get them removed from the land, even *that* would not cause them to lose the land forever. The land still belonged to them, and the Lord would never break His covenant with them or cast them away. We find this in the book of Leviticus:

**Leviticus 26:42:** "Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.

43 The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes.

44 And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God.

45 But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD."

The phrase "covenant of their ancestors" is very important. It does *not* refer to the Mosaic Law, since the Lord was currently in the process of giving that Law to Israel. The covenant God is talking about in verse 45 is the covenant He made with their ancestor Abraham – the promise to bless Israel and give them the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. No matter what Israel did, the Lord would never utterly cast them away. He would never abandon them. The Jews would always be His people, just as surely as the sun shines by day and the stars shine by night:

**Jeremiah 31:35:** "Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name:

36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

37 Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD."

I want to be absolutely clear on this point. God gave the land of Canaan to the nation of Israel, and it is theirs and theirs alone. He gave it to them with no conditions attached; it was to be theirs

forever as an everlasting possession. If Israel abandoned God He would evict them from the land, but that eviction would not be permanent; He would remember His covenant with Abraham and would bring them back. No matter what, though, the land was theirs and it would always be theirs.

Some might argue that God placed the condition of circumcision on the covenant that He made with Abraham. It is true that He said this:

**Genesis 17:11:** “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you.”

However, note that circumcision was a *token*, or sign of the covenant. Those who did not do this were “cut off” (as it says in verse 14), but it did *not* abrogate the covenant as a whole because *the covenant was unconditional*. No matter what happened, no matter what the Israelites did, “all the land of Canaan” was theirs “for an everlasting possession”.

The reason I am emphasizing this is because many Christians today have no idea that Israel has any special significance to God. They think that when the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD that God was finished with the Jews, and from that point on the Church became God's only special people. (This school of thought is called “replacement theology”, and it gets its name from the idea that the Church has “replaced” Israel.) They see no significance in the modern nation of Israel and do not believe that Israel has a right to that plot of land in the Middle East. They incorrectly think that God has abandoned Israel forever and that the Jews are no longer God's chosen people.

This is a very great error. As we saw in Jeremiah 31, God has made it clear that there is *nothing* Israel can do to get Him to abandon them. They will always be His people because His covenant with Abraham was unconditional.

It is true that after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem the nation of Israel was exiled for a long time – but that long exile actually fulfills an Old Testament prophecy. In fact, not only does the Bible predict a long exile, but it even foretells the date when Israel would become a nation again. We can find all of this in Ezekiel 4:

**Ezekiel 4:1:** “Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem:

2 And lay siege against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it; set the camp also against it, and set battering rams against it round about.

3 Moreover take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face against it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.

4 Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity.

5 For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

6 And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year.

7 Therefore thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it.

...

13 And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them."

Here we find that God is using Ezekiel as an object lesson. The Lord was going to punish Israel for 430 years (390 years + 40 years), and to illustrate this God commanded Ezekiel to lie on his side for 430 days. This was done as a sign to the house of Israel, but the Israelites paid no attention to the warning. Instead of repenting they hardened their hearts, and God's judgment came upon them – exactly as Moses had forewarned in the book of Deuteronomy. Israel abandoned God and so God removed them from the land. As was foretold, they were carried into captivity by the Babylonians and spent the next 70 years in exile.

Back in Deuteronomy God said that if He exiled the Israelites *and they repented* He would regather them to the land. After the 70 years were over God kept His promise and returned Israel to the land. However, Israel still refused to repent. Because of this the Lord only allowed a small remnant of the Jews to return to Israel in 536 BC. The rest of the nation remained scattered abroad, as the Lord had threatened in verse 13.

When the Jews returned home only 70 of the appointed 430 years had taken place, which still left 360 years of punishment. However, the fact that the Israelites did not learn their lesson during the first 70 years activated this provision of the Mosaic Law:

**Leviticus 26:23:** "And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me;

24 Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins."

This says that if God punished the Israelites and they refused to repent, God would multiply their punishment by seven.  $360 \text{ years} \times 7 = 2520 \text{ years}$ . Since the Bible uses 360-year days in its prophecies, that would equal 2,483.8 of our calendar years. (The math:  $2520 \text{ years} * 360 \text{ days} = 907,200 \text{ days}$ .  $907,200 \text{ days} / 365.25 \text{ days per year} = 2,483.8 \text{ years}$ .) So, if you add 2,483.3 years to the spring of 536 BC (keeping into account there was no year 0, only 1 BC and then 1 AD), you get the spring of 1948. (Math:  $1948 + 536 = 2484$ .)

When did Israel become a nation again? On May 14, 1948. This time, however, more than just a small remnant returned to the land; there are now millions of Jews living in Israel, and more continue to move there as time goes on. This process will only accelerate as the time of Christ's return draws near. The Lord is calling His people back to their promised land.

On top of this, Israel became a nation in a *single day*, just as the Lord had foretold through Isaiah:

**Isaiah 66:7:** "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.

8 Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

9 Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? Saith the Lord: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? Saith thy God."

It seemed very unlikely that Israel would become a nation again in a single day, but that is exactly what happened. The modern regathering of the Jews to Israel is not a random historical event; it is the fulfillment of prophecy. In fact, when God said that He would disperse the Jews, He also said that He would regather them a *second time*:

**Isaiah 11:11:** “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.”

The Israelites have been dispersed twice: once when they were deported to Babylon and once when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The first time they were regathered was in 536 BC after spending 70 years in Babylon; the second time was in the modern era. The modern nation of Israel, therefore, represents the *second time* God has regathered them. God promised to bring His people back to the land and He has done so.

The Bible goes on to say that the nation of Israel will never be destroyed again:

**Amos 9:15:** “I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.”

The reason God has regathered them is to save them and turn their hearts to Him, and He will accomplish exactly that:

**Hosea 3:4:** “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim:  
5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”

Do you see what this is saying? Israel did “abide many days” without a king, or sacrifice, or even a country. Now they have returned “in the latter days”, as it says in verse 5. The phrase “David their king” refers to the Messiah; the passage is saying that when Israel is regathered they will seek the Lord, and ultimately the Messiah as well. (That, however, is a topic I've discussed elsewhere so I won't repeat it here.)

What I want to focus on is that the land of Israel belongs to the Israelites. It does not belong to anyone else. God made that promise to Abraham and He later confirmed that promise to Jacob – thus making it clear that the land was being given to the *Jews*:

**Genesis 35:11:** “And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;  
12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.”

God was very specific when it came to the ownership of the land. The Arabs are the descendents of Abraham's son Ishmael, but the land was not given to them. The Palestinians are the

descendents of Isaac's son Esau, but the land was not given to them. The land was given only to Jacob's offspring, the Jews. Even the city of Jerusalem was given to the Jews:

**Zechariah 8:7-8:** “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.”

There is one other point that needs to be brought out. The land promise was not the only promise that God made to Abraham; there was something else as well. We can find it in Genesis 12:

**Genesis 12:3:** “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

As Christians we know that Jesus is the descendent of Abraham that God used to bless the entire world. In Him all the families of the earth are blessed indeed! However, we often overlook the rest of the verse. God was not just talking about Abraham here; He promised bless those who blessed the Jews *and to curse those who cursed them*. God has some very harsh words for those who would try to harm Israel:

**Zechariah 2:8:** “For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”

Later in Zechariah God elaborates on this theme. He makes it clear that He is going to destroy all nations that seek to harm Israel:

**Zechariah 12:9:** “And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

These verses are describing a time when Israel (the “house of David”) will finally realize that Jesus is the Messiah and will repent as a nation. It says they will “look upon me whom they have pierced” – a reference to Jesus. (We know this day is drawing near because verse 10 says that when this happens the Israelites will possess the city of Jerusalem, and the Jews regained control over Jerusalem in 1967. The Jews will actually repent at the very end of the Tribulation, but that is a topic for another time.) The key point that I want to emphasize here is verse 9, where God says that He will seek to destroy “all the nations that come against Jerusalem”. God takes attacks on Israel *personally*.

God makes this even more clear in the book of Joel:

**Joel 3:1:** “For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

2 I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of

Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land."

Here God says that when He has returned Israel to the land and has given Jerusalem back to her, that He would gather all nations and judge them. The reason God is angry with the nations is because they have scattered the Jews and have "parted my land". In other words, God is incredibly angry with the world because they have *taken land away from Israel*. Taking land away from Israel *really* upsets God.

The fulfillment of these verses is not far off. In recent history God did indeed "bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem". On top of that, over the past few decades the nations of the world have tried very hard to divide Israel (especially Jerusalem!) and take away her land. These events that God foretold centuries *before* the birth of Christ are happening in our lifetime.

Zechariah expounds on this a little further and points out something very important:

**Zechariah 14:2:** "For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."

In verse 2 we see the same language as in Joel 3:2. However, a very important detail is added: on the day that the Lord gathers all nations to Jerusalem so He can judge them, the Lord will fight against them *in person*. Verse 4 says that "his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives". This event is quite famous; people usually call it the Second Coming. When Jesus Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation, the city of Jerusalem will be under attack; the nations of the world will have gathered around it and captured it. In response Jesus will come back to Earth, destroy those nations, and put an end to all those who threatened Israel. To put it another way, at the Second Coming Jesus returns *to defend Jerusalem on Israel's behalf*. He comes back so He can (among other things) *personally* kill all those who have dared to come against Israel and take what God has given to her.

God makes one point very clear: the land of Israel belongs to the Jews, and God gets *very upset* when people try to take that land away from her. The Lord said "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye", and He meant it. In fact, the day will come when God will get so upset at what people are doing to Israel that He will return *in person*, with the armies of Heaven, to destroy all those that have come against her. (You *know* a nation has crossed the line in a big way when God actually leaves Heaven so He can *personally* destroy it!)

The point I'm trying to make is that taking land away from Israel is a *really big deal* in God's sight. He hates it. He gave that land to Israel and it belongs to them. Those who try to take it away from her do so at their peril.

This peril is not merely theoretical. I believe that God has actively pursued what He said in Genesis 12:3 throughout history. Those nations that have blessed Israel have been blessed, and those nations that have cursed Israel (or have tried to take away her land) have been cursed.

For example:

**October 30, 1991:** President Bush announced a new Middle East peace plan, in which Israel would be forced to surrender parts of its land in return for peace – including parts of Jerusalem.

**October 30, 1991:** A powerful storm suddenly developed off the coast of Nova Scotia, which quickly reached hurricane strength. The next day the storm (which by now was hundreds of miles wide) smashed into New England, then traveled down the East Coast into the Carolinas. It caused millions of dollars in damage and was nicknamed “The Perfect Storm”. (The storm was so significant that a book and a movie were written about it, both named *The Perfect Storm*.)

President Bush owned a home in Kennebunkport, Maine, that was heavily damaged in the storm. The storm hit his home on the same day that the President initiated the Madrid Peace Conference, in which Israel was pressured to give up land.

**August 24, 1992:** The Madrid Peace Conference was moved to Washington, D.C., making it the first time that conference was held on American soil. Not only was Israel going to be pressured into giving up more land, but the Palestinians were going to be governing the land that Israel would have to give up.

**August 24, 1992:** Hurricane Andrew hit Florida and became the worst natural disaster ever hit to America (up to that time). \$30 billion in damage was done. The hurricane struck just a few hours before the Madrid peace conference began.

**September 13, 1993:** In Washington, DC Israel signed an agreement with Yasser Arafat, surrendering Gaza, Jericho, and the West Bank to Palestinians.

**September 13, 1993:** Hurricane Emily hit North Carolina, doing \$1 billion in damage.

**January 16, 1994:** President Clinton met with Syria's dictator, President Hafez Assad. They talk about making peace with Israel, and the agreement they came up with included Israel surrendering the Golan Heights to Syria.

**January 17, 1994:** A 6.8 magnitude earthquake hit Los Angeles, causing \$25 billion in damage. This happened less than 24 hours after President Clinton pressured Israel to give up more land.

**September 27, 1998:** Secretary of State Madeline Albright met with Arafat in New York City, to finalize an agreement in which Israel would surrender 13% of its land in exchange for peace.

**September 27, 1998:** Hurricane Georges hit the Gulf Coast, doing extensive damage to Mississippi and Florida. The hurricane then stalled, causing severe flooding. The total damage came to \$5.9 billion.

There are many more examples I could give, but in the interests of time I'll limit it to one more. In April 2005 President Bush met with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon in order to set a timetable for



Israel's withdrawal from 25 Jewish settlements. The process was started on August 16 and it was completed on **August 23, 2005**. Approximately ten thousand Jews were forcibly evicted from their land. The reason this happened is because President Bush put enormous pressure on Israel to evict them and give that land to the Palestinians. In fact, the United States offered to give Israel \$1.2 billion in order to relocate the settlers. (In other words, the United States was actually *paying the bill* to make this happen.) This was the first step in evicting all Jews from Gaza in order to further Bush's plan to establish a Palestinian state.

The eviction of these settlers was not a minor task. Thousands of people lived there. The area was a major agricultural center of Israel and produced about 15% of Israel's vegetables. It took 40,000 troops to force the settlers to leave. After they were evicted the army demolished their homes and destroyed their settlements. The last settler was removed on August 23, and on that date President Bush praised Prime Minister Sharon for his "courageous decision to withdraw from Gaza and parts of the West Bank."

One might ask: what else happened on **August 23, 2005**? A tropical depression formed over the Bahamas, which grew into Hurricane Katrina. I don't think I have to tell you what happened when Hurricane Katrina hit the United States. The total damages from that storm came to a staggering \$81 billion.

Some might say that it's just a coincidence that every time America forces Israel to give up her land, some terrible disaster happens. If so, it's really an amazing string of coincidences! This phenomenon doesn't just apply to the United States; it can also be seen in other countries. For example:

**March 9, 2011:** Japan announces that they are sending the Palestinians millions of dollars so that they can create a state with Jerusalem as its capitol. (To do this, of course, Jerusalem will have to be taken away from the Jews.)

**March 11, 2011:** Japan is hit by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake – the worst it has ever experienced in its history. The damage from that earthquake was estimated to be *\$300 billion*.

**July 21, 2011:** Norway's prime minister goes to an island in Norway that is home to a youth camp. He announces that Norway is going to support a Palestinian state and will help the Palestinians take land away from Israel. The youth in the camp are excited about this and shout that they, too, want to help destroy Israel.

**July 22, 2011:** Anders Breivik just happens to travel to that very same island in Norway and just happens to open fire on those very same young people. 69 people are killed and 110 are injured. It was the deadliest attack in Norway since World War II; 25% of Norwegians knew someone who was affected by the attacks.

If this is all just a coincidence then it's the most amazing set of coincidences in all of history. These things happen like clockwork: whenever a nation decides that it's going to try to take away Israel's land, something enormously bad happens to them. This happens over and over and over again. You don't have to take my word for it, though; just wait until the next time the President goes to Israel and forces her to give away her land to her enemies. Then see what happens.

I believe that God is fulfilling His promise to trouble those who trouble Israel, and I think this phenomenon will continue to occur. As America and other nations continue to force Israel to give up

her land, you can expect even more breathtaking disasters. God is not a respecter of persons.

Now, I'm not saying that every natural disaster that happens is because of this; there are many things that happen simply because we live in a fallen world. However, God has been known to judge nations that have transgressed His laws (remember Sodom and Gomorrah?), and I believe He continues to do so today. After all, God does not change.

The final judgment, though, is still ahead of us. One day the nations of the world will gather against Jerusalem in order to destroy her and her people. They will invade the city and they will sack it, but then Jesus will come back in person to destroy them all. He will put a final end to all those who seek to trouble His people.

# ARE PEOPLE JUST ANIMALS?

As time has gone by I've noticed more and more people referring to humans as "just another animal." What they mean by this is that the life of a human being is no more important than the life of any other living creature. If it is wrong to kill a man then it is also wrong to kill a squirrel. Some people refer to Thanksgiving as "Turkey Murder Day" and speak of the "execution" of thousands of turkeys as if it was some sort of modern holocaust. These people see no distinction between human beings and the animal kingdom. "We're all just animals!" is their battle cry.

While the world may not see a difference between people and porcupines, the Bible presents a very different view of creation. It teaches that mankind is entirely different from any animal. This can be seen right from the very first chapter in the Bible. In Genesis 1 we find this account of God's creation of the animal kingdom:

**Genesis 1:20:** "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

21 And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

23 And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good."

This passage recounts God's creation of aquatic life, birds, insects, and land animals – but it does not mention mankind. Humans were formed in a separate act of creation:

**Genesis 1:26:** "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

Here we learn several remarkable things. First, man and man *alone* was created in the image of God. No animals, birds, or insects can make this claim. There is something unique about us; we are like God in a way that separates us from all animal life. Second, God gave mankind dominion over all

forms of life on Earth. Not only is mankind not “just another life form”, but we also have authority over all other living creatures.

This authority even extends to the point of being allowed to eat animals. Some people claim that it is immoral to eat meat because that requires the death of an animal. They say that people should be vegetarians because that is more humane. However, *God* is the one who gave mankind the right to eat meat. He did this right after the Flood:

**Genesis 9:3:** “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

4 But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.”

As we can see, God placed just one restriction on this: men were not allowed to consume blood. (Incidentally, this verse is not related to blood transfusions in *any way*. Receiving a transfusion of blood is not even *remotely* similar to “eating” blood.) *God does not condemn eating meat* or criticize that practice in any way. Instead He explicitly tells people that it is their right to eat meat if they so choose. People who condemn others for eating meat are going beyond anything that God Himself commands.

Nor has God changed His mind on this issue. In the New Testament we find that Jesus Himself talked about this, and He did *not* believe that animals were as valuable as people. In fact, He thought that the life of a human being was *far more valuable* than the life of an animal. Look at what He said in the book of Matthew:

**Matthew 10:29:** “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Do you see what verse 31 says? Christ did *not* tell His disciples “The life of a bird is just as important as your own life”. Instead He taught that men were more valuable than *many* sparrows! In His eyes the value of a human being was far greater than the life of any animal. We can also see this taught in the sacrificial system, which required the death of *countless* animals. That system was instituted by God Himself.

Now, it's not that God doesn't care about animals; He clearly does. As Matthew 10:29 says, God notices every sparrow that falls. When the entire world was destroyed by water the Lord had Noah build an ark and bring *animals* into it, thus saving countless species. Proverbs tells us that the righteous are concerned about the lives of their animals and take care of them. The real issue is that animals are *not* more valuable than people. This means that it is *not* acceptable to murder people in order to save the lives of a few laboratory animals (and yes, there are groups that actually do that).

I could go on but I think I have made my point. The Bible does *not* teach that people are just another kind of animal. After all, it was people, *not* animals, who were made in the image of God. The Lord gave mankind sovereignty over animals and He also gave us the right to eat meat. Jesus Himself said that the life of a person was worth more than the lives of many animals.

I'm sure that some of you are thinking that this is obvious, but it is not obvious to the world. They don't seem to have a problem with putting human lives in danger in order to spare the habitat of an endangered species, or of dooming hundreds of thousands of people to painful deaths rather than use a pesticide that might endanger some birds. If the life of an endangered snail is as valuable as the life of a person then why not put human lives in danger in order to save that snail? After all, there are billions

of people; what does it matter if some of them have to be killed in order to save a rare insect?

To God it matters a great deal. People were made in His image, and endangering men in order to protect wildlife is a horrible thing to do. The world may shower praise upon people who think it is wrong to cut down trees but right to kill the unborn, but to God it is an abomination. He will judge those who have endangered so many innocent lives, and when that day comes no amount of politically correct arguments is going to help.

# BIBLE CODES

Back in the mid-1990's the "Bible Code" craze erupted, and the entire world was told that "hidden messages" had been discovered in the Bible. Israeli researchers used computers to analyze the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament and found that if you searched for letter sequences (say, examining every 5<sup>th</sup> letter in a passage) the result would occasionally spell out some kind of word or phrase. This became a huge phenomenon and many people wrote books about it that revealed all the "hidden things" they found in the Bible.

I remember watching TV one day while someone showed how they had found the name "Jesus" embedded in a verse in Psalms. I was not impressed. After all, the word "Jesus" was very short and the Psalms were *really* long. People looked for codes forwards and backwards, skipping anywhere from just a few letters to thousands of letters. It seemed to me that if you looked hard enough you could find just about anything you wanted.

Even worse were the people who were using these codes to predict the future. One book said that Bible Codes predicted that Los Angeles would be destroyed by a nuclear weapon in 2008. Now that it is 2013 I can safely report that the city has *not* been destroyed.

To me it looked like the codes were just a lot of nonsense: people were finding things that had no statistical significance and were just as likely to be discovered in *War and Peace*. On top of that, they were trying to use these "hidden messages" to predict the future, and they failed pretty miserably. So I lost interest and moved on.

One day, however, I came across a fascinating book entitled *Bible Code Bombshell* by R. Edwin Sherman. The reason this book caught my attention is because it was written by a mathematician who analyzed the Bible codes from a statistical point of view. Like myself, he was deeply skeptical of the whole phenomenon and wanted to see just how probable the codes actually were. Was there anything to this or were the codes statistically meaningless?

The author of the book had a master's degree in Mathematics and was a member of the American Academy of Actuaries. (An actuary is someone who uses statistical analysis to manage things like insurance programs.) For seven years he was a Principal of PricewaterhouseCoopers, a very large accounting firm. Since he did not know ancient Hebrew (which is a pretty important skill to have if you're looking for messages in ancient Hebrew manuscripts!) he worked with Dr. Nathan Jacobi. Dr. Jacobi was a Holocaust survivor with a Ph.D. in physics; he lived in Israel for a number of years and has taught classes in Hebrew. Together they made up a team: Dr. Jacobi worked to uncover the codes themselves, and the author analyzed them from a statistical point of view.

I was very pleased to see that that the author shared more than just his conclusions; he also provided the mathematics he used to arrive at those conclusions. The book included his equations and the approach he took in using them, so if you have an understanding of statistics you can see exactly what he did. The author clearly wanted to be as open as possible with his work, and I appreciated that tremendously.

So what did he find? Well, first of all, as one might expect, the length of the Bible codes (or ELS, which stands for "equidistant letter sequence") determines its likelihood of appearing. Shorter words are far more likely to appear than longer ones. On page 33 the author provided a table that explained how likely it was that words of various lengths would appear in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible):

<b>Number of Letters</b>	<b>Expected Number of Appearances in the Torah</b>
2	192000000
3	4000000
4	132000
5	4500
6	165
7	6
8	0.25
9	0.01
10	“0.0004”
11	“0.000016”
12	“0.00000066”

As you can see, as the number of letters in the phrase grows, your chance of finding it drops off dramatically. This is how the author explained it:

“If a code has six letters or less, it is nearly certain that you could find it somewhere in the Torah, and probably find it in many places. If it has eight or more letters, it is very likely that you won't find it anywhere in the Torah by chance. The probability that you will not be able to find a word you selected as a code in the Torah is 78.5% if it has 8 letters, 99.0% if it has 9 letters, 99.96% if it has 10 letters and 99.998% if it has 11 letters.” (*Bible Code Bombshell*, p. 34)

In other words, if you are looking for a very short code (like “Jesus”) then you are *guaranteed* to find it a great many times in a book the size of the Torah – in fact, you would expect to find it *thousands* of times. (The author puts a number on this: he said that because the Hebrew name for Jesus has only four letters, you would expect to find it *600,000 times* in the Torah just by *random chance* alone.) That is exactly what I suspected: the ability to find very short phrases in a very long document is not the least bit surprising. The author pointed out that this holds true even for random collections of Hebrew letters.

Therefore, if you want to find something special you need to look for long phrases. If you are looking for a phrase that is 11 letters long, there is a 99.998% chance that you will *not* find it. Finding something that long *would* be significant. This creates a problem, however, because most books that talk about Bible Codes look for very *short* phrases – usually words that are 6 letters long or shorter. Then when they find something they get all excited about it, when in reality they would have had just

as much luck searching for it in *War and Peace*.

The bottom line is that Bible codes are only meaningful *if they are longer than just a few letters*. Finding something a dozen letters long would be special; a phrase that long is unlikely to appear just by chance. Finding something even longer than that would be very special indeed.

As it turns out, the number of possible words and phrases that you can find in the Torah is *not* infinite. In the back of the book the author calculates that there are only 1.2 trillion different possible combinations. (The author does explain how he arrived at that number, but in the interest of not putting everyone to sleep I'll skip over that.) That may seem like a huge number, but it is nowhere near infinite. The bottom line is that you *cannot* find anything that you want to find if you just keep looking for it: the math says that there are some things you will definitely find, some things you might find, and some things you are *extremely* unlikely to find.

What came as a great shock to me was that the author found codes a lot longer than 12 letters. The longest code that he found had *73 letters*. This was part of a “mega-cluster” of Bible codes that was focused on Isaiah 53, which is a chapter that deals with the crucifixion of the Messiah. By “mega-cluster” he meant that in that one chapter alone he discovered more than *a thousand* Bible codes. For the record, here is Isaiah 53 in its entirety. As you read it, try to imagine what it would take to hide *hundreds* of secret messages in it:

**Isaiah 53:1:** “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil





My shepherds are among the disciples.	14
Jesus is salvation	8
Mary is the mother of God	8
Son of Elohim	8
Dreadful day for Mary	7
It is finished	7
Jesus reigns	7
She weeps much	7
Shiloh is a guilt offering	7
True messiah	7
Second Adam	6
Thirty	6

These are just a few of the codes that were found in Isaiah 53; there are many more. The point I want to emphasize is that the odds of the longest code appearing by chance (let alone the odds of *all* of the discovered codes appearing clustered in this one place) is simply unfathomable. The author calculates the odds of just that one 73-letter phrase appearing are 1 in 71.6 billion x 1 billion. It is simply impossible for this to be an accident: this mega-cluster of codes *had* to have been put there deliberately. It is not a product of simple random chance.

It is the author's belief that the codes demonstrate that God must have written the Bible. No one else had the expertise necessary to embed the codes into the passage. Even with modern technology it would be difficult to fit *1600 codes* into a passage as short as Isaiah 53, even if you weren't concerned about producing something that made sense! For a passage as short as that chapter to have that much hidden in it, and for the messages to tie so neatly to what the chapter is talking about, is nothing short of a miracle – it has to be the handiwork of God. Bible codes are strong evidence that *God wrote the Bible*. Only a divine, all-powerful Being could have hidden that much material inside such a short passage. (There are actually other “mega-clusters” besides Isaiah 53, but I think this one example is enough to illustrate the point.)

The codes are also evidence that the Bible has not been tampered with. If the original text had been extensively modified then the codes would have been “broken” and it would be impossible to find these messages. The fact that they are still intact indicates that God has preserved His Word throughout the millennia, exactly as He promised.

And yet there is something odd about these codes, isn't there? The short phrases are easy enough to understand (“thirty”, for example, may be a reference to the 30 pieces of silver that were used to betray Jesus), but the longer ones are cryptic, at best. “Does Peter despise the burden of the extra ships”? What on earth does that mean? The phrase is so long that it cannot be an accident; it must have been put there deliberately. But why? (Some of the Bible codes that have been found in Isaiah 53 are even more bizarre than that.)

On page 165 the author lays out a number of principles that put the Bible codes in context and explains why they are the way they are. For the purposes of this discussion I think it's important to quote this in its entirety. He said:

1. Codes by definition are hidden, but this would not be inconsistent with the nature of God. “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter...” (Proverbs 25:2)
2. Divine codes would probably relate generally to the subject matter of the surface text. The Bible clearly sets forth the principle of confirmation – that is, a matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. This principle is clearly stated twice in the Hebrew Old Testament (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:5), and three times in the New Testament (Matthew 18:16, 2 Corinthians 13:1, and 1 Timothy 5:19). So codes that served as another witness to the message of the literal text would seem quite natural.
3. Divine codes would often relate to future events. God claims that one of His unique abilities is His full knowledge of the future. “To whom will you compare me or count me equal? ... I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Isaiah 46:5, 9-10). About 25% of all Bible verses are prophecies of future events.
4. The reliability of Divine codes should be clearly inferior to that of the literal text. If Bible codes were truly reliable, the content of the literal text would be open to challenge on the basis of newly discovered codes. Such discoveries, or the proclamation of prophecies based on codes, would give glory to the researchers who discovered them, rather than giving glory to God. Yet we know that God will not share His glory with others (Isaiah 42:8, 11).
5. Divine codes should be inherently unreliable as the basis for accurately predicting the future. Otherwise, God would be openly tempting us to do evil. Yet God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13). Using Bible codes to attempt to predict the future is akin to practicing divination, sorcery, and/or the reading of omens. Such practices are strongly condemned in the Bible (e.g, Leviticus 19:26, Deuteronomy 18:10-13).
6. Divine codes may well be foolish, lowly, and despised, and yet they would still confound the wise. God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

... Why would God intentionally encode unreliable messages within a sacred text? This would make sense if God wanted to provide implicit evidence within the text that He composed it, while at the same time discouraging attempts to derive new truths or predictions from such messages. It appears that the only real purpose of Bible codes is like that of the embedded strip in \$20 bills. The strip adds nothing except proof that the bill is the real thing. (*Bible Code Bombshell*, page 165-6).

I think the last paragraph is key. Bible codes are very real and offer compelling evidence that God wrote the Bible and that the Bible has not been corrupted over the centuries. However, the codes are *not* intended to provide a way to predict the future. They are something like a watermark: they demonstrate the authorship of the text *but they were not designed to add anything to it*. People who try

to use them to predict the future will find themselves in a mess, because that is not what the codes were designed to do. They are not a magic 8 ball that predicts the future: they are the fingerprints of God, showing that the Scriptures were written by God and not by men.

If you are interested in this subject I'd highly recommend reading the book. The author goes into a tremendous amount of detail and offers a lot of valuable insights. If you are interested in a scientific analysis of Bible codes then this is definitely the book for you.

# BIBLICAL CREATIONISM

There are a number of passages in the Bible that are very difficult to understand. There are other passages that people understand but simply don't like. Then there is a third class of passages: verses that people simply refuse to believe. In the past this third category was quite small, but recently there has been an ever-growing number of Christians who read the Bible and dismiss large portions of it. It is no longer considered shocking or horrifying to say that you disagree with the Bible. At one time that would have considered proof of heresy, but today it's quite fashionable. The church has abandoned the idea of inerrancy – but as I have already defended inerrancy elsewhere I will not dwell on it here.

If I had to pick one passage that I thought was the most rejected passage out of the entire Bible (and I mean rejected by those who call themselves believers), it would be this one:

**Exodus 20:11:** “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

The Church today does not believe that God created the world in six days. This idea is mocked, laughed at, and ridiculed. It is seen as an insane, extreme position that is as embarrassing as believing that the Earth is flat or that the Moon is made of cheese. There are very few churches left that agree with Exodus 20:11. Worldly, godless scientists have told mankind that God did not create the world in six days, so the Church has obediently abandoned this verse and moved on. The Church makes this mistake over and over again on issue after issue. When the culture tells us that divorce is acceptable, the Church agrees. When the culture says that abortion is simply a woman's right to choose, the Church makes peace with it. In all of these fights the Bible's position has not changed, but the Church has changed tremendously. It has tried hard to win the approval of the world by abandoning the teachings of the Bible. This has terrible consequences, as the Lord plainly tells us that “friendship with the world is enmity with God”. A church that has won the world's approval is one that has lost God's approval.

Now, there are scores of people who have tried very hard to reinterpret “six days” to mean “14 billion years”. However, let's just be brutally honest: the Bible doesn't say anything remotely like that. No one has ever read Genesis 1 and came away thinking “Oh, life came to exist gradually over incredibly long periods of time, as simple organisms gave rise to more complex ones.” The chapter doesn't even hint at that line of thinking; in fact, it *directly contradicts it*. The reason that people try so hard to reinterpret Genesis 1 is because they hear the culture saying that evolution created the world, and so they look for creative ways to force that interpretation upon the chapter. No, no one *really* believes that the actual Hebrew text has been teaching evolution all along and people simply overlooked it for 4000 years. The reason people make that ludicrous claim is because today's culture has decided that evolution is the truth, and there are many people who are willing to “reinterpret” rather straightforward passages of the Bible so that they agree with whatever our culture wants them to say. The great problem with this is that it simply *does not work*. It is impossible to reconcile evolution with Genesis because the Bible goes out of its way to contradict evolution. The Bible *really does* teach that God created the world in six days – and the reason it teaches that is because *that is what God actually did*.

If you stop and read the first chapter of the Bible, you can't escape the idea that the person who wrote it actually, honestly believed that the entire universe was created in just six ordinary days. For

example, look at how many times the phrase “evening and morning” is associated with the word “day”:

**Genesis 1:5:** “And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. ...

8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. ...

13 And the evening and the morning were the third day. ...

19 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day. ...

23 And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. ...

31 And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.”

In the Jewish culture a day consists of *an evening and a morning*. No Jew who read this chapter could escape the idea that these days were ordinary days, not vast ages of time. God could not possibly have communicated this any clearer to a Jewish audience. Exactly six days are mentioned, with the phrase “evening and morning” attached to each one. Just in case we missed it, this “six day” idea is repeated in Exodus 20:11, which I quoted at the top of the paper. What that verse is saying is that God wanted Israel to work six days and rest one day *because God worked six days and rested one day*. If God had actually created the world over an incredibly long stretch of time then that verse would have been a great place to mention this fact, but no such mention can be found. Instead the Bible uses the word “day” each time it talks about creation – not words like “year”, or “age”, or “unfathomable period of time”.

Keep in mind that if God had wanted to say that evolution created the world He could have easily done so. But Genesis does not even hint that the life forms we see today arose from more primitive ancestors. Instead it says that they sprouted out fully-formed, with birds appearing at the same time as aquatic life, and land animals appearing only *after* birds came into existence – something no evolutionist would agree with:

**Genesis 1:21:** “And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

23 And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.”

This tells us that birds and fish were created on day five, while land animals were created on day six. This doesn't “basically agree” with evolution; it directly contradicts it! Evolution teaches that fish gave rise to land animals, which in turn gave rise to birds. No evolutionist would agree that birds existed *before* land animals. That idea is considered to be preposterous – but that is what Genesis 1 says.

The Bible goes even further than that, however, and claims that plants existed *before* stars:

**Genesis 1:12:** “And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

13 And the evening and the morning were the third day.

14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

15 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.

17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

19 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.”

In other words, Genesis 1 says that on the third day God created plants, grasses, herbs, and trees. Then on the fourth day God created the Sun, Moon, and stars. Once again, this does not “basically agree” with evolution; this contradicts it. No evolutionist would agree that plant life existed before the Sun came into being. Evolution teaches that the stars existed for *billions* of years before the first plant ever took root. The Bible, however, says that plants came first.

Anyone who interprets Genesis 1 in a normal, straightforward manner cannot escape the idea that it really *does* teach that God created the world in six days. Think about it: if God was trying to say that He used evolution to create the world then He did an *unbelievably* poor job. Instead of using words that convey enormous periods of time, He used the word “day” over and over, and then took the extra step of defining the word “day” to mean an “evening and morning” – something any Jew would interpret to mean an ordinary day, not an age of time. Instead of saying that the stars were created first, then the Earth, then plants, then sea creatures, then land animals, and then birds, He instead said that the *Earth* was created first, then plants, and then the stars came long – followed by fish and birds at the same time, then land animals came later. Instead of saying that one kind of living creature gradually turned into more complex creatures He insisted that each animal reproduced after its *own kind*:

**Genesis 1:24:** “And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.”

And just in case that was too complicated to follow, this same idea was repeated in the New Testament:

**Hebrews 11:3:** “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

This is not “basically the same” as evolution, as many people have claimed. This is a *direct and total contradiction of it*. You simply *cannot* read Genesis 1 in a normal, straightforward way and come away thinking that it teaches evolution. The only way to do it is to take one of three approaches, all of which are grossly unbiblical:

- Reinterpret words to mean things that they don't mean and have never meant. For example, some have said that the word “day” means “a long age of time”, and that “evening and morning” refer to the start and end of that period. They then say that these ages overlapped and some took place before others, even though the text itself presents them in a strict chronological order. However, it is fundamentally dishonest to interpret words to mean the *opposite* of what they actually mean, *especially when there is no textual support for it*. If your approach to interpreting the Bible is to say “Well, I want this passage to say this so I'm going to change the meaning of words until it says what I want it to say”, then *you are doing it wrong*.
- You can dismiss the entire chapter (or the first 11 chapters of Genesis, for that matter) as a myth. Some argue that it's not intended to be history at all; it's simply a make-believe fable filled with “spiritual truths”. However, doing this has severe consequences, which we'll get to in a moment.
- You can say Genesis 1 is just plain wrong. This is much more honest than trying to force the chapter to say something it doesn't actually say. However, this also has very grave consequences.

Some people see this entire discussion as a rather minor issue. Rather than debate it or defend what the Bible teaches, they would rather move on to some other subject that the culture doesn't have a problem with. However, I believe that this is an *extremely* serious issue. There is no getting around this basic truth: if evolution is true then Christianity is false. The two belief systems are mutually exclusive; they cannot both be true.

Now, I realize there are many Christians who believe in evolution, and I am not doubting their salvation. I am not saying that belief in evolution will send you to Hell. What I *am* saying is that if evolution is actually *true* then it is not possible for anyone to be saved. You see, the Bible tells us that before man sinned *nothing ever died*. The sin of man is what brought death into the world:

**Romans 5:12:** “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

The Scriptures go on to say that death is an enemy, but one day God will put an end to it:

**1 Corinthians 15:26:** “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

In other words, the Bible says that God created a perfect world in which there was no suffering, pain, or death. However, mankind sinned, and that sin brought death into the world and upon all creation. Christ then came to provide a solution to this problem. Since death was caused by the actions of *one man*, it was possible for the sacrifice of one man to undo sin and provide salvation:

**Romans 5:17:** “For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. ...



18 Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

Now, as an aside, it will not do to say that the death this speaks of is a simple spiritual death, and that physical death is normal. Christ did not die a spiritual death on the cross: He died a genuine, brutal, *physical* death. Nor did He experience a spiritual resurrection, with His body remaining in the tomb. He took on Himself the punishment for sin, which was *physical* death – and then experienced the joys of *physical* resurrection. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is not spiritual death, but physical death. The Bible is very clear on this point.

The reason this is important is because the gospel message depends upon the idea that there was no death before Adam sinned, and everyone today who dies does so because of what Adam did. (As a technical point, we do not die because Adam sinned; we die because we inherit Adam's sin nature, which causes us to sin and therefore become worthy of death. But that is beyond the scope of this paper.) As Romans 5:19 points out, the obedience of one man is sufficient to save us *only* because the disobedience of one man is what made us all sinners. But all of this hinges on a couple key points: that Adam was the first man, that there was no death before Adam, and the Fall in the Garden actually happened. Notice that *all of these points depend upon Genesis 1-3 being literally true.*

What happens if you dismiss Genesis 1-11 as myth? In that case there is no Adam and no Fall. However, since there is no Adam there can be no salvation either. The gospel also becomes a myth and our faith becomes vain. Interpreting the “days” of Genesis 1 to be “billions of years” does not help either because evolution *depends upon death*. In order for evolution to work its magic there must be *countless* generations of living creatures that are born, live, have offspring, and die. Biblical creationism says that death is the enemy, inflicted upon the world because of Adam's sin. Evolution says that death is a friend who has always been here. Biblical creationism says that pain, suffering, cancer, disease, and destruction were *not* a part of God's original creation and came into existence because of sin, and that one day God will put an end to them. Evolution says that pain, suffering, cancer, disease, and destruction were a vital part of our creation and are simply how the world works.

To put this another way: Biblical creationism says that God created a perfect world in which there was no suffering or death, and then mankind ruined it through sin. Theistic evolution says that God *deliberately* created a world filled with suffering, cancer, and death, and then used death for *billions of years* to bring about the creation of mankind. These two Gods *could not be more different*. One of them hates death, sees it as an enemy, and has vowed to destroy it. The other loves death, has called it “very good”, and used it for billions of years – and then lied to all of us and claimed that there was no such thing as death before a mythical Adam sinned.

Evolution is *not* a trivial matter: it attacks the heart of the gospel, the character of God, and the accuracy of the Bible. It is a devastating belief system. If it is true then none of us can be saved, and God is a sadistic liar who enjoys tormenting His creatures for no real purpose.

For what it's worth, Jesus was not an evolutionist. He believed that the world was created in six days. We can find this in Mark:

**Mark 10:6:** “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.”

Evolutionists laugh at statements like this. According to their belief system, the male/female distinction did *not* appear “at the beginning of creation”. In fact, something like 10 *billion* years supposedly went by without any life forms existing anywhere. It wasn't until quite recently (in the past two billion years or so) that male and female organisms arose. In other words, according to evolution, the male/female distinction occurred near the very *end* of creation, not at its beginning. The only way you could say that God made them male and female from the very beginning is if you believed that God created the world in six days.

Now, some might argue that Jesus was simply mistaken – that He had accepted the values of His culture and just didn't know any better. The problem with this theory is that Jesus *is actually the one Who created the world in the first place*:

**Colossians 1:13:** “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:

14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

16 For **by him** were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:”

In other words, the very same person that died and shed His blood for us is the same One who created all things. If Jesus used billions of years of suffering, pain, and death to create the world then He certainly could have said so – but instead He stuck to the Genesis account and claimed that Abel was a real person who actually existed.

The point I am trying to make is that the Bible directly contradicts evolution, and does so in very plain language. Furthermore, the Bible cannot be reconciled with evolution: if evolution is true then Christianity is false. The two are mutually exclusive. If evolution is accurate then the Bible is wrong, and all of Christianity is nothing but a hoax. However, if the Bible is accurate – and I believe it is – then evolution *must* be wrong, and those who believe evolution and support it are also wrong. They may be quite sincere and they may think that they have a good case, but they are mistaken.

The real question is one of authority. Who do you ultimately believe is the source of truth? Is your authority the Word of God or the culture around you? The way that you answer this question is extremely important. There are three different ways this question has been answered:

1. There are some people who have placed their full confidence in the Bible. They say “The Bible is true and this is what it says, so those things must be true no matter what anyone else claims.”
2. There are others who will only trust the Bible as long as it agrees with what the culture around them is saying. They say “The Bible says this, but the culture disagrees. Therefore, the Bible must be wrong.”
3. There is another group who trusts only themselves. They say “This is what the Bible teaches, but I disagree with it. Therefore, I am right and the Bible is wrong.”

These views are *radically different*. The first person uses the Word of God as their source of truth. The other two have rejected the Bible's authority and replaced it with a different source of truth. (As a side-note, I hope you realize that these views do not mix well. If you are willing to go along with the Bible most of the time but then occasionally reject it for personal reasons, then claiming that the

Bible is your ultimate authority is silly. Your true ultimate authority is the one that you use to override everything else.)

As Christians, our source of truth *must* be the Bible. It can never be the ever-changing culture around us, whose standards differ from generation to generation. If we are evaluating the Bible by what the culture tells us then the Bible isn't our source of truth – the culture is. What is even worse is to evaluate the Bible in the light of what *we* think, instead of letting the Bible *tell us* how we should think.

Jesus was quite clear as to what our source of truth should be:

**Matthew 4:4:** “But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

Notice that Jesus did not command us to follow the dictates of our culture or to simply do whatever we thought was best! No, Jesus commanded us to obey God, not our peers. The reason we can do this is because every word of God is flawless and fully able to be trusted. Those who add to it, however, are liars:

**Proverbs 30:5:** “Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

6 Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”

Notice that this verse does not say “Every word of God should be subjected to whatever the culture around you has to say. Feel free to add to God's Word or take away from it as you deem necessary.” It is simple, direct, and to the point: God's Word can be trusted, but those who would add to it or replace it with something else are liars.

This point is repeated in the New Testament, where we are told that the Bible really is all we need:

**2 Timothy 3:15:** “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Note the clarity of this passage! *All* scripture was inspired by God. *All* of it is trustworthy. Verse 17 tells us that the Scripture was given so that we might be “perfect” and have what we need to accomplish *all* good works. That means the Scriptures left nothing out. There are no truths that we need that are not found in its pages. There are no works that we can only accomplish with doctrines that are found outside its pages. Christ echoed this, pointing out that the Scriptures could not be wrong:

**John 10:35:** “If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;”

Jesus also expected people to know the Bible:

**Matthew 22:29:** “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.”

Of course, Jesus knew the Bible quite well and frequently used it to support His teachings. He was not of the opinion that parts of it were good and other parts of it were bad, and that the culture had the final say. However, this is a topic I've discussed at length elsewhere so I will not elaborate here.

Let me point out that there are a great many scientific reasons for believing that God created the world in six days and for believing that evolution is merely a modern superstition, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. In a sense the science is not the real issue anyway. You see, facts do not speak for themselves; they have to be interpreted, and a person's presuppositions have a tremendous impact on how they interpret facts. The same fact can be interpreted in wildly different ways, depending on your assumptions.

For example, a few years ago a researcher found live blood cells inside a bone that once belonged to a Tyrannosaurus Rex. Creationists looked at that and said "See, this is proof that dinosaurs lived recently." Evolutionists looked at it and said "See, this is proof that blood cells can survive for millions of years under the right conditions." The evidence was the same, but since the presuppositions were different the two groups arrived at completely different conclusions.

That is why there is no such thing as "evidence for creation" or "evidence for evolution". What matters is *how you interpret the evidence*. The way that you interpret it depends on what you believe, and what you believe depends on *who your authority is*. As the blood cell example demonstrates, if your authority is the Bible then you will interpret scientific evidence in light of what it teaches. If your authority is yourself then you will interpret the evidence in light of what you already believe. If your evidence is your culture then you will use modern assumptions to interpret the evidence.

The final question is this: who do you believe, and why? Who is *your* authority? By whose orders are you living your life – by God's Word, by your words, or by the words of your peers? The answer will make an enormous difference on how you live your life – and on where you spend eternity.

## SALVATION WITHOUT REPENTANCE?

Recently I have noticed a number of people saying that you don't have to repent in order to be saved. They claim that being sorry for your sins and asking God to forgive you is simply not necessary; as long as you believe in Jesus you will be fine. Jesus doesn't ask you to be sorry for anything; all He wants is for you to believe.

However, is that actually the case? Does the Bible really say that you can be saved without ever repenting of your sins? Let's take a look and find out.

First of all, the Bible definitely says that we must *believe* in order to be saved. For example:

**John 3:16:** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

**Acts 16:31:** “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

**Romans 10:9:** “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

That looks pretty straightforward, doesn't it? All of these verses say that if we believe in Jesus we will be saved. However, these aren't the only verses in the Bible that talk about salvation. In Matthew 4 we find the first message that Jesus ever preached. If you will notice, Christ preached a message of *repentance*:

**Matthew 4:17:** “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Jesus repeated this message on numerous occasions. For example:

**Matthew 9:13:** “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinner to repentance.”

Why did Jesus come? To call “sinners to repentance.”

**Matthew 11:20:** “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:”

Why were the cities condemned? “Because they repented not.”

**Mark 1:14:** “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,  
15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

What did Jesus command people to do? Not just to believe, but to *repent* and believe.

**Luke 3:8:** “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

What did Jesus want to see from people? “Fruits worthy of repentance.”

**Luke 13:3:** “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Notice the clarity of this verse! I don't see how it could be any more clear. Jesus said that if you do not repent *you will perish*. Repentance is not optional.

**Luke 15:10:** “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

What causes joy in Heaven? “One sinner that repenteth.”

**Luke 24:47:** “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

What did Jesus say should be preached, starting at Jerusalem? “Repentance and remission of sins.” The disciples proclaimed the same message:

**Acts 2:38:** “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

**Acts 3:19:** “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

I could go on, but I think I've made my point. Jesus was *very* clear that if you want to be saved you must believe *and* repent. Repentance is *not optional*. Salvation is impossible without it. There is no salvation that says “Jesus, save me from Hell, but other than that stay out of my life. I'm not sorry about my sins and I'm not going to let you run my life.” That road leads straight to Hell.

It is true that in order to be saved you must believe in Jesus. After all, it is impossible to believe that Jesus will save you if you don't believe in Jesus in the first place! Salvation depends on the existence of Jesus; without Him no one can be saved. You can only be forgiven of your sins if a very real and sinless Jesus died a very real death on a very real cross, and then rose to life again in a real and physical way. Nothing else can save you. You cannot be saved by your good deeds, by your church membership, or by your ancestry. Only the death and resurrection of Jesus can do it.

At the same time, you must also *repent* in order to be saved. God will not save anyone who approaches Him and says “I refuse to be sorry for anything that I've done and I refuse to call You my master. You have no right to control my life.” After all, even *demons* believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died and rose again, but they are not saved! Do you really think that adopting the demonic attitude of “Don't you dare tell me what to do!” is going to lead to salvation?

You see, belief in Jesus leads to repentance. Genuine belief is when you realize that you are a sinner who is bound for judgment and eternal damnation if God does not forgive your sins. It is the moment you realize that your most desperate need in life is God's forgiveness. At that point you will seek forgiveness with all your heart, and God will freely grant forgiveness to those who repent and believe. He turns no one away; He accepts all who come.

Now, I don't want to be misunderstood. Repentance does not mean that we never sin again. People who are saved still have a sin nature inside them that they must fight each and every day until the Lord brings them home. What saves us is not being sinless (for none of us are) but our faith in Jesus. The difference is that we are sorry for our sins and we seek the Lord's grace to fight the sin in our life so that we may please our Heavenly Father. There is a tremendous difference between seeking the Lord's forgiveness and grace, and telling God "I refuse to admit that I'm a sinner and I am not the least bit sorry about breaking Your law." It is the difference between life and death.

You must believe to be saved – but you cannot be saved apart from repentance. Approaching God apart from seeking forgiveness will only lead to Hell.

# DESIRE

Those of you who have heard me speak before know that I like to talk about unusual things. Whenever I have a chance to teach I try to talk about something that you didn't even know was in the Bible. My lessons tend to be about things that get overlooked, or are rarely discussed, or that have been forgotten about.

The reason that I do that is because I want to *teach* you something. I want you to go away from our time together having actually learned something. I have no interest in telling you something that you understand well and have heard a thousand times before. That accomplishes nothing; you go away knowing exactly what you knew when you walked in. What I want to do is to show you something new; that way when you leave you will depart with more knowledge than you had when you walked in. I want to educate you, and that means teaching you new things – and so I spend a lot of time trying to find new things to teach you.

But today I want to take a different approach. When I prepared today's message I took a step back. What is the most important thing that I could teach you? If I only had this one opportunity to address you – if this was the only chance I ever had to tell you something – what would be the best thing to tell you? What is the one thing that is more important than everything else?

If you are not a Christian then the most important thing I can tell you is the gospel. If you do not know Jesus then the most important thing for you to know is that you have sinned against a holy God. You have wronged God, and God is not happy about it. All of us are guilty before God. We have all lied; we have all cheated; we have all taken that which is not ours; we have all lusted; we are all guilty. None of us are perfect – and that is very bad, because God requires absolute perfection 100% of the time. All those who have wronged God will be judged by Him after they die. They will face God's unending wrath and will spend eternity in a terrible place of eternal fire. It is a truly horrible fate.

But there is hope. God knew that we were all guilty and He knew that there was no way we could ever pay the price for our sins. So God did something truly remarkable: He sent His Son Jesus to Earth. Jesus lived a perfect life and then died a cruel and torturous death on the cross. When He died, He did not die for His sins (for He had no sins of His own); instead He died for ours. He took the punishment that we deserved – and that makes salvation possible. All those who repent of their sins and believe on Jesus will have their sins forgiven. When they die they will not face the wrath of God; instead they will live forever in a place of joy and peace. On the one hand is eternal life; on the other hand is eternal torment. That is the choice.

So, for those of you who are not Christians, that is the most important thing that you can ever be told. You will never receive any information that is more important than the gospel. The gospel has the power to change your fate – not just in this life, but for all of eternity. It is the only thing that can save you from the wrath of God. It is the only thing that can deliver you from death.

But what about the rest of you – those who *are* Christians? There are many people here who have been Christians for decades. They know the gospel and have shared it with other people. They not only attend church, but have served in church. They've read the Bible and know what it teaches. They are seasoned veterans. What is the most important thing that I can tell *them*? If I only had this one chance to address those who already know Christ, what would I tell them?

And that brings us to **Psalm 73**. This particular psalm has something important to tell us – in fact, it may contain the most important thing that a Christian can ever be told. There are a lot of



priceless truths in the Bible, but this one is truly life-changing. This truth also happens to be rare. In these last days, this particular teaching is not taught very often. The reason is simple: this psalm says something that we do not want to hear.

The teaching that I want to bring out is found at the end of the psalm, but to get there we have to go through the entire chapter. It won't do to skip to the end; we need to take the entire journey.

In this psalm, Asaph laments the prosperity of the wicked. He is appalled that the wicked lead really great lives:

**Psalm 73:1:** “Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.  
2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.  
3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

Asaph tells us that he actually *envied* the wicked. He was jealous of their prosperity. The wicked were living very luxurious lives, and that drove Asaph crazy:

**Psalm 73:4:** “For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.  
5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.  
6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.  
7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.”

The wicked were leading truly *great* lives. They weren't in trouble like other people. They weren't plagued with problems. Most of all, they had more than their heart could wish for. They truly had it all. Even though these people were proud and violent, they had it made. In fact, these people had it so well that their success emboldened them to speak out against their fellow man *and against God Himself*:

**Psalm 73:8:** “They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily.  
9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.  
10 Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.  
11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?  
12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.”

At this point Asaph is absolutely beside himself. The wicked are speaking against both God and man. They oppress others and they mock God. Yet, despite all of this, they are actually *prospering*. They are increasing in riches. They are doing *really well* for themselves.

If we were honest with ourselves we would have to admit that we often share Asaph's frustration. In our own day there are wicked people who have incredible power and great wealth. We know exactly what Asaph is talking about, and we have thought the same kind of things that he is thinking. Asaph is astonished at how successful the wicked are – and we are equally astonished. In our society it seems like evil is advancing on a daily basis. Terrible men are doing terrible things, and somehow instead of being punished for it they become more wealthy and more powerful. We look at the things that people are getting away with and we shake our heads. We see righteous people suffering

and wicked people prospering, and it just baffles us.

Asaph is equally puzzled. He starts to think that his righteousness has been an utter waste of time:

**Psalm 73:13:** “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

Asaph has cleansed his heart – but despite this, he is plagued with problems and adversity. Yet the wicked, who have given themselves over to wickedness, find wealth and peace. It just isn't fair. Asaph wonders if being righteous is just a big waste of time. What good does it really do?

This entire subject was very painful to Asaph, until he remembered something:

**Psalm 73:15:** “If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.

16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.

18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.

19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.

20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.”

Yes, it is true that the wicked were successful. It was true that they didn't have the same problems that other men had. It was true that they were wealthy and prosperous. But there was one more piece to the story – a very important piece. Asaph finally remembered the ultimate end of the wicked. He remembered that one day the wicked would have to stand before God and give an account of their lives. They would have to answer for every crime, every lie, every sin, and every evil act. Even every idle word would be judged. Nothing would be left out, or skipped over, or overlooked.

On that day the difference between the righteous and the wicked will be extremely obvious. The righteous have their sins covered by the blood of Jesus, so when they are judged they will be declared innocent and let go. They will inherit everlasting life, joy, and peace. They have nothing to worry about; their future is absolutely secure.

The wicked, though, are a different story. They have not repented and they have not believed. Their sins are not covered. When they are judged they will be found guilty, and they will face the unending wrath of God – and they will face it for all the endless ages of time. They will be cast into a place of fire and torment and they will never be let go. Their future does not contain peace; instead they face a fate that is horrible beyond words.

When Asaph remembered this, it changed his outlook on life:

**Psalm 73:21:** “Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.

22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.

23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.

24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”

Asaph remembered that God was always with him – both in the easy times and in the hard times. He knew that God was there, guiding him and holding him. Asaph also knew that one day God would receive him up to glory. Better days were coming, and he knew it.

Now that we know the story, ***we can finally get to the point*** that I would like to bring out. We find it in the very next verse:

**Psalm 73:25:** “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.

26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.

28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.”

Verse 25 contains the heart of this chapter; it is the sum of the matter. In fact, it is the key to life itself. When Asaph looked over the entire situation he said that ***God was all that he really wanted.*** Sure, the wicked had prosperity. Their lives were easy and they had wealth and success. Things went well for them. All of that was true – and on top of that, that the lives of the righteous were difficult.

But Asaph did not care. The prosperity of the wicked didn't appeal to him. Their riches were not tempting. He didn't want their money, or their power, or their success, or any of it. *All he wanted was God.* God was enough for him. In fact, God was the only thing that he desired. Nothing else really mattered. Let the wicked have their prosperity; Asaph had something better because he had God. Asaph might never have wealth, or success, or fame – *but it didn't matter because Asaph had God.*

This is the point that I want to focus on. You see, if we were honest with ourselves I think we would have to admit that Asaph's attitude is rare. If God took away everything that we had and left us with nothing but Himself, I think there would be outrage. I think people would be rioting in the streets. We would be profoundly upset. We would feel wronged. This idea that “God is all that you need” is nice in theory, but in practice – if it actually came down to that – we just don't believe it. There are an awful lot of things that we want in life, and the truth is that God just isn't enough for us. We would never dream of saying “There is nothing on earth that I desire except for God”. In fact, that very idea is *unthinkable.*

The reason this is so unthinkable is because many people treat God as some kind of bill that they have to pay off every month. They have divided their lives into two categories: the part that they have given to God, and the rest that they have kept for themselves. They understand that God wants something in exchange for salvation, so they try to pacify God by tithing and going to Church and volunteering now and then. They give God “His cut” and do what they want to with the rest. You might say that God is a chore, like vacuuming the floor. It's a box that you check off.

For a lot of people, the only reason they want God in their lives at all is to save them from Hell and to rescue them whenever things go wrong. Other than those two things, they would be quite happy if God left them entirely alone. What they really want in life is money, and fame, and power. They have things that they want to accomplish in life. They have wishes and desires. They may try to appease God by doing religious things now and then, but their lives are really just about themselves.

**But that is not the deal that God wants.** God doesn't want a tenth of us; He wants *all* of us. He doesn't want our money, or our stuff, or our time; what He truly desires is *us*. He wants to own our heart. This is how Jesus put it:

**Mark 12:29:** “And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:  
30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”

According to Jesus Himself, the greatest commandment of all is to love God with *all* your heart, and *all* your soul, and *all* your mind, and *all* your strength. *That is what God wants from you.* That is what God requires from you. Nothing less will do. God does not want “His cut”; He wants absolutely everything. He doesn't want to become a part of your life; He wants to *become* your life.

You see, when we become saved, God requires us to declare spiritual bankruptcy. We can't say “Well, God, if you will save me then I'll give you ten percent of my life, but the other ninety percent is mine. You do what you want with your cut and I'll do what I want with the rest.” That is not going to work. What God actually wants is this: “Lord, I completely surrender myself to You, and I belong to You now. You are the master and I am the servant. I will do what You want me to do: I will go where You want me to go, I will think what You want me to think, and I will believe what You want me to believe. I will hold nothing back. I sacrifice my dreams and desires and replace them with *Your* dreams and desires. I now have but one purpose in life: to glorify and honor You.”

Have you ever heard the phrase “Give your life to Jesus”? That isn't supposed to be a metaphor. Becoming a Christian literally means that our life doesn't belong to us anymore. God doesn't want us to follow our dreams; instead He wants us to follow *His* dreams. God doesn't want us to follow our desires; instead He wants us to follow *His* desires. God wants us to reach the point where the only things that we want are the things that He wants, and the only things that we desire are the things that He desires.

God wants us to see ourselves as servants – servants of God. He wants us to look at everything we have and everything we are and ask this question: how can we use it for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom? He wants us to see ourselves as stewards and to use our resources for His benefit. When we became saved our old man of sin was crucified with Christ, and we became new creatures. We have a new purpose – a very different purpose. God has called us to devote all of our passion and energy and love to God. We're literally living for Him now. The old ways are over.

That doesn't mean that God requires us to give 100% of our income as charitable donations. What it does mean is that we are to live our lives in a very different way. We are to see ourselves as stewards of God's property – as managers of His resources. Our lives aren't about us; they are about God. We are servants on a mission, and that mission is to glorify God and advance His kingdom.

This doesn't mean that it is a crime to be rich; Abraham and David both had great wealth. It also doesn't mean that it is a crime to have nice things. But it does mean that *riches must never own our heart.* Asaph was able to look at the prosperity of the wicked and honestly say that it just wasn't appealing to him. He didn't want any of it because he had something better. Let me repeat that: the riches and prosperity of the wicked meant nothing to Him because He had God, and *God was better than everything that the wicked had put together.* The wicked may have had wealth, but *God* was his portion.

You might say it is something like being in love. When you are in love with someone, that person becomes your whole world. You are obsessed with them, to the point where they are on your mind constantly. You want to spend all the time that you can with them, and you want to talk with them as much as possible. You are obsessed with pleasing them. Your whole life starts to become centered around them – around what they are doing, what they are seeking, and what they want. The reason you

are so obsessed isn't because you have to be, or because you feel like you should be; it is because you genuinely want to be. It is a natural outflowing of your heart. It just happens.

That is where God wants us to be. When God says that He wants us to love Him with all of our heart, He meant it. It wasn't a metaphor. God wants to become our whole world – not because He ought to be, but because we simply can't imagine any other kind of life. He wants our whole life to be centered around Him – what He is doing, what He wants, what He is saying. He wants to dominate our heart to such an extent that all of this just happens. Everything else just fades away and becomes unimportant.

The apostle Paul had this attitude. There was just one thing he wanted in life, and that was to know Christ. His love for God was so great that everything else was utterly meaningless to him:

**Philippians 3:7:** “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”

Asaph desired one thing in life, and that was God. The Lord didn't just have part of his heart; He had *all* of his heart. Nothing else really mattered. Likewise, the apostle Paul counted everything as loss so that he might know Christ. Paul loved God so much that He was *all* that Paul longed for. Nothing else mattered.

Now, I'm not going to ask you if you have arrived at the place that Paul reached. I'm not going to ask if you can honestly say that Christ is your all-consuming passion. I am going to ask this, though: *is that the kind of person that you want to be?*

You see, if you *want* to be that kind of person then you *will* be that kind of person. If you seek it you will find it. If you cry out to God and beg Him to change your heart then He will. It may take time and it may not happen overnight, *but it will happen*. God is very willing to give you a heart that is perfect toward Him.

But *do you want it?* You see, there are a great many people who don't. A lot of people really prefer to give God a cut of their life and then keep the rest. They don't want to completely give themselves up to God. They want to hold on to their desires, to their wants, and to riches and fame and power. They don't mind having God *in* their life, but they don't want God to *be* their life. They don't mind serving God now and again but they have no intention of changing their perspective. They don't want to be completely and solely dedicated to serving God. That's not what they want.

It is what God requires, though. People are fine with the idea as Jesus as Savior, but they don't really like the idea of Jesus as Lord. We don't mind giving God “His cut”, but we have a big problem with giving God everything. However, the truth is that becoming a Christian is an all-or-nothing deal. God wants all of you, and He will be satisfied with nothing less.

In the famous Parable of the Sower, Christ warned that there would be a whole class of people who would become fruitless. The reason they would bear no fruit is because the cares and riches of this world would draw their heart away from God:

**Mark 4:19:** “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

God can fix this problem; He can give you a new heart. The question is this: *do you want it?* Do you really want to be passionately dedicated to God, or do you actually prefer the cares and riches of this world? The choice is yours – and the consequences will last forever.

This is not a minor issue; it is the acid test. This is how the true sheep are differentiated from the false sheep. This is how you can tell if your salvation is real or is just a mirage. This is where the truth comes out. Yes, if you want you can choose to hold onto your heart. You can decide to keep your life. You can continue seeking after riches and power and all the other things that are forever tempting us. You can do that – but as the apostle John warns us, the price is high:

**I John 2:15:** “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

You see, if Christ truly has our heart, then the things of this world aren't going to be able to tempt us because they're not what we want. The problem is that many people would much rather have the things of the world. We don't actually want God. Sure, we'll come to church and serve God and maybe even give God a cut of our income, but *we don't actually want Him*. We'll include Him in our lives if we have to, but we don't *really* want Him. The world is what really has our heart.

So yes, you can continue your love affair with the world – but it will cost you everything. Those who love the world will pass away with the world – but those who have actually given their lives to Christ will abide forever. It really is an all-or-nothing deal: God will not be satisfied with a “cut”. If He cannot have it all then He will not accept any of it. Either we truly belong to God or we don't. If our heart belongs to the world then it doesn't belong to God, and that is a serious thing.

Asaph was clear: his heart really did belong to God. The only thing that he desired in all the world was God Himself; riches meant nothing to him. Paul's heart also belonged to God: he was willing to count everything as loss so that he might know Christ.

Where do you stand?

## DIVINE CHOICE

It's so easy to breeze right by a Bible verse without stopping to consider its implications. One rather striking example of this can be found in a remark that Jesus made about Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord said something about these two cities that is extremely shocking – and yet for years I read right over the statement without stopping to consider its staggering implications.

In order to give a little context to the passage let's back up a bit. As most people know, Sodom and Gomorrah were two ancient cities that were so wicked that God decided to investigate them *in person*:

**Genesis 18:20:** “And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;  
21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.”

Now, there were many times when God sent down judgments upon a person or a nation. In nearly all cases, though, God acted through an intermediary. Throughout the Old Testament God meted out judgment through angels, prophets, storms, plagues, and natural disasters. However, it is *very* rare for God to go down to Earth and do it *Himself*, in person. Aside from the Tower of Babel, the only other example of this that I can think of is the Second Coming, when the Lord will return to put an end to *the entire world itself*. What this means is that this kind of personal visit by God Himself is a Very Serious Matter. It is a sign that someone has crossed the line in a *big* way. If you are in so much trouble that God is coming to *personally* execute judgment against you, then that means your world is about to end. It is simply not possible to get into more trouble than that.

As an aside, there are some commentators who claim that God didn't actually go Himself; instead He sent angels to investigate. However, that's not what Genesis 18:21 says. As best I can tell, at least one of the three men who visited Abraham on that fateful day was actually God Himself. If you read through Genesis 18 and pay close attention, you will notice that when one of the men speaks the Bible says that it was actually the Lord who was doing the talking. For example:

**Genesis 18:9:** “And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.  
10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. ...  
12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?  
13 And **the LORD** said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?  
14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.  
15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.”

Do you see what happened? In verse 10 the man said “I will certainly return unto thee”, and then in verse 14 we are told that it was “the LORD” who said “I will return.” The man, then, must be the Lord! It's as simple as that.

But to continue the story: as we know, the Lord told Abraham that He was going to judge Sodom. When Abraham heard this he interceded on the city's behalf, and after a round of negotiations the Lord said that He would not destroy the city if He found 10 righteous people there:

**Genesis 18:32:** “And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.”

As it turned out, though, Sodom didn't have 10 righteous people, so the Lord destroyed it:

**Genesis 19:24:** “Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;  
25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.”

When it was all over the cities were utterly destroyed and everyone who lived in them perished. The cities were full of utterly wicked people and the Lord judged them, giving them exactly what they deserved.

This is all well-known and there is nothing new here. However, what *is* startling is what Jesus had to say about it. When Jesus was on Earth He performed a great many notable miracles. Some cities repented when they saw His works, but others did not. The cities that refused to repent, *even after seeing miracles performed by Jesus in person*, were singled out by Him for special condemnation:

**Matthew 11:23:** “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.”

Do you see what this verse says? Jesus said that if the miracles that He performed in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, then the people in Sodom would have repented and the city would not have been destroyed. Stop and think about that for a minute! Do you see how shocking that is? It means that God knew exactly what the people of Sodom needed to see in order to repent, *and yet God did not save them*. God could have raised up a prophet, sent him to Sodom, and used him to do mighty works and save the city, but He didn't. God actually *knew* they would repent if “mighty works” were done in the city, *but yet He didn't send anyone to do those mighty works*. Instead of saving them He wiped them all out. God could have saved them, but instead God chose to kill them.

What makes this even more striking is that there is another very famous case in which an equally wicked city was on the verge of judgment, but instead of destroying them the Lord *did* send someone to save the city. That wicked city was Nineveh. As we all know, the Lord treated Nineveh *very* differently from the way He treated Sodom. Instead of going down to see the wickedness of the city and then destroying it, the Lord sent Jonah to preach a message of repentance:

**Jonah 1:2:** “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.”



One of the things that makes this story so famous is that *Jonah did not want to go*. He was *not* a willing participant in this missionary journey and he did everything possible to avoid going. His reasoning was very clear:

**Jonah 4:2:** “And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”

The whole reason Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh was because he knew that if he went and the city repented, the Lord would not destroy them – and Jonah desperately wanted to make sure that God killed everyone who lived in that city and sent them all straight to Hell. But the Lord forced Jonah to go. Let me emphasize that fact: Jonah only went because *the Lord forced him to go*. God actually held Jonah hostage in the belly of a fish until Jonah finally gave in. Jonah was not a willing participant in any of this, but the Lord forced him to go anyway because God was determined to save Nineveh – and Nineveh was indeed saved:

**Jonah 3:5:** “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?”

As an aside, I have heard people say that God cannot use you unless you are 100% right with God. They claim that if you are backsliding or in sin then God can't do anything with your life; you must be a paragon of holiness before God can use you. I think Jonah conclusively proves that this is not true. After all, Jonah was *not* right with God. Jonah had a deep and abiding hatred toward the people of Nineveh, and he had a heartfelt desire to see them all burn in Hell. Jonah hated them so much that when they repented he got very angry. Yet the Lord *still* used Jonah to save them! The Lord used Jonah to save people *that Jonah hated with all his heart*. This proves that the Lord is the one who works through us. Any fruit that we bear is His doing, not ours. The Ninevites weren't saved because Jonah wanted to see them saved or because Jonah was a righteous man; they were saved because God decided to save them, and He saved them *in spite* of Jonah.

I say all of that to say this: God Himself said that both Sodom and Nineveh were exceedingly wicked cities. Jesus was clear that Sodom would have repented if someone was sent to Sodom to perform great miracles – but no one was sent, so Sodom was destroyed and its inhabitants perished. Abraham desperately wanted to save the city, and if the Lord had commanded him to go he would have gone – but the Lord gave no such command. Yet in the case of Nineveh, the Lord *did* send someone

(even though that person did not want to go!) and the city *did* repent and was saved. As you can see, *the Lord did not treat Nineveh the way He treated Sodom*. He saved one city and He destroyed the other.

Now, there is nothing evil about this. Sodom really did deserve to be destroyed, and the Lord was absolutely justified in destroying it. The Lord is under no obligation to save anyone, and no one deserves mercy. Yet it is impossible to escape the fact that God chose to save Sodom (a city that *Jesus Himself* said would have repented) and He chose to destroy Nineveh. In other words, *this is a clear case of God deciding to save one person and destroy someone else*. God chose *not* to save someone who could have been saved. Both cities needed salvation, but God only helped one of them. Nineveh would have been destroyed if God hadn't sent Jonah, but God *did* send Jonah – in fact, God actually forced Jonah to go against his will. That is something He did *not* do with Sodom. There were two cities that could have been saved, but God only chose to save one of them. He let all the inhabitants of the other city go straight to Hell.

The case of Sodom vs Nineveh is a clear case of divine choice. It shows us that God actually does not save everyone. There are some people that God divinely chooses to save, and there are other people that God chooses *not* to save. Divine choice is a real thing. This idea may seem shocking to us, but it shouldn't. The apostle Paul lays out the case for it in unmistakable terms:

**Romans 9:14:** “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

...

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

Notice how clearly Paul explains that God never promised to have mercy on everyone. Verse 18 is direct and to the point: God extends mercy to some people so that they *will* be saved, and God hardens others so that they *will not* be saved. You can go back and read those verses if you don't believe me – God is quite up-front about this. God chooses to save some people and He chooses to *not* save others.

Of course, a great many people absolutely hate the idea of divine choice. I have seen some people use this verse to argue against it:

**John 3:16:** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Now, let me say that I completely agree with this verse. It is absolutely true that any and all who believe in Jesus will not perish but will have everlasting life. However, it is *also* clear that the people of Sodom would have repented and believed if the Lord had sent someone to demonstrate His power – but He didn't, even though He *did* send someone in the case of Nineveh. According to Jesus Himself the people of Sodom *would have believed* but God chose not to intervene on their behalf. Instead of sending someone to save them He sent them all to Hell.

Does God treat everyone the same? No – but then, God never promised that He would. God

gives some people amazing talents while He gives others a life of disability and pain. Some people are given long lives while others die before they are even born. God moves miraculously to save some people while He hardens others and sends them to Hell. And make no mistake about it – God *does* harden people's heart to make sure that they *will not* be saved. For example:

**Exodus 4:21:** “And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.”

**Exodus 7:3:** “And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.”

Who hardened Pharaoh's heart? The Lord did. He said this not once, *but twice*. The reason Pharaoh did not let the Israelites go is because the Lord hardened his heart – and after the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would not let Israel go, the Lord then destroyed him for not letting Israel go. Pharaoh's hardening led to the devastation of Egypt, the death of all the firstborn in the country, and the death of Pharaoh himself. And it all happened because *the Lord intervened and made it happen*.

People today don't like to hear this. They prefer a God that treats everyone the same. Many people say that God has given everyone a chance to be saved and it's up to us to take it. If some people aren't saved then it's their own fault because God did all He could to save them.

But that's not what the Bible says! Jesus clearly said that *Sodom would have repented*, but God chose to destroy them instead. Nineveh was on the same path to destruction but God *did* intervene to save them (over the strenuous objections of Jonah). Pharaoh might have let the Israelites go, but God hardened his heart so that he wouldn't. God chose to save some people and chose to *not* save others:

**Romans 9:18:** “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.”

Notice that verse 18 does *not* say “God has mercy on everyone, but some people are rebellious and don't listen.” No, what the verse actually says is “God has mercy on some and God hardens others.” It is frighteningly clear.

Why would God do such a thing? In order to demonstrate His power:

**Romans 9:22:** “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:  
23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,  
24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”

What people do not realize is that God is glorified by those who are saved *and* by those who are damned, because both groups allow God to demonstrate His character. Those who are saved glorify God by giving Him an opportunity to demonstrate His mercy and love, while those who are damned demonstrate God's wrath and power – not to mention His justice.

The key to remember is that *everyone* deserves to spend an eternity in Hell. All have sinned, and the wages of sin is death. Hell is the just punishment for our immense crimes against God, and

there is *no one* who deserves to be forgiven. No one can stand up and say “God owes me salvation” or “God owes me mercy.” It is a gift – and that means that God has the right to give it to some people and to withhold it from others. As Paul said:

**Ephesians 2:8:** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:  
9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

We are saved through faith, and that faith is *not of ourselves*. God gives us the faith we need in order to be saved. However, God does not give that faith to everyone. There is nothing unrighteous about this because no one deserves anything from God, and God has not promised to save everyone. Those who *are* saved are given a tremendous gift, because God has given them something that they did not deserve and could never earn. My salvation did not happen because I decided to accept God; it happened because God chose to bless me with saving faith. If God had decided to harden me (as He did to Pharaoh) then I would have been lost and there would have been nothing I could have done about it. My eternal fate – and the eternal fate of everyone – rests solely in the divine choice of God.

If this seems incredible to you, or if it seems like something God would never do, remember the cases of Sodom and Nineveh. One was saved and the other was lost, because God chose to have mercy on one city but withheld His mercy from the other.

# DOES THE BIBLE SAY THE FLOOD WAS GLOBAL?

In Genesis chapters 6 – 8 we find the Biblical account of the Flood. The passage tells us that the Flood was sent because of the overwhelming wickedness of man:

**Genesis 6:5:** “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

6 And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

7 And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.”

In modern times many people have attacked the idea that God sent a Flood to destroy the whole world, and even many Christians no longer believe it. Some scholars teach that the Flood was simply a minor local event, not a planetary cataclysm that destroyed the entire ancient world. This has caused many people to start wondering what the Bible really teaches. Did God really say that the Flood was global?

Since these questions have become increasingly common I'd like to take some time to discuss what the Bible teaches about Noah and the Flood. Believe it or not, the Bible really *does* teach that the Flood destroyed the entire planet; the evidence *against* a purely local flood is incredibly strong. For example, in Genesis 6 – 8 there numerous verses that speak of the epic scope of the Flood:

**Genesis 6:7:** “And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air: for it repenteth me that I have made them.”

**Genesis 6:13:** “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”

**Genesis 6:17:** “And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.”

Do you see the magnitude of what God had planned? These verses say that the wickedness of mankind had become so great that the Lord decided to destroy “all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven”. *All flesh!* In verse 17 God emphasized that “every thing that is in the earth shall die.” This is *far more* than a simple local flood; God is clearly talking about a planetary event. The Lord wanted to destroy *all flesh* from the *entire planet!* The only survivors would be those on board the Ark (aside from aquatic life, of course, which would not be affected).

In fact, the whole reason God told Noah to build an Ark was to preserve life. If the Flood was just a local event then Noah and his family could have survived by simply leaving town for a few days.

The only reason he would need a boat is if the *entire planet* was under water.

The passage goes on to say that the waters rose above the world's highest mountains:

**Genesis 7:17:** “And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lifted up above the earth.

18 And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters.

19 And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered.

20 Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.

21 And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man:

22 All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.

23 And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.

24 And the waters prevailed upon the earth a hundred and fifty days.”

This passage could not be more clear: “All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died”. Verse 19 tells us that the water rose above every hill that was under the whole heaven. Every mountain was covered! The only people who survived were those on board the Ark. These verses do *not* teach that a local flood destroyed a few pockets of local wildlife; instead they report the global destruction of all land creatures. *Everything* died.

On top of all this, when the Flood ended the Lord gave Noah a promise:

**Genesis 9:11:** “And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

12 And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

14 And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

15 And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and very living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

16 And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.”

The Lord promised Noah that He would never again send another flood like the one that had just occurred. He then gave the rainbow as a sign to remind everyone that such a terrible event would never happen again. If the Flood was just a local event then the Lord has broken His promise hundreds of thousands of times, because local floods happen constantly. The only way His promise makes sense

is if the Flood was indeed global in scope – which is precisely what the Bible teaches.

You may not realize this, but Genesis is not the only book of the Bible that speaks of the Flood. For example:

**Isaiah 54:9:** “For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so I have sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.”

10 For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

Here the Lord uses the Flood as an example of His faithfulness, saying that just as He swore that the Flood of Noah would never happen again, so He swears that He would never stop loving the nation of Israel. If the Flood was just a local event then the Lord has broken His promise many, many times. However, we know that the Lord never breaks His word and cannot lie. If (as Genesis teaches) the Flood was a global event then the Lord has kept His word, just as He promised.

In Ezekiel we find this verse:

**Ezekiel 14:14:** “Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God.”

This isn't really a reference to the Flood but it's interesting all the same. When the Lord wanted to give an example of people who had truly outstanding character He picked Noah, Daniel, and Job. Noah is clearly held in very high esteem by the Lord. If you believe that the Genesis account of the Flood is accurate then that makes sense; after all, Noah was the only righteous person on the entire planet! Hebrews explains that it was Noah's faith in God that prompted him to act:

**Hebrews 11:7:** “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

This passage raises some great points. If the Flood was just a local flood then why didn't God just ask Noah to leave the area? After all, if Noah has enough time to build an enormous boat then he surely had enough time to leave town! And how would building a boat “condemn the world” if the Flood was confined to his local area? This passage only makes sense if the Flood was a global judgment on *all* of mankind. By building a boat he saved his family and condemned the world, because the world was offered a chance to repent and escape judgment but they refused. As Peter says, the ungodly world rejected God's offer and as a result only eight people were saved:

**I Peter 3:20:** “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

**II Peter 2:5:** “And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing the flood upon the world of the ungodly;”

**II Peter 3:5:** “For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:  
6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.”

Notice how clearly these passages state that only *eight people* survived the Flood. Everyone else in the world died! These verses emphasize the fact that the *entire world* perished (as it says in II Peter 3:6). II Peter 2:5 does *not* say “And spared not Noah's village”, or “And spared not Noah's country”. No, it says it spared not *the world*.

Jesus also spoke of the Flood:

**Matthew 24:37:** “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark;

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

**Luke 17:26:** “And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.

27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”

The Lord Jesus Christ compared His Second Coming to the Flood of Noah, which He clearly believed was a real event. Jesus did not speak of the Flood as if it were a myth or merely a local disturbance; instead He taught that the Flood “destroyed them all” and “took them all away”. The scope and suddenness of His Second Coming is likened to the scope and suddenness of the Flood. The Second Coming is never depicted as a small, local event that only impacts a few people; the Bible speaks of it as the culmination of time itself – a terrible time in which God's judgment will be poured out on the entire world.

As you can see, the Bible quite clearly teaches that the Flood was a global event that killed *every last person on Earth* except for the eight people that were on board the Ark. In those days the world was full of wickedness and violence, and one day the Flood came and destroyed them all. Noah and his family were saved because they believed God and accepted His offer of grace. The rest of the world ignored Noah's warning that destruction was coming, and when it came it caught them completely by surprise.

The Second Coming will be just like that. Today the world is full of wickedness and violence. People are sounding the alarm that Jesus' Second Coming is at hand, but they are ignored. One day Jesus will return, and those who accepted His offer of grace will be saved – but the rest will be caught completely off guard and will face judgment and destruction.



## DREAMS AND VISIONS

Some time ago I was doing some research and came across an article on visions. The author of the article claimed that God had given him a series of visions that, among other things, offered glimpses into the future. He then started talking about the details of his visions and what they meant.

These days it is very easy to find people who claim to have special revelation from God – be it about Heaven, or Hell, or the future, or the Second Coming, or whatever. Many people claim that God told them exactly when the Rapture was going to happen, and others claim to have been given personal guided tours of Heaven – tours that they will be happy to tell you all about if you just buy a copy of their latest book.

I have to say that I am pretty skeptical about all this, for a host of reasons. One thing I noticed long ago is that these personal accounts of Heaven are rarely consistent. Although there are many books that supposedly offer guided tours of Heaven, the accounts in the books cannot be reconciled: it's as if each author visited an entirely different place. For example, one book said that the gates of Heaven were made out of a single giant pearl, another said that the gates were composed of thousands of tiny pearls, and another said that the gates weren't made out of pearls at all but just had a pearlescent look to them. Well, which is it? If you sit down and read several different accounts back-to-back you will see exactly what I mean. The accounts directly contradict each other.

If they were really all accounts of the same place then you would expect them to be similar, but they're not. It is something like questioning three different witnesses about a bank robbery and finding out that each witness had a completely different description of the bank robber. If this happened in a court of law then their conflicting accounts would be thrown out. Even if one of the descriptions was accurate, the fact that all three descriptions disagreed with each other would make it impossible to tell who was telling the truth and who was not. The only way to find out who was telling the truth would be to use some other piece of evidence – and if you already knew the truth then *you would not have needed the testimony of the witnesses in the first place.*

That brings us to another point. Many times the visions include details that directly contradict the Bible. For example, in one rather famous vision of Hell the person said that he saw demons there torturing lost souls. Now, I realize that this is a very popular concept that's deeply ingrained into our culture, but the idea that demons are in control of Hell comes from Dante's *Inferno*, not the Bible. In fact, Hell was actually created as a place to *torment demons*:

**Matthew 25:41:** “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”

The ultimate fate of the devil is to *be* tormented, *not* to be the chief tormenter of Hell:

**Revelation 20:10:** “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Demons are not in charge of Hell. As a matter of fact, demons desperately want to *avoid* going there. At one point when Jesus cast out some demons they begged Him not to imprison them:

**Luke 8:31:** “And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.”

The phrase “the deep” is actually the word “abyss.” This is the same place mentioned in Revelation 20:1 where the devil will one day be bound for a thousand years. Demons do *not* want to go to Hell; they are afraid of it and know that one day they will be tormented there forever and ever. They are *not* in charge of it and they do not run the place. That is a pagan idea that is not found in the Bible – but it is a popular part of our culture.

If this person had actually been given a genuine tour of the real Hell then I would have expected his account to conform to the Bible. Instead it contradicted the Bible and replaced its description of Hell with the one that we find in popular culture. This strongly implies that the person's vision did not come from God. After all, the Lord is *not* going to contradict what He has revealed in His Word.

That brings up another problem with these visions: they always end up being extra-biblical sources of divine revelation. The whole appeal of these type of books is that they offer details that aren't found in the Bible. For example, they give the reader a chance to discover what the afterlife is *really* going to be like, or they talk about events that the Bible doesn't mention, and so forth. These books offer themselves as “expansion packs” to the Bible – and that is exactly how cults get started. After all, the Book of Mormon is supposedly “special revelation” that Joseph Smith was given by an angel – a revelation that offered “truths” not found in the Bible. The same thing can be said about the Koran. In each case we're being told that the Bible just isn't enough: if you just read this new book over here then you will learn all sorts of *new* truths!

However, the Bible claims to be all that we need. It clearly states that it is a *complete* work that has *no need for expansions*:

**2 Timothy 3:15:** “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Do you see what these verses are saying? Not only are the Scriptures said to be the very words of God Himself (and not the words of men) that are able to make you wise, but it also says that they give you everything you need for *all* good works. If the Bible has what you need to equip you to perform *all* good works then that means it doesn't have any gaps that would need to be covered by some new revelation (like the Book of Mormon).

These verses do *not* say “All Scripture is given so that the man of God may know some things, but there are other things that won't be clear until additional revelations come along to fill in the gaps.” Lots of cults like to claim that the Bible is not enough, but the Bible says otherwise. It really does claim to be all that we need.

If the Bible is really all that we need, then that means we don't need any new visions that give us “additional information” about Heaven. What the Bible already has to say about Heaven is enough to equip us to all good works. God has already provided the right level of detail about Heaven; we don't need anything more.

You may be surprised to learn that some people in the Bible were given a glimpse of Heaven and then told to *not* talk about it. That is exactly what happened to the apostle Paul:

**2 Corinthians 12:1:** “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

This person that Paul knew is actually Paul himself; out of modesty and humility he is talking in the third person. Notice, though, that Paul doesn't reveal what he saw. All he says is that he heard “unspeakable words.” We don't know what he experienced because he doesn't tell us.

Another person who had a vision of Heaven was the disciple John, who wrote the book of Revelation. It's true that Revelation has a lot to say about Heaven, but there is also a great deal that it doesn't say. God has had a lot of opportunities to fill in the missing details, but He did not do so. Am I really supposed to believe that even though God chose *not* to reveal the details of Heaven in the Bible, I can still learn all the answers through these highly contradictory visions? Is it really plausible to believe that God has chosen to *not* reveal the details of Heaven in the Bible but instead has given contradictory visions to random people whose claims cannot be independently verified? How could that possibly be a valid source of divine revelation?

Why is it that these modern authors are permitted to describe Heaven in such rich detail while Paul, John, and Isaiah were largely kept silent? We know without a doubt that these three men actually were in Heaven. Why would God say so little about Heaven through them, and so much through sources that we have no reason to trust or believe? Does no one find that odd? Isn't it much more likely that God has done no such thing and, in fact, all of these modern visions of Heaven are just frauds?

I think that our desire to find divine revelation outside of the Bible is a very dangerous trend that has led many people into error. The Bible claims to be all the divine revelation that we need, and the reason it makes that claim *is because it really is all the divine revelation that we need*. It is time that we started taking the Bible a little more seriously.

# FUNDAMENTALISTS

It is not uncommon these days to hear people use the word “fundamentalist” in a negative way. Some people accuse certain Christians of being this, as if it were some kind of bad thing. Even some professed believers will mock the idea of being a “fundamentalist.”

This raises an important question: just what does it mean to be a fundamentalist? The term was actually defined in 1910 by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. At that time a great many Biblical doctrines were being attacked, and the Assembly wanted to define the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith. They laid out these five points:

1. Belief in the inspiration of the Bible
2. Belief in the Virgin Birth
3. Belief in the substitutionary atonement (meaning we are saved because Jesus died in our place)
4. Belief in the resurrection of Jesus
5. Belief in the miracles of Jesus

People who believed in these five points were called “fundamentalists.” That is where the term comes from.

I have to ask: is belief in these five points really that radical? Is it a shocking thing for a Christian to believe that the Bible is inspired, that Jesus was born of a virgin, and that His death on the cross paid for our sins? Is it “extreme” to believe that Jesus performed the miracles that are recorded in the Bible?

Personally I think that these “fundamentals” are some of Christianity's most basic tenants! These are things that *all* Christians should believe. To mock someone for believing these things is really no different than mocking him for being a Christian – and that is something that no believer should ever do.

# GOD IS A SPIRIT

This morning I was reading an article and noticed that its author made a very peculiar comment. He stated that when Genesis 1:26 says we were made in the image of God, what that means is that God looks just like we do – that He has a head, two arms, and two legs. “God doesn't look like a puppy,” he explained. “He looks like us.”

What was especially appalling is that this person was a *Bible scholar*. He had actually written a popular book in an attempt to correct people's misconceptions about the Bible. What's even worse is that people actually *believed* him! They thought that his teaching made a lot of sense.

This just goes to show how many Christians are illiterate when it comes to the Bible. The ignorance in the Church today is just appalling. This is not eschatology or predestination, folks. The idea that God is a spirit and doesn't have a body is an extremely simple and basic concept. This is something that everyone should have learned in Sunday School.

First of all, God is a Spirit:

**John 4:24:** “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Second, spirits *do not have bodies*. We know this because Jesus told us this after He was raised from the dead:

**Luke 24:39:** “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.”

It's really a pretty open-and-shut case. God is a spirit and spirits do not have bodies. God, therefore, does not have a head, arms, legs, bones, blood vessels, and all the rest. How could God have said it any more clearly? When God said “Let us make man in our image” He wasn't talking about the physical body. He was focused on the *spiritual* side. We are made in the likeness of God *spiritually*, not physically. People are unique in that they have a spiritual component and are capable of having a relationship with God. We can experience God in a way that no other creature can. It also means that God gave us some of His attributes – things like creativity, love, and so forth. It does *not* mean that our physical makeup resembles God's physical makeup.

If Jesus was already a physical being then there would have been nothing particularly special about His becoming a man because *He would have been a man all along*. But if instead He was a spirit, and if the boundless, eternal Presence (which the universe itself could not contain!) descended and entered human form, then that truly *was* a remarkable thing. Jesus became something that He was not before – a physical being. A human. A creature with flesh and bones and skin and appetites and hair.

Paul points out that God is actually **invisible**:

**I Timothy 1:17:** “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Solomon went on to explain that the entire universe is too small a thing to contain the presence of God:

**1 Kings 8:27:** “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”

God Himself echoed that very thought through the prophet Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 23:23:** “Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?  
24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.”

So God is a spirit – eternal, immortal, and invisible. He is so vast that the universe itself cannot contain him, and He fills Heaven and Earth. He does *not* have a head, arms, and legs.

Now, there is one side-note to all of this. The Trinity is composed of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In the beginning all three were spirit (Genesis 1:1-2). However, about two thousand years ago something astounding happened: God the Son became a man. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, lived for thirty-some years, and was then executed for our sins. When He died His physical body was buried, and three days later God raised it from the dead. Jesus then ascended *bodily* into Heaven as the God-Man – fully God and yet fully Man. Jesus *does* have a physical body, and to the best of my knowledge He will always have it. But He did *not* have it when He uttered the words “Let us make man in our image” in Genesis 1. Jesus is the only part of the Trinity which became a man; God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are still spirits.

That brings up another point. The Holy Spirit is definitely a spirit; very few people would dispute that. Ask yourself this: does the Holy Spirit have a body? Does the Holy Spirit (which each Christian has living inside them!) have a head, arms, and legs? The author of the article I was reading claimed that the God-spirits still look like people; they just have bodies made out of “spirit stuff,” with heads and legs and all the rest. Does that match any description of the Holy Spirit found in the Bible? Does it even make sense?

I rest my case.

# GOD'S LIBRARY

The Bible is the Word of God and is His most prominent book. It – and it *alone* – contains God's specific revelation to mankind. Despite what you may have been told, the Bible is complete, authoritative, and infallible. As 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, the Bible contains everything that is needed in order to make “the man of God...perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Cults often claim that the Bible isn't enough and that God wrote other books to fill in the gap, but that is not true. The Bible is God's one and only book of revelation.

However, that doesn't mean that the Bible is the only book that God has written. Heaven contains a few other books that have been created by Him. Since this topic doesn't get discussed very often I thought it might be worthwhile to take a moment to explore the other volumes that can be found in God's heavenly library.

## **The Book of Life**

Other than the Bible itself, this is by far the most famous book in God's library. As I said earlier, this book will be used in the Great White Throne judgment, which takes place after the Second Coming, after the Millennial Kingdom, and after the final defeat of Satan. At that time all of the dead are brought before the Lord and judged:

**Revelation 20:12:** “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

A great many things have been said about this judgment over the years, and unfortunately there are a number of misconceptions about it. First of all, it's very important to note that all of the people who are at this judgment *are dead*. Verse 12 actually emphasizes this point twice: it says that “the dead” are the ones who stand before God and “the dead” are the ones who were judged “out of those things which were written in the books.” In both cases the people who are being judged are dead. In the entire passage the living are not mentioned even once. I often hear commentators say that all of mankind will be present at this judgment, but that is not the case: as you can see, the only ones who are judged during this event *are the dead*.

The reason this is important is because the righteous are resurrected long before this judgment ever takes place. The Church is resurrected at the Rapture, and the Old Testament and Tribulation saints are resurrected at the Second Coming (which takes place some years after the Rapture). Therefore, the only people who will still be dead when this judgment occurs are the lost and whoever dies during the Millennial Kingdom. If the only people who die during the Millennial Kingdom are the lost, then that would mean that *only the lost will be at this judgment*.

Getting back to the topic at hand – as you can see, there are actually a number of different books that are used in this judgment. The one I want to focus on here is the Book of Life, which is the deciding factor. All those whose names are missing from the Book will be cast into the Lake of Fire,

where they will be tormented day and night, forever and ever:

**Revelation 20:15:** “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

As you can see, having your name written in the Book of Life is tremendously important. Jesus Himself emphasized this point:

**Luke 10:20:** “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”

If your name is written in the Book of Life then you will be spared from the wrath of God. It rescues you from eternal torment in the Lake of Fire and gives you eternal life. It even grants you access to New Jerusalem:

**Revelation 21:27:** “And there shall in no wise enter into [the city] any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

In other words, having your name written there is an astounding blessing! All those whose names are written there will live with God, in His city, forever and ever. They will never again know suffering, crying, or pain, but will live in everlasting joy and peace. If you are saved, your name is written there and will never be erased:

**Revelation 3:5:** “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

As we can see, all those who “overcome” have their name written in the Book of Life. I John tells us that those who overcome are those who have put their faith in Jesus:

**I John 5:4:** “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.  
5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”

So, then, all those who believe in Jesus have overcome the world and have their names written in the Book of Life. Their name will never be blotted out, they will not be cast into the Lake of Fire, and they will be allowed to enter New Jerusalem.

People usually assume that our names are written in the Book of Life the moment we are saved, but that is not the case. The Bible tells us that our names were written in the Book of Life when God created the world:

**Revelation 17:8:** “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of



the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”

This verse tells us of another advantage to having our names written in the Book of Life: those whose names are found there will not be led astray by the antichrist during the Tribulation. The rest of the world will wonder and be deceived, but those whose names are written will understand. They – and they alone – will be spared. In fact, all those whose names are written in the Book of Life will be delivered:

**Daniel 12:1:** “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.”

As we can see, the Bible has a lot to say about the Book of Life. However, there are several other heavenly books mentioned as well. For example...

### **The Book of Tears**

This book is easy to miss. As far as I have seen, it is only mentioned in one verse. You can find it in this psalm of David:

**Psalms 56:8:** “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?”

What David seems to be saying is that God has a book that records all of our sorrows and tears. This is very different from the Book of Life, which is a simple register of names. The Book of Tears does not list names; instead it lists sorrows. In other words, God doesn't just care about our sufferings; He actually *writes them all down*.

Why does this matter? Well, think of it this way. We know that God cares about our problems, but this caring can sometimes seem very abstract. After all, even though God cares for us we still have to suffer and we still have to endure terrible trials. Sometimes it almost seems like God is saying “Yes, I know this trial hurts, but it's good for you so just grit your teeth and bear it.” God's compassion isn't always something that we can actually *see*. Our relationship with God is founded on faith: we believe in Someone we've never actually seen and we believe that He loves us even when our lives are going terribly wrong and the pain seems endless.

What we see here is that God really *does* care. He doesn't just care in a vague “I feel your pain” kind of way; He cares enough to actually write it all down. God never forgets anything, but He still records all of our tears so that the record will be there for all of Heaven to see, for all the rest of time. Our suffering matters to Him and He is not indifferent about it.

## **The Book of Remembrance**

This book seems to be mentioned in several different passages. The first one can be found in the last book of the Old Testament:

**Malachi 3:14:** “Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?”

15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a **book of remembrance** was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”

It would be easy to confuse this book with the Book of Life, but I think they are two separate books. Although the Book of Life was written when God created the world, this book was written only after people started complaining to God (verse 16). Since this book is newer than the Book of Life, it must be separate from it.

The reason God created this book was because people were upset that the wicked were living prosperous lives while the righteous were suffering and being abused. They didn't think that life was fair. “It is vain to serve God”, they grumbled. “What's the point of serving the Lord if all it does is ruin your life?”

Because of these complaints the Lord had a book of remembrance written so that people could “discern between the righteous and the wicked.” This book was written specifically for “them that feared the Lord.” God wanted to make it clear that He *did* draw a distinction between those who belonged to Him and those who did not. It may have looked like the wicked were getting away with murder while the righteous were life's big losers, but that was just an illusion. God was aware of the righteous acts of His saints and He commissioned a book to record those acts.

It's quite likely that the Book of Remembrance is one of the unnamed books that are mentioned at the Great White Throne judgment:

**Revelation 20:12:** “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

**Daniel 7:9:** “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.”

Notice how it says that the dead were judged according to their works, based on what the *books* had to say – meaning that there were more books there than just the Book of Life. Verse 12 seems to say that the books contained an account of each person's works. The Book of Life doesn't have that information, but the Book of Remembrance is a good candidate for this.

It's easy to fall into the same trap that the Israelites did and start thinking that obeying God isn't important. Some Christians today have noticed that the wicked appear to be having a great time and have decided to copy their pagan lifestyle. “After all,” they reason, “I'm saved and going to Heaven. Who cares how I live my life? It's not like it matters! Trying to obey God is just asking for trouble. Suffering is for suckers.”

However, the fact is that it *does* matter. God cares tremendously about whether His children are faithfully serving Him, and He disciplines those who are not. He also offers rewards for obedience and sacrifice. On top of everything else, God actually records our acts of service. In other words, God is recording our tears *and* our sacrifices. He is aware of our acts of service and He writes them all down in a permanent record. The things that we do are not forgotten; they are recorded in the Book of Remembrance.

## **The Book of Body Parts**

The last book is definitely the strangest, and unfortunately very little is known about it. It is mentioned in this psalm of David:

**Psalm 139:13:** “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and **in thy book all my members were written,** which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”

I call this one the “book of body parts” because that seems to be exactly what it is: a book that lists body parts. Now, I don't know if this book covers everyone who has ever lived or if it's restricted to those whose names are written in the Book of Life; the passage doesn't say. But verse 16 is clear that it *does* list body parts, and the list is apparently made before each person is even conceived. (It's quite possible that, like the Book of Life, this book was written when God created the world.)

I do not know the purpose of this book. In the surrounding verses David is praising God for the fact that he was “fearfully and wonderfully made” and marvels that his body parts were all written down before he even had any body parts. I'm sure that there is some significant truth here, but nothing jumps out at me. It's easy to understand the purpose of the Book of Life, the Book of Tears, and the Book of Remembrance, but this book just seems odd. I have no doubt that there is a reason for it (after all, *everything* God does has a reason behind it), but at this time I can offer no theories.

## **Conclusion**

It's interesting to note that the Bible actually mentions quite a few books that are not included in the Bible itself. For example, there is the Book of Jasher:

**Joshua 10:13:** "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day."

There's the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel:

**1 Kings 15:31:** "Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?"

The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah:

**1 Kings 14:29:** "Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?"

The Book of the Wars of the Lord:

**Numbers 21:14:** "Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,"

The Book of the Acts of Solomon:

**1 Kings 11:41:** "And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon?"

The Book of Jehu:

**2 Chronicles 20:34:** "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani, who is mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel."

The Book of the Decree of Esther:

**Esther 9:32:** "And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book."

All of these books have been lost. They were earthly books, written by men, and God chose not to preserve them. While this is a loss of historical knowledge, it is not fatal. After all, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 makes it clear that the Bible contains *everything* we need. Although the lost books would have been

interesting to read, the Bible has no gaps. It is a finished work.

At the same time, the Bible mentions other books that are *not* lost because they are heavenly books. We've already taken a look at the Book of Life, the Book of Tears, the Book of Remembrance, and the rather odd Book of Body Parts. One other book that bears mentioning is this one:

**Psalm 69:28:** “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”

This one may well be poetry; after all, “blotted out of the book of the living” sounds like a poetic way of saying “let them die.” But what if it's not? If it *is* a real book then it's almost certainly not the same thing as the Book of Life. The reason I say this is because asking God to blot someone's name out of the Book of Life is the same thing as saying “Lord, please send that person straight to Hell. Make sure they can never, ever be saved no matter what.” I *really* don't think that's a prayer that God wants us to be praying. If the Book of the Living is a real book and not just a poetic metaphor then I think it's a separate book entirely – one that apparently lists everyone who is currently alive.

When thinking about the Book of Life, don't forget about the other heavenly books that God has revealed to us. The Lord cares about your tears and He remembers your righteous acts. He is not a vague, distant God that can't be bothered with our problems; He is an ever-present help in trouble, and He truly does care for us.

# GOOD FRIDAY

On Good Friday (which is the Friday before Easter) it is traditional for people to commemorate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This is done because most Christians believe that on that day in history our Lord Jesus was crucified. However, was Jesus actually crucified on a Friday? It may come as a surprise to many, but there is strong evidence that Jesus did *not* die on that day of the week.

Before we can demonstrate this, it's important to understand that by the time Sunday morning came around Jesus had already risen from the dead. We can see this from a number of passages:

**Matthew 28:1:** "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.  
2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.  
3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:  
4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.  
5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.  
6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Here we can see that Mary Magdalene and Mary went to the tomb of Christ on the *first day of the week*, where they met an angel that told them that Jesus was risen from the dead. This same story is repeated in Mark:

**Mark 16:1:** "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.  
2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.  
3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?  
4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.  
5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, and they were affrightened.  
6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrightened: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him."

Aside from a bit of additional detail, this passage tells the same story that Matthew does. A small group of women went to the Lord's tomb early on Sunday morning and discovered that His tomb was empty. This means that Christ must have risen from the dead either early Sunday morning or late Saturday night. In either case, by the time Sunday morning rolled around His tomb was already vacant.

The reason this is important is because Jesus said that He would be dead for three days *and three nights*. This can be found in Matthew:

**Matthew 12:38:** “Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

(As an unrelated aside, the word translated “whale” in verse 40 is actually a generic word that simply refers to a great sea creature. The exact type of aquatic creature was not specified.)

Verse 40 clearly says that Jesus will be in the grave (“in the heart of the earth”) for three days and three nights. However, there are only *two* nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning (specifically, Friday night and Saturday night). If Jesus was “in the heart of the earth” for three days *and* three nights then He could not possibly have died on Friday. It doesn't matter if you are using modern 24-hour days, or Jewish days, or Roman days; there is no system of days that allows for three nights (or even a *part* of three nights) between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. Therefore, Jesus *did not die on a Friday*. It is far more likely that He died on a Thursday. This would allow for three days (part of Thursday, Friday, and Saturday) and three nights (Thursday night, Friday night, and Saturday night).

As a side-note, some have argued that Christ actually died on a Wednesday. This would allow for three full Jewish days between His crucifixion and resurrection. Jewish days begin in the evening and continue until the next afternoon (as it says in Genesis 1:5, “and the evening and the morning were the first day.”) The days would be: Wednesday night to Thursday afternoon, Thursday night to Friday afternoon, and Friday night to Saturday afternoon, with the resurrection sometime Saturday night. This is also a distinct possibility.

## **The Mysterious Sabbath**

One might ask, what about the Sabbath? The Bible says that Jesus was crucified the day before the Sabbath. We can see this in a couple different passages:

**Mark 15:37:** “And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.

...

42 And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath...”

Mark clearly says that the day after Jesus was crucified was the Sabbath. Luke says the same thing:

**Luke 23:46:** “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

...

54 And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.

55 And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid.

56 And they returned, and prepared spices, and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.”

So, if the day after Christ's death was the Sabbath, and the Sabbath is Saturday, wouldn't that mean that Christ must have died on a Friday?

The key to understanding this is that the seventh day of the week *is not the only Sabbath on the Jewish calendar*. In Leviticus 23 a whole list of holy days is defined, one of which is the seventh day of the week:

**Leviticus 23:1:** “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,  
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts.  
3 Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.”

In Leviticus 23:3 we see that the seventh day of the week is set aside to be a “holy convocation”, or what we call a Sabbath day. However, look at what verses 5 through 8 have to say:

**Leviticus 23:4:** “These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.  
5 In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover.  
6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.  
7 In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.  
8 But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.”

We are told that on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the Jewish calendar is the Passover. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month (in other words, on the day after the Passover) is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasts for 7 days. The first day of that feast is set aside as a “holy convocation.” It is declared to be a Sabbath and *no work can be on that day*.

The reason this is important is because Jesus was offered as our Passover Lamb. In fact, at the Last Supper Jesus celebrated *the Passover* with His disciples – right before He was taken to be crucified *on the day of Passover*. We can see this in Matthew:

**Matthew 26:17:** “Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?  
18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.  
19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.  
20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.”



Keep in mind that Jewish days go from evening to afternoon. The Passover did not actually begin until that evening (compare Matthew 26:20 with Leviticus 23:5). Jesus was arrested that night and crucified the next day, but according to the Jewish calendar it was still the Passover because a new day did not begin until the *following* evening. As we've just established, the Passover is followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread – and the first day of that Feast is always a *Sabbath* no matter what day of the week it falls on. No work can be done on that day. In Luke 23:56 when the Bible says that they rested “according to the commandment,” it is not referring to Exodus 20:8-10 (“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: ...”) but Leviticus 23:7!

What this means is that while the day after Jesus was crucified was indeed a Sabbath, it was *not* the seventh day of the week. It was actually the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In summary, the Bible says that Jesus was in the grave for three days and three nights. Since there are not three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, Christ could not have been crucified on a Friday. It is far more likely that He was crucified on either a Wednesday or Thursday. The Sabbath that followed His crucifixion was not the seventh day of the week but the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

## HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

One of the most well-known Christmas hymns is a song named “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” Its first verse goes like this:

*Hark the herald angels sing  
“Glory to the newborn King!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled”  
Joyful, all ye nations rise  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With the angelic host proclaim:  
“Christ is born in Bethlehem”  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

This beautiful hymn repeats the widely-held belief that angels sang at the birth of Jesus. In countless plays, hymns, and sermons, the message is the same: angels sang the news of Christ's birth to the world.

However, this is actually not the case. Angels did *not* sing at the birth of the Messiah. Take a look at Luke to see what I mean:

**Luke 2:8:** “And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Do you see what verse 13 says? We are told that there was a host of angels that praised God *and said*, “Glory to God in the highest.” They did indeed proclaim the news, but they did not sing it. In other words, the famous “herald angels” did not actually do any singing!

In fact, it's very difficult to find evidence of angels singing anywhere in the Bible. In the famous Christmas hymn “Angels From The Realms of Glory” we are told this:

*Angels from the realms of glory  
Wing your flight over all the earth*

*Ye who sang creation's story  
Now proclaim Messiah's birth*

Did the angels sing at the creation of the world? Well, look at Job 38:

**Job 38:4:** "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God **shouted** for joy?"

We are told that the angels (which are here called the sons of God) shouted for joy, but it doesn't say they did any singing. The real challenge is the identity of the morning stars. The only being the Bible ever calls the "bright and morning star" is Jesus (Revelation 22:16) – but there is only one Jesus, so He cannot be a group of morning *stars* (plural).

I have researched this passage and discovered that there is a lot of disagreement over what it means. Some say that the morning stars are angels, and some say they're not. Some say it is a poetic reference to actual stars. Other commentators have even stranger theories. If the morning stars are angels then this would represent the one time in the entire Bible where they sing – but there is just no agreement on how verse 7 should be interpreted. If the Bible ever referred to angels as "morning stars" in some other passage then the answer would be clear, but it never does that. This is the one and only time that this particular phrase is used.

What about in Heaven? Well, in Revelation we are told that the elders (which represents the Church) and the four beasts sing a song to the Lord:

**Revelation 5:8:** "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

In the next verse the angels join in, but notice that they don't actually do any *singing*:

**Revelation 5:11:** "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

12 Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

As you can see, the angels praise God and shout for joy, but we don't actually find any evidence of them singing. Now, this is not to say that angels are incapable of singing. It is entirely possible that

angels sing all the time and the Bible simply doesn't tell us. (For all we know, angels may do all sorts of things that we don't know about!) What I am saying is that our popular idea of angels singing is incorrect. There is no evidence that they sang at the birth of Christ. (Of course, I will admit that “Hark the Herald Angel Said” doesn't have quite the same ring to it!)

I doubt that this has any deep significance but it is something to think about. It does make you wonder how much of our image of angels is actually real. Angels are regularly depicted in our culture as tall women with wings who spend their time strumming golden harps. Here's a fun activity for you: go through the Bible and try to find a reference to a female angel. You may be surprised at what you find – or in this case, what you *don't* find!

# HELPING ISLAM

Some time ago I was watching the news on TV and saw a special report on a very unusual church ministry. This particular church (and I'm afraid I don't remember what state it was in) had Islamic neighbors who were renovating their mosque. Since their mosque was undergoing construction the Muslims who attend it were unable to hold services there. The Christian church offered to let the Muslims use *their* church instead until the renovations were complete. So the two groups shared a single facility: the Christians held their traditional services and left, and then the Muslims held their Islamic services and left. They did not share services or change the gods they worshiped; they simply shared the same building.

People talked about what a wonderful, kind thing it was for the Christian church to do that, but I'm not sure it was the right thing to do. Is it really a good idea to take a building that is dedicated to the glory of God and allow Muslims to use it to worship Allah? How is that different from the church endorsing Islam as a true religion that honors God? After all, suppose the tables were turned. Do you really think that Muslims would allow Christians to use their mosques to worship Jesus? (A related question: how many Jewish synagogues do you think there are in Mecca? Isn't it interesting how everyone is supposed to be tolerant of Islam and yet Islam is never asked to be tolerant of others? Why do you suppose this tolerance only goes one way?)

Let's think about this for a minute. I hope it's clear to everyone that the Christian God is not the same as the Islamic Allah. Christianity teaches of a triune God who sent His Son Jesus (who was fully God and fully man) to Earth to die for the sins of mankind and, through that death, purchase forgiveness and salvation for mankind. Islam strenuously denies all of these things. Some people may stand up and say that they're all the same, but even Muslims do not believe this. After all, if they're "all the same" then why do Muslim countries execute people who leave Islam and convert to Christianity? *They* clearly see a difference between the two religions!

There are a tremendous number of differences between Islam and Christianity, but I will focus on just one. Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, who came to Earth to die in our place and purchase our salvation. Islam, however, completely denies this. The Bible has this to say about people who deny this doctrine:

**1 John 4:2:** "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world."

That's pretty cut and dried. Islam denies this, so it is not of God. Its god is not the God of the Bible but a false god. Just in case we missed it, this concept can be found repeatedly all throughout the Bible:

**1 John 2:22:** "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."

Does Islam agree that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the World, and that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but should have everlasting life? Absolutely not! The Bible, then, calls the teachings of Islam lies. Islam is false, and those who hold to it worship a false god. Allah *cannot* be the God of the Bible. This is not complicated.

Therefore, those who follow Islam are following a false god, and those who help Islam are helping people down the road to Hell. If a church offers to lend its facilities to Muslims *for the express purpose of allowing them to worship their false god*, isn't that aiding the spread of Islam – and therefore leading people *away* from the real God? Should churches really be doing that?

Some might say “Oh, you're just overreacting. It's not a big deal.” The Bible disagrees. Look at what 2 John has to say about this:

**2 John 1:7:** “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

John warns Christians to be wary of “deceivers” who deny that Jesus is the Messiah. Islam would *definitely* fall under this category. John then goes on to say this:

**2 John 1:10:** “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed:

11 For he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

Do you see what this is saying? The Bible strictly commands Christians to not provide any form of help *whatsoever* to those who are spreading a false gospel. Even *verbal* support is forbidden! Do you think that, just maybe, *lending your church to people so they can worship their false gods* just might be considered “support”? Do you think the Apostle John would have put his stamp of approval on that decision? Do you think that *God* would have approved of it? I don't think so.

The Bible commands us to love each other and to be a light to the world, but I see nothing loving or kind about helping people spread a false gospel. The world may approve of it but I do not believe that God is honored.

# INCOME REDISTRIBUTION

One fact that continues to astonish me is that many people today have no problem with certain forms of slavery. You would think that in 21<sup>st</sup> century people would have learned to abhor it, but that is not the case. Support for it is growing by leaps and bounds, even among people who really ought to know better.

Of course, we don't call it slavery anymore and we implement it a little differently than we did in the past. The institution itself, however, is still more or less the same: the economic output of one person is taken away from him by force and is given to someone else. People are forced to work for others and give them what they earn, whether they want to or not. Apparently what people objected to was the *word* slavery, and not the *concept*. Forcing other people to work for you against their will is widely accepted and praised.

So what is slavery? The dictionary defines it like this:

1. the state or condition of being a slave; a civil relationship whereby one person has absolute power over another and controls his life, liberty, and fortune
2. the subjection of a person to another person, esp in being forced into work

In the old days slavery was very direct: one person owned another person outright and forced the slave to work for him until he died. The slave did all the work and the owner reaped all the benefits. The slave was forced to live on whatever the owner let him have. Society eventually outlawed this arrangement, but it kept the idea of allowing one person to forcibly take what another person had produced. People are no longer allowed to own other people, but they *can* legally take away other people's income by force and keep it for themselves, without providing anything in return. The net effect is remarkably similar to slavery: one person works and someone else takes his money.

Now, it's true that it's illegal to break into people's houses and steal their things. That will land you in prison. However, you *can* use the government to take away other people's money and have it given to you, which has exactly the same effect. Today we call it the "redistribution of income." Welfare is one example, but there are many others. The money that is handed out as welfare doesn't grow on trees or fall out of the sky. Instead money is forcibly taken from one person and given to someone else – and this happens on a regular, recurring basis, as if people were slaves and had no right to keep what they had earned. When a thug forcibly takes money away from other people we put him in prison, but when the government does it on behalf of *that same thug* we somehow think it's ok. Apparently if you use the government as an intermediary it makes stealing morally acceptable.

For example, countless millions of dollars are given to farmers in the form of ethanol subsidies, even though some of these farmers are millionaires that own tens of thousands of acres. Where did that subsidy money come from? Why, it was forcibly taken from other taxpayers. Any taxpayer who refuses to give up their money to the millionaire farmer will be prosecuted and, depending on the circumstances, put in prison. In other words, money was taken from one person under threat of imprisonment and given to millionaires.

Of course, farmers are not the only offenders. There are a great many other groups of people that end up with other people's money: bankers who are bailed out by the government, artists who are given grants, students who are given free tuition, and people who are too lazy to work (to just name a

few). If these people had mugged Joe Smith and stolen his wallet they would have all been arrested, but since they used the power of government to empty Joe's wallet for them it's all somehow ok. I have to ask: how can people not realize that getting a third party to take away your neighbor's property for you *is just as immoral as stealing it yourself*? Everyone realizes that hiring a hit man to kill an enemy makes you just as much a murderer as if you had killed him personally. But somehow, when it comes to stealing, we think that using an intermediary makes it moral.

Some would say “Well, these people need the money. How could lazy slobs survive without welfare? How could students go to college? How could sick people get the care they need? The need is so great that it makes it all right. It's just social justice.” That sounds all wise and noble, but honestly, it makes no difference. Think about it: if a drug addict broke into your home, stole your TV, and told the cops “I did it because I needed the money”, his excuse isn't going to make a bit of difference. The judge doesn't care that the burglar was a student trying to pay his college tuition. It doesn't matter how great your need is: *you are not allowed to take things that belong to other people*. There is nothing “just” about it.

The Bible has something to say when it comes to this sort of situation:

**Exodus 20:15:** “Thou shalt not steal.”

This is very easy to understand: you are *not* allowed to take things that belong to other people. It doesn't matter if you're poor, or hungry, or wealthy, or want higher margins on your corn crop. It doesn't matter if your bank is failing, or you're behind on your mortgage, or you made some bad investments. You *cannot* help yourself to other people's money. Period.

Now, there is nothing wrong with *giving* money to the poor – in fact, the Bible commands it. We are to love our neighbors and do what we can to help them. However, there is a *tremendous* difference between giving money to someone *and having that person steal it from you*. The fact that the person may need the money does *not* give him the right to steal it:

**Proverbs 6:30:** “Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry;  
31 But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.”

In this country people accept the idea that there's nothing wrong with forcing other people to pay your bills. If a student needs money to go to college, just have the government confiscate the funds from other people. If an elderly person needs prescription drugs, just have the government loot other people's bank accounts. If a person is sick, just have the government force someone else to pay their medical expenses.

People no longer have the idea that it is the *individual's responsibility* to pay for the things that they consume. People should pay for their own college, or their own drugs, or their own medical bills. If they can't then the honest thing to do is to ask for help, *not* arrange for someone to forcibly take money from other people. That is called *stealing*.

Sadly, this concept has been entirely lost on today's society. Few people believe that a person has a right to keep the money he's earned, or that other people do *not* have a right to take it from him. People enjoy living at other people's expense, which is exactly what slavery is all about.

The redistribution of wealth in any form – be it through subsidies, or welfare, or some sort of “benefit” – is a grossly immoral act that is simply legalized theft. America has not outlawed slavery; it



has simply changed it into something that is socially acceptable. However, changing the name does not change the reality. Just because you call it “social justice” instead of slavery doesn't mean you're doing something moral.

God, however, is not amused. Just because theft is legal doesn't mean God is going to give it a pass. There is a peculiar thing about welfare states: they always destroy themselves. As more and more people start believing that their neighbors should be forced to pay their bills, the pool of people who are willing to be stolen from starts to dry up. Eventually there are more parasites than hosts and society collapses, overwhelmed by debt and unable to pay its bills. Nor can it rise again, because this sort of theft has a way of exterminating the productive members of society – and without them, all you have left are leeches that demand to be paid for doing nothing at all.

## JOY TO THE WORLD: A CHRISTMAS CAROL?

Whenever Christmas rolls around it's traditional for churches to sing "Joy to the World." It's a very well-known song, and many people know its first verse by heart:

*Joy to the World , the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room,  
And Heaven and nature sing,  
And Heaven and nature sing,  
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.*

At first glance this does look very much like a Christmas carol. One could imagine that "Joy to the World" is talking about the angels' proclamation to the shepherds of "peace on earth, good will toward men," and that "the Lord is come" is a reference to Christ's birth in Bethlehem. However, if you take a look at the next few verses it becomes obvious that this song is actually talking about Christ's *second* coming, not His first:

*Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as, the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

Do you see what I mean? Think about it: do those verses better describe the Lord's birth or the Lord's return? For example, look at verse 3. It triumphantly declares that the Lord has come to put an end to sins, sorrows, and "the curse." This is a reference to the time the Lord cursed the ground after mankind sinned in the Garden of Eden:

**Genesis 3:17:** “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;”

Did Jesus remove the curse at His first coming? No. Did He put an end to sin and sorrow? No. His first coming was about providing mercy, forgiveness, and salvation – *not* about revoking the curse and ending all suffering. It isn't until after His Second Coming that He will put an end to war, sorrow, and sin, and will finally repeal the curse. Verse 3 is a great description of the Lord's *return*. It joyously declares things that the Lord *will* do in the future. It does *not* talk about the events that surrounded His birth!

Or consider verse 2. It declares “Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!” and verse 4 talks of Jesus ruling the world “with truth and grace.” In Jesus' first coming He did not do any reigning at all; in fact, the Bible says that He was a poor man with no place to lay His head! He was persecuted, he was tortured, he was executed, he rose from the dead, and he ascended to Heaven. But this song speaks of a time when the Lord will come to Earth and *reign over it*. The Bible says that this will indeed happen – but it will not take place until after the Second Coming:

**Revelation 20:4:** “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

I realize that “Joy to the World” is a popular Christmas song, but I cannot escape the idea that this song is actually talking about the Second Coming. It provides a beautiful picture of things the Lord will do *after He returns*. If you'll notice, the song doesn't even mention anything the Lord did in His first appearance! There is no mention of the cross, or forgiveness of sins, or even the resurrection. Nor is there any mention of His birth, or the wise men, or the shepherds, or the baby in the manger. Instead the song exclusively focuses on things that are yet to come.

This is why I don't believe that this song was intended to be a Christmas song. I think it's actually meant to celebrate the Lord's return. It makes a great deal more sense when you look at it from that perspective.

## “JUDGE NOT”

Have you ever heard someone say that we shouldn't speak against sin in someone else's life because Jesus commanded us to not judge each other? I don't know about you, but I've heard that more times than I can remember. This paper was written to compare this idea to the Scriptures and see if it has any merit.

In Matthew 7 Jesus said this in his famous Sermon on the Mount:

**Matthew 7:1:** “Judge not, that ye be not judged.

2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine own eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?”

On the face of it that looks very conclusive. Jesus does indeed say “judge not” and goes on to state in verse 2 that we will be judged in the same way that we've judged others. The passage even condemns the hypocrisy of those who judge others when they themselves are committing the same sinful acts.

But Matthew 7 has more than just four verses. Christ goes on to say this in the *very next verse*:

**Matthew 7:5:** “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.”

What does Christ say here? Does He end by saying “And so, whatever you do, never, ever tell someone else about their sin”? No. In verse five He says to clean up your own life *so that you can then see clearly to help other people*. The focus of this passage is not “don't ever judge people under any circumstances.” Instead it is this: “don't judge people *for sins that you yourself are committing.*” The Lord wants us to help each other overcome sin, but He doesn't want us to be hypocritical about it. That is the whole point of those five verses.

That alone should put to rest the idea that the Lord wants us to be silent about the sin that we see in others, but let's look at a few other passages. James had this to say:

**James 5:19:** “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

First of all, notice that this passage is aimed at *brethren* who err from the truth. James is talking about believers here. And how do you “convert the sinner from the error of his way” after a brother “errs from the truth”? I'll give you a hint: it is *not* accomplished by refusing to say anything for fear of being seen as judgmental! No, what James is asking us to do is take our fellow believers aside and correct them in love. James actually *wants* us to address the sin in other believers' lives! This passage places high value on those who *turn others away from sin* – and you can't do that by ignoring the

problem.

That brings up an interesting point: how did the apostles deal with this issue when they encountered sin in the lives of others? In Acts we find this exchange between Peter and two members of the church:

**Acts 5:1:** “But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,  
2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

So here we have two members of the early church who are telling a lie, saying that they were donating all of the proceeds from a real-estate sale when they were actually just donating a portion of it. How does Peter handle this situation? Does he refuse to judge them? Not exactly:

**Acts 5:3:** “But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?  
4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.  
5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.”

Not only did Peter harshly rebuke Ananias (and, later in the passage, his wife Sapphira), but Ananias *actually died*. That doesn't sound like Peter refused to pass judgment on them and just went on about his business! Peter saw sin and confronted it – and the results weren't pretty.

Even more striking is what Paul had to say to the Corinthian church. First, he told them that he had learned there was sin in their midst:

**1 Corinthians 5:1:** “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.”

Apparently some members of the Corinthian church were guilty of incest – a sin so awful that even pagan unbelievers abhorred it. Does Paul refuse to pass judgment on this? Does he say that we should just live and let live, and the most important thing is to mind our own business? See for yourself:

**1 Corinthians 5:2:** “And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.  
3 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed.  
4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
5 To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

This may come as a surprise to many modern Christians, but Paul actually condemns the Corinthian church *for not removing this person from their congregation*. (The person does seem to be a Christian, for verse 5 mentions the spirit being saved.) In other words, Paul doesn't stop at just condemning the sin; he actually tells the Corinthians that since this person has refused to repent they should not allow him be a part of their church any longer. In fact, the sin was so awful that in verse 5 Paul *actually turns the Christian over to Satan so that Satan can kill him*. (Notice the bit about “the destruction of the flesh” – that sounds a lot like death to me.) That is about as far from “don't be judgmental” as one can possibly get.

But Paul is not done. He has a lot more to say about this:

**1 Corinthians 5:6:** “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.”

Paul is comparing the sin in the church to yeast, and points out that if you add a little yeast to a loaf of bread it causes the entire loaf to rise. Likewise, having a little sin in the church leads to problems and temptations that affect the entire church body. Think of it this way: if one person in the church is leading a sinful life, what kind of example does that set for others? How long will it take for other Christians to decide to give in to that sin and start following their example? Once the church leadership establishes that a certain sin is acceptable, how long will it take for the congregation to decide that it must really be ok after all?

That is why Paul was so adamant that this person be evicted from the church: he didn't want his appalling behavior to poison the rest of the body. Sin is a poison that must not be tolerated among Christians; it has to be dealt with or else there will be terrible consequences.

But Paul is still not done. He goes on to say that we *shouldn't even associate* with Christians who are living sin-filled lives:

**1 Corinthians 5:9:** “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:  
10 Yet not altogether the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.  
11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat.”

Paul doesn't want believers to even *have dinner* with Christians who were doing the things that he listed in verse 11. Please note that he is not talking about people who fell into sin and then turned from it. He is focused on those who have been confronted with their sin but have refuse to change. Such people should be avoided. This doesn't mean that we should ignore them entirely, but that we should not have fellowship with them. They are not to be our companions. Why? Because a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Your holiness isn't going to rub off on them, but their sinfulness will rub off on you. If there is one rotten apple in a barrel of good apples, the good apples aren't going to convert the rotten one. Instead, the single rotten apple will ruin them all.

There are a lot of other examples that I could list, but let's end this by going back to Jesus. In Matthew 18 Jesus said this:

**Matthew 18:15:** “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

Does Jesus say “If your brother sins against you, don't judge him”? No. Instead, Jesus commands us to *go and tell him his fault*. And why are we do to this? So that we can turn the brother around and win him back.

What happens if this doesn't work? Christ goes on:

**Matthew 18:16:** “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

So Jesus said that if talking to the brother privately does not work, we should bring along a few more people so that they can correct him as well. If that fails then we should bring it before the church. However, if he doesn't listen to the church then we should consider the brother to be a pagan. Why? Because he was repeatedly corrected of his sin but he refused to repent of it. In other words, he decided that he would rather knowingly live in sin than live in holiness. This is a truly horrible thing for a believer to do, and we must not hang around such people – because if we do, their sin might rub off on us.

Of course, these days churches would never, ever dream of doing any of this. Churches aren't going to kick members out just because they have deliberately chosen a sinful lifestyle and have refused to turn from it. Likewise, Christians aren't going to refuse to associate with a fellow believer who is living in sin and who refuses to be sorry about it. The modern church has decided to not judge one another, and as a result our churches are full of sin and our congregations have been devastated. Holiness is hard to find these days, but that's to be expected. After all, Paul did warn us that a little sin goes a long way.

Interestingly, Christ told us that this was going happen. In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Him what signs there would be to indicate that His return was near. This was one of the things that He said:

**Matthew 24:12:** “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

Jesus is saying that in the last days the amount of sin will be so staggering that many people will lose their love for God and for one another. It's easy to see why. After all, if one Christian is refusing the path of holiness and has given their life over to sin, then that provides a strong incentive for others to do the same. When the church refuses to do anything about it the sin of one person starts spreading, and before long the whole congregation has stopped caring about holiness. Many people have rejected Jesus and become worldly. We no longer care about holiness; we'd much rather have all the pleasures that sin has to offer.

The reality is that the path of not judging other people actually leads to rampant sin and apostasy. Far from being “the right thing to do,” it actually *destroys* people's lives and kills their love for the Lord. It can even destroy entire churches. Sadly, that is the path that many churches have chosen. Jesus is aware of this and He is not happy. In Revelation He had this to say about it:

**Revelation 3:15:** “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wast cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of thy mouth.”

In other words, the carnal nature of these churches *actually makes Jesus vomit*. That's putting it pretty strongly, but Jesus isn't done yet. He went on to say this:

**Revelation 3:19:** “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Verse 20 is often used as a verse of comfort, but it's actually very frightening. Notice that Christ is addressing a lukewarm church that couldn't care less about their Savior. In that church, where does Jesus claim to be? *Outside, knocking on the door*. Christ is actually outside the church and He is asking for someone to open the door and let Him in! He will forgive them if they will turn and repent, but right now they don't have Christ at all – and a church without Christ is not a church.



## JUDGING THE BIBLE

One thing I have noticed is that it's increasingly common for Christians to judge the Bible. What I mean by this is that those who call themselves followers of Christ are reading the Bible and criticizing its teachings. If they agree with a verse then they decide that it must be true, and if they disagree with it then they say that it must be in error.

On a related note, it's also common for Christians to say that while the Bible does contain some truth, it's not entirely perfect. Many claim that there is error and superstition mixed up in it, and it's up to each person to decide what parts are right and what parts are wrong. People don't have a problem with rejecting whole passages (or even entire books!) if they happen to disagree with them. To them, the Bible cannot be trusted and instead must be judged. Who does this judging? Why, people do. They decide, based on either their own authority or on what modern culture believes, what is right and what is wrong.

This can be seen in so many areas. Does the Bible say that adultery or divorce is wrong, or perhaps make other statements that conflict with what the culture says? Then it simply doesn't know what it's talking about.

I wish I was making this up but I'm not. Even some Christian colleges no longer believe that the Bible is inerrant. They teach students that each person must make up their own mind about what parts of the Bible can be believed. The Bible is no longer viewed as the infallible Word of God. Instead people see it as simply a collection of spiritual truths that are only true as long as they agree with what people already believe.

The reason people believe this is *not* because there is evidence that the Bible has been corrupted. In fact, there is a tremendous amount of evidence that the Bible has been faithfully copied throughout the centuries. Scholars have found manuscript fragments of the New Testament that date to within a few decades of when the books were actually written, and they have copies of the Old Testament that date back several centuries before Christ was born in Bethlehem. When these manuscripts are compared to today's Bible it is found that the text has *not* been corrupted. In fact, no errors of any significance have crept in over the past several thousand years! The Bible that we have today accurately reflects the Bible's original manuscripts.

People are *not* rejecting the Bible because it has been corrupted; they are rejecting the Bible because they don't like what it says. It all boils down to the issue of *authority*. Who gets to decide what is right and what is wrong? Who gets to define truth and error? Is it God through His Word, or is it left up to individuals? Does God want us to read the Bible and believe it, or should we just do whatever is right in our own eyes?

It amazes me that modern Christianity has rejected the authority of the Bible and has set *themselves* up as the ultimate authority. If a person decides on his own what is right and what is wrong, and what is truth and what is error, then he has set himself up as God. He is the giver of truth and the master of his life. He bows the knee to no one but himself. Why? Because he is living by *his* rules. He who makes the rules is king. Look at it this way: if we live by God's rules then He is our king. If we live by our rules then we are king – and it's silly to edit the Bible to our liking and then pretend that we are still living by God's rules. After all, at that point anything goes. The Bible becomes nothing more than a prop that people use to justify whatever they're doing. People might as well write their own Bibles, for if you reject the teachings of the Word of God then that's what you are doing anyway. If you

throw out the epistles of Paul then how is that *not* writing your own Bible? And if you write your own Bible then you aren't believing in God anymore, but in yourself. It is *your* word, not God's Word, that counts. How can you claim to be a follower of Christ when you refuse to believe what He had to say?

Christ certainly didn't take a "pick-and-choose" approach to believing the Word of God! In fact, Jesus once defended the resurrection of the dead based on **the tense of a single word** in the Old Testament. When the Sadducees attacked the resurrection, Christ responded as follows:

**Matthew 22:31:** "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

Jesus taught that because God said I *am* the God of Abraham instead of I *was* the God of Abraham, then that means Abraham must still be alive, and therefore there is a resurrection. Christ clearly believed what the Old Testament taught about the Bible:

**2 Samuel 22:31:** "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him."

**Psalms 12:6:** "And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times."

**Psalms 18:30:** "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him."

**Proverbs 30:5:** "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."

In case we missed it, this idea is re-emphasized in the New Testament:

**2 Timothy 3:16:** "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

This says that Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. In other words, *we should take it seriously and believe what it says* – instead of editing it so that it teaches something more to our liking.

Of course, a lot of people would rather believe whatever they want to believe. The Bible has something to say about that, too:

**Proverbs 3:7:** "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil."

**Proverbs 16:2:** "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits."

**Proverbs 26:12:** "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of

a fool than of him.”

What else did Jesus believe about the Scriptures? Well, let's take a quick look. After all, Christians are supposed to be followers of Christ, so it would be great if they had the same view of the Bible that He did.

It should be noted that Christ quoted the Old Testament many times. For the purposes of this paper I will just focus on a few controversial areas – places where Christ upheld the Bible at the very points where modern scholars tend to disregard it.

### **Christ believed Abel was a real person**

Today it is common for Christian scholars to teach that the first 11 chapters of Genesis are simply a myth. There was no Adam and Eve, no Cain and Abel, and no Noah and the ark. However, Christ strongly disagreed. He believed that Abel was a real person who died a martyr's death:

**Luke 11:50-51:** “That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zechariah, which perished between the alter and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.”

As you can see, Jesus believed that Abel was just as real as Zechariah. If Abel was just a myth then this would have been a great place for the all-knowing God to mention that, but He did no such thing. Instead He upheld the historicity of Genesis.

### **Christ believed in Noah and the Great Flood**

Jesus was also clear about where He stood regarding the story of Noah and the Flood:

**Luke 17:26-7:** “And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.”

As you can see, Jesus did *not* dismiss the story of Noah and the Flood as a myth. He believed that Noah really existed and that the Flood really happened. He did *not* believe in a local flood, as modern scholars do; instead He taught that the Flood destroyed the whole world, and that Noah survived by entering the Ark. Jesus said that the Genesis Flood was just as real as his Second Coming was going to be.

## **Christ believed in the story of Lot**

Christ also believed that the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha was real history:

**Luke 17:28-9:** “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, the builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.”

## **Christ believed in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**

Likewise, Christ believed that there really was a real Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were real people, not mythological figures:

**Matthew 8:11:** “And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”

## **Christ believed in the story of Jonah**

It is common for modern scholars to dismiss the story of Jonah as a myth that has no basis in history. However, Jesus believed that the story was true. In fact, He said that just like Jonah spent three days in the great fish, so He would spend three days “in the heart of the earth”:

**Matthew 12:39-41:** “But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah: For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Ninevah shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.”

If the story of Jonah was just a myth then Jesus could certainly have told us that, but He did not. Instead He upheld it as a real historical event – and the reason He did this is because it really did happen.

## **Christ believed that the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon**

Jesus believed that the Queen of Sheba (here called the “queen of the south”) really did exist, and actually did visit Solomon:

**Matthew 12:42:** “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

According to Jesus, Solomon was not a myth; he was a real king who actually existed. The wisdom of Solomon was not a myth; it was genuine. The Queen of Sheba was not a myth; she really lived and actually did come to hear Solomon. Jesus is affirming that the Old Testament history is real, genuine history – not mythological accounts.

### **Christ believed in Daniel and his prophecies**

It is common for modern scholars to say that the book of Daniel was not written by Daniel. They claim that his prophecies were written by someone else, long after the events he foretold actually happened. The reason scholars say this is because they do not believe in prophecy and therefore insist that all prophecies *must* have been written after the fact. However, Jesus clearly taught that Daniel was a prophet and said that the words in the book of Daniel were written *by him*, centuries *before* the events took place:

**Matthew 24:15-6:** “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand;) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains:”

According to Jesus, *Daniel* wrote the book of Daniel. He also wrote the prophecies in Daniel. They were *not* written by someone else.

### **Christ believed that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible**

Some modern scholars teach that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible. However, Jesus disagreed. This can be seen in a number of different passages, but I will just quote one.

**Mark 12:26:** “And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?”

Other verses to check out include: Matthew 19:7, 8; Mark 7:10, 12:26; Luke 5:14; 16:29, 31; 24:27, 44; John 1:17; 5:45, 46; 7:19. Jesus clearly believed that Moses was the author of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Let's also not forget what Christ had to say about the rest of the Old Testament:

**Luke 24:44:** “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me.”

### **Christ believed that Isaiah wrote the entire book of Isaiah**

Modern scholars like to say that the book of Isaiah had multiple authors. They say this because Isaiah makes many prophetic statements, and moderns scholars do not believe in prophecy. Therefore, any prophetic statements had to have been written by someone else, long after they happened. However, Christ attributes the *entire book of Isaiah* to that prophet:

**Mark 7:6:** “He answered and said unto them, Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

**John 12:37-41:** “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.”

Notice how clearly Jesus attributed the book of Isaiah to that prophet. Jesus actually said that *Isaiah* prophesied and *Isaiah* said those things. The all-knowing God left no doubt as to who was responsible.

### **Christ condemned people for not knowing the Scriptures**

Here we get to the heart of the matter. It is very common for modern Christians to know almost nothing about the Bible. However, Jesus was not hesitant to criticize people for not knowing the Scriptures:

**Matthew 22:29:** “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.”

### **Christ obeyed the Scriptures and was subject to them**

Most importantly of all, Jesus not only knew the Scriptures, but He *obeyed them*. He believed that He – the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe – was subject to them and had to do what they commanded:

**Matthew 26:24:** “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.”

**Matthew 26:53-4:** “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”

This last point is key. You *never* see Christ attack the Bible or say that it's wrong or claim that it's riddled with errors and people must decide for themselves what is true. In every single case Jesus upheld the Scriptures – believing in Noah, Jonah, the prophets, and so forth. But most notably of all, *Christ obeyed the Scriptures*. He did not judge them, nor did He ever change them to something that was more to His liking. God Himself submitted to them and obeyed them! If *God* is required to obey the Scriptures then *why do you believe you have a license to reject them?* Do you think you are greater than God? Why would they be binding on God but not on you?

Shouldn't the supposed followers of Christ do what Christ did? If He knew the Scriptures and obeyed them then shouldn't we do the same? But I fear that we are living in the time spoken of by the apostle Paul:

**2 Timothy 4:3:** “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

To all those who call themselves followers of Christ, I urge you to *follow Christ* and not follow yourselves. Ask yourself this: who makes the rules that govern your life? Who do you answer to? Who decides what's right and what is wrong? Is Jesus your Lord, or are *you* your own master?

This is a very important question. In order to be saved Jesus **must** be your Savior *and* your Lord. There is no salvation that says “Jesus, I refuse to repent of my sins and make you Lord, but I don't want to go to Hell. So I'm going to keep on serving myself and living in sin. I want You to take me to Heaven when I die, but stay out of my life. Don't you dare tell me what to do.” That prayer will not save anybody. In order to be saved you *must* give your life to Jesus. You *must* repent of your sins. This doesn't mean that you'll never sin again, but it does mean that Jesus is your master. There is no salvation that rejects the Lordship of Christ.

## LONGING FOR HOME

Have you ever heard the phrase “That person is so heavenly minded that they're of no earthly use”? I'm sure we've all heard some variation of it at some point in our lives. The warning is clear: if you focus too much on heavenly things then you'll become useless, so it's best to keep at least one foot firmly planted on Earth. However, I have to ask: is that really a Biblical sentiment? Does the Bible really warn us against becoming too “heavenly minded”?

This may come as a surprise, but it actually does not! In fact, it says quite the opposite: the Scriptures urge Christians to be even *more* heavenly minded. This is a constant refrain throughout the Bible.

For example, take a look at Matthew 6. Here we see Jesus commanding people to not lay up treasures on Earth. Instead, He wants people to lay up treasures in Heaven. Why? Jesus explains:

**Matthew 6:19:** “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:  
20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:  
21 **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**”

Do you see verse 21? Jesus wants us to lay up treasures in Heaven *so that our heart will be focused on Heaven*. You don't see Jesus saying “Now, whatever you do, don't think too much about Heaven!” He *wants* our heart to be set on it.

Paul expands upon this idea in Hebrew 11, which is often called the Hall of Fame for people of faith. The chapter lists person after person that exhibited extraordinary faith and holds them up as shining examples to follow. At the end of this list he explains the reason why these people had the courage to act as they did:

**Hebrews 11:13:** “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were **strangers and pilgrims on the earth.**  
14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.  
15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.  
16 But now **they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly:** wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

Do you see what these verses are saying? The reason Abraham, Noah, and the rest were able to act with such great faith was because they desired a “better country” – a *heavenly* one. Their mind was so firmly fixed on Heaven that they were willing to make tremendous sacrifices. They saw themselves as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” – and *because* of that they were able to serve God with incredible effectiveness. Since they were not tied down to this world, they were willing to give up the things of this world. Their heart was somewhere else.

I have heard people say that it is selfish to long for Heaven, but the Bible tells us that being “heavenly minded” *pleases* God tremendously. Verse 16 tells us that *because* these people had their



hearts set on Heaven, God was “not ashamed to be called their God.” In fact, it goes further to say that God *prepared for them a city*. Since these people longed for a better country, the Lord was going to give it to them. Since these people sacrificed earthly things, the Lord was going to give them heavenly things in return. God was *honored*, not appalled, at their passionate longing for Heaven!

The apostle Paul was definitely heavenly minded. He longed to go Home:

**Philippians 1:21:** “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”

If you'll notice, Paul does not say “Longing for Heaven is bad! Keep your mind here on earth. It's selfish to want to go and be with Jesus.” Instead Paul makes it clear that dying is *gain*. He says that it is “far better” to depart and be with Christ than it is to stay here. Although Paul recognized the fact that the churches needed him, he clearly had a passionate desire to “depart, and to be with Christ.” That was what he really wanted – and that desire is never condemned anywhere in the Bible.

The reason Paul was longing for Heaven was *not* because he was mired in defeat and had no hope for the future. Instead Paul realized what many of us fail to understand: our life doesn't end when the Lord calls us to Heaven! Instead it actually gets *much better*. For Christians, dying does not end life; instead it starts a whole new chapter that is so glorious and amazing that the Bible says it “cannot be compared” to even the greatest trials and struggles of our life here. Paul knew that he would *improve* his life by changing his address – and the same can be said for the “Hall of Faith” people who are listed in Hebrews 11.

After the Last Supper, when Judas had departed to betray Christ, the Lord took His disciples out for a walk. In those precious last moments before His crucifixion the Lord told them this:

**John 14:1:** “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Jesus said that the time of His departure was at hand, but they were not to “be troubled” about it. The reason He was going away was so He could prepare a place for them, and one day He would come back and get them so they could be with Him forever. In other words, the Bridegroom was leaving to prepare a home for His Bride, and one day He would come back and get her so they could be together for eternity.

Do you honestly think that the Lord wants His Bride to be *indifferent* at the prospect of finally going home and being with Him? Do you think it pleases Him when she puts the thoughts of her future with Him out of her mind and instead focuses on the things of this world (which are rapidly passing away)? The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. How can we passionately love God and *not* want to go Home so that we might be with Him? Isn't that part of loving God?

It is true that we have work to do here on Earth, but as Paul pointed out in Hebrews, the thing

that enabled the great people of faith to do what they did was *a longing for Heaven*. Because their heart was not set on Earth, they were able to make great sacrifices and accomplish great things. A true longing for Heaven doesn't make a person ineffective; instead it frees him from the “cares of this world” that distract from God and enables him to see the Lord's will and pursue it with less hesitation.

I am greatly concerned that many Christians are so earthly minded that they are of no heavenly good. That is something that Christ *did* warn us about:

**Mark 4:18:** “And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,  
19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

That is the real question. Have we become so distracted by the “cares of this world” that we can no longer see straight? What is *really* distracting us from the Lord: is it Heaven, or is it actually the world in which we live?

I do not think we are in any danger of being so Heavenly minded that we are of no Earthly use. That is simply not possible. However, it is quite possible that we may be so Earthly minded that we are of no Heavenly use – and I think many people fall into that category.

# MORMONISM

In the past few years the American public has seen the rise of some very prominent Mormons, and that has led to a lot of questions about Mormonism. What do Mormons believe? What does the Bible have to say about these beliefs? Is Mormonism Biblical? Is Mormonism just another denomination of Christianity, or is it something entirely different?

With all of these questions swirling about I thought it might be a good idea to take some time and address the beliefs of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS). This paper can't possibly cover every aspect of Mormonism, but I would like to cover some of its most basic teachings.

By way of acknowledgments, I'd like to thank Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, the authors of the book *Mormonism 101*. Their thorough Biblical examination of Mormonism was extremely helpful, and I recommend their book to anyone who is trying to understand more about this belief system.

## God The Father

Do Mormons and Christians worship the same God? The leadership of the Mormon church says that the answer is no. In fact, the Mormon god is quite different from the one that Christians are familiar with. For example:

“The false gods of Christendom bear the same names as the true Gods of the Bible. Beyond this they have little resemblance. They are described in the creeds that the Lord told Joseph Smith were “an abomination in his sight.”

“And be it remembered that the gods of the creeds, which are the gods of Christendom, are just as false as are the gods of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Muslims, Amorites, Hittites, or any other peoples, excepting only the members of the true church.”

Bruce McConkie (Mormon Apostle)

“In contrast [to ideas believed in Mormonism], many Christians reject the idea of a tangible, personal God and a Godhead of three separate beings. They believe that God is a spirit and that the Godhead is only one God. In our view, these concepts are the evidence of the falling away we call the Great Apostasy.”

Dallin H. Oaks (Mormon Apostle)

That is pretty strong language! Both of these LDS leaders claim that what Christendom teaches about God is entirely false. Oaks rejects both the Trinity and the idea that God is a spirit, and claims that the Godhead is composed of three separate beings.

However, the Bible's stance on this is pretty clear:

**John 4:24:** "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

**Deuteronomy 6:4:** "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:"

**1 John 5:7:** "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one."

Does the Bible say that God is a Spirit? Yes, in John 4:24. Does the Bible say that there is just one God? Yes, in Deuteronomy 6:4. Does the Bible teach the doctrine of the Trinity – that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons but yet one being and one God? Yes, it certainly does, in I John 5:7. This is why Christians believe it: it is what the Bible teaches, and the Bible is very clear about it.

So immediately we see that the Mormon idea of God is quite different from the Biblical view of God. But the differences go much further than this. Mormons do not believe that God was always God. They teach that He had a beginning – that God had a father, and his father had a father, and so on:

"We were begotten by our Father in heaven; the person of Father in Heaven was begotten on a previous heavenly world by His Father; and, again, He was begotten by a still more ancient Father; and so on, from generation to generation."

Orson Pratt (LDS Apostle)

In fact, they believe that God probably began life as a mortal, had a childhood, and eventually grew up to become the God that He is today:

"Remember that God, our heavenly Father, was perhaps once a child, and mortal like we ourselves, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement; has moved forward and overcome, until He has arrived at the point where He now is."

Orson Hyde (LDS Apostle)

This idea that God was an ordinary person who eventually grew to become God is quite shocking to Christians! That's because this Mormon doctrine is not even close to what the Bible teaches. This is what the Bible has to say about God:

**Isaiah 44:6:** "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

7 And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.

8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no

God; I know not any.”

That's a pretty clear statement! God says that He is the first and the last; He did not have a father, nor did He have a beginning. God was also quite clear that He is the *only* God: there are no other beings like Him. He had no father, or grandfather, or great-grandfather; He is the one and only. This is important because Mormonism teaches that, just as God was a person who grew to become God, so we can grow and become gods ourselves:

“The Lord created you and me for the purpose of becoming Gods like Himself; when we have been proved in our present capacity, and been faithful with all things He puts into our possession. We are created, we are born for the express purpose of growing up from the low estate of manhood, to become Gods like unto our Father in heaven. That is the truth about it, just as it is. The Lord has organized mankind for the express purpose of increasing in that intelligence and truth, which is with God, until he is capable of creating worlds on worlds, and becoming Gods, even the sons of God.”

President Brigham Young

However, as we've seen in Isaiah 44:6, this is *not at all* what the Bible teaches. God was quite clear that “beside me there is no God.” We will never become equal with God; for all of eternity there will never be any other being like Him. God is entirely unique and *always will be*. This point is made over and over in the Scriptures:

**Deuteronomy 4:35:** “Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him. ...

39 Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else.”

**Isaiah 43:10:** “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.”

**Isaiah 46:9:** “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me,

10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:”

Do you see how clear the Bible is on this subject? It says over and over that “there is none else beside him”! God is the *only* God. Isaiah 43:10 states that “before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me” – thus refuting both the idea that God came from a long line of other gods, *and* the idea that one day we will be equal with God.

This brings up an interesting point: just who was it that told mankind that they could become like God? Why, it was Satan, back in the Garden of Eden:

**Genesis 3:4:** “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:  
5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened,  
and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

Mormonism makes the same promise that the serpent did: “ye shall be as gods.” But that is not what the Bible teaches.

Moreover, Mormonism teaches that God changes:

“Yet, if we accept the great law of eternal progression, we must accept the fact that there was a time when Deity was much less powerful than He is today. Then how did He become glorified and exalted and attain His present status of Godhood? In the first place, aeons ago God undoubtedly took advantage of every opportunity to learn the laws of truth and as He became acquainted with each new verity He righteously obeyed it.”

Milton R. Hunter

Once again we see the Mormon idea that God started out as an ordinary person and eventually earned His status of Godhood. However, the Bible is quite clear that God never, *ever* changes:

**Malachi 3:6:** “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

This idea is repeated over and over in the Bible. God *does not change*. He always has existed and He always will exist:

**Psalms 90:2:** “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

Do you see what the Bible is saying? The Scriptures do not say that God had a humble beginning and eventually grew to become God; instead they teach that God was God “from everlasting to everlasting”! He is *eternal* and has *always* been God.

Mormonism also teaches that God is not omnipresent. They say that He cannot be everywhere at once:

“Some would have us believe that God is present everywhere. It is not so.”

President Brigham Young

If God was once a man who eventually became God then that would make sense, but that is not what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures really do teach that God is everywhere at once:

**Proverbs 15:3:** “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”

**Jeremiah 23:23:** “Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?”

24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.”

The Bible is quite clear that God fills heaven and earth; He sees all and is everywhere at once.

It is clear from even this brief examination of the subject that the god of Mormonism is *very* different from the God of the Bible. The Mormon god was not always god, nor was he the first god; he is just the latest in a long line of gods. He had a beginning, and over time he grew and learned until he eventually obtained his current status as god. He is not a spirit, he is not the only god out there, and he is not everywhere at once.

The God of the Bible, on the other hand, is the *only* God, and has been God for all of eternity. He has no beginning and He has no end. He does not change or grow, for He is perfect and has always been perfect. He *is* a Spirit and He is everywhere at once.

These differences are quite profound. Mormons do *not* worship the same God that Christians do, and their whole concept of God directly contradicts what the Bible has to say about the subject.

## **Jesus**

The Mormon idea of Jesus is radically different from the one that Christians are familiar with. First, Mormonism teaches that Jesus had to *attain* Godhood by being a good person. He wasn't always God:

“He [Jesus] is the Firstborn of the Father. By obedience and devotion to the truth he attained that pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as God, as the Lord Omnipotent, while yet in his pre-existent state.”

Bruce McConkie (Mormon Apostle)

This idea that Jesus was once an ordinary person who eventually earned His position of Godhood goes against everything the Bible has to say about God. However, as I've already covered the Bible's teachings on God and the Trinity in the previous section, I won't repeat it all here. The Bible is clear that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God and have always existed; there was never a time when they were not God, and they never change.

But the differences go much deeper than that. Mormonism rejects the Christian idea of the Virgin Birth. Instead they teach that God and Mary had sex, and the product of their physical union was Jesus. I know this idea seems shocking but it has been repeated by many Mormon leaders:

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!”

Ezra Taft Benson

“Thus, God the Father became the literal father of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father.”

Gospel Principles

“The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood – was begotten of his father, as we were of our fathers.”

Brigham Young

“I will say that I was naturally begotten; so was my father, and also my Saviour Jesus Christ. According to the Scriptures, he is first begotten of his father in the flesh, and there was nothing unnatural about it.”

Heber C. Kimball

“There is no need to spiritualize away the plain meaning of the scriptures. There is nothing figurative or hidden or beyond comprehension in our Lord's coming into mortality. He is the Son of God in the same sense and way that we are the sons of mortal fathers. It is just that simple.”

Bruce McConkie

The problem with all of this is that the Bible teaches that Jesus was born *of a virgin*. Logically, if Jesus was the product of a sexual relationship between Mary and God then He was *not* born of a virgin. After all, virgin is someone who has *never had sex!* This is really pretty straightforward:

**Isaiah 7:14:** “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

Notice how it says that *a virgin* shall conceive. If Jesus was the result of sexual intercourse then He was not born of a virgin, was he?

This is what the Bible *actually* says about the conception of Jesus:

**Luke 1:35:** “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Mormonism says “No, it wasn't the Holy Ghost. God just impregnated Mary in the same way that husbands impregnate their wives. There was nothing unusual about it.” To say that the Mormon stance is unbiblical is putting it mildly; it is a gross perversion of what the Bible teaches about the



virgin birth.

Mormonism also teaches that Jesus and Lucifer were brothers. In fact, Lucifer actually wanted to be the savior of mankind, but Jesus got the honor instead:

“Long before you were born a program was developed by your creators. ... The principal personalities in this great drama were a Father Elohim, perfect in wisdom, judgment, and person, and two sons, Lucifer and Jehovah.”

Spencer W. Kimball

“The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer ... this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind.”

Milton R. Hunter

Does the Bible really say that God had two children, Jesus and Satan, and that Satan tried desperately to be our savior? Absolutely not! I've already shown earlier that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, and they have always existed and will always exist. Satan is *not* a part of the trinity. He is a created being, and in fact he was created by Jesus. This means that he *cannot* be Jesus' brother:

**John 1:1:** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
2 The same was in the beginning with God.  
3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

Do you notice what it says in verse 3? *All things* were made by Jesus. Everything in this universe was created by Him, including the angels – of which Satan is one. The Bible says that Jesus was the eternal God, without beginning or end, while Satan is a being that was created *by* Jesus. *They are not brothers.*

## **Preexistence**

Mormonism teaches that before we were born we lived in heaven – the offspring of heavenly parents. However, in order to grow we left heaven and were born on earth as physical beings:

“Our heavenly parents provided us with a celestial home more glorious and beautiful than any place on earth. We were happy there. Yet they knew we could not progress beyond a certain point unless we left them for a time. They wanted us to develop the godlike qualities that they have. To do this, we needed to leave our celestial home to be tested and to gain experience. We needed to choose good over

evil. Our spirits needed to be clothed with physical bodies. We would need to leave our physical bodies at death and reunite with them in the Resurrection. Then we would receive immortal bodies like those of our heavenly parents. If we passed our tests, we would receive the fulness of joy that our heavenly parents have received.”

Bruce McConkie

This is why Mormons taught for a long time that people should have as many children as possible, in order to provide bodies for spirits that were waiting in heaven:

“There are multitudes of pure and holy spirits waiting to take tabernacles, now what is our duty? - To prepare tabernacles for them; to take a course that we will not tend to drive those spirits into the families of the wicked, where they will be trained in wickedness, debauchery, and every species of crime. It is the duty of every righteous man and woman to prepare tabernacles for all the spirits they can.”

Brigham Young

In other words, Mormons believe that there are millions of spirits in heaven that are just waiting to be born. Mormons were told to have large families so that these waiting spirits would be placed into Mormon homes. This is why President Joseph F. Smith called birth control one of the greatest crimes in the world.

This idea is completely alien to Christians. Nowhere does the Bible say that there are countless spirits in heaven just waiting to be born on earth, nor does it say that spirits are created by the union of two other spirits. These are all completely foreign concepts! God made it quite clear that we weren't waiting around in Heaven when God created the world. Instead we were nowhere to be found:

**Job 38:4:** “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.”

Mormons try to use a number of passages to claim that the Bible teaches this concept. One verse they use is this one:

**Jeremiah 1:5:** “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

Mormons say that this verse proves that Jeremiah existed before he was born. However, that's not what this verse is saying at all. Notice it says that Jeremiah was formed in the *womb* of his mother – not in some heavenly preexistence! It doesn't say “Before I took your spirit out of heaven and put you in the womb of your mother I knew you.” What God is saying is that before Jeremiah even existed, God knew him and had a destiny for him.

Another verse that is used to as evidence for a pre-birth existence is this one:

**Ecclesiastes 12:7:** “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

Mormons argue that this is evidence for preexistence, but all it is really saying is that after death our spirit goes to God. This is because God is the one who forms our spirit:

**Zechariah 12:1:** “The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.”

Notice it doesn't say our spirit is the offspring of a spirit father and a spirit mother! *God* forms our spirits. They are formed *in the womb*, and after death they return to God. Some go on to everlasting life, while others go on to everlasting torment.

What you *don't* find in the Bible is a statement that says “Before you were conceived in the womb you existed in spirit form in heaven, and you were sent to earth so you could grow spiritually.” Nor do you find any verses that say “Your spirit is the offspring of a spirit father and mother, who are waiting for you back in heaven.” Those concepts are simply not found in the Bible. Another way to put it is that this Mormon doctrine is unbiblical.

## **The Fall**

Mormonism teaches that the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden was actually a good thing. It states that Eve made the right decision in choosing to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit, and that mankind was greatly blessed because of this:

“Some Christians condemn Eve for her act, concluding that she and her daughters are somehow flawed by it. Not the Latter-day Saints! Informed by revelation, we celebrate Eve's act and honor her wisdom and courage in the great episode called the Fall.”

Dallin H. Oaks (Mormon Apostle)

This brings up a question: was God pleased that Eve ate of the fruit? Was He delighted that mankind disobeyed Him? No, He was not! In fact, He cursed everyone involved, starting with the serpent:

**Genesis 3:14:** “And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: ...”

He cursed Eve:

**Genesis 3:16:** “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”

And He cursed Adam:

**Genesis 3:17:** “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

The Bible says that this one action brought death into the world:

**Romans 5:12:** “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

It goes further to say that *all of creation* is in pain because of what happened:

**Romans 8:22:** “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”

This act of disobedience resulted in curses for all parties involved, and it brought death, disease, suffering, and pain into the world. It took a perfect world and turned it into the world that we see today – a place filled with poverty, hunger, crime, war, and bloodshed. And yet we are to believe that Eve made the *right decision* and that God was delighted that mankind took Satan's advice? This Mormon doctrine flatly contradicts what the Bible has to say about the Fall.

One way that Mormonism tries to get around this is by saying that what Eve did was a “transgression”, and transgressions aren't sins:

“Some acts, like murder, are crimes because they are inherently wrong. Other acts, like operating without a license, are crimes only because they are legally prohibited. Under these distinctions, the act that produced the Fall was not a sin – inherently wrong – but a transgression – wrong because it was formally prohibited.”

Dallin Oaks (Mormon Apostle)

Does the Bible actually say that transgressions aren't sins? No, it does not:

**1 John 3:4:** “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.”

In fact, the Bible actually says that this one act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden made us *sinners*:

**Romans 5:18:** “Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men

unto justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were **made sinners**, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

Do you see what these verses are saying? Sins *are* transgressions of God's law. That is the very *definition* of sin! God puts no difference between “sins” and “transgressions.” If you break God's law you are sinning, and that's the end of the story. This idea that God was hoping mankind would disobey God and obey Satan instead is completely unbiblical. The fall of mankind brought death, misery, and judgment upon all men and made us all sinners. That is why Jesus came to save us: apart from His sinless life, death, and resurrection there could be no salvation. Eve's choice was not wise; it was *devastating*, and we are still feeling its effects today.

## **The Cross**

Mormonism teaches that the place where Jesus atoned for the sins of man was *not* on the cross. Instead it was actually in the Garden of Gethsemane:

“Forgiveness is available because Christ the Lord sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane as he bore the incalculable weight of the sins of all who ever had or ever would repent.”

Bruce McConkie (Mormon Apostle)

“[Christ] suffered as only God could suffer, bearing our griefs, carrying our sorrows, being wounded for our transgressions, voluntarily submitting Himself to the iniquity of us all, just as Isaiah prophesied (see Isaiah 53:4-6). It was in Gethsemane that Jesus took on Himself the sins of the world, in Gethsemane that His pain was equivalent to the cumulative burden of all men, in Gethsemane that He descended below all things so that all could repent and come to Him.”

Ezra Taft Benson (President)

“Where and under what circumstances was the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God made? Was it on the Cross of Calvary or in the Garden of Gethsemane? It is to the Cross of Christ that most Christians look when centering their attention upon the infinite and eternal atonement. And certainly the sacrifice of our Lord was completed when he was lifted up by men; also, that part of his life and suffering is more dramatic and, perhaps, more soul stirring. But in reality the pain and suffering, the triumph and grandeur, of the atonement took place primarily in Gethsemane.”

Bruce McConkie (Mormon Apostle)

As McConkie says, Mormons believe that “the pain and suffering...of the atonement took place primarily in Gethsemane.” In fact, he is very dismissive of the idea that we are saved by Christ's death on the cross:

“Christians speak often of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power. Much that is believed and taught on this subject, however, is such utter nonsense and so palpably false that to believe it is to lose one's salvation. For instance, many believe or pretend to believe that if we confess Christ with our lips and avow that we accept him as our personal Savior, we are thereby saved. They say that his blood, without any other act than mere belief, makes us clean.”

Bruce McConkie (Mormon Apostle)

Here we get to the heart of the matter. Notice how he says that you can actually *lose your salvation* if you believe that salvation is “mere belief”, or if you believe that the blood of Jesus is all it takes to atone for your sins! Mormonism teaches that the blood of Jesus is *not enough* to save you. Let me repeat that: they state that belief in Jesus is *simply not enough*. You need something more in order to reach the celestial kingdom – specifically, good works and obedience to *all* of the Mormon laws. This is why you will not find crosses displayed in LDS churches.

The fact is, the Bible really *does* teach that belief in Jesus is how you are saved, or “made clean”:

**Romans 10:9:** “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, **thou shalt be saved.**  
10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Notice there is *no mention of works* in any of those verses. You confess and believe, and that is *all there is to it*. The Bible is quite clear that works on our part are not involved in this cleansing process:

**Ephesians 2:8:** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:  
9 **Not of works**, lest any man should boast.”

Do you see how direct that statement is? You could not get any clearer than this: we are saved *by grace through faith*, and this salvation is *not of works*. What cleanses us from our sins is Christ's *death*. As Romans says, we are justified *by His blood*:

**Romans 5:8:** “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.  
9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.  
10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Notice how it says that we are justified by *His blood*. This is because all of us are sinners, worthy of the wrath of God – and the penalty for sin is *death*. The reason we can be saved is because Jesus died in our place, taking upon Himself the punishment that we deserved. When we ask God to forgive our sins and believe in Jesus then He will forgive us, and at that point we are saved. Christ's death is all-important because it is His *death* – the sacrificial shedding of His blood – that paid the price for our sins. That is what justifies us.

It was not suffering in the garden that provided atonement, but the death *on the cross* – the very cross that Mormonism holds in such light esteem:

**Galatians 6:14:** “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

**Colossians 1:20:** “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”

**Colossians 2:14:** “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nauling it to his cross;”

The message of these verses are very clear: it is *through the blood of the cross* that we are reconciled to God. The cross of Christ is *central* to the gospel! It really is His blood that makes us clean. That is the very message of the gospel itself: our sins have been nailed to the *cross*. It is not Gethsemane that saves us; it is Christ's death on the cross.

This is where Mormonism gets into very dangerous territory. As we've already seen, they do not believe that “faith alone” is enough to save you. This has been spelled out in very explicit language:

“One of the most fallacious doctrines originated by Satan and propounded by man is that man is saved alone by the grace of God; that belief in Jesus Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation.”

President Spencer Kimball

As we've seen, Romans 10:9-10 and Ephesians 2:8-9 tell us a very different story. Mankind *is* saved solely by the grace of God, and belief in Jesus *is* all that is needed for salvation. The Bible has very strong words for those who would add obedience to the law to salvation:

**Galatians 2:21:** “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

**Galatians 3:11:** “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”

This is one of the key differences between Mormonism and Christianity. The Bible teaches that all of us are sinners (unlike Mormonism, which teaches that mankind is basically good):

**Romans 3:23:** “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

Moreover, the penalty for sin is death:

**Romans 6:23:** “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This means that if our status does not change, we are all sinners that will face the wrath of God. However, the death of Jesus on the cross changed everything:

**Romans 5:8:** “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be **saved from wrath** through him.

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Notice how much is said in these verses! Before Christ died we were the *enemies* of God. However, God reconciled us to Him *by the death of His Son*. It is Christ's *death* that saves us from the wrath of God. All of us need salvation, and that salvation can only come through Christ. This is because Christ is the only sacrifice that God will accept: someone had to die in our place, and Christ was the only sinless one that could do it. We all desperately need salvation, and that salvation can only come through faith in Christ.

Mormonism, on the other hand, teaches that men are basically good and are saved unconditionally, whether they believe in Jesus or not:

“Many aspects of God's grace are unconditional. For instance, one free gift of salvation is resurrection and immortality, given by Jesus Christ to all people who have lived on this earth. This gift is not affected by anything we do here. Everyone, from the most righteous to the most wretched, will be resurrected and will live forever in the next life ... By breaking the bands of death, Jesus Christ overcame death, and all will live again. In this respect, we are saved by grace unconditionally.”

Rex Lee

Mormonism teaches that Christ's death saved *everyone*. It doesn't matter if they believe in Jesus or not, and it doesn't matter if they have ever repented of their sins. They could spend their whole lives as devoted Satanists and it would not matter. Everyone who has ever lived is saved, and everyone will be resurrected and live forever. Now, it's true that Mormonism teaches that some people go to a better afterlife than others, but what determines that is *not* whether you believed in Jesus but whether you *led a good life* and kept the law perfectly. The better job you did keeping the law, the better resurrection you will obtain.

This is *not at all* what the Bible says. The Bible is quite clear that you can only be saved *if* you believe in Jesus:

**Acts 16:30:** “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”



31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

Notice how Paul did not say “You misunderstand; everyone is saved no matter what they do. If you want a better afterlife then you need to start keeping the law perfectly.” No, Paul was quite clear: in order to be saved from God's wrath you must *believe in Jesus*. The Lord clearly stated that many people were not going to do this, and because of that they would be lost forever:

**Matthew 7:13:** “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and **many** there be which go in thereat:  
14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** there be that find it.”

Jesus said that there were *few* who would find the path that leads to life, while there were *many* who would go on to destruction! Revelation 20 tells us that there is a day of judgment coming, and all those who did not *believe in Jesus* will be sentenced to eternal torment in a place called the Lake of Fire:

**Revelation 20:11:** “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

In case there is any confusion over this, verse 15 mentions the Book of Life. The names that are written in it are the names of those who have believed in Jesus, repented of their sins and accepted Him as their Lord and Savior. It is not a book of works, but a book of *faith*.

Now, it is not true that Mormons don't believe in Hell. Their doctrine is a bit more complicated than that. They believe in four possible eternal destinations:

- **Outer Darkness:** a place of torment. Only evil spirits, extremely wicked people, and apostate Mormons go here.
- **Telestial kingdom:** the wicked go here.
- **Terrestrial kingdom:** honorable people and “lukewarm Mormons” will go here.
- **Celestial kingdom:** this level is itself composed of three separate levels. Mormons hope to reach the highest level of this kingdom.

As we've said before, Mormonism teaches that what defines your eternal state is not your faith in Jesus but how you've lived your life. If you are a basically good person then you can make it to the terrestrial kingdom, even if you never came to trust Jesus at all. You don't even have to be a Mormon! However, if you want to attain the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom then you not only have to be a good and devout Mormon, but you must keep all of the commands perfectly. In other words, they teach that it is your *works* – your obedience to the entire law – that decide how things turn out. It's a very strict law, too: the simple act of drinking a cup of tea or smoking a cigarette could be all that it takes to prevent you from entering the celestial kingdom:

“Who will be saved in the celestial kingdom, and go into the presence of the Father and Son? *Those only who observe the whole law*, who keep the commandments of God – those who walk in newness of life, observe *all* his precepts and do his will.”

Brigham Young

“You cannot neglect little things. “Oh, a cup of tea is such a little thing. It is so little; surely it doesn't amount to much; surely the Lord will forgive me if I drink a cup of tea.” If you drink coffee or tea, or take tobacco, are you letting a cup of tea, or a little tobacco stand in the road and bar you from the celestial kingdom of God, where you might otherwise have received a fullness of glory?”

President Joseph Fielding Smith

Notice that it is not *faith in Jesus* that does the trick; instead it is your obedience to the law. If you want to reach the highest level of exaltation then you have to observe the “whole law.” This is salvation by works: if you want to go into the presence of God then you have to *earn* your way there.

The Bible does not teach any of this. As we've seen, it states that there are only two possible destinations: everlasting life with Jesus, and everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire. *All* those who never trusted in Jesus alone for salvation will be cast into the Lake of Fire, where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. On the other hand, all those whose names *are* written in the Book of Life will go on to spend eternity with the Lord. Those are your only two choices. It is not your works that will determine your final destination; it is your faith in Jesus, and *nothing else*.

The differences can be summed up like this: Mormonism teaches that Christ's death saved everyone and therefore everyone gets resurrected. However, everyone doesn't have the same afterlife. Your position in the resurrection is determined by how well you obeyed the entire law. If you have done all the right things and lived a good life then you will end up in a higher kingdom. However, if you were evil or wicked then you will end up in one of the lower ones, depending on just how wicked you actually were.

Christianity, on the other hand, teaches that the *only* way to avoid an eternity of unbearable torment is to *believe in Jesus*. It is not our works that saves us but our faith in Jesus Christ. If we believe in Jesus then we will be saved and will go on to be with God forever. However, if we reject God's offer of forgiveness then we will face His wrath, no matter what else we may have done during our life. *Everything* rests on our faith in Jesus.

There are a great many other facets of Mormonism that I have not touched on: their use of extra-Biblical sources of revelation (Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, etc.); their view that baptism is required for salvation; their idea that marriage can extend beyond death; etc. However, I think I've gone far enough to show that Mormonism is completely different from Biblical Christianity, despite what Mormons might claim:

“Mormonism is Christianity; Christianity is Mormonism; they are one and the same, and they are not to be distinguished from each other in the minutest detail...Mormons are true Christians; their worship is pure, unadulterated Christianity authored by Christ and accepted by Peter, James, and John and all the ancient saints.”

Bruce McConkie (Mormon Apostle)

Mormonism is *not* the same thing as Christianity. It offers a completely different view of God, Jesus, salvation, the gospel, the resurrection, and the afterlife – one that is contrary to what the Bible teaches. Following the tenants of Mormonism will not lead to salvation: it is yet another part of the wide gate that leads many people to destruction. Mormons may hate it when people say they are not Christians, but the fact is they are not. I think this quote puts it well:

“It is not bigotry to say that a faith that denies the most basic of all Christian doctrines according to all the mainstream canons of Christianity qualifies as a non-Christian cult. That isn't bigotry. It is theology.”

(Jack Kinsella, The Omega Letter Intelligence Digest, Vol 121, Issue 11, 10/11/11).

I strongly urge people to flee from the unbiblical doctrines of Mormonism and instead “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”, as the Bible says in Jude 1:3. The Bible has not been corrupted, nor is it full of myths and fables: it is the inspired, infallible Word of God. I highly recommend trusting it. Believe in Jesus leads to salvation; belief in Mormonism leads only to Hell.

## SHOULD WE NAME FALSE TEACHERS?

Here is a question for you: is it right or is it wrong to call out false teachers by name? In the world today there are many people who call themselves Christian leaders but actually teach dangerous, heretical doctrines. Some simply reject the Bible outright and claim that we need to look elsewhere for truth. Others teach things that are contrary to the Bible or twist the Scriptures to their own ends. For example, there are those who deny the virgin birth, the resurrection, the identity of Jesus as God, the reality of Hell, and that salvation comes only through Jesus – just to name a few common heresies! Such people abound in today's world and have led a great many astray.

The question is, what should be done about it? Some people believe that it's wrong to even call people false teachers. They say that calling someone a false teacher is the same thing as judging them, and Christians “aren't supposed to judge people.” In their opinion the best thing to do is to ignore them entirely. They may not say this directly, but they do recommend not responding to them, and not responding to someone is exactly the same as ignoring them. At most they might address the false teaching, but they never address the false teacher.

Others say that we should live by Thumper's motto. The rabbit from Bambi famously said that “if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.” I have heard people seriously suggest that this philosophy should guide everything we say. In other words, if we don't have anything nice to say about someone then it's best to keep silent. Calling someone a false teacher isn't nice, so we shouldn't say it. Once again, I'd like to point out that failing to deal with a situation is no different from ignoring it. The results are the same.

All of this brings up another question: what did people do in the Bible? Is this policy of ignoring false teachers actually Biblical? It's an excellent question, and fortunately it's easy to answer.

First of all, Jesus Himself made it quite plain that He had no interest in Thumper's motto. The Lord did not hesitate to condemn people in the strongest possible terms:

**Matthew 23:27:** “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. ...

33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

You can see that Jesus did not mince words! He called the Pharisees hypocrites and a generation of vipers, and He did it *while they were standing there listening to Him*. There was nothing remotely nice about what He said. He actually told them, to their face, that they were unbelievably wicked men and were headed straight for Hell. The Lord *definitely* confronted both the false teaching *and* the false teacher.

Of course, Jesus was God, and that is an important distinction. Jesus has a right to judge everyone, and one day we will stand before Him and be held accountable for the way we've lived our lives. God has every right to judge mankind, so the fact that He exercises that right should not come as a surprise.

So let's look at another example. What did the apostles do when they were confronted with this sort of situation? Did they believe that confronting false teachers was wrong? Did they live by the “be

nice at all costs” motto? Actually, they did not. For example, Paul had quite a bit to say about someone named Alexander:

**I Timothy 1:19:** “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:  
20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

**2 Timothy 4:14:** “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:”

These are remarkable statements! Not only did Paul call Alexander out by name as an evil person (which is not a nice thing to say!), but he said that he *delivered him over to Satan*. Before you panic, I'd like to point out that the reason Paul did this was so that Alexander could learn not to blaspheme. Paul hoped that by doing this Alexander would come to regret what he'd done and would repent of his sins. However, Alexander apparently didn't learn anything because in 2 Timothy Paul once again mentioned the wickedness of Alexander and asked God to avenge Paul for all the evil things that Alexander had done do him.

So we see that the apostle Paul called out two false teachers by name (Hymenaeus and Alexander). Paul didn't restrain himself to just addressing the false teachings themselves, and he didn't say “Well, let's be nice about it.” You don't see Paul saying anything remotely like “Even though some people are teaching false doctrines, it would be wrong and judgmental to call them out for it. We need to get along with such people and be nice to them.” No, Paul is pretty direct in saying that Alexander is evil and people need to be aware of who he is and what he's doing.

This is far from the only example that we find in the Bible. There are many more cases where the apostles called out someone for being a false teacher or evildoer:

**Galatians 2:11:** “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.”

**2 Timothy 4:10:** “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.”

**III John 1:9:** “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.  
10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.”

This is not just limited to the New Testament; one finds the same thing in the Old Testament as well. For example, Nehemiah names quite a few names:

**Nehemiah 13:7:** “And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.  
8 And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber.”

**Nehemiah 13:28:** “And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.  
29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.”

Another place where you can find this in abundance is in the Psalms. In fact, there is a whole class of Psalms called imprecatory Psalms, in which the psalmist asks God to avenge him for some evil that was done to him. For example, one psalmist wrote this:

**Psalm 69:22:** “Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap.  
23 Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake.  
24 Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.  
25 Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.  
26 For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.  
27 Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness.  
28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”

That is some pretty harsh language! Now, lest we think that these verses are simply the ravings of a lunatic, it's worth noting that we find the same thing going on *in Heaven*. Take a look at Revelation:

**Revelation 6:9:** “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:  
10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

**Revelation 11:16:** “And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,  
17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O LORD God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.  
18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.”

**Revelation 16:5:** “And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.  
6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”

I realize that we've strayed a little bit from the original topic, but there's an important point here. The modern church has been infiltrated with the idea that its primary role in life is to be *nice*. Calling out false teachers for heresy isn't nice, so many people say we shouldn't do it. Condemning sins like adultery and abortion isn't nice so we shouldn't do that either. Asking God for vengeance is *especially* not nice. It's the Thumper approach to life: be nice at all times and never say anything that isn't positive and uplifting.

If you look at the Bible, however, it becomes obvious that the Thumper philosophy isn't the least bit Biblical. We aren't called to be nice; we're called to be loving, and that is an entirely different matter. There is nothing loving about refusing to tell people that certain actions are sin. After all, the wages of sin is death. If you don't call sin out then you're allowing it to continue to claim life after life. Calling it out and urging people to repent of it is the only way to save them from its terribly destructive consequences. We *must* call it out.

Likewise, there is nothing loving about refusing to confront false teachers. Life isn't just a game where everyone goes to the same place after death and receives the same meaningless prize. We are playing for keeps, and the reward is either everlasting life in paradise or everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire. There is no middle road or neutral ground. False teachers are denying everlasting life to millions of people and sending them down the road to Hell. They're like angry bears roaming in crowded neighborhoods, looking for the weak and disabled so they can tear them limb from limb. If there was a rabid bear in your neighborhood you wouldn't ignore it on the grounds that we should be nice to bear; instead you would hide your children and then call animal control so they could capture the bear before it hurt anyone.

Refusing to name false teachers is devastating for many reasons. If no one confronts them then how will they learn that they're wrong and need to repent? If no one names them then who will tell those who are weak or new to the faith that they should be avoided? There's nothing loving about refusing to warn people against men like Rob Bell, who teach that there is no Hell or judgment for sin. How many people are going to walk into a bookstore, buy his books, and go away deceived because no one warned them against him? How many souls will be lost forever because those who knew better refused to do something about it?

The call to be loving means that sometimes we have to engage in behaviors that aren't nice at all. Paul really did turn Alexander over to Satan, but the reason he did it was in the hope that Alexander might learn the error of his ways and change. Would it really have been better if instead Paul had done nothing and let Alexander continue down the road to eternal damnation?

Now I realize that the imprecatory Psalms are a bit different. The key there is to realize that while God forbids *us* from taking revenge, He does *not* rebuke our thirst for justice. All He says is that when we've been wronged we should allow the Lord to take care of it. Those who have been brutally murdered for the cause of Christ *do* thirst for justice to be done, as we saw in Revelation 6:9-10. The Lord does not rebuke this but instead promises that justice *will* be done. One day He will avenge His children, but that is a topic for another time.

Refusing to confront false teachers may be “nice”, but there is nothing loving about it. I fear that our refusal to combat false teachings *and* those who teach them only makes it that much easier for false teachers to guide millions down the road to Hell. After all, if you refuse to tell campers that a vicious wolf is roaming their campground, what do you think is going to happen? Is being nice really worth all the lives that are going to be lost?

# ON HEAVEN

## **Is Heaven really a city?**

“IN THE COUNTRY that lies beyond the farthest star there is a giant, golden city. Nothing that is abominable, or evil, or false can ever enter into that celestial paradise. It is home not only to the righteous, but also to the Holy One. Its glory outshines the sun, and it is an eternal city that will never fade away.”

(*Beyond the Farthest Star*, prologue)

When most people think about Heaven they picture either a long and boring church service or a bunch of white clouds floating in the sky. I think both of these pictures are unbiblical. Believe it or not, the Bible consistently tells us that our eternal home is actually a city that has been built for us by God Himself. For example, take a look at this:

**Hebrews 11:16:** “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

Notice that this verse does *not* say “God has prepared for them a cloud and a harp”! The verse is quite clear: God has prepared for us *a city*. In Revelation the apostle John is given a glimpse of this amazing place:

**Revelation 21:10:** “And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,”

If you're interested in an eyewitness account of this amazing place then go read the rest of Revelation 21. The details of this heavenly metropolis are quite astonishing.

Now, to be fair, theologians don't know if this city of God is currently inhabited or not. For reasons too complex to get into right now, it's possible that the city is currently under construction and will not be unveiled until after Judgment Day. What I *do* know is that our ultimate destiny is not to float on a cloud, but to live in a city.

## **Do people in Heaven know what is happening on Earth?**

Do people in Heaven really know what is happening back on Earth? I think there are a lot of reasons to believe that they do. Now, I don't know *how much* they are aware of, but they seem to have



at least some knowledge of events. For example, Jesus once said this:

**Luke 15:7:** “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

Jesus tells us that when a sinner repents there is joy in Heaven. This brings up an obvious question: how could people in Heaven know that a sinner has repented if they don't know what is going on? Obviously, if events on Earth are causing people in Heaven to rejoice then *people in Heaven must know about those events*.

Or take a look at this:

**Hebrews 12:1:** “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”

Here Paul says that we should persevere through the trials of this life because we are surrounded by a great “cloud of witnesses.” Now, in the context of a race there are two distinct groups: the people who are running in the race and the spectators who are watching. It's tempting to think that the witnesses Paul mentions are simply other people on Earth, but I think that's wrong. Why? Because all of us who are still alive *are supposed to be racing*. The only ones who are not in the race are those who have already finished it. The witnesses, then, must be people in Heaven who are watching us as we live our lives. It's a little unsettling to think that we're being watched by millions of dead people, but keep in mind that Paul *did* warn us about this.

As you can see, there is actually quite a bit of support for the idea that Heaven is aware of what God is doing on Earth.

### **Will we recognize other people in Heaven, and will we remember our lives?**

Despite what you may have been told, I think the common idea that you forget your entire life once you set foot in Heaven is simply not Biblical. In fact, the Bible actually tells us that this is not the case. We can see this in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which is found in Luke 16.

One thing to keep in mind when reading Luke 16 is that Jesus is *not* telling a parable. Whenever Jesus told parables He started off by saying “The kingdom of Heaven is like...” This time Jesus does not do that. Instead He matter-of-factly states that there were two people, and then He tells us what happened to them. The text itself gives every indication that Jesus was telling a true story.

First of all, notice that even though the rich man was dead, he still immediately recognized Lazarus:

**Luke 16:23:** “And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

As you can see, the rich man even recognized Abraham! As if that was not strange enough, Abraham also recognized the rich man and knew everything about his ill-spent life:

**Luke 16:25:** “But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”

We can see from this passage that no one had forgotten anything. People still recognized each other, they still remembered their lives, and they even knew everything about the lives of other people – even people they had never met.

Based on this passage I think it is very reasonable to believe that we will recognize other people in Heaven and remember our lives. After all, these people did!

## **Are there books in Heaven?**

Well, for starters, the Bible tells us of the existence of several Heavenly books. First of all, there is the Book of Life:

**Philippians 4:3:** “And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.”

There is also the Book of Tears:

**Psalms 56:8:** “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?”

And there is the Book of Remembrance:

**Malachi 3:16:** “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.”

From these passages we can see that there are actually several books in Heaven. However, are these the *only* books? It's possible, but it's not likely. After all, the Lord has promised to give us a city, and a city is full of all sorts of things. Think about it for a minute: what kind of things do cities have? What makes a city a city? Does it have buildings? Parks? Offices? Streets? Restaurants? Libraries? Houses?

You may be thinking “That's crazy!” – but stop and think. If Jesus had wanted to He could have said “God has prepared for them a cloud, where they will sit and be bored for all of eternity.” He could have also said “God has prepared a giant sanctuary, where the saints will sit in pews and sing hymns forever.” However, God didn't say either of those things. Instead He used a word that we're very familiar with – the word *city*. Is it really so crazy to think that God used the word “city” on purpose to give us some idea of what was in our future? After all, God *wants* us to know what Heaven is like because He wants our heart to be set on it! How can our heart be set on it if we don't know anything about it? Isn't it possible that since God used the word “city” then maybe Heaven *really is like a city*,

*and has the sort of things a city has?*

Do cities have books? Yes, they do – and they have lots of other things as well. I think it's time we started thinking outside the box and embraced the idea that there may be more for us to do in Heaven than strum a harp.

## **What will life in Heaven be like?**

When people think of Heaven they usually think that nothing exciting or fun ever happens there. During their lifetime on Earth they may have had an exciting career and served as a photographer, or an artist, or a musician, or whatever. However, they believe that once you die that's it. It's up to you to have all the fun you can now because there is absolutely *nothing* to do in Heaven. Your whole eternity consists of sitting on a cloud, being bored out of your mind. On top of that, if God called you to be a missionary and you gave up a promising career as a theoretical physicist, well, that career is just over. Sorry.

Even though this rather dour view is quite common, I don't believe it is accurate. In fact, I think it is a gross distortion of what Heaven is really like. The city God has built for us not a boring or dull place where nothing ever happens. Quite to the contrary! I believe there is even *more* going on there than there is now on Earth.

Why do I think this? Well, first, there's the fact that our destiny is to *live in a city*, not sit on a cloud. Things happen in cities – there are jobs and opportunities and all sorts of things. The mere fact that we will be living in a city implies that there will be activity, life, and vibrancy! On top of that, there is explicit Biblical support for this idea. For example, in the parable of the talents the Lord rewards His servants for a life well-lived. When He does this He does *not* take away what they had before and then tell them to go sit on a cloud. No, what He actually does is *give them even more than they already had*:

**Matthew 25:20:** “And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

21: His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”

The five talents the servant was entrusted with were not taken away, and the Lord did not seize the extra five talents the servant earned. In fact, this man ended up getting even more talents to manage:

**Matthew 25:28:** “Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

It's very exciting to realize that the word the Lord uses to describe our future lives is *abundance*, not boredom! The Lord obviously expected this man to keep on managing the 11 talents he now had,

on top of doing a whole bunch of new and more exciting things. The point is crystal clear: in the afterlife God does not take away our talents and abilities and leave us with nothing to do. Instead God expects us to *keep using what He gave us earlier* while He gives us *even more things to do!*

In other words, God gave us abilities and He wants us to use them to bring Him glory *forever*. These abilities are not taken away in the next life; instead they are enhanced and added to. Moreover, God doesn't give us talents that we can never use. It's quite possible that the abilities we never had a chance to use in this life were meant to be used in the next life instead.

## **Is there sadness in Heaven?**

I am sure this idea will come as a surprise to many people. After all, didn't the Bible say this?

**Revelation 21:4:** “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

The Bible does indeed say that there will be no more sorrow, crying, or pain. However, the problem is that this verse is often taken out of context. The promise that God makes in this passage does not come to pass until *after* Judgment Day. This is quite obvious if you read Revelation 20 and 21 in their entirety, but even this one verse hints at it. Notice that one of the promises is that there will be “no more death.” When is death finally destroyed once and for all? On Judgment Day. Has death been destroyed yet? No. So that right there tells us that this is still in the future.

On top of that, there is actually a recorded case where a group of people in Heaven were upset about something. We find that here:

**Revelation 6:9:** “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

Here we have a group of saints who were martyred for their faith in God. These people are clearly in Heaven. Are they blissfully at peace, without a care in the world? No, they are not. In fact, they are actually crying out to God and asking Him to avenge their blood. They want to see His wrath poured out upon the people who killed them. It's important to keep in mind that if you're begging God to avenge your blood, the chances are very good that you are *not happy*. That's not a request that happy and content people usually make.

Is there anything sinful with their request? No, there isn't. God doesn't rebuke them for it; instead He tells them to be patient for a little while longer and then He will do as they ask. Nor is there anything wrong with them asking for vengeance; after all, God did say that vengeance belonged to Him. These people are simply asking God to keep the promise He had made. Is there anything strange

with the idea that people who were brutally murdered for believing in Jesus might want justice to be done? I don't think so.

Here is another way to think about it. We know that Jesus (who is in Heaven) cares very deeply for us. He understands what we are going through because He was tempted as well:

**Hebrews 4:15:** "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Do you really think that Jesus is indifferent to our pain? Do you think that He feels nothing when His children are hunted down, put in prison, and are murdered? Do you believe that all of our troubles in our life mean absolutely nothing to Him? Of course not! That's ridiculous. God is not a callous, unfeeling monster. He has tremendous love and compassion for His children.

So the question is, if we are in Heaven and we are like Christ, does it really make sense that Jesus would care and we would *not* care? Is that reasonable? Personally, I think it's much more likely that we will share the emotions – and the compassion – of our Lord.

## **Are there mansions in Heaven?**

Are there really mansions in Heaven? Is there any truth to this, or is it just a popular misconception? Well, first of all, the idea of heavenly mansions comes from the King James Version of the Bible. In that particular translation John 14:2 reads like this:

**John 14:2:** "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

The word "mansion" in that verse is the Greek word "mone" (Strong's #3438). It means "a staying, i.e. residence (the act or the place):—abode, mansion." All other modern translations of the Bible render the word as "rooms."

On the surface, "rooms" makes a lot of sense. "In my Father's house are many rooms" is a plausible and reasonable translation. After all, a house does have rooms! I've never seen a house yet that had mansions inside. The problem is that the word "mone" actually means dwelling place. Implying that we will all be living together in one big house is quite misleading – much more misleading, I think, than translating the word to mean mansion.

Here is what I mean. In Luke 16 we have one of the most misunderstood parables in the Bible – the parable of the unrighteous steward. At the end of the parable Jesus sums up its message like this:

**Luke 16:8:** "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

Jesus is saying that we should use our earthly wealth to help other people, so that when we're in Heaven they will remember what we've done and will invite us into their homes. I know that sounds pretty shocking, but that really is what the passage means! Verse 9 clearly states that we're to “make to yourselves friends” with the “mammon of unrighteous”, which is simply our earthly wealth. The reason we're supposed to do that is so “they may receive you into everlasting habitations” – or, to put it a bit more clearly, “so they will receive you into their heavenly home.”

For the record, this verse is *not* saying that lost people should make friends with saved people so that the saved people can bail them out of Hell. That is blatantly unbiblical; Christ Himself said that people who end up in Hell cannot escape and are trapped there forever. This verse is talking about Christians being invited into the heavenly home of other Christians.

Now, if everyone lives in different rooms in one big heavenly house then this passage makes no sense, because you can't be invited into someone else's home *if you already live with them*. Luke 16:9 only makes sense *if each person has their own, separate estate*. For that reason I do not think we will all be sharing the same house, and that is why I think the modern translation of John 14:2 is misleading. “In my Father's house are many rooms” sounds a great deal like “we will all live together in some kind of giant commune”, which is not correct. We will each have our own, individual homes.

As far as the size of the estate goes – Jesus told His disciples repeatedly that they were to store up their treasures in Heaven. In the parables of the talents He made it clear that the reward He would give us for our earthly service was far out of proportion to what we had actually done. In other words, God has promised to give us *far more than we deserve*. Is it really reasonable to think that when we finally reach Heaven after a lifetime of service and are shown our eternal home, that all we'll find waiting for us is a tiny, unfurnished, one-bedroom apartment? Keep in mind that this is the same God who decided that the Earth needed a night-light and so created *billions of galaxies* to provide it. This is also the same God who uses gold for pavement! I find it very difficult to believe that *any* home on Earth (even the most extravagant ones) will be better than what God has prepared for us in Heaven.

To put this another way: can you really imagine someone going to Heaven and saying “Man! My house back in Chicago was much better than this place. In fact, I've seen closets that were bigger than this!” Personally, I don't think so. No one in Heaven is going to be looking back at Earth and saying “Life was so much better there.”

## **Will the Earth be restored? Is there really going to be a new heavens and earth?**

A lot of people don't realize this, but our eternal home is *not* going to be in Heaven. It is actually going to be here, on Earth. This will come as a surprise to many people, but the Bible is quite clear about it. I honestly do not understand why so few people know this.

I suppose I had better explain where this idea comes from. First of all, we all know that when believers die they go on to be with Jesus in Heaven. Then, at some point in history, Judgment Day will occur. This is what the Bible has to say about it:

**Revelation 20:11:** “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were

opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

One interesting thing we learn is that during this judgment Hell is emptied (verse 13). However, as verse 15 points out, those who are not saved are not cast back into Hell but instead are cast into the Lake of Fire – a completely separate and different place. We know that Hell and the Lake of Fire are different places because verse 14 tells us that Hell itself is cast into the Lake of Fire. Hell, then, is *not* the final resting place of the unrighteous. Technically speaking, *no one will spend eternity in Hell*. It is simply a holding place until Judgment Day. The final place of torment for those who did not believe in Jesus is, as verse 15 points out, the Lake of Fire.

What about those who *did* believe in Jesus? Well, as it turns out, Revelation 20 is not the last chapter in the Bible. John goes on to explain what happens *after* Judgment Day, and what he says is quite surprising:

**Revelation 21:1:** “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Let's take this one piece at a time. Verse 1 tells us that the current universe – the sky, the stars, and the Earth itself – are destroyed. However, God then makes a *new* heaven and Earth. The word “new” here is a special one: it carries with it the idea of something that has been restored to its former glory. It's not like trading in an old car for a new one. Instead, it's like taking that old car and remodeling it until it's better-than-new.

What God is saying is that after Judgment Day, He's not just going to get rid of the universe and then that's it. Instead He is going to make a *new* universe – a restored one. He is going to remake this planet and put it back to the way it was before mankind sinned. Verse 2 tells us that after God does this He is going to move the New Jerusalem (the heavenly city He built) *to this new earth*. Why? So that He can live with men. In other words, God is going to recreate the planet Earth, put us back on it, and then *move Heaven to Earth so He can live with us forever*. That is the exciting truth: we are going to spend eternity *right here on Earth*, and God is going to move here and live with us.

## **Will there be rivers and trees in the heavenly city?**

Yes there is! This is what Revelation 22 has to say:

**Revelation 22:1:** “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

As you can see, the heavenly city really does have a river, and there really are trees. Heaven is *not* just a giant cloud that floats in a big void of nothingness.

## **Will there actually be mornings and afternoons in Heaven?**

No, I don't think so. Since Heaven is lit by the glory of God and does not need the sun, I don't see how there could possibly be mornings or afternoons. However, I *do* believe that there will be time in Heaven. We find this in the book of Revelation:

**Revelation 8:1:** “And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

If half an hour went by in Heaven then time must pass there! The reason most people think that time doesn't exist in Heaven is because of a misinterpretation of these verses:

**Revelation 10:5:** “And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,

6 And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:

7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

In verse 6 the angel does indeed say that “there should be time no longer”, but all the angel was actually saying was that the mystery of God would no longer be a mystery because its time had run out. It's like a teacher standing up at the end of an exam and saying “Pencils down, class, your allotted time is over.” The angel is *not* saying that time itself has stopped. After all, if time itself stopped then nothing else could ever happen! Everyone would be frozen in place.

But as far as afternoons and mornings go – that is different. The New Jerusalem is lit by the glory of God so it has no night. If the sun doesn't rise and set then there can't be mornings or afternoons. Think about it: our entire clock is based on the fact that the sun rises and sets. Without that you'd need to come up with a whole different scheme of measuring time. After all, what does twelve



o'clock even mean if there's no sun directly overhead? We can see that there is clearly time in Heaven, but how days are measured (if they are measured at all) is something that remains to be seen.

### **Will we reign over things in the afterlife?**

This idea that we will one day reign over things may sound bizarre, but it is quite Biblical. In fact, this idea comes from Jesus Himself. In one of His parables He talked about rewarding people for their faithful service, and the reward that was given to them was authority over cities:

**Luke 19:17:** “And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.”

But that's not the only support there is for this. Revelation also echoes this same idea:

**Revelation 5:9:** “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;  
10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Look at verse 10: the people in Heaven are saying that God has made them *kings and priests*. What was their destiny? *To reign on the earth*. Nor is this the only passage that talks about it! Look at what John has to say about the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem:

**Revelation 21:24:** “And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.”

Here we are told that the *kings of the earth* would bring treasures into the heavenly city. That tells me that there must still be kings! So there is actually quite a bit of evidence that reigning is in our future. After all, Jesus did make that promise to His disciples:

**Matthew 19:28:** “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

And Jesus always keeps His promises.

### **Will there be corporations and businesses in the heavenly city?**

The idea that there might be corporations in Heaven may be shocking, but stop and think about it for a moment. Isn't it plausible that in that heavenly city people will form teams and work together to

accomplish things? Isn't it also possible that certain very large challenges might require large teams, and that those teams may need to work together for an extended period of time?

At their core, businesses are groups of people who are working together to accomplish a specific goal. I will admit that in this life the goal is usually to make money in any way possible, but there are not-for-profit organizations even today. Given that God has built a heavenly city for us and that cities are full of people who work together to accomplish things, I think it's quite possible that there might be formally-established groups that have dedicated themselves to reaching a certain goal.

Now, when people think of “problems” they tend to think of crime, or world hunger, or poverty, or something like that. But there are also mathematical challenges, scientific riddles, space exploration, and all sorts of other things. There are forests to traverse, literal mountains to climb, and so on. Even if mankind had never sinned the world would still be full of challenges, mysteries, and opportunities. I see no reason to believe that the abolition of sin and death would make all of these things go away – especially if God expects us to continue to use all of the abilities that He has given to us.

### **Will there be computers and software developers in the heavenly city?**

Now, I will admit that I have no idea if there are computers in Heaven or not. It's quite possible that the people in Heaven have moved on to something far more advanced, and computers are as primitive to them as stone knives and bearskins are to us. However, there is almost certainly some kind of technology in Heaven, and it's very likely that whatever technology exists in Heaven is far more advanced than what exists here.

The reason I believe this is because God has promised us a city (Hebrews 11:16). Cities, by their very nature, incorporate a certain level of technology. After all, you can just glance at a photograph of a town and tell how advanced it is. Is the city made of mud huts or log cabins? Does it have brick houses or glass-and-steel skyscrapers? How advanced are the buildings? What engineering principles are reflected in their designs? What amenities are offered? Do the houses have windows? If so, are they just empty holes or are there panes of glass?

The very design of a city reflects the character, knowledge, and skill of the people who built it. The New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, is no different. Since it was built by God, it will reflect *His* character, His knowledge, and His skill. Do you really believe that our modern cities are going to make God's city look primitive by comparison?

I find it very difficult to believe that people are going to enter Heaven and say “My goodness! Everyone here is a caveman who bangs rocks together. I've seen more advanced knowledge in the lost tribes of Papua New Guinea.” Do you really think that the streets of gold are going to be lined with mud huts?

So there may not be computers, but I do believe that the technology and skill in that heavenly city will be astonishing. After all, the city was built by God Himself! I don't know if there will be software developers there or not, but any time there is high technology there will be people who are skilled in using it to solve complex problems.

# HOW TO BECOME SAVED

Do you know with certainty that if you died right now you would wake up in Heaven? Would you like to know for sure? You see, no one goes to Heaven by default. This is because **everyone has sinned against God**. The Bible says this:

**Romans 3:23:** “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

This verse says that everyone has sinned. At some point in their life everyone has disobeyed God. Have you ever stolen anything? Have you ever lied? Have you ever taken God's name in vain, or hated someone, or lusted after someone? If so then you have sinned. It doesn't matter how many good deeds you have done – in God's eyes you have sinned, and your sin must be paid for.

The Bible goes on to say that **the penalty for even one sin is death:**

**Romans 6:23:** “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Since you have sinned you are no longer right with God. The punishment for your sin is death – eternal death in a place of endless torment that the Bible calls the Lake of Fire. There is no way for you to pay for your sin on your own. No amount of good deeds will make things right.

But God stepped in and did what you could never have done. The Bible says that God loved you so much that **Jesus Christ came to Earth and died in *your* place to pay for *your* sins:**

**Romans 5:8:** “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus, the Son of God, came to Earth and lived a perfect life. He then suffered and died a cruel death on the cross – not to pay for His sins (for He never sinned once in his life) but to pay for **yours**. He loved you so much that He took on Himself the punishment that you deserved. Jesus then rose from the dead and offered salvation freely to anyone who trusts Him as their Lord and Savior. Jesus is the only way to be saved; there is no other path to God. This is because His death on the cross is the only payment God will accept for your sins. If you reject this payment and try to pay your debt another way (such as through your own good deeds) then God will reject you.

To become saved, all you have to do is:

- (a) **ask God to forgive your sins** (for God will not save anyone who refuses to admit that they have sinned, or who refuses to make Jesus the Lord and master of their life)
- (b) **believe that Jesus died in your place and that His death completely paid for all of your sins** (which means you have to stop believing that you are good enough to get to Heaven on your own, or that your good deeds will somehow outweigh your bad deeds and that will be enough)
- (c) **believe that Jesus rose from the dead**
- (d) **ask God to save you**

These passages sum it all up:

**Romans 10:9:** “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

**Mark 1:15:** “And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

**John 3:16:** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

If you come to Jesus and ask Him to save you then He will. At that moment your debt of sin will be canceled and from God's point of view it will be as if you had never sinned. The Bible says this:

**Romans 8:1:** “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

When God forgives your sins they are forgiven once and for all. When you die you will not face the wrath of God but instead will receive His mercy. God will invite you to live forever with Him in unending peace and joy:

**Revelation 21:4:** “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

When you give your life to Jesus (which means that your life is now about honoring God instead of honoring yourself) and ask Him to be your Savior **and** Lord, a whole new life will open up. Your life will become centered around Jesus as you learn how to love Him and honor Him in all that you do. The Holy Spirit will enter your life and begin turning you into a new person. As God begins changing your heart you will lose your appetite for sin and become hungry for spiritual things.

Once you become saved I highly recommend finding a good local church and attending it regularly. This will help you to grow spiritually. But the key to remember is that Christianity is not a do-it-yourself religion. God will always be with you and will never stop loving you or watching over you. He promised to make you perfect in every way (just like Jesus) and He will do exactly that.

# SATAN'S ACCESS TO HEAVEN

In the book of Job we find this interesting passage:

**Job 1:6:** “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

7 And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.”

The story of Job is a very popular one and these verses are quite well-known. However, many people don't stop to consider what this passage is actually saying. There is a surprising fact hidden in these verses that gets overlooked time and time again: Satan has access to Heaven.

This is so obvious that it almost doesn't need an explanation. The verses state that there came a day when the angels (which are here called the “sons of God” for reasons I've explained elsewhere) came to present themselves before the Lord. In verse 7 Satan says that he *had* been on the Earth, which implies that he wasn't on Earth anymore. We know that God dwells in Heaven, so if Satan wasn't on Earth and he was standing before God, then it's pretty safe to say that he was in Heaven.

Also, notice that these verses seem to describe something that happened on a regular basis. This scene repeats itself in Job 2:1 when once again Satan made a trip to Heaven to present himself to God. If Satan is making regular trips to Heaven then that can only mean that Satan has access to Heaven.

Some people claim that this is not the case and that Satan was cast out of Heaven long ago. In order to support this idea they quote these verses from Revelation:

**Revelation 12:7:** “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

Here we find the account of a war that took place in Heaven. Satan lost this war and was cast out of Heaven. However, there is a very important question to ask: just when did this battle take place? Did it happen before human history began, as some claim, or is it still in our future?

First of all, notice that this war is recorded in the *twelfth* chapter of Revelation – a little more than halfway through the book. It's very important to realize that Revelation takes place in chronological order, which we can see from Revelation 1:19. There Jesus gave this commandment to John:

**Revelation 1:19:** “Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;”

This is a basic outline that explains the structure of the entire book. After this verse Jesus dictated seven letters to seven churches, which represented the things “which are.” In chapter 4 (after

all the letters had been written) the scene changes, and John is caught up into Heaven to see the things “which must be hereafter”:

**Revelation 4:1:** “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.”

After this a great many things take place – all of which happen at some point in the *future*. The seven seals were opened (Revelation 6), the 144,000 Jews were sealed (Revelation 7), the seven trumpets sounded (Revelation 8), and the two witnesses were killed (Revelation 11). All of these things are depicted in chronological order: first the first seal is opened, then the second one, and so forth.

The war in Heaven takes place between chapter 11, where the two witnesses are killed, and chapter 13, where the Mark of the Beast is instituted. As of the time John wrote Revelation it was still in the future. We know this because Revelation 4:1 clearly says that the things John was about to see had not yet taken place.

What this means is that the war in Heaven must take place in the middle of the Tribulation. In other words, *it hasn't happened yet*. This is made even more clear when you read the rest of the passage:

**Revelation 12:9:** “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”

After the devil is cast out of Heaven in verse 9 a voice proclaims that “the accuser of our brethren is cast down.” Satan had been accusing believers “day and night”, just as he had done in the book of Job. Now, however, his ability to do this was stripped from him and he was cast down to the earth. Verse 12 says that he was filled with “great wrath” because he had only a short time left.

What strikes me about this passage is verse 11, where it says that the people Satan was accusing “overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.” These people were clearly martyrs because it says “they loved not their lives unto the death.” This creates a real problem for those who believe that the war in Heaven happened before mankind was created. Think about it: if that was the case then Satan was bringing accusations against people who hadn't even been born yet! In fact, he was accusing a race that *hadn't been created yet*, let alone fallen into sin! On top of that, verse 11 is in the *past tense*, speaking of people who *had* been martyred because they believed in Jesus. If the war in Heaven took place before mankind was created then this makes no sense at all, because no one had yet been martyred for believing in Jesus! Besides, if Satan's ability to bring accusations to God was revoked before mankind was formed, then what was he doing making accusations against Job?

These verses simply make no sense at all if they are describing something that took place before

mankind sinned in the Garden of Eden. However, they make a great deal of sense if they are talking about a future event that takes place in the middle of the Tribulation. We know that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us:

**Romans 8:26:** “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

If Satan is indeed accusing us day and night then it is a tremendous comfort to know that there is someone else there who is speaking on our behalf. (For the record, the word “Satan” actually means “adversary”; it is more of a descriptive title than a name.)

This does bring up another question. What about this verse? Jesus had something very interesting to say in the book of Luke:

**Luke 10:18:** “And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”

Doesn't this imply that the war in Heaven had already happened as of the time Jesus walked the Earth? Not quite. In this passage Jesus said that He saw Satan *fall* from heaven. However, in Revelation 12:9 it doesn't say that Satan fell; it says that he was *cast out*. I think Jesus is referring to the time when Lucifer tried to exalt himself above God and fell into sin. Jesus watched that happen – He saw Lucifer become Satan. This would be consistent with what we find in Job.

So what does all of this mean? It means that it's quite likely that Job was not the only person that Satan has brought accusations against. Revelation tells us that he accuses the brethren day and night, using his access to Heaven to try to get God to bring disaster upon believers. However, midway through the Tribulation a war will erupt in Heaven, and Satan and the rest of his fallen angels will be permanently ejected from Heaven and cast down to Earth. His days of accusing the brethren will be over and he will be full of wrath because he'll know that he only has a little more than 3 years left before Jesus returns and binds him for a thousand years. This knowledge will fill him with rage, and he will pour out his anger upon those who are still on the Earth.

His eviction from Heaven marks the beginning of the end. The three years he is given on Earth are not enough to stop the return of Jesus, and when Jesus returns He will bind Satan for a thousand years and usher in an unprecedented age of peace. A thousand years later Satan will be released and gather an army, only to see the entire army destroyed by fire when it approaches Jerusalem. The devil will then be cast into the Lake of Fire, where he will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The bottom line is that Satan does currently have access to Heaven, but that will not last forever. His days of accusing the brethren are limited and will soon come to an end.

# THE SHROUD OF TURIN

For years people have wondered if the famous Shroud of Turin is the one that was used to wrap the body of Jesus. Fortunately, the Bible provides us with an answer. For those who have never heard of the Shroud, here are a few quotes describing it. This is from the official Shroud of Turin website (<http://www.shroud.com/>):

The Shroud of Turin is a centuries old linen cloth that bears the image of a crucified man. A man that millions believe to be Jesus of Nazareth. Is it really the cloth that wrapped his crucified body, or is it simply a medieval forgery, a hoax perpetrated by some clever artist? Modern science has completed hundreds of thousands of hours of detailed study and intense research on the Shroud. It is, in fact, the single most studied artifact in human history, and we know more about it today than we ever have before. And yet, the controversy still rages.

This is what Wikipedia has to say about it ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shroud\\_of\\_Turin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shroud_of_Turin)):

The Shroud of Turin (or Turin Shroud) is a linen cloth bearing the image of a man who appears to have suffered physical trauma in a manner consistent with crucifixion. It is kept in the royal chapel of the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist in Turin, northern Italy. The origins of the shroud and its image are the subject of intense debate among scientists, theologians, historians and researchers.

Some contend that the shroud is the cloth placed on the body of Jesus Christ at the time of his burial, and that the face image is the Holy Face of Jesus. Others contend that the artifact postdates the Crucifixion of Jesus by more than a millennium. Both sides of the argument use science and historical documents to make their case.

The image on the shroud is much clearer in black-and-white negative than in its natural sepia color. The striking negative image was first observed on the evening of May 28, 1898, on the reverse photographic plate of amateur photographer Secondo Pia, who was allowed to photograph it while it was being exhibited in the Turin Cathedral. The Catholic Church has neither formally endorsed nor rejected the shroud, but in 1958 Pope Pius XII approved of the image in association with the Roman Catholic devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus.

Most probably, the Shroud of Turin is the single, most studied artifact in human history. In 1978 a detailed examination was carried out by a team of American scientists called STURP. It found no reliable evidences of forgery. STURP called the question of how the image was formed "a mystery." In 1988 a radiocarbon dating test was performed on small samples of the shroud, concluding that they date from the Middle Ages, between 1260 CE and 1390 CE. Controversy has arisen over the reliability of the test.



As Wikipedia says, it is possible to get an image off of the Shroud – an image of a bearded man. Is this face of Christ?

According to the Bible, **the answer is no**. The Shroud cannot be the one that Christ was buried in because it does not match the shroud that is described in the Bible. For example, look at this passage from John:

**John 20:6:** “Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie,  
7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.”

If you do a search for the Shroud of Turin (or even just visit the Wikipedia page) you'll see that the Shroud is **a single piece of cloth that covered an entire body from head to toe**. However, the shroud described in the Bible is **not** a single piece of cloth. Instead it is described as having two pieces: there was the linen cloth that covered the body, and a napkin that covered the head. These two pieces were actually found in different places when the disciples discovered that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. Therefore, since the Shroud of Turin is a single piece of cloth, and the shroud used to bury Christ was a two-piece set, the Shroud of Turin cannot be the one described in the Bible.

Some may argue that the shroud John speaks of in verse 6 was a head-to-toe shroud, and the napkin was inside the shroud covering the head. If that was the case then the face of Christ would have been marked on the napkin and *not* the shroud, since His face never touched the shroud. (After all, John 20:7 clearly says that the napkin had been “about his head.”) But if you look at the image of the Shroud of Turin you can see a face on it, suggesting that it was directly in contact with the face of the person who was buried within it.

In my opinion this provides very good evidence that the Shroud of Turin was not the one that Jesus was buried in. Now, it may or may not be a genuine burial shroud and it may or may not date to the time of Christ; I cannot address any of that. What I *do* know is that John 20:6-7 strongly argues that it was not the one that was used by Jesus.

# SIGNS OF GENUINE FAITH

Here is a question for you: how do you know if you've really been saved? On the surface this seems like an easy question, but what do you do when you start having doubts? Are doubts a sign that you have not been saved, or are they just a temptation to doubt true faith? For that matter, how can you tell the difference? Some people claim that when you are faced with doubts you should think back to the time you were saved and reclaim that moment. But how do you know if that moment was real? Do you just go by what your feelings tell you?

There are probably some people out there who have never had any serious doubts about their salvation. They are confident that they are saved and that confidence never wavers. Other people, however, are plagued with doubts for their entire life. Some become so overwhelmed that they get saved again, and again, and again. To them the question "How do you know?" is very frightening.

As it turns out, one of the reasons the book of I John was written was to help people know if they are actually saved:

**I John 5:13:** "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God."

I don't know if its contents will answer everyone's doubts, but I John does go a long way toward establishing some objective criteria that we can use to determine if our faith in Jesus is actually real.

According to I John, people whose faith in Christ is genuine...

**Point One: ...admit that they are sinners.** In fact, we cannot get saved at all if we don't admit to God that we are a sinner and ask Him for forgiveness:

**I John 1:8:** "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

I can say unconditionally that if you have never admitted to God that you are a sinner and have never asked Him to forgive you for your sins, then you are not a Christian. Period. There is no such thing as a saving faith that says "I have no sins; I am perfect and need no forgiveness." In order to be saved you *must* repent and ask God to forgive you for your sins.

**Point Two: ...submit to the Lordship of Christ.** This means that those with genuine faith acknowledge that Jesus has authority over them and they must do as He says. Genuine believers seek to obey God and follow His commands, instead of simply doing as they please. This does not mean that they obey perfectly, for even the strongest Christians still struggle with sin. But it *does* mean that we have submitted ourselves to Christ's authority:

**I John 2:3:** “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.”

In other words, *you cannot be saved if you have rejected the authority of Christ*. All of those who look at Jesus and say “Don't you dare tell me what to do!” are not saved. There is no such thing as salvation that rejects Jesus as Lord.

As Christians we may do a terrible job of following Jesus and we may often find ourselves struggling with sin, but the one thing that true believers do *not* do is tell Jesus “You have no say in my life whatsoever. I am in charge and you are not.”

**Point Three: ...have a love for other believers.** This means that people with genuine faith have a heartfelt love for other Christians and try to help them. Now, this doesn't mean that all Christians are easy to get along with or that there won't be arguments or disputes. However, it *does* mean that those with real faith *do not* categorically hate other believers *simply because they are Christians*:

**I John 2:9:** “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

**I John 3:15:** “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

**I John 3:17:** “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

If you find yourself hating other Christians *because* they are Christians then you are not saved. Despising people because they have faith in God is a very strong sign that you have never known God at all. Genuine faith will naturally give you a love for other Christians. This doesn't mean that you are always going to feel warm fuzzy feelings whenever you're around them, but it does mean that you will seek their welfare and do what you can for them.

Now, some might argue that when John uses the phrase “brother” he is actually talking about all of mankind and not just other believers. I do not believe this is the case. John is actually very specific about what he means:

**I John 3:14:** “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”

Notice how John specifically refers to *the brethren*, and then equates “the brethren” to “his brother” in the very next sentence. Now, should Christians love other people? Of course – Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was to love your neighbor as yourself, and He was definitely referring to all of mankind. But here, in this passage, John is *not* referring to all of mankind. What he is saying is that genuine Christians love *each other*.

What makes this sad is that all too often those who call themselves by the name of Christ show contempt for their fellow Christians. John says that anyone who hates his fellow Christians “is in darkness even until now”, and later on he goes further to say that those who are full of such hate *have never known God at all*.

**Point Four: ...believe that Jesus is the Messiah.** This may seem obvious, but it still must be said: if you do not believe in Jesus then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus is fully God then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus is fully man then you are not saved. If you deny that Jesus was crucified and then rose bodily from the dead you are not saved. In other words, in order to be saved you must not believe in *a* Jesus, but in the *Biblical* Jesus:

**I John 2:22:** “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.”

**I John 3:23:** “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”

**1 John 4:1:** “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

**I John 4:15:** “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.”

There are many ways to deny what the Bible has to say about Jesus. Many cults talk about a person whom they call “Jesus” but who is actually *radically* different from the Biblical Jesus. For example, Mormonism teaches that Jesus was once a man who rose to prominence and became God. That is *not* the real Jesus because they deny that Jesus eternally existed as God and they deny Jesus' role in the Trinity. Therefore, since they deny the Biblical Jesus, I John 2:23 states that they are lost. If you deny the Son then you deny the Father as well, and that means you are not saved. It is not any more complicated than that. As John said:

**I John 5:12:** “He that hath the Son hath life: and he that hath not the Son of God

hath not life.”

**Point Five: ...lead a righteous life.** This is a very difficult point that will need some explanation. First, however, here are the verses:

**I John 3:6:** “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

I know this may seem counter-intuitive, but this passage does *not* teach that Christians never sin. It is *not* saying that if you sin then that means you're not a Christian. The reason I know this is because later in the book John tells us that if we see a fellow Christian caught up in sin we should pray for him so that he can be rescued from that sin. Obviously, John believes that someone with genuine faith can sin.

So what does John mean? Well, it's worth noting that John is talking about a *particular* sin. In verse 10 John specifically talks about people who do not love each other. Later in the chapter we see this theme repeated:

**I John 3:22:** “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

This is the same language that we saw earlier, but here John explains precisely what he means: genuine Christians are people who “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ” and “love one another.” Those are the commandments that John is talking about. Someone with real faith will believe in Jesus and will love those around them – which, in turn, constitutes a righteous life.

What did Jesus say the two greatest commandments were? To love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. A person with true faith will do that, and a person whose faith is counterfeit will not. Those who do not love God and do not love those around them are not righteous, have not known God, and (as John plainly says) are “of the devil.”

So, then, a genuine believer leads a righteous life, and that righteousness consists of *believing on Jesus, loving God, and loving others*. People who do not do this are not saved. If you hate God or if you hate other people, then you should seriously stop and consider whether you are actually saved.

**Point Six: ...seek the things of God, not the things of the world.** John made this very clear:

**I John 2:15:** “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

Christ told us that no man can serve two masters; we will either serve God or we will serve something else. These verses echo that point and reemphasize the fact that we *cannot* love the things of this world and the things of God at the same time – we will either love one or the other. The reason for this is because the things that this world has to offer (pride, lust, ambition, fame, riches, power, etc.) are not godly things but carnal things. If we spend our lives trying to obtain these things then we are serving ourselves, not God.

People with genuine faith will lead lives that are dedicated to serving God. They will have little interest in “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” because their priorities are different. However, the lost don't have that passion for God, and because of that they will be caught up in all sorts of things. John is quite clear: those who lead self-centered lives do not have the love of God dwelling in them.

**Point Seven: ...continue in the faith.** What I mean by this is that people who have genuine faith keep that faith all their lives. They don't abandon it when life gets hard, and they don't abandon Christianity for a different religion. John puts it this way:

**I John 2:19:** “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

People whose faith only lasts for a short time before it is discarded never had genuine faith at all. As John says, the fact that they drifted away is proof that they were never really a Christian in the first place. Genuine, saving faith is something that sticks with you for life.

## THE AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the most common and widely-held ideas in the Church today is the idea of the age of accountability. This doctrine teaches that God only holds you responsible for your sins once you are old enough to understand the gospel. If you attend a Baptist church for any length of time it will not be long before you hear someone bring up this idea.

Now, the exact age at which God starts holding people accountable is a matter of debate. Most people claim that it is different for each person and that some people (such as the insane or mentally handicapped) never reach this age at all. They go on to say that those who die *before* they reach this age automatically go to Heaven, since God doesn't hold their sins against them. The only people who need to be saved are those who reach the age of accountability. To put it more plainly: all children and mentally-challenged people go to Heaven.

I have been in the Baptist denomination for a number of years, and during that time I've heard numerous sermons along these lines. However, one thing I've noticed is that in all the sermons I've heard on this idea, not one of them tried to use the Bible to justify it. *Not a single one.* To me this immediately raised red flags. If this teaching is true then there must be some support for it in the Scriptures. If that is the case then why not show the proof? Why not proudly display the evidence for all the world to see? After all, pastors use the Bible to defend their beliefs all the time. Why is this topic any different?

I've encountered the same thing when talking to church members who believe in this teaching. No one I've ever talked with has told me that they began believing it because they ran across it in the Bible. In every case, people believed it simply because they could not believe that God would send a child to Hell. That idea was so horrifying that the "age of accountability" doctrine *had* to be true. Whether it was *actually* true or not wasn't important. People had an emotional need for this to be true, and so they held on to it. They might not have been able to defend it or point to any Bible verses that taught it, but they believed it all the same.

Now, I'm not saying that no one has ever tried to defend this teaching with the Bible. What I *am* saying is that most people believe in this idea for emotional reasons, not for Biblical ones. The reason this belief is widely-held is because *people desperately want it to be true.*

The question is, are they right? Is the age of accountability something real, or is it just a myth? Let's take a look and see.

If you try to research this topic you'll quickly discover that few people try to defend this belief by quoting Bible verses. Instead, theologians will tell you that it's obviously not in the character of God to send children to Hell. They'll say that God would never dream of holding people responsible for their sins when they had no idea that they were sinning. They will also say that it is an offense to God to require faith from someone who is mentally incapable of understanding what faith is.

But most of the time you won't see them using the Bible to defend these statements. If it's not in the character of God to send children to Hell then it should be easy to provide a few Bible verses to back this up – but that doesn't happen. If God doesn't hold people responsible for sinning out of ignorance then it should be a simple matter to show us where the Bible says that – but they don't. If God doesn't hold mentally challenged people responsible for their lives then just show us the Bible verses that back that up. You would think that if these things were truly obvious then it would be easy to do – but it's not.

In fact, so far I have only found two Bible verses that have been used to support the age of accountability. The first one is this one:

**2 Samuel 12:23:** “But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

This is by far the most commonly quoted verse. If you go up to a pastor and say “Where can I find the age of accountability taught in the Bible?” this is the verse you will be given. In order to understand why, let me back up and give a little context. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and as a result she got pregnant. David eventually sought forgiveness for what he had done. God forgave him, but there were still consequences:

**2 Samuel 12:13:** “And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. 14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.”

In other words, as a consequence of what David had done, God decided to kill his child. David begged God to spare his son, but God did not and the child died. That is when David said what was quoted in verse 23 – he was telling his servants that his son was dead and there was nothing he could do about it. “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

So what does that phrase mean? Those who teach the age of accountability say that this verse proves their case. In other words, “I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” is translated to mean “since the child died before he was old enough to believe in God, he is saved and is in Heaven. However, if he'd grown up to be a teenager he would have had to believe in God or else he'd wind up in Hell.” When you put it like that it seems ridiculous, but that is what people claim the verse means.

Personally, I think that interpretation vastly overstates what David was actually saying. If “I shall go to him” means “one day I'll die”, and if “he shall not return to me” means “he won't come back to life”, then what David is saying is “one day I'll die too, but my son won't come back to life.” Did David believe that he would see his son in Heaven? Perhaps, but at the very least it's unclear – and David was definitely *not* trying to make a blanket statement that applies to all children that were ever born. What I do know is that David did *not* say “It's ok that my son is dead because all children go to Heaven. God doesn't hold children responsible for their sins.” In fact, David doesn't say anything remotely like that.

There is one other verse that could be used to defend this doctrine. It is this one:

**1 John 2:12:** “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.”

At first glance that verse looks quite definitive. I could see how people could use this verse to argue that God doesn't hold a child's sins against him. However, look at the very next verse:

**1 John 2:13:** “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.”



John says that these children have “known the Father.” Isn't it quite possible that the reason their sins are forgiven is *because* they have known the Father? In other words, these children are saved not by an age of accountability but by *their relationship with the Father and their faith in Him*.

You might be thinking “So what? Why does it matter?” One reason it matters is because the age of accountability has some really bizarre consequences. This doctrine teaches that you can lose your salvation. It says that everyone is born saved, but after your brain develops to a certain point you lose that salvation and must start believing in God. If you die *before* that happens you will go to Heaven, but if you die *afterward* you will go to Hell. So if a 13-year-old teenager has already reached the age of accountability but has *not* accepted Jesus yet, he will burn in Hell forever if he dies in a car accident. However, if that car accident had happened a year earlier, before he reached that age, then he would have ended up in Heaven. By virtue of getting one year older he lost his ticket to Heaven and had to regain it before he was condemned to Hell forever.

To put it another way: there have been around 50 million abortions since Roe vs. Wade. If the age of accountability is true then every single one of those aborted people have gone to Heaven. However, if those babies had not been aborted and were allowed to grow into adulthood, there's a very real chance that many of them would never have accepted Christ. So, then, being aborted *actually saved them all from Hell*. People get very angry when I mention this, but the age of accountability teaches that aborting your children sends them straight to Heaven. It guarantees their salvation.

People are appalled at the thought of killing your children in order to make sure that they reach Heaven, and they should be. It is a horrifying idea and is deeply wrong. *But that is exactly what the age of accountability teaches*. It could not be more clear: if all children are born saved but children lose their salvation when they reach adulthood, then aborting them before they are born guarantees that they will reach Heaven. I read in the news just the other day of a mother who was worried that the Tribulation was about to begin, so she tried to murder her preteen children so that they would be saved. The whole reason she did this was because she thought that all children went straight to Heaven, so killing them would save their souls. Now, what she did was *wrong* – not to mention deeply, horribly awful – but it's the logical consequence of the age of accountability, and *people do think this way*.

The Bible is clear that God *hates* people who murder children. It upsets Him *tremendously*. Jesus famously said that when it comes to child abuse, it would be better if the abuser had never been born. One of the reasons God sent the Israelites into exile at Babylon is because they were offering their children as human sacrifices to pagan gods. They were murdering their children and God *did not like it*. Yet I am supposed to believe that thanks to the age of accountability, this act that God so despises actually *guarantees* salvation – and that abortion has actually saved millions of souls?

If that is really the case then where is the Biblical evidence for it? Where does the Bible teach these things? I've heard people say “Well, God doesn't hold you accountable if you didn't know that your actions were sinful.” This sounds like a nice idea, but it's not true. Take a look at this:

**Leviticus 5:15:** “If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the Lord; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering;

16 And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.

Notice that God does not say “If a soul sins in ignorance, it's ok because he didn't know any better.” Instead God instituted a special sacrifice so that the person who sinned in ignorance could *ask for forgiveness*. God *still* held him accountable for what he had done – even though he didn't realize he was sinning – and God still required him to seek forgiveness. So, then, it *doesn't matter* if we know that we are sinning or not. A sin is still a sin, and we must still seek forgiveness for it.

In fact, the Bible is quite clear:

**Romans 6:23:** “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

If you'll notice, that verse does not have any conditions attached to it. It doesn't say “The wages of sin is death *if* you knew that you were sinning, *if* you have reached adulthood, *if* you are mentally competent, and *if* you are capable of understanding the gospel.” Nor does it say “The wages of sin is death for some people, but not for children, the insane, the unborn, or those who have never heard of Jesus.” It doesn't say *any* of those things. It is clear, direct, and to the point: the wages of sin is death. Period. It is death *for everybody* because everybody has sinned:

**Romans 3:23:** “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”

Notice how clear this verse is! It says that all have sinned. It doesn't say “All *adults* have sinned”, or “all those who have reached the age of accountability have sinned, but children are innocent and God doesn't hold them responsible.” People desperately wish that it said that, but it doesn't. There are no exclusions based on age or mental capacity. The Bible really does teach that *everyone* is a sinner, right down to the youngest child. It carves out no exceptions, nor does it teach that God somehow excuses sins that are done in ignorance. The wages of *all* sin – even ignorant sin – is death, no matter how old you are.

You might say “Well, but that doesn't apply to infants. They're innocent.” The problem with that idea is that the Bible explicitly says that even the *unborn* are sinners:

**Psalms 51:5:** “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

The psalmist is not saying that he was born of adultery; he is saying that he was a sinner *from conception*. None of us start out innocent. We are not born good people who then somehow fall into sin. We are sinners from the very first moment that our life begins – and life begins at the moment of conception, *not* when we are born.

Just in case we missed the point, God repeats this idea a few chapters later:

**Psalms 58:3:** “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”

When are the wicked “estranged”? Is it once they reach the age of accountability? No, it is *from the womb*. When do they become evil? Is it when they become teenagers? No, it is *as soon as they are born*. This idea that children are innocent, incapable of being evil, is not Biblical. Psalm 58:3 really does say that the wicked were evil *as babies*.

That is already more than most people can take, but there's more. Does God say that children are not held responsible for the things they do? No, He doesn't:

**Proverbs 20:11:** "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right."

Notice how this verse doesn't say "Sure, children misbehave, but it's ok because they're young and haven't reached the age of accountability yet." Instead it says that even children are known for being good or being bad. They are capable of good *and* evil. This idea that children are innocent and sinless is simply not Biblical.

As if all that was not enough, we then come to this:

**1 Corinthians 7:14:** "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy."

This verse says something rather startling. Paul is examining the situation where one person in a marriage is saved and the other is not. Should they get a divorce? Paul says that there are some cases where they should not get a divorce, and he goes on to discuss them. One case he lists is verse 14, where the couple has children. Since one of the parents is saved, the children are holy. This is important because if neither of the parents were saved the children *would be unclean*.

You can go back and reread the verse if you don't believe me. Notice how Paul divides children into two camps: those who are holy *and those who are not*. This would have been an outstanding time for Paul to say "All children are holy and all children are saved", but he doesn't say that. Paul actually talks about children *that are not saved*.

Now, you might be thinking "Surely there's some other explanation for all this! Maybe these passages are meant to be taken in some symbolic way. Surely God considers *all* children to be holy and righteous." There is actually a passage we can look at to find this out once and for all. In the Old Testament there was a time when God was determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. When Abraham found out about this he pleaded with God on behalf of Sodom, asking Him not to destroy it. Abraham finally ended his negotiations with this plea:

**Genesis 18:32:** "And he said, Oh let not the LORD be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

Do you know what happened? God couldn't find 10 righteous people, so he destroyed the cities:

**Genesis 19:24:** "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;  
25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."

The reason I bring this up is because there were certainly at least ten children in these cities. In fact, there were probably *thousands* of children. *Yet God did not find even ten righteous people*. If all children really are innocent and holy in God's sight then God would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah

on the grounds that there were more than 10 children there, and children were holy, and therefore God would not destroy the holy with the wicked. But that did not happen. In fact, the only people God rescued were Lot, his wife, and his two daughters. How many of the children of those cities did God rescue? *Zero*.

If all children are innocent and holy in God's sight then this would have been a fantastic place to make that point – but it did not happen. If children are sinless or if God does not hold children accountable for their sins, then Romans 3 or I Corinthians 7 would have been a great place to mention that fact – but it wasn't mentioned.

If you've never heard any of this before then these passages are probably shocking. We tend to have our own ideas about what is right and wrong and what is fair and unfair, and when God comes along and says that He sees things differently we tend to react by saying “No, God couldn't possibly have meant that. That's just crazy!” We want to believe that God thinks the way that we think, instead of realizing that He is completely different. This is something that God Himself pointed out:

**Isaiah 55:9:** “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

So what is the answer? If the age of accountability is not true then what *is* true? What does the Bible actually say about what happens when a child dies before he is born?

Well, let's start in the book of Luke. There was a time when the disciples went to the Lord and were very excited because they had been able to cast out demons. The Lord said that was nice, but that wasn't something worth getting all excited about:

**Luke 10:20:** “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”

That seems like a strange thing to say. Who cares if your names are written in Heaven? What difference does that make? Well, it actually makes a lot of difference:

**Revelation 20:12:** “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Anyone whose name was not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life (which is a real book, by the way) was cast into the Lake of Fire, where they would be tormented day and night, forever and ever. All those whose names *were* written, however, were saved and given eternal life. In other words, whether or not you ended up in Heaven or Hell is completely determined by whether your name is written in that book. That's why the Lord said that the disciples were to rejoice because their name was written in it, as that meant they had eternal life to look forward to.

So, then, that brings up a question: when is your name written down in that all-important book? Is it when you become saved? Actually, no. If your name is there, it was written there *when God created the world*:

**Revelation 17:8:** “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”

In other words, the Book of Life was completed when God created the world. If you are saved then your name was written there long before you were born. In fact, you were saved *because* your name was written there.

This is another truth that is very unpopular, but it is true all the same. You see, people do *not* come to God and get saved. Instead, God comes to people *and saves them*. From our perspective it looks like we are coming to God, but in reality what we're seeing is God saving us.

Paul expounded upon this idea in Romans:

**Romans 9:11:** “(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”

In the Old Testament God said that He loved Jacob and hated Esau. (Yes, believe it or not, God hated Esau. Not Esau's sin, but *Esau himself*. We like to say “Well, God hates sin but loves the sinner.” In this case, though, it was the sinner that God hated.) What is striking about this is that God hated Esau *before he was even born*. He didn't hate Esau because of anything he had done, because he hadn't done anything yet. This wasn't a case where Jacob had been a good boy and Esau a bad one, so God came to like Jacob and dislike Esau. No, what happened here was that before either of them were born, God divinely chose to love one and hate the other – *and there was nothing either of them could do about it*. God extended mercy to Jacob and withheld it from Esau simply to prove that people are saved based on God's divine choice.

This, of course, seems grossly unfair – which is the very next point Paul brings up:

**Romans 9:14:** “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

These verses are possibly some of the most unpopular verses in the Bible, but they are crystal clear. God saves some people and does not save others based on *His divine choice*. He chooses to have mercy on some and He chooses to withhold mercy from others. As verse 16 says, God doesn't make this decision based on how good you are or who your father was or even how much you want it. God is the one who makes the call and He does so based solely on His own will – and He made the decision

long before you were born.

This brings up a point: if God chooses to save some but not others then why does God hold the lost accountable? After all, it's not the fault, is it? Paul has this to say about that:

**Romans 9:18:** “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?”

In other words, God is in charge. He is the one who made the universe and He is the one who created the human race. God does not owe any of us anything, including salvation and mercy. All of us have sinned and all of us deserve death. If God chooses to have mercy on some but not others then who are we to tell God that He has no right to do that? As verse 21 says, doesn't the potter have the right to do as he wishes with the clay? If he wants to rescue some pots and leave the others broken then isn't that his business?

But why would God do that? Paul explains that as well:

**Romans 9:22:** “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,”

What we overlook is that both the righteous *and* the unrighteousness bring glory to God – in very different ways. Theologians call this the “grand demonstration.” Before the universe was created there were aspects of God's character that were hidden and had never been revealed in all the ages of eternity. For example, God could not show His mercy, grace, or forgiveness because no one had ever done Him wrong. God also had no way to demonstrate His wrath, judgment, or justice because no one had ever sinned.

But when God created the world and mankind fell into sin, the situation changed. Now aspects of God's character that had been hidden could now be clearly seen. As verse 9 says, the wicked allow God to demonstrate His awesome wrath, power, and longsufferingness. The forgiven ones are demonstrations of His mercy, grace, and compassion. Both glorify God by revealing His character and allowing Him to demonstrate who He is.

What does all that have to do with children? Simply this: we are saved by repentance and faith in Jesus. However, the reason we have faith – the reason we repent – is because God divinely chose to write our name down in the Book of Life when He created the world. *God chose us*, and therefore we are saved. Theologians call this “irresistible grace”, and it is a very unpopular idea. But it is exactly what the Bible teaches.

Whether or not children are saved depends entirely on whether their names are written in the Book of Life. If they are written they will inherit eternal life, and if they are not then they won't. The Bible makes no exceptions; this policy holds true for everyone.

The bottom line is that if God chooses to have mercy on a person then they will be saved, no

matter how old they are or how sane or insane they may be. If God chooses to withhold that mercy then they will be lost.

Can we know for sure if a child is saved? Well, let me ask you a question: can you know for sure if another *adult* is saved? Remember, the disciple Judas had everyone fooled. When Jesus said “One of you will betray me”, no one said “Oh, I bet it's Judas! He's got those shifty eyes.” The other disciples had no idea who the traitor might be. Judas fooled the eleven people on Earth who were closer to Jesus than anyone else. If you can't tell if other adults are saved then why would you think that children would be any different?

At the end of the day it has to be enough to know that the matter is in God's hands, not ours. He is the one that makes the call, and He is perfect, holy, loving, and just. As far as I have seen God has not told us of any blanket policy that He might have. I think we simply have to trust Him – and He can most definitely be trusted.

# THE BOOK WITH A BLESSING

To the best of my knowledge there is only one book in the Bible whose introduction includes a specific blessing for anyone who reads the book. Ironically, this blessing is found in a book that many Christians tend to avoid. That book, of course, is the book of Revelation:

**Revelation 1:3:** “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”

As you can see, God promises to bless those who read Revelation or who have it read to them. There's also a blessing for those who “keep those things which are written therein.” That word “keep” is the Greek word *tereo*, which means “to attend to carefully, take care of, to guard.” In other words, God promises to bless those who read the book of Revelation and who pay careful attention to what it says.

There's something else unique about this book. While the Bible is full of verses that command people to not tamper with God's Word, this is the only book that includes a specific curse for anyone who dares to alter its contents. This can be found at the end of the book:

**Revelation 22:18:** “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”

Notice the tremendous severity of this curse! Now, this curse isn't directed at those who misunderstand the prophecy or have trouble figuring out what it means. What it is saying is that if anyone tampers with the text of the prophecy itself and removes a portion of it, God will *remove their name from the Book of Life* and condemn them to the Lake of Fire for all eternity. In other words, tampering with Revelation and altering its contents is as great a crime in God's eyes as taking the Mark of the Beast! It's a very serious matter.

So, then, God promises to bless those who read Revelation and pay attention to it, and He also threatens eternal damnation on anyone who dares to tamper with its text. That tells us that there is something very special about this book. God clearly wants His people to be familiar with what it has to say – after all, that's the whole point of Revelation 1:3!

Yet there are a many people today who simply do not care about prophecy. Some of them say that they are “pan-millennial”, meaning “it will all pan out in the end, so why should I care?” Others say “Well, all of this end-times stuff doesn't really impact the way I live my life, so why does it matter?” There are still others who are simply intimidated by the book and are confused by the *many* different ways it has been interpreted. They see no reason to get mixed up in something that complex and controversial.

So why should we care about Bible prophecy? The simple answer is *because God wants us to care*. We see that right in Revelation 1:3, but that's not the only verse that teaches this. Jesus Himself had this to say when He was asked about matters relating to end-times:



**Matthew 24:3:** “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.”

Notice that Jesus didn't say “Oh, don't worry about it! All that end-times stuff is going to pan out in the end anyway, and it really doesn't have any practical applications. Just focus on serving God and you will be fine.” That's what a lot of people believe, but that's not what Jesus said! In fact, what He actually said was “Take heed that no man deceive you” – and He then described in great detail the events that would foreshadow His Second Coming. He *wanted* His disciples to know what was going to happen *so that they would not be deceived*, and He wanted them to be watching *because it could happen at any time*:

**Mark 13:34:** “For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

35 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”

Notice that we don't see any trace of Jesus saying “Oh, just don't worry about it. Life is too short to be focusing on things like that.” He actually told His disciples not once but *several times* that they needed to be watching! Saying “oh, it doesn't matter; it will all pan out in the end” is *not at all* the same thing as understanding end-times prophecy and being watchful for the return of Christ.

Some people say “There's no reason to study all of this end-times stuff. As long as you're ready you will be fine.” That sounds wise, but it is actually a very foolish thing to say. After all, *what are you getting ready for?* According to Preterism, Jesus came back thousands of years ago. According to Post-Tribulationism, the Church is going to have to endure seven years of Hell-on-Earth. According to Dominionism, the Church is going to conquer the world with the gospel and usher in an age of peace. According to Pre-Tribulationism, Jesus could return at any moment and remove the Church from the world. There is no such thing as “being ready” in a generic sense. Is Jesus going to come back soon, or is He going to come back in the distant future, or has Jesus already come back, or is He never going to come back at all? Is the Church going to conquer the world, or is the Church going to be removed from the world, or is the Church going to go through the worst period that the world has ever seen? If you don't understand end-times prophecy and have no idea what is true and what is a lie then how could you possibly “be ready”?

Jesus said to be wary because many false Christs would come in His name. If you don't know the truth then how can you tell a genuine Second Coming from a fake one? Do you know enough about the return of Christ to tell the genuine article apart from a fraud? If your knowledge of end-times prophecy is “I'm sure it will all pan out in the end”, then the answer to that question is *no*. People like Harold Camping have destroyed the lives of many people with false end-times prophecies precisely because those people did not understand what the Bible teaches. Other people have actually murdered their own children because they thought the Tribulation was starting and they wanted to save them. People's lives have been utterly destroyed because they did not understand this subject and were led

astray by false teachers. If you do not know the truth then you are open to being deceived by the next charlatan who comes along – and don't think that it can't happen to you. Just because you didn't believe one lie doesn't mean you won't find the next one convincing.

Paul echoes this very same idea. He did not want the Thessalonian church to be ignorant:

**1 Thessalonians 4:13:** “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Notice that Paul did not tell the Thessalonian church “Hey, don't worry about all this prophecy stuff.” No, what he actually said was “I would not have you to be ignorant.” He *wanted* them to understand the doctrines that surround the Second Coming. Paul, like Jesus, was *against* this “pan-millennial” idea. He wanted them to know what God had to say about the Lord's return and he wanted them to comfort each other with these teachings. In fact, in Paul's second letter to them he repeated that idea:

**2 Thessalonians 2:1:** “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”

Paul didn't want them to be deceived by false or erroneous teachings, and he expected the Thessalonians to remember what he had taught them. Each time the Second Coming is mentioned we find God urging us to pay attention and hear what He has to say about it! I find it interesting that one of the last things Jesus does in the Bible is bless those who “keep” (*tereo*) what He had just revealed about end-times prophecy:

**Revelation 22:7:** “Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.”

(You can almost hear Jesus saying “P.S.: This Revelation stuff is important! Pay attention to

it.”)

I've already explained what that word “keepeth” means. God is very clear on this point: He wants us to not only *care* about end-times prophecy but to also pay attention and *understand* it. After all, how can we possibly avoid being deceived if we ignore the subject altogether? How can churches tell the truth apart from lies if they don't know anything about the subject?

Yes, it's true that Revelation has been interpreted in many different ways. Since God clearly wants His children to understand Revelation, doesn't it seem likely that Satan would go out of his way to spread confusion, doubt, and distrust over this subject? After all, if people aren't paying attention anyway then spreading lies is a great way of suppressing the truth!

It is also true that the Second Coming is not an easy subject. Revelation is not a simple book, and it took years of concentrated effort before I finally understood what it was saying. It was difficult but it was worth it. As the Bible says, “Seek, and ye shall find.” If we seek the truth we will find it. That doesn't mean that it will be easy, but we need to remember that we do have help: God has promised to give wisdom to all those who ask for it, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. We're not in this alone. If we apply ourselves then God will be there to help us.

Today is actually a great time in history to begin studying eschatology (the study of end-times) because there are so many great resources available. If you're new to this subject, a great place to start is *Footsteps of the Messiah* by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. He begins by explaining the rules that he uses to interpret Scripture, and he then consistently applies those rules to all of the prophetic passages that are throughout the Bible. He takes each passage, quotes it, applies the rules, and then shows the interpretation. It's a very easy book to read, and it's easy to see how the author arrived at his conclusions.

My point, though, is that there's nothing Biblical or godly about what people call “pan-millennialism.” It is *not* God's will for us to adopt a “who cares?” attitude to this subject – or to *any* Biblical doctrine, for that matter. These days it's common for people to say “Let's just stick to the major truths; they're all that really matters.” Frankly, God is not amused. The Lord did not give mankind a 3-page booklet that outlined the major truths and then say “Just stick to these and you'll be fine.” Instead He spent thousands of years writing a 1000+ page book that was filled with all kinds of truths, and He expects us to know and believe *all* of it. This idea that we can ignore most of what the Bible says “because it's not core truth” does *not* come from God. Do you really think that the Lord is up in Heaven thinking “Boy, I sure hope My Church ignores 90%+ of what I had to say”?

Finally, let me close by saying that the study of eschatology is important for another reason as well: without a good working knowledge of the subject there are many Bible passages that just won't make any sense. For example, take this passage:

**Matthew 25:1:** “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:

4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.

7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.

8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.

9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you:

but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.

10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

This is a pretty well-known Bible story, but people misinterpret it all the time. They approach this passage thinking that they already know what it means, and in doing so they gloss over all of the important points and arrive at an erroneous conclusion. First of all, notice that these 10 virgins (or bridesmaids) are waiting on the bridegroom to come. Right away we have a problem because the Church is always represented as the *Bride*, not as ten bridesmaids. Nor is the Church in danger of being excluded from her own wedding – in fact, it's impossible for the wedding to happen without her! This passage isn't talking about the Church at all. It's actually talking about a very *different* group of people.

Plus there's the odd deal surrounding the lamps. Back in ancient times lamps used oil as a fuel, and in the Bible oil always represents the Holy Spirit. When these 10 bridesmaids started waiting all 10 of them had oil; the problem was that the groom tarried for so long that 5 of them ran out. This presents a huge problem because this story is saying is that half of these people *ran out of the Holy Spirit*. In other words, they originally *had* the Spirit, but they eventually lost Him and were caught empty-handed when Jesus returned. Since they lacked the Spirit at the moment of Christ's return, Jesus left them behind and rejected them.

However, Christians today *can't* run out of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sealed within us and cannot be lost. We can offend the Spirit and grieve it, and we can even ignore the Spirit, but we can't lose it. Moreover, having the Spirit sealed within us means that our salvation is assured and cannot be lost. Christians don't have to worry about doing something wrong, losing the Spirit, and then having to scramble to get saved again; that's not how it works. All of this is evidence that the story isn't talking about the Church at all, but instead is aimed at a very different group of people in a very different period in history. Once you understand the events that surround the Second Coming then this passage makes a great deal of sense, but without that understanding these verses are a real mess.

(For the record, these verses are actually talking about Tribulation saints. In all of history the only group that has ever been given the Holy Spirit as a permanent gift is the Church. In the Old Testament it was a rare gift that – as in the case of Sampson – was easily lost. When the Church is Raptured things will change. It is not possible for someone in the Church to lose their salvation, but in the Tribulation it *will* be possible. Those who are saved during that terrible time in history will need to hold on to what they have lest it slip away.)

Another passage that seems bizarre is this one:

**Matthew 25:31:** “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: . . .

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an

hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? . . .

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: . . .

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

If you don't understand the events that surround the Second Coming then this whole event seems strangely redundant. Is Jesus really going to take all the righteous people out of Heaven and all the wicked people out of Hell and then judge them again? Why would people who were *already in Heaven* be so shocked at what Jesus had to say, and why would the people who had already been burning in Hell be amazed that Jesus was upset with them? It seems rather pointless to judge people who had already gone on to everlasting life or everlasting punishment! Why would He regather everyone just to give a short speech and then send them right back where they came from?

The answer is that there's a great deal more going on here – but that only becomes apparent once you understand all the events that surround the Second Coming. (These verses are talking about judging the *living*, not the dead. This judgment is not the same as the Great White Throne judgment, but that is a subject for another time.)

Here is an example from the Old Testament:

**Isaiah 65:17:** “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.”

At first it's easy to think that this is talking about the New Heaven and Earth that are created after the Great White Throne judgment (which is another set of doctrines that few people are familiar with). However, we have a problem: verse 20 tells us that there are still sinners and people still die. It is true that people are living such a long time that someone who dies at the age of 100 is considered to be just a child, but the point is that *people still die*. Yet the Bible tells us that at the Great White Throne judgment the Lord will put an end to sin and death! So what, exactly, is this passage talking about? (The answer is that this is about life in the Millennial Kingdom – a period in history when things will be very different from the way they are today.)

Here is another odd passage:

**Zechariah 14:16:** “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.”

Here we see God saying that one day all of the nations of the world will be required to go to Jerusalem every year to worship God and “to keep the feast of tabernacles.” If any nations refuse to go then God will curse them by withholding rain. This is not just unexpected; it is astounding! In all of history nothing like this has ever happened. Just when is this going to take place? How does it fit in with God's plan for history? Is there really going to come a day when the entire world will keep Jewish feasts?

There are answers to all of these questions, but you have to work to find them. Let me close by saying this: those who have a “who cares?” attitude will never find the answers. Those who seek wisdom, however, will find it – and they will also find many amazing truths that they never knew existed. As Christ said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)

## THE LAND GIVEN TO ISRAEL

Here's an interesting question: just how much land did God give to the Israelites? We see in Genesis chapter 17 that God gave them the entire land of Canaan:

**Genesis 17:4:** "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

This passage, however, does not define any boundaries. We can see in verse 8 that the land was given to Israel "for an everlasting possession", which is a topic I've extensively explored elsewhere. But just how large a territory did this represent?

We can find part of the answer in Genesis 15:

**Genesis 15:18:** "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:"

Here God answers the question in very explicit terms: the Israelites were given all the land that was east of the Nile and west of the Euphrates river. This is quite a lot of territory and include parts of modern Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the entire Sinai Peninsula. The promised territory is roughly 1500 miles wide. That verse doesn't tell us how far north or south the territory goes, but we at least have some east-west boundaries to work with.

To put this into perspective: modern Israel currently covers 8000 square miles. At its narrowest point the country is less than *ten miles wide*. The territory that God promised to give Abraham, however, is *125 times larger!*

How will they get this territory? God will give it to them. Currently this land is occupied by the enemies of Israel, who are plotting to destroy her from off the face of the Earth. In the near future they will form a large coalition and launch a major war against her, which was prophesied in Psalm 83. God will then judge the nations that attempted to destroy her and will give Israel their land.

Ultimately, however, Israel will probably not possess this entire territory until the Lord returns. I believe these will be the boundaries of Israel during the Messianic Kingdom, but that is a subject for another time.

# THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Whenever a major earthquake happens someone inevitably points to the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 as proof that the earthquake was some kind of fulfillment of prophecy. I don't know how many times I've been told that earthquake activity is a sign that the Tribulation is near. You see it everywhere – blogs, books, sermons, etc.

I believe this is caused by a misunderstanding of the Olivet Discourse. As it turns out, Matthew 24:1-14 is not talking about the period before the Tribulation. What Jesus is describing in those verses is the first half of the Tribulation itself. In other words, Matthew 24 describes the *actual* Tribulation, not the years leading up to it.

Stop and think about it for a moment. In the beginning of Matthew 24 the disciples approached Jesus privately and asked Him a few questions:

**Matthew 24:3:** “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Today when we read those verses we immediately think about the Rapture, but that would not have been on the disciples' minds. After all, at this point in time the disciples didn't even know that the Church was going to exist, let alone that there would be a Rapture! When Paul mentioned the Rapture for the first time in I Corinthians 15:51 he said “Behold, I show you a mystery.” The word “mystery” is a very meaningful one, and in the Bible it refers to something *that had never been revealed before*. Christ had alluded to a deliverance “from the wrath to come” but Paul was the first one to expound on the details. The disciples didn't find out about the Rapture until long after the Resurrection.

What this means is that when the disciples asked Jesus “what shall be the sign of thy coming”, they were asking about the Second Coming, *not* the Rapture. It is important to emphasize that the Second Coming and the Rapture are not the same thing. The Rapture happens *before* the Tribulation and removes the Church from the Earth. The Second Coming happens *after* the Tribulation when Jesus returns from Heaven *with* the Church and ends the reign of the Antichrist.

We can see the difference between these two comings illustrated in several passages. First, look at I Thessalonians:

**1 Thessalonians 4:16:** “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

This is actually where we get the word “rapture.” In Latin translations of the Bible the phrase “caught up” in verse 17 is the word “rapturo.” When people speak of the Rapture they are talking about the time when the Church will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air. As far as I know the idea that we will “meet the Lord in the air” is not seriously disputed among believers. What people do argue about is when this happens and what happens next, but that is a topic I've discussed elsewhere so I won't repeat it here.



The key point is that in the event described in I Thessalonians 4, the dead are raised, the living are changed, and we are “caught up” to “meet the Lord in the air.” Notice also that Jesus appears to come to Earth *alone*. The reason this is important is because the Bible also describes a very different event where Jesus returns to the Earth *with the armies of Heaven*, full of wrath and ready to wage war:

**Revelation 19:11:** “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. ...

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

21 And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.”

You can immediately see that this is a very different event from one the described in I Thessalonians 4!

Interestingly, earlier Revelation 19 the Marriage of the Lamb took place in Heaven, between Christ and His Bride the Church (verse 7). Since I Thes. 4:17 describes the time when Jesus comes to Earth to take His Bride *to* Heaven, and Revelation 19 described the Marriage of the Lamb *in* Heaven, then Rev. 19 must take place *after* the Rapture. What we see described in Revelation is the Second Coming that the disciples were asking about – the time when Jesus returns with the armies of Heaven.

Zechariah also mentions this event:

**Zechariah 14:3:** “Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

5 And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in

the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee."

Needless to say, in Christ's first coming He never stood on the Mount of Olives and broke it in half, creating a giant valley! He did not "fight against those nations." What the Bible is describing in these verses has yet to take place.

Do you see the difference between the Rapture (I Thes. 4) and the Second Coming (Rev. 19)? In the Rapture the Lord returns to Earth *alone*, meets the Church *in the air*, and *goes back to Heaven*. In the Second Coming the Lord returns to Earth with the armies of Heaven, *sets foot* on the mount of Olives, and *wages war* against the armies of the antichrist. They are *completely different events*.

Now that a distinction has been made between the Rapture and the Second Coming, we can turn our attention back to Matthew 24. In this chapter Jesus tells His disciples what signs will occur before His Second Coming, and He goes into a lot of detail. The important thing to remember is that everything you see in Matthew 24:4-28 happens *during* the Tribulation. I realize that verses 5-14 are commonly used as evidence that the Tribulation is near, but what they are actually describing are *the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation itself*.

Take a look to see what I mean:

**Matthew 24:5:** "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrows."

Compare that to the verses in Revelation that describe the Tribulation itself:

**Revelation 6:1:** "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.

4 And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword."

Do you see the correlation? Matthew 24:5-7 says the *beginning* of sorrows will be composed of "wars and rumors of wars", and that is exactly what happens in Revelation 6 when the *first* two seals are opened during the beginning of the Tribulation.

Matthew 24:8 says there will be a famine, and that happens when the third seal is opened:

**Revelation 6:5:** "And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand.

6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.”

The “penny” mentioned in verse 6 was actually a day's wage. When these events take place, food prices are so high that it takes an entire day's salary to purchase a single measure of wheat! That is a famine of catastrophic proportions.

Verse 12 mentions a “great earthquake” – the sign that people get so excited about:

**Revelation 6:12:** “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.”

Notice that neither Matthew nor Revelation say “there will be an increasing number of severe earthquakes as the Tribulation draws nearer.” Go back and look – it doesn't say that! All Jesus says is that there will be earthquakes in diverse places (which is completely different from “an ever-increasing number of earthquakes”), but not to panic because *the end is not yet*. In other words, in Matthew 24:6-7 Jesus was actually saying that if you see earthquakes happening, *don't* panic! He was telling the disciples about signs that *should not cause alarm*. Besides this, the earthquakes Jesus mentioned (and Revelation does talk about more than one) happen *during* the Tribulation, not *before* it. There is a huge difference!

Matthew mentions martyrs:

**Matthew 24:9:** “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.”

Revelation 6 does as well:

**Revelation 6:9:** “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

Matthew says that the gospel will be preached to the whole world, “and then shall the end come”:

**Matthew 24:14:** “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Revelation reports that this happens *during the Tribulation*, just before the end:

**Revelation 14:6:** “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation,

and kindred, and tongue, and people,

7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

Do you see the striking correlation between Matthew 24 and Revelation 6? The events Jesus describes in those first few verses match the events that take place in the first half of the Tribulation – and as I’ve explained elsewhere, the verses in the second half of the passage *definitely* correspond to the Tribulation. It is at the midpoint of the Tribulation when the “abomination of desolation” takes place, which Jesus mentions in Matthew 24:15, and the rest of the chapter discusses the terrible events of the “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:21). I cannot escape the conclusion that what Jesus is describing in Matthew 24 *is the seven-year Tribulation itself*. He isn't telling them events that are going to take place *before* the Tribulation; instead He's telling them things that will happen *during* the Tribulation!

The reason He is doing this is because the disciples wanted to know what signs would happen just prior to His Second Coming. When does that take place? *After* the Tribulation. (Look at the passage to see what I mean – the “great tribulation” is mentioned verse 21, and the Lord returns in verse 29-30, “immediately after the tribulation.”) So it makes perfect sense that the Lord would explain the events of the Tribulation to them – events that would certainly indicate that the Second Coming was near, and events that Jesus was the first to reveal. At this time Revelation had not yet been written; in fact, Revelation would not be penned until all of the disciples except for John had been executed.

When Jesus says in verse 34 that “this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled”, He is saying is that the generation that is alive when the Tribulation begins will still be alive when Jesus returns. When Jesus told this to His disciples no one realized this. Jesus was the first one to make it known that the generation that was alive when the Tribulation started would not have died out before the Second Coming.

I want to emphasize this again: when Jesus says in Matthew 24:33 “so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors”, He is not talking about the Rapture or the Tribulation. What He is saying is that His Second Coming (which takes place *after* the Tribulation) is near. When He says in verse 36 “But of that day and hour knoweth no man” He is talking about the Second Coming, *not* the Rapture. The Rapture is not even mentioned in Matthew 24! People apply these verses to the Rapture all the time but that is *not* what Jesus was talking about.

Just to make it clear, *before* the Tribulation begins the Lord will come and get His Church and take them home to Heaven. That is the Rapture. Later, at the *end* of the Tribulation, the Lord will come back to Earth *with* His Church and defeat the Antichrist. This is the Second Coming, and *that* is what Matthew 24 is talking about.

So, in conclusion, when you see an earthquake happen, take Christ's advice in Matthew 24:6 and *don't panic*. As Jesus said in that very same verse, “the end is not yet”!

# THE ULTIMATE PROOF

Some time ago I read a book by Dr. Jason Lisle entitled *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*. In it he presents an argument against evolution that cannot be logically refuted, which he calls the “ultimate proof”. The book is very thorough, and I strongly recommend reading the entire thing. What I wanted to do here is give a brief summary of his argument.

Sometimes when creationists debate evolutionists the debate turns into a contest to see who has the most evidence. Creationists bring out things they believe prove their case, and evolutionists bring out things they believe prove their case. They then try to see who has the most evidence on their side.

Dr. Lisle points out that evidence doesn't work that way. Evidence does not speak for itself; it must be interpreted. For example, the History Channel once aired a documentary on some dinosaur bones that someone had dug up. To their surprise they found *living blood cells* inside those bones! When creationists learned of this they argued that the bones proved that dinosaurs lived recently and therefore Creation is true. However, evolutionists argued that the bones proved that blood cells can live for millions of years, because they were clearly still alive “after all that time”! The evidence was the same but the interpretation was vastly different because evolutionists and creationists have different *worldviews*.

The worldview is all-important. An evolutionist believes that evolution is true and interprets everything in that light. If he finds living blood cells in a dinosaur bone then *to him* that proves that blood cells can live for million of years, since he *assumes* that evolution is true. The idea that evolution is true is a founding assumption that *he does not question*. To him *there can be no such thing as evidence against evolution* – he can always find some way to explain away problems.

Dr. Lisle said that is accomplished through a “rescuing device”. The example he gave in his book was the Oort Cloud. Scientists know that comets can only last for a few tens of thousands of years before the Sun's heat burns away all the comet's ice and gasses and destroys them. If the solar system is billions of years old then there should no longer be any comets. Creationists argue that this is evidence for creation. Evolutionists argue that since comets exist, that means there must be a cloud of comets on the edge of the solar system, and occasionally one of them gets disturbed and is thrown into orbit around the Sun. They say this not because anyone has ever *seen* the Oort Cloud (they say it is too far away to be seen even with our best telescopes), but because this “rescues” their theory. In order for their theory to be true the Oort cloud *must* exist – and so evolutionists simply assume that it does.

So, while there is all sorts of evidence for creation, the evidence is not the real issue. The real problem is two competing worldviews – the Biblical one of creationists and the evolutionary one of evolutionists. It is the *worldview* that needs to be addressed. No matter what evidence creationists bring to the table, evolutionists can always use a “rescuing device” to explain it away (just as they do with comets and the Oort Cloud). In other words, *the real battle is between competing worldviews*. In order to disprove evolution once and for all you must show that the evolutionary worldview is irrational. That is what the ultimate proof of creation is all about.

This is how Dr. Jason Lisle defines the ultimate proof:

“The ultimate proof of creation is this: if biblical creation were not true, we could not know anything!” (Page 40)

He goes on to say that “only the Christian worldview...can rationally make sense of the

universe.” Evolution cannot explain the laws of logic. Evolution cannot give a reason for the uniformity of nature (the idea that physical laws apply equally everywhere, and will continue to work in the future). Evolution also cannot give any basis for morality or even knowledge itself. This is how he puts it:

“In fact, if evolution were true, there wouldn't be any rational reason to believe it! If life is the result of evolution, then it means that an evolutionist's brain is simply the outworking of millions of years of random-chance processes. The brain would simply be a collection of chemical reactions that have been preserved because they had some sort of survival value in the past. If evolution were true, then all the evolutionist's thoughts are merely the necessary result of chemistry acting over time. Therefore, an evolutionist *must* think and say that “evolution is true”, not for rational reasons, but as a necessary consequence of blind chemistry..

“Evolution is anti-science and anti-knowledge. If evolution were true, science would not make sense because there would be no reasons to accept the uniformity of nature upon which all science and technology depend. Nor would there be any reason to think that rational analysis would be possible since the thoughts of our mind would be nothing more than the inevitable result of mindless chemical reactions. Evolutionists are able to do science and gain knowledge only because they are inconsistent – professing to believe in evolution while accepting the principles of biblical creation.” (page 62)

This is not necessarily intuitive, so let me expound on this a bit. Let's take the example of morality. If evolution were true then there could be no such thing as *right* or *wrong*. After all, “right” means it conforms to a universal standard of behavior and “wrong” means it falls short of that standard. This makes sense in a Biblical worldview because God sets the standard. Murder and theft and lying are wrong because they violate God's standard. That is the *only* reason they are wrong.

However, in an evolutionary worldview there is no absolute moral standard. Nothing, therefore, can actually be wrong. Individuals may have their own personal beliefs about right and wrong, but there could never be a standard that applies equally to everyone. Person A may think that stealing is wrong while Person B thinks that stealing is right. Person A would have no grounds to condemn Person B because apart from God there cannot be a higher standard that applies to everyone. I've heard some argue that “Well, if it hurts people it's bad”, but *that is a Christian idea*. If there is no God then why is hurting people bad? Why would anyone's definition of “bad” apply to anyone else? After all, if evolution is true then we are all just chemical reactions. Does it really matter what one chemical reaction does to another? Evolutionists claim that there is no real difference between an animal and a person, and if an animal kills another animal we don't call it murder.

People inherently believe that things are right and wrong because there *is* a God and He *has* set a very clear standard that He put into all of our hearts. In a Biblical worldview there is a *reason* to believe in morality. But in an evolutionary worldview there is no reason to believe in a universal standard of behavior. Therefore, if evolution were true, morality would be *irrational*. If an evolutionist believes in morality then he is borrowing that concept from a Biblical worldview, because his own worldview provides no rational basis for that belief.

The same thing can be said about the laws of logic. Dr. Lisle points out that people believe in the law of non-contradiction, which says that something cannot be both true and false at the same time.

For example, I cannot say that my car *is* parked in my garage and that my car is *not* parked in my garage *at the same time*. It must be one or the other. The laws of logic are foundational to our ability to perform science, make sense of the universe, and perform reason.

In a Biblical worldview there is a reason to believe in the laws of logic. This is what Dr. Lisle said:

“For the Christian there is an absolute standard for reasoning; we are to pattern our thoughts after God's. And we know (in a finite, limited way) how God thinks because He has revealed some of His thoughts through His Word. According to Genesis, God has made us in His image (Gen 1:26) and therefore we are to follow His example (Eph. 5:1). The laws of logic are a reflection of the way God thinks, and thus the way He expects us to think. The law of non-contradiction is not simply one person's opinion of how we ought to think, rather it stems from God's self-consistent nature. God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13), and all truth is in God (John 14:6, Col. 2:3), therefore truth will not contradict itself. Since God is constantly upholding the universe by His power (Heb. 1:3), the consistent Christian expects that no contradiction will ever occur in the universe.

“Laws of logic are God's standard for thinking. Since God is an unchanging, sovereign, immaterial Being, His thoughts would necessarily be abstract, unchanging, invariant entities. In other words, they are not made of matter; they apply everywhere, at all times. Laws of logic are contingent upon God's unchanging nature. And they are a prerequisite for logical thinking. Thus, rational reasoning would be impossible without the biblical God.” (Page 52)

In a Biblical worldview there is a reason to believe that the laws of logic are universal and unchanging because they reflect the character of God and are upheld by His power. However, an evolutionist has no reason to believe any of those things. He has no reason to believe that the laws of logic will not change this afternoon, or that they apply equally on Mars as they do on Earth, or that he will never find a logical contradiction. He may *believe* that the laws of logic are universal, but he does not have a *reason* to believe this. Since he has no reason to believe in logic, logic is therefore *irrational* in an evolutionary worldview. If he believes in logic then he must borrow that concept from a Biblical worldview, since evolution provides no reason to believe in logic.

The book has a great deal more to say about all of this but I'll close with just one more point. Dr. Lisle states that if evolution were true then science would actually be impossible. This is because science depends upon something called uniformity. Uniformity is the idea that if you perform an experiment and get a certain result, you will *always* get that same result as long as the conditions are the same. In other words, the physical laws that we see today are going to be exactly the same tomorrow, and next week, and next year, and the year after that. Physical laws *do not change*. Science is only possible because we believe that the experimental results that we get today will *never change*. This allows us to make predictions about the future and learn how the universe works.

In a Biblical worldview there is a reason to believe in uniformity. This is how Dr. Lisle put it:

“The biblical creationist expects there to be order in the universe because God made all things (Gen 1:1; John 1:3) and has imposed order on the universe. Since the Bible teaches that God upholds all things by His power (Heb. 1:3), the

creationist expects that the universe would function in a logical, orderly, law-like fashion. Furthermore, God is consistent (1 Sam. 15:29; Num. 23:19) and omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-8). Thus, the creationist expects that all regions of the universe will obey the same laws, even in regions where the physical conditions are quite different. The entire field of astronomy depends upon this important biblical principle.

“Moreover, God is beyond time (2 Pet. 3:8) and has chosen to uphold the universe in a consistent fashion throughout time for our benefit. So even though conditions in the past may be quite different than those in the present and future, the way God upholds the universe (what we could call the “laws of nature”) will not arbitrarily change. God has told us that there are certain things we can count on to be true in the future – the seasons, the diurnal cycle, and so on (Gen. 8:22; Jer. 33:20-21). Therefore, under a given set of conditions, the consistent Christian has the right to expect a given outcome because he or she relies upon the Lord to uphold the universe in a consistent way.” (Page 58)

Science would become impossible without the concept of uniformity. If the laws of physics changed arbitrarily or if experimental results were constantly changing then it would be impossible to know anything. In a Biblical worldview there is a reason to believe in uniformity. In an evolutionary worldview, however, there is no reason to believe in it. Scientists may believe that uniformity is true but they must borrow from a Biblical worldview in order to do so.

Some may say that “in the past things have always been the same, so I believe that things will continue to be the same in the future,” but those who say that are just assuming that their argument is true in order to prove their argument. As Dr. Lisle pointed out, you might as well say that I believe I will never die because I have never died in the past! Evolutionists have no *reason* to believe in uniformity. Therefore, their belief in uniformity is irrational.

In conclusion, the Biblical worldview provides a reason to believe in morality, the laws of logic, and uniformity – but the evolutionary worldview does not. If evolution is true then morality is irrational, logic is irrational, and science itself has no rational basis. If evolution were true it would be impossible to know anything; our thoughts would just be chemical reactions in our brain, and a chemical reaction doesn't “know” anything. Evolution destroys the very possibility for science or knowledge. Since it cannot rationally explain the universe it must be wrong – and since only Biblical creation *can* provide reasons for explaining the universe, it must be true. That is the ultimate proof.



## THEE, THY, AND THOU IN THE KJV BIBLE

One common complaint about the King James Version of the Bible is that it is filled with archaic language – and that is quite true. For example, Genesis 41:3 mentions the word “kine.” How many people today know that this is actually an old word for cattle? There are other archaic words in it as well – right off the top of your head, do you know what “chapter” or “ague” means?

Most of the time, though, what people are complaining about is not its vocabulary but its use of words like “thee”, “thy”, and “thou.” Since people haven't talked like that in centuries, these words make the KJV much harder to read. What is especially curious, though, is that the KJV has been updated a number of times since its creation in 1611 to modify things like spelling and punctuation, and yet these archaic pronouns are still there. Why have these outdated and difficult-to-read words been left in the text?

As it turns out, there is a really good reason: the word “thee” and the word “you” *do not mean the same thing*. “Thee” is a *singular* word and “you” is a *plural* word. The reason the KJV translators used “thee” and “thy” was to preserve the difference between singular and plural pronouns. The KJV Bible is the only English translation that has done that; all other modern translations have replaced “thee” with “you” and obliterated the difference.

Does it matter? Well, let's take a look at a passage:

**Luke 22:31:** "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

What's actually going on here? Well, now that we know that “you” is plural and “thee” is singular, the passage takes on new meaning. When Jesus said “Satan hath desired to have you”, what He means is that Satan has desired to have *the disciples*. We know this because the “you” in that verse is plural and therefore must refer to a group of people. However, when Jesus says “I have prayed for thee” in verse 32, the word “thee” is singular so Jesus must be saying that He has prayed for *Peter*. In other words Jesus is actually saying this: “Simon, Satan wants to destroy the disciples, but I have prayed for you personally. When you are converted, strengthen your brothers.”

When we read this passage in the NIV, however, all of those nuances are lost:

**Luke 22:31:** “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.

32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Do you see how the meaning of the passage has been obliterated? Here it looks like Jesus is saying “Simon, Satan wants to destroy you, but I've prayed for you.” Now, it's true that the online NIV translation has a footnote saying that the “you” in verse 31 is plural, but how many people noticed that footnote or understood it? (For that matter, how many NIV Bibles include that very important footnote? The footnote is missing from the NKJV, and I suspect that most Bibles lack it.) I would guess that of all the people who have read those two verses in the NIV Bibles, very few of them (if any!) realized what was really going on.

The bottom line is this: while the use of “thee” and “thy” in the KJV may be archaic and make the text harder to read, it does have a purpose behind it. That old, outdated language maintains the distinction between singular and plural pronouns, which *can* affect what a passage means. Translations that don't use that language (including the NIV and NKJV) may be easier to read, but they obliterate that distinction and lose some of the meaning.

## THORN IN THE FLESH

The Apostle Paul told us that the Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh in order to keep him humble:

**2 Corinthians 12:7:** “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

This passage says that God gave Paul so many extraordinary revelations that the apostle was in danger of being “exalted above measure.” In order to keep this from happening the Lord blessed him with a serious problem. Paul asked the Lord three times for it to be removed, but the Lord refused, saying “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

In this passage Paul does not come out and say what this “thorn in the flesh” actually was. In fact, Paul doesn't explain the nature of this “messenger of Satan” anywhere else in the New Testament. This has led many people to wonder what, exactly, Paul was suffering from.

It is my opinion that Paul's “thorn in the flesh” may have been poor eyesight, or some other eye-related problem. The Bible does not come out and state this directly, but it does offer a few clues. The first one is the famous scene in Acts where Paul was brought before the High Priest in order to answer charges that he had been causing a disturbance in the Temple. This is how that scene played out:

**Acts 23:1:** “And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.”

This particular scene is quite well-known. The High Priest commanded that Paul be punched, and Paul immediately shot back “God shall smite thee” – only to become apologetic once he found out that he was talking to the High Priest. What is remarkable about this is that Paul was not only a Pharisee, but he was a “Pharisee of Pharisees.” He should *definitely* have been able to recognize the High Priest! Even if he didn't know him personally (which he probably did, given his old status as a Pharisee), the High Priest would not have been hard to spot – and yet Paul missed him entirely! Someone actually had to *tell Paul* which one of them was the High Priest, and that is quite astonishing.

After all, this is what Paul told King Agrippa:

**Acts 26:4:** “My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;  
5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.”

In other words, Paul was not only a Pharisee, but he was a *famous* Pharisee. Verse 5 tells us that “all the Jews” knew how zealous he was. Before his conversion Paul was not an obscure man. In fact, look at Acts 9:

**Acts 9:1:** “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,  
2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”

Where did Paul (previously Saul) get permission to go around hunting down Christians? *From the High Priest.* It's inconceivable that Paul would not have recognized the High Priest, and yet that is exactly what happened. Even if the High Priest had changed between Paul's days as a Pharisee and his arrest in Jerusalem (and given the many years that passed between those two events, that is possible), he should still have been quite easy to spot. It would be something like going into court and not being able to tell which person in the room was the judge!

But Paul's astonishing lack of ability to recognize the High Priest is not the only evidence for this. Take a look at what Paul said in his letter to the Galatians:

**Galatians 4:15:** “Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.”

Paul said that the love of the Galatians was so great that they would have given Paul *their eyes*. If Paul had poor vision or some other eye-related problem then that statement would make perfect sense: the Galatian church wanted to meet a great need in Paul's life.

Besides, do you remember what happened when Paul met God on the road to Damascus?

**Acts 9:3:** “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man:  
but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.  
9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.”

After Paul met Jesus he was *struck blind*. It's true that God sent someone to lay hands on Paul and heal him, but it's still interesting all the same.

This is something we will probably never know, but perhaps – just perhaps – this is the “thorn in the flesh” that God sent to afflict Paul.

# TIME

Let's say that one day you decide that you're going to read the entire Bible cover to cover. This is quite a task: even if you read three chapters a day, every single day without fail, it's still going to take you an entire year to read through all 66 books! The Scriptures are quite lengthy and contain a *lot* of information. It's really not something that you can just plow your way through over the course of a long weekend.

At first your effort will probably go fairly well. Genesis and the first half of Exodus are easy to read. Things will get harder in the second half of Exodus, when Moses begins talking about the details that surround the construction of the Tabernacle. After this the reader is faced with the daunting task of reading Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – three books that are quite difficult to get through, let alone understand. However, if you persist things will eventually get better: Deuteronomy is followed by Joshua, which is a really fascinating account of Israel's invasion of Canaan. This is followed by a lot of other historical books that are easy to understand.

Eventually, however, you will come to I Chronicles, where you will be greeted by page after page of genealogies. You'll encounter verses like these:

**I Chronicles 1:11:** “And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim,  
12 And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (of whom came the Philistines,) and Caphthorim.”

I suspect that nearly everyone who encounters these lists of names ends up skipping them entirely. No matter how firm their intention might be to read every last verse in the entire Bible, people will make an exception when it comes to the first few chapters of I Chronicles. After all, people can't even *pronounce* these names (who names their child Naphtuhim?), and, to be quite honest, no one cares that Mizraim has six sons. So people skip over these verses entirely, believing that these lists of names are completely and utterly useless. Oh, they may have been useful back in the day, but let's be honest: are there really deep spiritual truths buried in the fact that Mizraim had a son named Ludim?

In fact, for that matter, why is this information even in the Bible at all? I've never met anyone who was passionately concerned about Mizraim and his offspring, and I've never heard a sermon about him either. Over the course of my life I have heard thousands of sermons and I believe I can safely say that not a single one ever focused on the fact that Mizraim had a son named Pathrusim. I have a feeling that everyone who is reading this paper can say the same thing. The truth is, no one cares about Mizraim or most of the other people in these long lists.

But we *should* care because there really is an important truth buried in these chapters. There is something absolutely vital about all of this that *can* change the way we live, if only we will take the time to stop and see it.

You see, the reason no one cares about Mizraim and his six sons is because he died thousands of years ago. Mizraim is mentioned four times in the Bible (Genesis 10:6 and 10:13, and I Chronicles 1:8 and 1:11), and each of the four times is in a genealogical record. If it weren't for these verses he would have been forgotten about entirely.

To be more blunt about it, these verses are *all that is left of his life*. All of his possessions were destroyed long ago. If he had a house it is certainly no longer standing. All of the people that once knew him are long dead. Anything that he ever accomplished in life has been forgotten about. In fact, if

the Bible had not recorded his name *no one alive today would have ever known that he even existed*. His life would have been entirely forgotten about.

Mizraim may have been a millionaire. He could have been a powerful individual that controlled vast tracts of real estate. He may have had vast farms, herds of cattle, and the best that life had to offer. But now, today, all of that is gone. Time has destroyed everything that he had and everything that he did. These four mentions in the Bible are all that is left of him – and even that doesn't do Mizraim any good, because you and I just skip over his name as a bothersome annoyance.

The fact is, all of these people were once alive. Mizraim was born, lived, and died. He had hopes, dreams, a family, and children. He had problems, triumphs, and losses. As the son of Ham he was the grandson of Noah, and it's quite possible that he was famous, or at least prominent in his day.

But today none of that matters. Everything he had and everything about him has been lost. The passage of time has destroyed it all.

We don't like to think about it, but one day that will be true for us as well. We spend our whole lives trying to get all the stuff we can lay our hands on – cars, houses, money, power, fame, you name it. We think that the rich have got it made and we covet their success. We devote our waking hours to the pursuit of *things*, and we put all of our energy into it. If our neighbor has nicer things than we do then we've got to have them too. So on and on we go, until eventually we die.

But we *will* die – everyone does. Then time will destroy every last thing we ever possessed and will erase our name from history. After enough time has passed everything we've ever owned will be gone and everything we've ever done will be forgotten. There are a few people whose names linger on long after they die, but for the vast majority of the human race that doesn't happen. If we're extremely lucky we'll eventually become like Mizraim – a name in a genealogy list. If we're unlucky then we'll be forgotten about entirely, and from the point of view of those who are still alive it will be as if we had never existed at all.

But there is one other side to all of this – a very important side that is too easily missed. This Mizraim that we read about in I Chronicles 1:11 may be dead, but he is *not* gone. The truth is that *everyone lives forever*; the only question is where they will spend eternity.

You see, if Mizraim followed God – if he responded to God's call and believed Him – then he has been in Heaven for a long time now. He is with his Savior and with the rest of the family of God, living in Paradise, enjoying a life that the apostle Paul said was far better than the one we have now. He hasn't gone off into utter oblivion; instead Mizraim has been living in a place where there is no sin, disease, or death. He has been enjoying an existence that make the wealthiest men today look like paupers.

However, if Mizraim did not follow God – if he refused to believe the Lord or tried to save himself by living a good life – then he has spent thousands of years being tormented in a place of fire and brimstone, where there is no rest or relief from his agony. All he has to look forward to in the endless ages of eternity are even greater agonies and pains. At this very moment Mizraim longs for just a single drop of water, but even that is forever beyond his reach.

The fact is, there is just one thing that matters to Mizraim now, and that is *the relationship he had with God while he was still alive*. The same is true for every one of us. Yes, it's true that if the Lord does not return in our lifetime then one day we will die, and eventually the living ones will forget about us. But when that day comes *all* of us will still be alive somewhere, and that somewhere will be entirely determined by *what we did with Jesus*. Those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus will be granted forgiveness and everlasting life. However, those who refuse to accept God's forgiveness and refuse to believe will be faced with the unending wrath of an angry God.

The Lord freely offers everyone forgiveness and grace. Those who accept it will find mercy, and those who reject it will find wrath – and they'll have no one to blame but themselves, for they *chose* to reject God's offer of forgiveness. And that decision will matter for all of eternity.

As human beings we spend a great deal of time chasing things that don't matter. People spend their entire lives trying to get all of the wealth, power, and fame that they can possibly obtain – but this is ultimately a meaningless pursuit. Even the richest and most famous person will still die, and when that day comes he will find out that he can't take any of his riches with him. What *will* matter in that day is his relationship with God, and that is the one thing that people tend to neglect. We vainly seek things that we cannot keep, and we neglect the things that will matter *forever*.

If we have come to Jesus and begged for mercy then we will still be around through all the ages of time. The world may have forgotten about us, just as it has forgotten about Mizraim, but when it does we'll be in Paradise, enjoying blessings that far outstrip the greatest riches that this world has to offer. (Plus we have a Resurrection to look forward to!) When our lives are judged we will learn that the hours we spent building our own fame and fortune were simply wasted time, but the effort we put toward building God's kingdom will be richly rewarded and never forgotten. One day we will die and lose everything that we have in this life – but if we've taken our resources and invested them in God's kingdom we'll find a rich inheritance waiting for us.

All of us are faced with the same choice: what are we going to do about Jesus? Are we going to ignore Him or worship Him? Are we going to ask for His forgiveness or are we going to claim that we don't need to be forgiven for anything? Are we going to make Jesus our Lord or are we going to reject Him and follow our own desires instead?

The difference between these choices is the difference between life and death. Things that seem so urgent now aren't going to seem important at all when we're standing before God. There are a lot of things in this world that we can spend time on, but when we reach the end of our life there will be just one thing that really mattered: what did we do with Jesus?



## MARY: A PERPETUAL VIRGIN?

One of the dogmas of the Catholic Church is that Mary, the mother of Jesus, remained a virgin her entire life. To quote from the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

“Mary remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin.” (page 128)

“And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as Aeiparthenos, the 'Ever-virgin.'” (page 126)

The idea that Mary was “the Ever-virgin” is loudly proclaimed by the Catholic Church – and it is entirely wrong. In fact, it is so obviously wrong that one wonders why they haven't abandoned it in embarrassment. After all, the Catholic Church claims to be the infallible One True Church of God:

“This is the sole Church of Christ, which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic” (page 214)

“In fact, this is [the] one and only Church of God...” (page 216)

Yet we find out that, in reality, the Catholic Church is very fallible indeed. There are actually a number of Scriptures that disprove the perpetual virginity of Mary. For example:

**Matthew 1:24:** “Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:  
25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.”

These verses tell us that Mary remained a virgin *until* Jesus was born. Notice that verse 25 does not say “And Joseph never knew her, ever, for her entire life.” The Catholic Church likes to pretend that verse 25 says that, but it actually says quite the opposite. This passage tells us that Joseph waited to consummate his marital relationship with his wife *until* she gave birth. After she gave birth *he stopped waiting*. That's what the verse says.

Matthew 1:25 is not the only evidence we have of this. For example, there was this incident:

**Mark 6:1:** “And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.

2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?

3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at

him.”

This passage tells us of a time when Jesus returned to His hometown and tried to teach in the synagogue. Despite the fact that Jesus had done many notable miracles, the people of Nazareth refused to listen to him. Verse three tells us something very interesting – that Jesus (identified as the “son of Mary”, just to make it extra-clear) had four half-brothers and a number of half-sisters as well. In other words, Jesus was *not* an only child! Mary – the very same Mary that gave birth to Jesus, as verse 3 points out – had at least *6 other children* after giving birth to Jesus. In fact, Jesus' half-brother James later became one of His apostles:

**Galatians 1:19:** “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.”

Notice how clear Paul is about this! James, the apostle, was also James, *the half-brother of Jesus*. The book of Acts also mentions the fact that Jesus had brothers:

**Acts 1:13:** “And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

As does the book of Matthew:

**Matthew 12:46:** “While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.”

It is not difficult to see that Mary did *not* remain a virgin for the rest of her life. There is a tremendous amount of evidence that says otherwise! This is not a difficult subject that requires a lot of in-depth, arcane knowledge to figure out – it's right there, plain as day.

The reason this matters is because of two things. First, the Catholic Church claims that the only people who have the right to interpret the Bible are the leadership of the Catholic Church – and whatever they say is right 100% of the time. To quote their catechism again:

“The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted **solely to the magisterium of the Church**, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him.” (page 30)

In other words, Catholicism teaches that you, a common person, *have no right to read the Bible and decide for yourself what it says*. If the Church decides that Mary was a perpetual virgin then that's how it is, and you are required to believe it and accept it – no matter what the Bible itself might say.

Second, the Catholic Church claims that the Pope is infallible when it comes to matters of doctrine and faith:

“In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the

apostles, Christ who is Truth willed to confer on her a share in his own infallibility. By a supernatural sense of faith in the People of God, under the guidance of the Church's living magisterium, unfailingly adheres to this faith." (page 235)

"The Roman Pontiff...enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful – who confirms his brethren in the faith – he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals...This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself." (page 235)

So, not only does the Catholic Church believes that only their leadership has the right to interpret the Bible, they also believe that when the Pope "proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals" then he is absolutely infallibility right, 100% of the time. In fact, the last sentence even states that the Pope can *create entirely new doctrines!* Yes, you read that right. The Catholic Church teaches that if the Pope comes up with some new teaching that isn't in the Bible (or even contradicts it!), you still have to believe it because the Pope is always right.

Popes have been quite busy exercising this authority, too. Not only have they come up with the idea that Mary was a virgin for her entire life (despite what the Bible has to say about it), but they also teach that Mary never sinned:

"By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long." (page 124)

That Mary is the source of holiness:

"From the Church he learns the example of holiness and recognizes its model and source in the all-holy Virgin Mary..." (page 490)

That Mary ascended into Heaven at the end of her life and is now the Queen over All Things:

"Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things." (page 252)

Oh yes – and that Mary is also a co-redeemer with Christ, bringing salvation to all of mankind:

"Taken up to heaven she [Mary] did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation..." (page 252)

"Being obedient she [Mary] became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race." (page 125)

These doctrines are not Christian; they are blatantly pagan! Mary is the Queen of Heaven? Mary is the savior of our souls? Mary ascended into Heaven and is now the source of all holiness? All of those claims are ridiculous and laughable, and the Bible directly contracts every single one of them. Yet the Catholic Church continues to teach them as infallible truths.

As you can see, anyone who looks to Catholicism in order to learn how to interpret the Bible is going to find themselves in deep theological trouble. I have written extensively about this subject elsewhere, so I will not repeat myself here. But I urge any Christian who has no problem with Catholicism to take some time to closely examine their doctrines. Any church that condemns the idea that you are saved by grace through faith (as Catholicism does) has no right to be called a Christian church. It is time for Christians to step up and exercise discernment. Jesus did not come to Earth to get along with everyone and make people feel good about themselves; He came to seek and to save them which were lost – and a big part of that was preaching the truth. We would be wise to do the same.

# WE THREE KINGS

When Christmas starts to draw near it's common for people to erect Nativity scenes. These can be seen everywhere – in churches, in people's yards, in malls and stores, and on Christmas cards. A common feature of a Nativity scene is the presence of three Oriental kings that are standing next to a manger, accompanied by a host of shepherds and animals. However, how much of that picture is actually real? Were there really three wise men and did they really visit the manger on the night Christ was born?

One interesting fact is that only Matthew mentions the wise men. The books of Mark and John do not mention the birth of Christ at all. Luke has a detailed account of Christ's birth but he does not mention anything about a visit by wise men. Luke mentions the angelic announcement and the visit by shepherds, but no wise men were said to have made an appearance that night.

The only account of the wise men in the entire Bible is found in Matthew chapter 2. Since this is a fairly lengthy passage I'll break up the chapter with occasional bits of explanation.

**Matthew 2:1:** “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,  
2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

Here we see that the wise men came “from the east” (verse 1). However, these wise men didn't go to Bethlehem but to Jerusalem. Right away we can see that it's highly unlikely that they made it to the manger on the night Jesus was born. In order for that to have happened they would have had to travel from “the east” to Jerusalem, met with Herod, got directions, and then traveled to Bethlehem – all in the space of a few hours and without the benefit of modern transportation! That doesn't seem very likely (and it will become even more unlikely when we read the rest of the chapter).

A few other important points: note that the chapter doesn't mention how many wise men there were. There could have been two, or three, or even nine; we're just not told. Also notice that the passage does not give their names or their origin. All we know is that they were “from the east” and were motivated by the appearance of a star. The star told them that the King of the Jews had been born, and the wise men had come to worship him.

The story continues:

**Matthew 2:3:** “When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”

This is actually a surprising passage: even though the Messiah had been born, the news of this momentous event had not reached Herod or the religious leaders of the day! Apparently they did not

hear the announcement that had been made by the angels – or if they did they ignored it. The Messiah had been born and the chief priests missed it completely. They had to be brought up-to-date by *Gentiles* from a distant country!

Another amazing thing is that Herod knew exactly what question to ask. He knew that the wise men were seeking the Messiah and he wanted to know where the Messiah was supposed to be born. The priests told him about Micah 5:2, which prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. What happens next is astonishing:

**Matthew 2:7:** “Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.”

Herod wanted to know when the wise men had first seen the star – which implies that quite a bit of time had elapsed since then. (Later on we'll be given a hint as to just how much time had passed.) After finding out this key bit of knowledge he sent the wise men to Bethlehem and told them to find the Messiah and then let him know where he was.

What surprises me about this is what *didn't* happen. Notice that the chief priests and scribes did not say “The Messiah has been born! This is amazing news! We must go find him at once!” The wise men went to Bethlehem *alone* – no priests or scribes went with them. As far as I can tell the religious leaders of Israel were completely *uninterested* that the Messiah had been born. We know that the whole city knew what was going on because verse 3 tells us that *all of Jerusalem* was “troubled” by the news. Even that is quite astonishing: the people were not happy, or excited, or in awe: no, they were “troubled.” The news that the long-awaited Messiah had been born *troubled* them.

The Messiah had been born, and not only did the priests miss it, but after finding out that they had missed it they had no interest in tracking Him down.

The story continues:

**Matthew 2:9:** “When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.”

After the wise men left Herod they once again saw the famous star, which they followed straight to Jesus. They then worshiped Him, gave their gifts, and departed. However, God warned them in a dream to not go back to Herod, so they slipped out of the country and returned home. (As a side-note, notice that the passage does *not* say that the wise men found the child in Bethlehem. We're actually not told where Jesus was living when He was visited by the wise men.)

Some would argue that since three gifts were given there must have been three wise men. However, the passage doesn't actually say this. It's entirely possible that an unknown number of wise

men pooled their resources, obtain gifts, and presented them jointly. For all we know *all* of the wise men could have given gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The passage just does not say.

What amazes me is the striking contrast between the wise men and the religious leaders. The wise men – who were clearly foreigners from a distant country – not only recognized the birth of Christ but traveled from a distant land so they could worship Him and bring Him gifts. By contrast, the chief priests not only missed the birth of Christ but they couldn't even be bothered to go see Him! On top of that, the gifts brought by the wise men showed tremendous insight into the person and work of Christ: they brought gold, which is a gift for a king; frankincense, which is an offering for a God; and myrrh, which quite possibly looked toward the Messiah's crucifixion and death. The wise men were looking for the Messiah, they loved Him, they worshiped Him as King, and they seemed to know why He came.

Herod had a very different action: he wanted to kill the Messiah.

**Matthew 2:16:** “Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.”

Since the wise men didn't tell Herod where Jesus was, Herod decided to simply kill everyone in the area who was two years old or younger. Since this was “according to the time” that the wise men had told him, that implies that the star had first appeared about two years earlier. If it took the wise men two years to get to Israel then they were clearly not present the night of Christ's birth!

Now it's true that the chief priests aren't mentioned in verse 16. Herod apparently acted alone in attempting to kill the Messiah. However, we *also* don't see the chief priests intervening to attempt to save the Messiah's life – and, ultimately, the chief priests did succeed in having Him crucified. There is no indication that they were upset at Herod's attempt to murder their long-awaited Messiah.

In summary, we can see from these verses that the Bible simply does not say how many wise men there were, or where they were from, or what their names were. We can also see that the wise men were *not* present the night of Christ's birth but instead came by several years later. Finally – and most importantly – we can see that the wise men noticed the birth of the Messiah and came to worship Him, while the religious leaders of the day missed it entirely.

# WHO IS THE RESTRAINER?

Prophecy is an interesting field. Despite the fact that the Bible spends a significant portion of its text talking about end-times events, for the most part the modern Church sees prophecy as a distraction. Yes, there are pockets of people here and there who take the subject seriously, but they are the exception. The prevailing attitude seems to be “Well, Jesus hasn't returned yet and He probably won't return in my lifetime, so there's no sense in thinking about it.” Jesus' command to “Watch!” is largely ignored, and churches that teach prophecy are rare.

The early church, however, was different. They had all sorts of questions regarding the Second Coming, and Paul spent quite a lot of time addressing their concerns and clearing up their misconceptions. One such passage can be found in his second letter to the Thessalonians, which contains a verse that I would like to explore. First, though, here is the passage:

**2 Thessalonians 2:1:** “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,  
2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.  
3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;  
4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.  
5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?  
6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.  
7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.  
8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:  
9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,  
10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

There's a lot going on in these verses, and unfortunately the King James translation makes the verse I want to discuss very difficult to understand. But we'll get to that in a minute.

In these verses Paul is addressing some people in the Thessalonian church who were worried that they had missed the Rapture. Someone (we don't know who) was telling them that the Tribulation had already begun. Paul replied that these teachers were in error, and there were actually several key events that had to take place before the Tribulation could begin.

The first point Paul makes is that before the Tribulation can begin there must be a great apostasy:

**2 Thessalonians 2:3:** “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the



son of perdition;”

The phrase “falling away” in verse 3 is actually the Greek word *apostasia*, which is where we get the word apostasy. The “man of sin” is a reference to the antichrist. In other words, before the Tribulation period can start there must be a great apostasy and the antichrist must be revealed. Paul then explains that the reason the antichrist has not yet appeared is because someone is restraining him, and this restraining force must be taken out of the way before he can rise to power. We can see that in verse 6:

**2 Thessalonians 2:6:** “And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

The phrase “letteth will let” is the Greek word *katecho*, which means “to restrain, hinder.” The ASV translation of this passage is much easier to understand:

**2 Thessalonians 2:6:** “And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way.”

What this passage means is that someone is actively keeping the antichrist from appearing. The antichrist will not appear until this restraining influence has been taken out of the way. Only after that happens will he be free to rise to power.

This brings up an important question: just who is this restrainer? Traditionally scholars have taught that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, and that He is the one who is actively keeping the antichrist from appearing. This seems plausible, but if you go back and read the verses you'll notice that the passage never mentions the Holy Spirit. In fact, none of the verses identify the restrainer or offer any hints as to who it might be! This means that if we want to determine his identity we'll have to go about it in a slightly different way.

Based on what we know about the Holy Spirit, is it possible or likely that He is the restrainer? Well, in order to answer that we'll need to know what work the Holy Spirit performs. Are there good, Biblical reasons for thinking that He is an ideal candidate for this role?

As it turns out, the Bible actually tells us quite a lot about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. For example, He teaches us:

**John 14:26:** “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

He leads us:

**Romans 8:14:** “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

He intercedes for us:

**Romans 8:26:** “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

He gives specific counsel and guidance in situations:

**Acts 8:29:** “Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.”

He reveals things to mankind, and knows the deep things of God:

**1 Corinthians 2:10:** “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”

He sanctifies:

**2 Thessalonians 2:13:** “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:”

**Titus 3:5:** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”

He rebukes the world:

**John 16:7:** “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:”

There are also the gifts of the Spirit, which is another conversation entirely. However, notice that in this entire list there is one thing missing: there is no record of the Holy Spirit restraining evil! There are many amazing and wonderful things that the Holy Spirit does, but that activity is simply not mentioned. Now, it may be that the Spirit *does* restrain evil and God just hasn't told us, but that is a very weak argument. When looking at what the Bible actually has to say about the Holy Spirit I simply don't see anything that would support the idea that He is restraining the antichrist. That doesn't seem to fit into His ministry.

However, there is another candidate. As it turns out, there *is* a group that is actively involved in restraining evil and battling the forces of darkness. That group is known as the angels, and they are led by Michael the archangel.

First, the Bible tells us that angels watch over believers and protect them:

**Psalm 91:9:** "Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation;  
10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.  
11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

Second, Daniel records a time when demonic forces attempted to keep an angel from visiting Daniel and answering his prayer. The demons were forced to retreat when Michael came and provided additional support:

**Daniel 10:12:** "Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.  
13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

The demons were successful in keeping the angel at bay, but when Michael came they were forced to yield. This should come as no surprise, as the Bible describes Michael as a tremendously powerful being who is highly effective in resisting the powers of darkness:

**Daniel 10:20:** "Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.  
21 But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince."

There is even one case where Michael resisted Satan himself:

**Jude 1:9:** "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."

In fact, the Bible also tells us that during the Tribulation Michael will lead a charge of angels to evict Satan from Heaven once and for all:

**Revelation 12:7:** "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,  
8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.  
9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

Based on all of this, I think it's quite possible that the *angels* are actually the ones who are charged with restraining evil in this world. Daniel 10 gives us a fascinating glimpse at spiritual warfare, where angels of light battle demonic forces. The angel who seems to have the most power is Michael,

which Daniel 10:21 refers to as “your prince” and Jude 1:9 calls “the archangel.” In my opinion I think that the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 is not the Holy Spirit but is Michael. As you can see, the Bible contains numerous accounts of Michael restraining evil (up to and including resisting the devil himself!), whereas there don't seem to be any accounts of the Holy Spirit doing the same thing. In fact, Michael's entire ministry seems to be focused on that very point!

If this is the case, then for the past two thousand years Michael has been battling to keep the antichrist from appearing. One day God will remove him from the battlefield, and when that day comes the entire world will be plunged into a terrible time. The antichrist will rise to power and kill billions, but in the end he will be slain by the triumphant and returning Son of God:

**2 Thessalonians 2:8:** “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:”