

**Collected Sunday School Lessons
2012 - 2013**

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by Jonathan Cooper

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Soli Deo Gloria

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ALIENS AND UFOs

If you've spent your entire life in church, you will have heard thousands of sermons by the time you reach 30. If you attended Sunday School, the evening service, and the Wednesday service, then you would have heard even more messages. In fact, you'll have heard so many sermons that you can probably predict everything that the pastor is going to say. Simply put, you've heard just about everything.

But there are some subjects that are never discussed in church. Even after a lifetime of church attendance I bet you've never heard a sermon on aliens from outer space. I know that sounds funny, but I'm not joking. Churches simply don't talk about UFOs. It never happens. If you want to find out what the Bible has to say about aliens, going to church isn't going to help you.

That is unfortunate, because the culture is *very* interested in aliens. According to a 2008 Scripps UFO poll, 56% of Americans believe that life probably exists on other planets. 8% of Americans believe that they have seen an actual UFO. On top of that, according to a 2002 poll commissioned by the SciFi channel, 2% claim to have had an encounter with alien life. That 2% number has been fairly consistent over the past few decades; it keeps coming up in poll after poll. If there are 300 million Americans then that means that *six million people* claim to have encountered alien life – or, to put it more bluntly, have been abducted.

Most people just laugh at these numbers and move on, believing that the whole “alien” thing is nothing more than fringe lunacy. The problem is that they just *assume* it's lunacy without actually checking into it first. Since the Church doesn't take it seriously, pastors ignore the matter – and since Christians are not providing any answers, people are looking elsewhere for the truth. That is very bad, because the Bible actually does address this – and what it has to say is not being told.

One thing you may not realize is that UFO sightings have been increasing over the past few decades. In July 1992 there were 32 reported UFO sightings. In July 2002 there were 430 reported sightings. In July 2012 the number of sightings increased to 867. The reported sightings has jumped sharply in the past twenty years. You may not hear about them on the news, but the number of sightings is going up, not down. The UFO phenomenon is *not* going away.

Another fact you may not realize is that UFO sightings are not a recent occurrence. There are reports of UFOs in documents from ancient Egypt, Rome, and during the Middle Ages. A UFO was seen in Boston in 1639 – and there are many other cases as well. What *has* changed in the last century is the frequency of the sightings. In the past they were rare; now they are quite common.

Now, you may dismiss this whole phenomenon as the work of delusional minds. Maybe people are just seeing things. After all, there are lots of planes in the air these days; perhaps that's why people are seeing more UFOs. Maybe this whole subject is just a misunderstanding and isn't worth our attention. In any case, why should we take this seriously? Shouldn't it just be left to scientists and investigators?

The reason I think it's worth a closer look is because of what the aliens are telling people during abductions. Now, you may not believe in alien abductions; you may think that these stories are just the ravings of lunatics. But if you read the abduction accounts and listen to the claims of the supposed aliens, a picture begins to emerge – and it isn't a pretty picture.

There are certain common themes that run through nearly all abduction stories. For example,

the message that the aliens bring tends to be very religious. They didn't come here to talk about science; no, what they want to talk about is religion. They spend a great deal of time trying to convince people that Christianity is a hoax. Of all the religions in the world, Christianity is the one that is singled out and attacked. For some reason the aliens hate Christianity with a passion.

The aliens make a great many religious claims that contradict the Bible. For instance, aliens claim that we had past lives:

“Then [the alien] said that it was my choice, that I agreed to all this a long time ago. I said I didn't remember the agreement ... and he answered, 'Before you were born, and we've had this conversation before.’” [*Taken*, p147]

They claim that they are here to help us, and that if we join them we can become one with the Creator (also known as “pantheism”):

“People on Earth, open your doors to our help, for you need it desperately ... Join our Confederation and be one with the Creator.”

The aliens claim that they (not God) created mankind:

“‘Did you create humans, too?’ [the abducted woman] asked, and he confirmed this.” [*Taken*, p157]

“Aliens genetically changed the DNA of a distant cousin to the ape on this planet ... the aliens took the natural evolution and sped it up.” [*Alien Contact*, p178-9]

They claim that the Bible is not accurate:

“Not all stories in your Bible are accurate because your Bible is not 100% correct...” [*Alien Contact*, p177-8]

They claim that Jesus was an alien:

“The messages include ... exhortations to put the world in order by returning to the 'Cosmic Laws' as taught by great Masters such as Jesus, Buddha, and Krishna – all of whom are said to have come from other planets” [*Aetherius Society*, p12-3]

“The millions that come from other worlds, from far-off galaxies to assist in bringing peace upon Earth, have my staunch support... I am Sandanda, known to you as Jesus the Christ... I am Sandanda, and this is my message to the world.” [*Project World Evacuation*, p8-9]

“The most controversial thing is the ascension and resurrection of Christ. You see, he went up to a UFO in a beam...” [*Alien Contact*, p177-8]

“the creators therefore arranged for a child to be born of a woman of the Earth and one of their own people (aliens). The child in question (Jesus Christ) would thereby

inherit certain telepathic faculties which humans lack... Mary was the woman chosen..." [*The True Face Of God*, p60]

There is a great deal more, but I think you get the point. The main thing that aliens want to do is convince people that Christianity is false. Aliens claim that Jesus didn't actually die; instead He was just beamed up to a UFO and scientifically revived. They claim that Mary was an alien. They claim that Jesus was not sent here to save us from our sins but to help us advance scientifically – and on and on it goes.

The point is that these supposed aliens spend a great deal of time attacking the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel. Their message is primarily a religious, New Age message that is a *direct attack on Christianity*. In other words, the aliens are spending their time spreading a false gospel and promoting a false religion.

This message, incidentally, is having a *tremendous* impact. People are believing what the aliens are telling them. One person put it this way: "My belief system went right out the window" (*I in 40*, p322-3). After encountering aliens, people are not only drawn away from Christianity, but they are plunged into the occult. Alien encounters have the effect of changing the person's worldview – and this is happening to a great many people! Regardless of what you may think of alien abductions, these people believe that it was real, and their experiences are causing them to reject the gospel. In many cases alien abductions turn into *conversion experiences*, as people are shocked by what happened and accept a false gospel. Regardless of whether they were actually abducted or not, their embrace of paganism after the encounter is *very* real.

This should be a cause of great concern, because the aliens' message is spreading. Each year people are becoming *more* interested in what the aliens have to say. The message that they bring is both clear and disturbing: the Bible is false, Jesus cannot save you from your sins, the Earth is on the verge of a terrible crisis, and the only way to save mankind is to reject Christianity and put our faith in the aliens. What we are dealing with here is nothing less than a false religion – a dangerous cult that has led countless lives astray, and that has gone almost completely unchallenged by the Church. (Like I said earlier: how many sermons have you heard about this in church? For that matter, how many Christians know *anything at all* about aliens?)

All of this brings up a question: does it seem likely to you that genuine extraterrestrial beings would travel thousands of light-years across space just to come to Earth and tell people that the Bible is wrong? Does it seem likely that an advanced race of beings, with superior intelligence and amazing powers, would spend their time torturing people, sexually molesting them, performing horrifying medical experiments on live subjects, and preaching a false gospel to them?

Dr. Jacques Vallee put it this way:

"The 'medical examination' to which abductees are said to be subjected, often accompanied by sadistic sexual manipulation, is reminiscent of the medieval tales of encounters with demons. It makes no sense in a sophisticated or technical framework: any intelligent being equipped with the scientific marvels that UFOs possess would be in a position to achieve any of these alleged scientific objectives in a shorter period of time with fewer risks." [*Confrontations*, p13]

John Keel was more blunt:

"The UFO manifestations seem to be, by and large, merely minor variations of the

age-old demonological phenomenon..." [*Operation Trojan Horse*, p299]

What do we know about these supposed aliens? Well, based on abduction reports, the aliens are sadistic, cruel, and heartless. They torture people and molest them. They have tremendous powers. Most of all, though, they attack Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the gospel. Given that profile, isn't it possible that, instead of extraterrestrials, what we are actually dealing with are *demons*? What if these aren't aliens at all but evil spirits *posing* as aliens in order to peddle a false gospel and inflict horror? This does fit the profile of what we know about them, and demons are known as deceiving spirits.

There is another reason to suspect that these alien encounters are actually demonic in nature: born-again, Bible-believing Christians *have never been abducted*. Unbelievers are abducted all the time, and people who are involved in the occult are especially likely to have an encounter. (According to research, virtually *all* abductees had some sort of prior involvement with the occult before they were abducted.) But Christians are avoided. In the tens of thousands of abduction cases that have been studied, *not one* of them ever happened to a Christian.

On top of that, it turns out that there is only one way to stop an alien abduction. In nearly all cases, people who were abducted had no power over what happened. The aliens simply took them and there was nothing they could do about it. In a few cases, though, people were able to stop the abduction. How did they do it? In every case it was the same: they *called on the name of Jesus*. Even though the abducted people were not Christians, when they called on Jesus the aliens became terrified. They simply could not stand that Name. The name of Jesus made them flee.

Is there a group of powerful, superhuman beings who is terrified of the name of Jesus? Yes, there is. Demons are terrified of the Lord, as the New Testament demonstrates time and time again:

Matthew 8:28: "And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.
29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?"

I say all of that to say this. The modern Church has this idea that demonic occurrences are something that happened a long time ago, back when Jesus walked the Earth. In those days there were lots of demon-possessed people, and Jesus fought the demons and cast them out. Today, though, times are different. Demons may tempt people to sin, but that's about it. They don't go around tormenting or possessing people anymore. That only happened back then, in Bible times. Things are different now – or so the Church thinks.

But what if demons have *not* stopped seeking whom they may devour? What if they're still active, and the Church simply hasn't noticed because the demons picked a particularly good disguise? After all, posing as aliens would be a *terrific* way to deceive countless people, and there are many who would believe anything an "alien" told them. What makes it even better is that most people think UFOs are "goofy" and just ignore them – which would give demons free reign to do just about anything they wanted. If the demons are behind the UFO phenomenon, I have to say that they are winning because the Church isn't even fighting the battle. We're ignoring it entirely.

Regardless of whether aliens are demons or not, *someone* is out there destroying the faith of millions of people and bringing countless souls into spiritual darkness. Is this really something that should go unchallenged?

BIBLE STUDY

Today people commonly believe that the Catholic Church was just “the church” for a period of many centuries, and that the Reformation happened because the church had become too corrupt; it started out good but went bad over time. That is actually not the case. The origin of the Catholic Church can be traced back to Augustine in the 4th century, and it was bad from the start. The Catholic Church has *always* taught a false gospel of salvation by works, and all throughout its history there have been genuine Christians who opposed it and believed in salvation by grace through faith. The Catholic Church has *never* been the true church; instead it has spent 15 centuries opposing the true church and doing everything in its power to stamp it out – up to and including the execution of *millions* of people. You don't hear much about it anymore, but the Catholic Church has a long and bloody history.

One of the key threats to Catholicism during the past 1500 years was the Bible. It was immediately obvious to many people who read the Bible that the teachings of the Catholic Church were wrong and heretical. Since the Bible was a threat, the Catholic Church made ownership of Bibles a crime punishable by death. A great many people were hunted down and brutally murdered because they owned a copy of the Word of God. The Pope actually sent out armies to find Christian cities and massacre everyone inside, for the “crime” of believing in salvation by grace through faith. Throughout its history the Catholic Church has executed an estimated 50 million people for the “crime” of rejecting Catholic doctrine. They have never apologized for this.

Given the awful persecution that genuine believers suffered during the Middle Ages, you would think that their knowledge of the Bible would have suffered. After all, it was very difficult to even get a copy of the Bible (especially before the printing press was invented), and it was incredibly dangerous to own one. Yet, as it turned out, believers during this period had an amazing knowledge of the Bible. This is what one Catholic inquisitor had to say:

“They had the Old and New Testament in the vulgar tongue; and they teach and learn so well, that he had seen and heard a country clown recount all Job, word for word; and divers, who could perfectly deliver all the New Testament; and that men and women, little and great, day and night, cease not to learn and teach” (Orchard, p. 266).

What a testimony! Not only did these persecuted believers study and teach the Bible *day and night*, but there were some who could recite the entire book of Job – and others could recite *the entire New Testament!* Another inquisitor had this to say:

“They can repeat by heart, in the vulgar tongue, the whole text of the New Testament and great part of the Old: and, adhering to the text alone, they reject decretals¹ and decrees with the sayings and expositions of the Saints” (Faber, p. 492).

These ancient Christians could not only recite the entire New Testament, but a *great part of the Old Testament as well*. That is absolutely astounding!

¹ Statements issued by the Pope, which the Catholic Church claimed were binding on all Christians.

Today things are very different. The Catholic Church has lost its power to hunt down and execute Christians; the last time it tried to kill someone over the Bible was in 1902 when the Archbishop of Sucre (in Bolivia) suggested that a man who was handing out Bibles should be executed. There are still parts of the world today where Christians are hunted down and persecuted, but in the United States we are largely free to own Bibles and openly conduct Bible studies. Bible study material is readily available, and thanks to modern technology it is even possible to listen to the sermons of pastors who are thousands of miles away. The amount of Biblical knowledge that we have access to is simply staggering.

Yet, despite this, we know far *less* about the Bible than our ancestors. There are few Christians today who have even *read* the entire Bible. Our forefathers did more than just read it: *they actually had most of the Bible memorized*. I have never met *anyone* who could even come close to reciting the entire New Testament. That level of Biblical knowledge is simply unheard of today.

The reason for this is quite simple: our ancestors cared a great deal more about the Bible than we do. The Bible really mattered to them – but in our time (in the age of Laodicea) the churches are characterized by people who simply don't care. The Bible doesn't mean very much to us. I've lost track of how many times I've tried to tell a Christian about the Bible only to be told “Well, you know, I just don't really care.” People in ancient times cared so much about the Bible that they were willing to *risk their lives* to study it. Today that kind of passion is gone. There are still some pastors who beg their congregations to read the Bible, but most people can't be bothered. Many Christians think that reading the Bible is a chore – it's something they feel that they should do, but it's not something they actually want to do. The average American spends 5 hours *each day* watching television, but most Christians can't be bothered to spend 15 minutes reading their Bible.

Yes, it's true that the Bible is long, but let's be honest: that's not the real problem. The Harry Potter series is more than 4,000 pages long, and people who are fans can read the entire series in a matter of weeks. These fans spend endless hours studying the complex world of Harry Potter, learning about the characters and the plot and all of the tiny little details. Their passion for the books is so great that the hours that they spend reading them aren't a burden. In fact, they are so enthralled with the books that they don't even notice the passage of time.

Our ancestors had that kind of love for the Bible. They were truly passionate about it and were willing to risk death to own a copy of the Word. They loved it so much that studying it wasn't a burden. In fact, they very nearly memorized the *entire Bible*, simply because they were into it *that much*. They weren't forcing themselves to go through some kind of painful religious exercise; they genuinely loved it. It was a great joy to them. They had a tremendous love for God, and that love manifested itself in a love for God's word.

We are not at all like that. Our generation cares so little about the things of God that we make Him want to vomit:

Revelation 3:15: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

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

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do

not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

Don't get me wrong – the modern church is all about serving God. We spend lots and lots of time busily serving the Lord in all sorts of ways. It's just that we don't care very much about His Word. The Bible is so unimportant to us that reading it is a chore. Some people feel guilty about not reading it and try to squeeze in a few minutes here or there as time permits. If the truth were known, though, we don't actually *want* to read it.

If Christians care about the Word then why is it so difficult to find people who have read the entire Bible? If you read just one chapter a day you can read the entire Bible in 3 years. How is it that we can find time to watch 5 hours of television each day and yet we can't find time to read even one chapter out of the Bible? Isn't this a rather glaring sign that we just don't care?

There are other people who try to read through the Bible but who get stuck in Leviticus or Numbers and then just give up. To me this is a sign that their heart just wasn't in it. After all, if you really cared, wouldn't it make more sense to research the parts that are hard to understand – or, in a worst-case scenario, simply skip over them and move on to whatever is next? People who are die-hard Harry Potter fans will spend *years* discussing the parts of the series that are hard to understand or that don't make sense. Christians, though, just throw up their hands and say "I give up. What's on television tonight?"

This all comes down to a matter of the heart. If we *actually cared* about the Bible then we would read it and study it. In fact, we would do everything we could to learn about it. If we truly loved God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then we would have an incredible passion for His Word. We would *want* to know it. We would make it a priority. We wouldn't see reading it as a burden or afterthought; instead we would be all over it. We would care so much about it that we would know it forward and backward, inside and out.

Would that God would give us a heart like the one our ancestors had! I wish modern Christians had the same enthusiasm and passion for the Word as our forefathers. It would make a tremendous difference.

Read the Word – All Of It

This goes without saying, but I'm going to say it anyway: God wants us to read His word. He wants us to study it, think about it, meditate on it, and delight in it:

Psalm 1:2: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

God also wants us to live by it, and to hunger for it the way we hunger for food:

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."

Think of it this way: God wants us to live by His Word. How can you possibly live in obedience to His Word if you haven't read it? How can His Word be a light to your path if you don't know it?

People treat the Bible as if it contains a few good passages that are mixed up with a lot of fluff.

They study some parts of it and leave large portions of it unread and unlearned. The fact is that *all* of the Bible is important. It does not contain any extra or unnecessary parts:

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.”

Notice how clear this verse is! *All* Scripture is given by the inspiration of God. *All* Scripture is profitable. It is *all* meaningful. Don't just read the “good parts”; it is *all* “good parts”. You need to read all of it and know all of it.

In order to make sure that I don't miss anything, I like to start reading the Bible at the very beginning (Genesis 1) and read straight through to the end (Revelation 22). I've done this for many years and have read the Bible cover-to-cover many times. I'm not saying that this is the only way to study the Bible, but it's not a bad way. There are some people who just open their Bible at random and read whatever passage they happen to find. I am very leery of this approach because it makes it easy to skip entire portions of the Bible. *All* of it needs to be read. I encourage you to come up with a study plan that encompasses the entire Bible on a regular basis.

Here is another way to look at it: are you absolutely sure that *everything* in your life is more important than reading the Bible? Yes, we all have responsibilities, and yes, those are important. There are some people who read the Bible instead of doing their jobs, and that is a terrible thing. But are you really so busy that there is absolutely *no way* you could possibly spend some time with God in His Word? Isn't it far more likely that the reason you never get around to reading your Bible is because you don't actually care about it?

I realize that sometimes things come up. I read the Bible regularly, but there are some days when I don't. I am *not* saying that it is a sin to go an entire day without reading your Bible. What I am saying is that we need to do a lot more with our Bibles than just let them collect dust on a shelf. We need to have a plan to not only read it, but to read *all* of it *on a continual basis*. It's not good enough to read it once and then put it back on the shelf and forget about it; we need to stay in the Word our entire lives. A true sports fan would never say “Well, I've seen one football game so I'm good to go.” Since he is a true fan, he *keeps* watching football games. If we truly love God then we will *keep* reading His word – not because we should, but because we love it.

Know The Word

As Christians, we should know what the Bible teaches:

2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The reason we should read the Bible is so that *we can learn what it teaches*. Reading the Bible is not an end to itself; instead, it is how we learn its teachings. We also need to learn how to properly interpret the Bible (which is a topic I will discuss more later on).

The reason we need to learn what the Bible teaches is twofold. First, it is so that we can honor God with our lives. We can't possibly honor God if we don't know what His Word says. The Bible is

the only thing we have that tells us what honors God and what doesn't; there are no other sources of divine revelation. Without the teachings of the Bible we are walking in darkness.

But there is another reason we should learn it, and that is so that we can defend the faith:

I Peter 3:15: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:”

We need to know the Bible so that we can give an answer to those who ask questions. Modern Christians are absolutely terrible at this. They can tell you *what* they believe, but they can't tell you *why* they believe it. They can't defend their beliefs. Most of the time they can't even point you to Bible verses that defend their positions. The reason for this is because their beliefs aren't based on the Bible; instead they're based on what their pastors or parents have told them. When they were growing up they were told to believe certain things, and so they do. Their beliefs have no Biblical foundation; it's just tradition.

That is *not* how God wants us to be. God wants us to believe things *because His Word teaches them*, not because that's how we were raised. As Christians we *must* have the ability to defend our beliefs with the Word. In fact, the truth is that our beliefs *ought to come from the Word in the first place*. If we are starting with a belief and then going to the Bible to try to justify it then we are doing it backwards. Instead of imposing our beliefs on the Bible or using it as a prop to defend what we already believe, we ought to be reading the Bible and believing what it teaches. When the Word disagrees with what we already believe (and that will happen quite a lot) then we need to *change the way we think* and believe what the Bible says. There are many people who look at the Bible and say “Well, I just don't believe that”. The truth is, as a Christian, *you have no choice but to believe it*. If what you believe disagrees with the Bible then *you are wrong* and you need to change. You do not have the option of rejecting the Bible's teachings and doing your own thing.

Which brings me to my next point:

Don't Just Believe What You're Told

A lot of people treat their pastor as if he was God. They simply believe whatever he says. If a pastor or teacher stands up and tells them that the Bible says so-and-so, they will just believe it. I'm sure this seems like a very spiritual thing to do, but the truth is it's a terrible mistake. God charges us to study the Bible *for ourselves* and compare everything we hear to the Word of God to make sure that it's true. We ought to be like the Bereans:

Acts 17:11: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Why were the Bereans “more noble”? Because when they were told something they *searched the Scriptures for themselves* to see if it was true. In fact, they did this *on a daily basis*. They actually exercised discernment!

The modern church desperately needs to learn this skill because there is a staggering lack of

discernment today. A pastor can get up and say almost anything and people will just believe him. People are *not* going home and searching the Scriptures to see if their pastor was right. Instead they're just saying "Well, that sounds good to me" and going on about their lives.

The fact is that a lot of things that pastors say are actually *not* true. For example, almost everyone believes that angels sang at the birth of Christ. There is even a famous hymn entitled "Hark, The Herald Angel Sings". People have heard this all their lives and don't even question it – but it's wrong. Angels did *not* sing at the birth of Christ. In Luke 2 we find the account of Christ's birth, and this is what it says:

Luke 2:13: "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."

The angels *said* "Glory to God in the highest"; they didn't sing it. This isn't some complicated and hard-to-find truth; it's right there in Luke 2. It takes all of five minutes to look up the chapter, read it, and verify what the song says – but *nobody does that*. Instead people just believe what they're told.

Likewise, it's a widespread belief that Gabriel will blow the trumpet when the Lord returns; there's even a song about it. This "fact" is also wrong. Gabriel appears four times in the Bible (Daniel 8:16, 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26) but he never blows any trumpets, and he's not even mentioned when the Bible is talking about the angels that are involved in end-times events. It only takes a few minutes to find this out but no one ever checks. They just believe what they are told.

I can go on and on and on. This doesn't just affect minor things; there are all sorts of major doctrines that people commonly get wrong, but no one bothers to look it up for themselves and see what the Scripture actually says. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily, but we don't; instead we watch television because that's more important to us.

Interpret The Bible Correctly

When people do read the Bible, the question they ask themselves is this: "What does this passage mean to me?" *That is the wrong question to ask*. Despite what you may have been told, the Bible is *not* about you. God did not write the Bible with you in mind; in fact, there are large portions of the Word that are not aimed at you at all. (For example, some parts of it are written to Israel, and other parts are written to those who will live through the Tribulation. Taking a command that was given to Israel and applying it to the Church is a terrible mistake.) The question you should be asking is this: **what does the passage actually mean?** What is God doing in this particular passage, and what can we learn from it?

Think of it this way: when you get a bill in the mail you don't look for hidden personal meanings. Instead you interpret the bill objectively using the standard rules of grammar. You understand that when the electric company sends you a bill for \$293.11, it's because you owe them that amount of money and they want you to send them a check (and if you don't, they will cut off your power). You understand that bills are *bills* and you know what to do in response. It's not complicated.

This is very simple – but people don't interpret the Bible that way at all. Instead of researching the context, reading the entire passage, and trying to figure out what the writer was trying to say, they read verses out of context and utterly mangle them. People interpret Bible verses as if they were some

kind of personal fortune cookie – and as a result they get into all kinds of trouble.

For example, take this verse from Joel:

Joel 3:10: “... let the weak say, I am strong.”

This verse is quite famous. In fact, we even have hymns about it! People read that verse and say “See, God is telling me that I am actually a strong person.” We thunderously cry out “Let the weak say, I am strong!” It is a cheer – a rallying cry. It gets us all excited. It's great – except we are *completely butchering what the passage is actually saying*.

If you read the entire chapter of Joel 3 you will discover that God is talking about the battle of Armageddon. At the end of the Tribulation the armies of the world will gather and attack Jerusalem. They are determined to wipe out the Jews, but God mocks them. God says that He will defend His people and utterly wipe out the invaders. He then mockingly tells them this:

Joel 3:9: “Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:

10 Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruninghooks into spears: **let the weak say, I am strong**.

11 Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord.

12 Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.”

God isn't encouraging the Gentiles; He is making fun of them. He is saying that the Gentile nations are claiming to be strong, but they are actually weak. They are coming to make war and wipe out Israel, but instead God will judge them and wipe them out. When God says “let the weak say, I am strong”, what He is actually saying is this: you Gentiles are claiming to be strong, but in reality you are weak and I am going to utterly annihilate you.

Do you see how the *actual* meaning of the verse is *completely different* from the way most people interpret it? Finding the real interpretation wasn't hard: all we had to do was *read the entire chapter* instead of focus on just that one verse. It wasn't hard.

The rules for interpreting the Bible are not difficult. First, **if plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense**. If the Scripture can be taken literally then it *should* be taken literally. A symbolic or “spiritual” interpretation should *only* be used when a literal interpretation makes no sense or when the passage is clearly symbolic. Whatever you do, *do not* interpret the entire Bible symbolically. Only apply a symbolic interpretation when it is absolutely clear that the Bible is using symbolism. *The Bible is not an allegory*. You do not have the right to make it mean whatever you want it to mean. Your job, as a student, is to find the *actual* meaning of the passage.

Second, **interpret Scripture with Scripture**. When you run across a case of Biblical symbolism you are *not* allowed to decide for yourself what the symbol means. In order to find out the meaning of the symbol you must look the symbol up in the Bible and see how the Bible interprets that symbol. *The Bible defines the symbols it uses*. Whatever you do, don't look it up somewhere else; don't use external sources to define the Bible's symbols.

Third, as we saw in the case of Joel 3, **context is everything**. Don't read just one verse; instead read the entire chapter. It's really best to read the entire Bible and keep everything in mind, because sometimes the answer is not in the chapter that you're reading. For example, in 2 Kings 18 Rab-shakeh

told the Israelites that King Hezekiah had taken away God's altars and high places. That may sound plausible, but it's actually a lie. The truth is that Hezekiah loved the Lord and served Him – but that isn't mentioned in 2 Kings 18. The only way to find this out is to know the story of Hezekiah. You have to do your homework.

The final point to remember is to **keep the audience in mind**. Just because God told Israel that they couldn't eat bacon doesn't mean that *you* can't eat bacon. The Mosaic Law applied to ancient Israel; it does not apply to modern Christians. Likewise, God made some promises to Israel that He did not make to the Church. Just because God promised it in the Bible *does not mean God promised it to you*. When reading a passage you need to figure out who the passage is about. This is difficult and takes a lot of time and experience, but fortunately there are resources available to help. If you read the Bible and mistakenly assume that all of it applies to you then you will end up in a lot of trouble. This does *not* mean that you can ignore some parts of the Bible, but it does mean that parts of it are to be used in different ways.

For example, in the book of Revelation the Bible makes it clear that anyone who takes the Mark of the Beast will be damned forever. The book of Revelation also says that the Mark appears during the Tribulation. Since the Church will be raptured before the Tribulation begins, that means that the Church will never be confronted with the temptation of taking the Mark. Revelation's warning about the Mark is aimed at people who will be on Earth at that time, *not* us. Since we know the **context** and the **audience** we can arrive at the correct interpretation. We can also know that if we become Christians now, before the Rapture, then we will never have to face the Mark at all.

In Conclusion

There is a great deal more that can be said, but my time is short so I will close. It is *vital* that we study the Bible and learn what it teaches. It is vital that we take what we hear and compare it to the Word. It is vital that we know how to defend our beliefs and answer those who question us.

More than that, though, and above all else, it is vital that we develop a true passion for the Word. We need to love it and cherish it. If we truly love God then we will love His word; if we are passionate about Him then we will be passionate about the things He has said. If we have no love for the Word then the chances are very great that we have no real love for God either. We must cry out to God and ask for a heart that is passionate about Him, and we need to prepare our heart to seek Him. If our heart is cold and our passion is gone then our Bible studies are never going to get very far.

For my own part, I have made it a practice to continually read the Bible cover-to-cover. I have read the entire Bible many times, and each time I read it I see things that I had not seen before. The Bible never gets old and I never exhaust it; the more time I spend in it the more things I find. Even the seemingly boring parts have treasures hidden in them, if we will just take the time to dig them out.

If at all possible, though, I would advise you to do more than just read your Bible. Reading the Bible is good, but it's easy to read a passage and then immediately forget what was just read. You should strongly consider getting a journal and writing a few brief notes about the chapter that you just read. What did the chapter mean? Did you learn anything? Was there anything that you found strange or difficult to understand? Is there anything that you might want to research later?

You don't have to spend a great deal of time on this or go into a lot of depth. But if you do this – if you take the time to think about the chapter and write about it – you will get a great deal more out of the Bible than you did before. It will open up entirely new vistas.

BOUND HIM A THOUSAND YEARS

Since there is so much confusion and turmoil about matters relating to end-times and the book of Revelation, I thought it would be a good idea to take a moment and explain what I believe and why I believe it. This might be helpful for those who are sitting on the fence, unsure of where they stand.

There are four major interpretations of the book of Revelation. In my opinion, two of these views can be dismissed immediately, leaving just two interpretations to examine. The four views are:

Preterism: This view teaches that the whole book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD, including the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This view is utter nonsense and doesn't deserve to be taken seriously. In order for this viewpoint to be true the book of Revelation must have been written before 70 AD. However, it has been proven beyond any doubt that the book was written in the early 90s. This view has other tremendous problems, which I have discussed elsewhere.

Historical: This view says that the book of Revelation is an overview of all of history from the time of Christ to the Second Coming. The problem is that this interpretation just doesn't work: people's attempts to tie the events in Revelation to real events have failed catastrophically. It is a nice theory but in practice it does not even come close to working.

Amillennial: This view says that the book of Revelation is a symbolic look at the struggles between good and evil in the Church Age. It is called "amillennialism" because it teaches that there will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth. Instead, the "millennium" is symbolic of the Church Age that we are living in now.

Premillennial: This view says that the book of Revelation is a description of what happens during the 7-year Tribulation, and is a literal reciting of events that uses symbolic language. This is the view that believes in the Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Mark of the Beast, and so forth. This view believes that at the end of the Tribulation the Lord Jesus Christ will return to Earth in person, set up a physical kingdom, and reign from Jerusalem as a king for a thousand years.

The only two views that I take seriously are the amillennial view and the premillennial view. Preterism is easy to disprove and is actually silly. Christ has *not* already returned; that is utter nonsense. Likewise, the historical view sounds great in theory but in practice it utterly fails. People simply can't tie the events in Revelation to real historical events; no matter how hard they try they keep failing. That system of interpretation just does not work.

So, between the two possibilities, how do you know which one is right? Is Revelation simply a highly symbolic look at the struggle between good and evil, or is Revelation intended to be interpreted largely literally? Is the millennium symbolic of the age we're living in now, or is it a real thousand-year period to come?

Most people these days are "pan-millennial". They believe that since "it will all pan out in the end", it really doesn't matter one way or another. They're content to ignore the entire issue and go on about their lives. Although that may seem wise, I want to emphasize something: the "I don't really

care” viewpoint *is not a Biblical stance*. If your response to *any* Biblical truth is “I don't really care what the Word teaches” then you have a serious problem. The New Testament commands us to watch and be ready; Jesus Himself repeated this several times. Not caring is *not* the same thing as watching and being ready.

Watching and being ready is a far more serious issue than you might think. There are many people out there who are peddling false end-times beliefs that have destroyed the faith of many. Preterists teach that Christ has already returned; if you don't know the truth then how can you refute them? Harold Camping predicted that Jesus would return in May 2012 – and people believed him to such an extent that many sold their houses and their possessions. If you aren't solidly grounded in the truth then how can you refute the Harold Campings of the world? Telling people “your beliefs are obviously stupid” is not a Biblical response. If you have no idea what the truth is then you aren't going to be able to refute anyone. In fact, if you don't know the truth yourself then how are you going to protect *yourself* from being deceived?

I hesitate to mention this, but there is an old conspiracy theory called Project Blue Beam that suggested that the government might try to fake the return of Jesus Christ. I think this theory is utterly preposterous – but it does bring up a point. Satan is the father of lies, and he is quite busy in our age. Jesus warned His followers to beware of false Christs:

Matthew 24:4: “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”

Jesus warned that *many* imposters would come and claim to be Him. There would be false Christs and false Second Comings. If you don't know the truth then how will you keep from being deceived? Harold Camping proved that many people can't tell the truth from a lie – and remember, Satan and his demons can appear as angels of light. If the devil staged a false Second Coming, complete with what looked like angels and the appearance of someone who claimed to be Jesus, are you really well-grounded enough to tell the difference between a satanic deception and the real thing? Pan-millennialism is incredibly dangerous because it encourages ignorance, and ignorance has destroyed many lives. You need to know the truth because the truth is the only thing that can protect you.

On top of that, the Bible tells us that we should earnestly desire the return of Christ. If Christ really is the great love of our life and the great passion of our heart then we will long for Him to return and we will be interested in the events surrounding His coming. Telling Jesus “I do love you but I'm just not interested in when you're coming back; you can stay away forever for all I care” is the *opposite* of passion and does not honor the Lord. If you love somebody you will long to see them; if you don't want to see them then you probably don't really care about them at all (or, at the very least, you have a troubled relationship with them).

So how can you decide between premillennialism and amillennialism? It's a tough question, but I believe there is an answer. The passage that convinced me to take one side over the other was this one:

Revelation 20:1: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

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.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

In this scene an angel comes down from Heaven, binds Satan with a chain, and imprisons him in a pit so that he can no longer deceive the nations or cause any harm. He is bound for a thousand years. During that time the people who were martyred for their faith in Jesus are raised from the dead and reign with Christ for a thousand year period that is referred to as "the millennium". Now, premillennialism holds that this should be taken literally while amillennialism says that it should be taken symbolically. So which is it?

Here is what bothered me. The amillennial view says that this thousand-year period is symbolic of the age we are living in *now*. They teach that when Christ died on the cross, He bound Satan and rendered him powerless. In this age the Church is reigning triumphant. This passage is just a highly symbolic look at our time in history.

That brings up a question: is there anyone who actually believes that Satan has been bound and rendered powerless? Does anyone believe that Satan and his forces of darkness have been neutralized and can no longer deceive anyone or trouble the nations? The apostle Peter sure didn't! Long after Jesus was resurrected, Peter warned the Church that Satan was a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8). He didn't believe that Satan had been bound. The apostle Paul warned us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the forces of darkness, and urged us to take on the whole armor of God so that we can stand against the wiles of the devil. He didn't believe the devil had been bound. This is pretty strong evidence against amillennialism. If the devil hasn't been bound yet then amillennialism can't be true.

There is also the issue that the details don't match up. Amillennialism teaches that when Christ died on the cross He bound Satan. However, in Revelation 20 we see that Satan isn't bound by Christ; instead he is bound by an unnamed angel. Although Christ is mentioned in this passage (the martyrs reign with Christ), *Christ doesn't do the binding of Satan*. On top of that, the passage does *not* say that Satan was bound by the death of the Lamb; instead it says that Satan was bound with a chain. If this passage represented Christ binding Satan at the cross then Christ should have been the one doing the binding and the binding should have been accomplished by His death and His shed blood. But we don't see *any* of that here.

There is yet another big problem. Verse 6 speaks of a resurrection that happens *before* the reigning begins; it says that people who were martyred for their faith *in Christ* will be raised from the dead and reign with Him. In fact, it is *the martyrs* who are doing the reigning, and they start right after Satan is bound. So, then, Satan is bound, the Christian martyrs are raised from the dead, and the martyrs then reign with Christ. This timeline presents a really serious problem for amillennialism

because *no one was martyred for their faith in Christ before Christ died*. It's true that there were martyrs in the Old Testament, but they did not believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ because *it hadn't happened yet* and *people didn't know about it yet*. Even if you claim “Well, it's just a symbolic reference to the Old Testament saints”, that still presents a problem: how many Old Testament saints have been raised from the dead and are now reigning on the Earth? It won't do any good to claim that they are reigning from Heaven because *that is not the same thing as being resurrected* – and, besides, Revelation 5:10 makes it clear that the reigning happens *on Earth*.

For that matter, is the Church reigning over the Earth during this period of history? Not exactly: for most of the past two thousand years the Church has been brutally oppressed, persecuted, hunted down, and slaughtered. Paul says that we and the whole creation are groaning, awaiting our adoption. It is true that God is saving countless people, but it is a bloody process that is full of pain. Christ said “In this world you will have tribulation”, not “in this world you will reign as kings”.

Revelation 20 describes a time when Satan has been neutralized, the dead have been raised, the martyrs are living again, and the righteous are triumphantly reigning over an Earth where evil has been soundly defeated and the powers of darkness are unable to harm anyone. In *no way* does that even begin to describe the age we are living in now. I simply cannot believe we are in the millennium right now; the details are all wrong.

That only leaves one option. If the millennium is a real thing that is going to happen, and if it hasn't happened yet, then it must happen at some point in the future. If it happens in the future then the premillennial view must be true. At some point in the future there must be a time when Satan will be bound, the dead will be raised, and Christ and the martyrs will reign triumphantly over a peaceful Earth.

From that point it's not hard to work out the rest. Although Revelation does contain symbolic language, the symbols it uses are defined elsewhere in the Bible. It's not hard to look them up in the Old Testament and see what it is really talking about. The rest, like the millennium, is literal.

Now, some have argued that premillennialism must be wrong because that interpretation is only about a hundred years old. People claim that for most of history the church has been amillennial. The truth is that the early church was actually premillennial: surviving letters from that period show that in the centuries immediately following Christ the church interpreted end-times and Revelation much as premillennial people do today. However, when the Catholic Church arose in the 5th century they stamped out that view because Catholicism teaches that it is the fulfillment of the millennium. For more than a thousand years the Catholic church enforced amillennialism on pain of death. It was only with the advent of the Reformation that people began to escape its clutches and go back to what the Bible actually teaches. Shortly after the Reformation (and long before Darby and the 19th century) people began writing about premillennialism again.

You could just as accurately say that the idea that Christ is the head of the Church is a recent view. That view only became prevalent *after* the Reformation. Before the Reformation the Catholic church taught that the Pope was the head of the church (which they still teach today). Many Biblical doctrines appear to be “recent discoveries” because the Catholic Church forced their heretical view on the world for such a long time. After the Reformation, though, people began going back to the Bible.

The reason I am premillennial is because I see it taught in the Bible. It is the only viewpoint that consistently makes sense and doesn't result in bizarre problems. Amillennialism sounds good, but when you look at the details it falls apart. As amazing as it sounds, there really will come a day when Christ will establish an actual, physical kingdom on Earth, centered in Jerusalem. Revelation is not the only book that speaks of it; the Old Testament does as well. That, however, is a subject for another time.

CONCERNING BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Anyone who walks into a Christian bookstore will immediately discover that there are a *lot* of different translations of the Bible. This can be very intimidating, especially if you are a new Christian and don't know very much about the Bible. Are all translations basically the same, or are some better than others? Given the number of different versions that are out there, how can you possibly tell which ones are good and which ones should be avoided? Is there any way to find out that doesn't involve going to seminary and learning Hebrew and Greek?

Most people don't spend a lot of time thinking about this; after all, it's a difficult subject and it's rarely discussed in churches. It has taken me many hours of study over the course of several years in order to come to my own conclusion. (This paper is distilled from 600 pages of research material that I've compiled – and that does not count books that I've purchased about this subject.) This is a very difficult topic, but it's an important one. After all, God expects us to live our lives by His Word. It is therefore *very* important to make sure that the Bible we're reading is truly an accurate representation of what God has said. If our chosen translation of the Bible is wrong then we are in a lot of trouble.

One fact that complicates the matter is that the Bible was not written in English. The original manuscripts contain a variety of languages, with the Old Testament being predominately Hebrew and the New Testament being predominately Greek. Before we can understand the Scriptures they have to be translated, and translating ancient languages is very difficult.

When people walk into a Christian bookstore and look at the different versions of the Bible, they generally assume that the different versions represent different translations of the same manuscript. In other words, they think that different translators took the same ancient manuscript and translated it in different ways. However, that is *not* the case. There are actually *two* groups of manuscripts, not one, and some Bible versions are based on one while others are based on the other. What you are seeing is not different translations of the *same* document, but translations of *different* documents.

You see, there are two different manuscript families: the Received Text (which is sometimes called the Textus Receptus) and the Critical Text (which is sometimes called the Westcott-Hort text). Some translations are based on one while other translations are based on the other. Here is how it breaks down:

Bible Translations based on the Received Text: King James Version (KJV), Geneva Bible, Great Bible, Matthew's Bible, Coverdale Bible, Tyndale Bible

Bible Translations based on the Critical Text: Everything else. (CEV, ESV, GW, GNT, HCSB, ISV, JBP, NAB, NASB, NCV, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, NKJV (New King James Version), NRSV, REB, TNIV, TM)

One thing you may not have realized is that the New KJV is *not* an updated version of the KJV; it is actually a new translation of the Bible that is based on an entirely different manuscript – the same manuscript that the NIV is based on. (Yes, I know you were told that the NKJV was just an updated version of the KJV, but you were lied to.) Second, the reason the KJV is different from the NIV is because they are translations of *different things*. Basically, all versions of the Bible released before the

19th century were based on the Received Text, while all versions since then (NIV, ESV, etc.) are based on the Critical Text.

This raises some important questions. Just what are the differences between the Received Text and the Critical Text? Are there any differences that matter, or are they basically the same? Are there any reasons to trust one manuscript family over the other? Where did these manuscripts come from and what are their histories?

These are important questions, and I will try to answer them.

The Received Text And The Critical Text Are Very Different

The first point I'd like to make is that the Received Text and the Critical Text are quite different, and they are different in ways that affect the meaning of the text. Take the New Testament, for instance: the differences between the two manuscript families affect 7% of its content. The Critical Text deletes 9,970 Greek words out of 140,521, which amounts to almost 34 pages – roughly the combined lengths of Jude and Revelation. (Thomas Strouse, *Review of "From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man"*, November 2000.) This is not a minor difference! The Critical Text (which is the basis for all translations of the Bible since the 19th century) eliminates 45 entire verses and 185 partial verses, along with individual words *all throughout the text*. The Critical Text omits, cuts, or flags as unreliable these verses:

- Matthew 12:47: "Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee."
- Matthew 17:21: "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."
- Matthew 18:11: "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."
- Matthew 21:44: "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."
- Matthew 23:14: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation."

- Mark 7:16: "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."
- Mark 9:44: "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."
- Mark 9:46: "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."
- Mark 11:26: "But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."
- Mark 15:28: "And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors."
- Mark 16:9-20: This is the entire ending of the book of Mark, including the Great Commission!

- Luke 17:36: "Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left."
- Luke 22:43-4: "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."
- Luke 23:17: "(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)"

- John 5:4: “For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.”
- John 7:53-8:11: This is the story of the woman taken in adultery
- Acts 8:37: “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”
- Acts 15:34: “Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.”
- Acts 24:7: “But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,”
- Acts 28:29: “And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.”
- Romans 16:24: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”
- 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.”

These verses are all in the Received Text, but they are not in the Critical Text. Bibles based on the Critical Text either question these verses (by adding a footnote saying they are not reliable) or by simply eliminating them altogether. For example, try looking up Acts 8:37 in your NIV Bible. It's not there, is it? But it *is* in the KJV.

The differences go beyond missing verses or passages; there are also many places where the individual verses are different in some way. I have given a few examples of this below, to illustrate the fact that the differences between the Received Text and the Critical Text are not trivial. In these examples I am using the KJV to illustrate the Received Text and the NIV to illustrate the Critical Text. Keep in mind that these differences are **not** due to different ways of translating the same manuscript; it is due to the fact that *the two versions are based on different manuscripts*.

Colossians 2:18

KJV: “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,”

NIV: “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.”

KJV says “hath not seen” while NIV says “has seen”. One is opposite the other.

Luke 2:14

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

NIV: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

KJV says God's good will is toward men; NIV says it is toward men on whom His favor rests. These are not the same.

Mark 9:24

KJV: "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

NIV: "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!""

KJV says that the father called Jesus Lord; the NIV does not.

Romans 14:10

KJV: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

NIV: "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat."

KJV says that we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, thus identifying Christ as God and saying that we will stand before Him to be judged. The NIV only identifies it as being God's judgment seat and removes the reference to Christ as God.

Ephesians 3:9

KJV: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:"

NIV: "and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things."

The KJV says that God created all things by Jesus Christ; the NIV does not specifically single out Jesus Christ as the Creator.

Fasting

The NIV removes almost every reference to fasting in the New Testament, including the only verse in the New Testament that gives a reason for fasting. The verses that are altered are: Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29, Acts 10:30, 1 Corinthians 7:5, 2 Corinthians 6:5, 2 Corinthians 11:27.

Matthew 5:22

KJV: "But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca,

shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

NIV: “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

The KJV says angry without a cause; the NIV just says angry. This entirely changes the meaning of what Christ said.

As you can see in just this handful of examples (and there are many more!), the Received Text and the Critical Text are not “basically the same”. In fact, this is what one group of translators had to say about it:

“The King James Version has grave defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of Biblical studies and the discovery of many manuscripts more ancient than those upon which the King James Version was based, made it manifest that these defects are so many and so serious as to call for revision of the English translation.” (Preface to the Revised Standard Version)

For the record, I *do not* agree with this translator; I think the Critical Text is the one that has the grave defects. The reason I used this quote is because I wanted to show you that the people who invented the Critical Text did so because they rejected the Received Text and wanted something *different*. There are serious differences between the two – which means that translations based on the Critical Text (such as the NIV or even the NKJV) are different *in important ways* from translations based on the Received Text (such as the KJV or the Geneva Bible).

Given that the two texts are different, the question becomes this: which text is better? Where did the Received Text and the Critical Text come from? Are there any reasons to trust one over the other?

The Received Text: Handed Down Through Time

The Received Text (or Textus Receptus, as it is usually called) has a very simple origin: it is the version of the Bible that has been copied and recopied throughout the centuries and handed down through time. It is based on the idea that God has divinely preserved His Word and that the Bible has not become corrupted or lost. (This is important, because the Critical Text is based on the idea that the Bible *has* been lost and needs to be reconstructed by scholars, but I will get to that in the next section.)

Back in the 16th century there were multiple copies of the Greek New Testament available. Erasmus (one of the most eminent scholars of that period) collected these copies and divided them into two groups: those that were the generally accepted (or “generally received”) texts which were held and used by the Greek churches, and those that were based on manuscripts provided by the Catholic Church. Erasmus created what we now call the Received Text by using the manuscripts that had been passed down through time and were held by the Greek churches. He ignored the manuscripts that the Catholic Church provided because he believed they had been corrupted. (The manuscripts that were held by the Catholic Church were later used as the basis for the Critical Text, but we will get to that momentarily.) After spending many years gathering his source material and separating the manuscripts,

he compiled his Greek New Testament in a relatively short amount of time (less than a year).

The Greek texts that Erasmus based his New Testament upon were *not* ancient manuscripts, but were copies that had been copied from other copies down through the centuries. (There are some surviving manuscript fragments that are very old indeed, but no complete manuscripts exist.) This copying process was incredibly exacting. Some of the rules that were used by the ancient scribes are:

- Each column must have no less than 48 or more than 60 lines. The entire copy must first be lined.
- No word or letter could be written from memory. The scribe must have an authentic copy before him, and he must read and pronounce each word aloud before writing it.
- Revisions must be made within 30 days after the work was finished; otherwise it was worthless. If three mistakes were found on any page then the entire manuscript was condemned.
- Every word and every letter was counted. If a letter was omitted, an extra letter inserted, or if one letter touched another, the manuscript was condemned and destroyed.
- Copies were made from older copies, but in the process the older copies would wear out from use, which led to their demise. This is why there are no ancient copies of the manuscripts that Erasmus used: they had disintegrated long ago from being copied. There are some examples of very ancient manuscripts that are nearly complete, like the Latin Vulgate, but the reason they have survived is because people (like Erasmus) believed that they had been corrupted and refused to use them as source material. In short, the manuscripts that were seen as trustworthy were worn out and lost, while the ones viewed as corrupted survived because no one used them.

In summary, the Received Text is based on the idea that the manuscripts that had been handed down through the centuries were still accurate, had not been corrupted, and could be trusted. People held to this view because they believed that God had divinely preserved His Word through time; they did not believe it had become lost or corrupted.

There are a number of translations that are based on the Received Text. The most famous one is the King James Bible (but *not* the New King James Bible), but there are others as well (such as the Geneva Bible and the Tyndale Bible).

The Critical Text: From The Catholic Church

The Critical Text is based upon the idea that the Bible has been corrupted through the ages and we can never really know exactly what it said. Instead, the best we can do is try to reconstruct the Bible through the guesswork of scholars, using manuscripts provided by the Catholic Church. Proponents of this view *do not* believe that God preserved His Word. It should be noted that the Critical Text forms the basis of *all translations of the Bible since the 19th century* (NIV, ESV, NAS, etc.).

The founding principle of the Critical Text is the idea that the text of the Bible has been lost and the best we can do is come up with an approximation of what the Bible might have said. Lest you think I am exaggerating, here are a few quotes from supporters of the Critical Text:

“The ultimate text, if there ever was one that deserves to be so called, is for ever irrecoverable.” (F. C. Conybeare, *History of New Testament Criticism*, 1910, p. 129)

"We do not know the original form of the gospels, and it is quite likely that we never shall." (Kirsopp Lake, *Family 13, The Ferrar Group*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941, p. vii)

"It is generally recognized that the original text of the Bible cannot be recovered." (R. M. Grant, "The Bible of Theophilus of Antioch," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 66, 1947, p. 173)

"In general, the whole thing is limited to probability judgments; the original text of the New Testament, according to its nature, must be and remains a hypothesis" (H. Greeven, *Der Urtext des Neuen Testaments*, 1960, p. 20, cited from Edward Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, p. 67)

"The primary goal of New Testament textual study remains the recovery of what the New Testament writers wrote. We have already suggested that to achieve this goal is well nigh impossible. Therefore we must be content with what Reinhold Neibuhr and others have called, in other contexts, an 'impossible impossibility'" (R. M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, 1963, p. 51)

"...every textual critic knows that this similarity of text indicates, rather, that we have made little progress in textual theory since Westcott-Hort; that we simply do not know how to make a definitive determination as to what the best text is; that we do not have a clear picture of the transmission and alteration of the text in the first few centuries; and, accordingly, that the Westcott-Hort kind of text has maintained its dominant position largely by default" (Eldon J. Epp, "The Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 43, pp. 390-391)

I'm going to repeat this one more time: the basic idea behind the Critical Text is that the original text of the Bible has been lost, and the best we can do is make educated guesses about it. Note how the people quoted (all *supporters* of the Critical Text!) talk about "probability judgments" and the "recovery" of the New Testament. While the Received Text is based on the idea that God *has* preserved His Word; the Critical Text is based on the idea that God *has not* preserved His word.

The Critical Text is also called the Westcott-Hort Text because of the two primary men behind it, Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828–1892). Both of these men denied the infallibility of the Scriptures, believed that the Bible was mostly myth and not literal history, and claimed that Christ's death did not atone for our sins. There are many quotes from them that I could give, but I think these are enough to illustrate what they thought about the Bible:

"...the popular doctrine of substitution is an immoral and material counterfeit." (Hort to Westcott, 1860, cited in *Life of Hort*, Vol. I, p. 430)

"No one now, I suppose, holds that the first three chapters of Genesis give literal history – I could never understand how any one reading them with open eyes could think they did..." (Westcott, writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1890, cited in *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, Vol. II, p. 69)

"I am inclined to think that no such state as 'Eden' (I mean the popular notion) ever existed, and that Adam's fall in no degree differed from the fall of each of his descendants..." (Westcott, *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, Vol. I, p. 78)

As you can see, not only did these men reject the idea that Christ died in our place to save us from our sins, but they condemned that very idea as being *immoral*. These two men were *not* Christians and held a very low view of Scripture.

These men based their Critical Text on two major manuscripts that came from the Catholic Church (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus), along with a handful of Egyptian manuscripts. Some of these documents were known to Erasmus when he assembled the Received Text, but like many of his contemporaries Erasmus rejected them because he thought they were corrupt.

The Vaticanus codex (also known also as Codex B) comes from the Vatican Library. Its history dates back to 1475, when it first appeared in the Vatican Library catalog. It is thought to date back to 4th century Egypt. The Sinaiticus codex (known also as Codex Aleph) was discovered by Constantine Tischendorf at Saint Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai; he discovered the first part of it in 1844 and the second in 1859. Tischendorf found them in a wastebasket, where they had been placed with a lot of other papers that were about to be used to light a stove. (In other words, he found Codex Aleph in the garbage; it had literally been thrown away and was about to be burned.) These two documents form the majority of the differences between the Received Text and the Critical Text. When you see a footnote in your Bible that says "Some ancient manuscripts do not have this verse", it is referring to Codex Aleph and Codex B.

There are a couple points about these ancient manuscripts that should be mentioned. First, all of these documents come from ancient Egypt, which was a hotbed of ancient heresies. If you were looking for accurate, faithful copies of the Scriptures it would be hard to pick a worse spot to look than ancient Egypt. Back at that time the people there had not only rejected orthodox Christianity, but they also thought nothing about modifying the text of the Bible itself. Dr. Edward Hills said this about the subject:

"For all these documents come from Egypt, and Egypt during the early Christian centuries was a land in which heresies were rampant. So much so that, as Bauer (1934) and van Unnik (1958) have pointed out, later Egyptian Christians seem to have been ashamed of the heretical past of their country and to have drawn a veil of silence across it. This seems to be why so little is known of the history of early Egyptian Christianity. In view, therefore, of the heretical character of the early Egyptian Church, it is not surprising that the papyri, B, Aleph, and other manuscripts which hail from Egypt are liberally sprinkled with heretical readings" (*The King James Version Defended*, p. 134)

Second, these documents do not agree amongst themselves. There are 3,036 differences *in just the Gospels*, not counting minor errors such as spelling (Herman Hoskier, *Codex B and its Allies*, vol. II, p. 1). Not only do these documents have serious disagreements with the Received Text, but they also have serious disagreements with each other. (Incidentally, this is why the supporters of the Critical Text talk about "probability judgments". Since their two favorite manuscripts do not agree with each other, it is up to each scholar to decide for himself which version of a passage he likes the best.)

Third, given that both Codex Aleph and Codex B were found in the possession of the Catholic

Church, and that a manuscript very similar to it (the Latin Vulgate) has their official approval, we should take a moment to discuss how the Catholic Church views the Bible. The Catholic Church does not believe that the Bible is authoritative in and of itself; instead it teaches that the Scriptures derive their authority from the Catholic Church and that *only Catholicism* has the power to decide what is canon and what is not. Catholic fathers like Origen (185 AD – 254 AD), Eusebius (270 AD – 340 AD), and Jerome (340 AD – 420 AD) did not see a need to preserve the original Scriptures. Eusebius modified the text at will (not translated it, but *actually changed it*) and Jerome continued his efforts by preserving as canon the changes that Eusebius had made. Jerome's version became the official version of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Council of Trent declared that it was the only authoritative version of the Scriptures – even though churches outside the Catholic Church would have nothing to do with it.

On top of all this, there is an even larger issue: given the way the Catholic Church spent *fifteen centuries* hunting down and killing people for the “crime” of believing you are saved by grace through faith (apart from works), why on earth would any Protestant believe what they have to say about the Bible? Not only has the Catholic Church preached a false gospel for more than a thousand years, but they have aggressively persecuted all those who rejected Catholicism. Over the course of its history the Catholic Church has murdered an estimated *50 million people*. Given the sheer number of people they have killed and the length of time they have existed, it is quite possible that the Catholic Church is the worst enemy that Christianity has ever had. Why would any Protestant believe anything that Catholicism have to say about the text of the Bible?

It should be noted that the Catholic Church has *vigorously* opposed Bible ownership. In fact, for more than a *thousand years* the Catholic Church ruthlessly hunted down and executed people for the crime of having a copy of the Bible. **Pope Gregory IX (1227 – 1241)** prohibited people from owning Bibles and prohibited Bible translations from being made. The **Council of Toulouse (1129)** and the **Council of Tarragona (1234)** prohibited people from possessing *or reading* translations of the Bible that were made in the common languages (the only languages that people could actually understand). Those who were found to possess Bibles (or portions thereof) were executed and their Bibles were burned. **Pope Gregory X (1271 – 1276)** ordered that all copies of the Bible that had been translated into the common tongues be brought to Bishops and burned. **Pope Julius III (1550 – 1555)** issued a series of bulls commanding the destruction of all heretical and Lutheran books. This included vernacular translations of the Bible. **Pope Paul IV (1555 – 1559)** prohibited the possession of Bible translations not permitted by the Inquisition. Those who were found to possess Bibles were executed.

The Council of Trent prohibited *anyone* from reading the Bible without a license. **Pope Clement VII (1592 – 1605)** forbade anyone from granting these licenses, thus prohibiting the common people from reading the Bible under any circumstances. He then sent “missionaries” to the valley of Piedmont *for the express purpose of destroying all Bibles in that area* and those who owned them. Nicholas Walsh was murdered while in the act of translating the first Irish New Testament. **Pope Benedict XIV (1740 – 1758)** confirmed the Council of Trent's prohibitions against Bible translations. **Pope Pius VII (1800 – 1823)** *condemned* the Bible societies of the 19th century – and on and on it goes.

Given that the Catholic Church has a history of both modifying the text of the Bible *and executing people who dared to own a copy of it*, why would anyone believe that the manuscripts they provided can be trusted? The Catholic Church has done its very best to stamp out Bible ownership entirely. They have killed millions of people because they rejected salvation by works. When they come forward and claim that certain words and verses ought to be deleted from the Bible based on nothing more than manuscripts *that they have provided*, why would anyone believe them?

All of this is on top of the fact that Codex Aleph and Codex B are quite different; they contradict each other in many places. Since the two manuscripts are so inconsistent, Westcott and Hort

developed something called Textual Criticism in order to reconcile the problems. (This, incidentally, is where the name “Critical Text” came from). Some of its guiding principles are as follows:

- In matters of textual criticism, the Bible is to be treated just like any other book.

Westcott and Hort believed that there is no principle of divine inspiration and preservation. They did not believe that God had preserved His Word, or that there was anything particularly special about the Bible. They believed it should be treated just like any other book. This is how they put it:

“The principles of criticism explained in the foregoing section hold good for all ancient texts preserved in a plurality of documents. In dealing with the text of the New Testament no new principle whatever is needed or legitimate” (Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, vol. 2, Introduction and Appendix, 1881).

The next time someone mentions “textual criticism”, remember that one of its guiding principles is that *there is nothing special about the Bible*.

- Early Christians were not careful about the text of the New Testament and had no special interest in its exact preservation.

Westcott and Hort believed that Christians were careless when they copied the New Testament and didn't really care if their copies were accurate or not. This is completely wrong; as we mentioned earlier, the copies that were handed down through the centuries were made with great care.

However, this *was* true in ancient Egypt – *the very place where Westcott and Hort got the manuscripts they used to create their Greek New Testament!* They chose to reject manuscripts that had been carefully copied for centuries, and instead used manuscripts from a region that was known for both careless copying and tampering with the text!

- The Received Text that creates the foundation of the King James Bible is consistent because in the 4th century a group of editors got together and smoothed out any differences.

Westcott and Hort believed that the only reason the Received Text manuscripts are so uniform and free from contradiction is because someone got together and fixed all of the manuscripts. The problem with this theory is that there is no evidence such a council ever happened. One person put it this way:

“The weakness of Westcott and Hort's theory of a 4th century Syrian revision which resulted in the substitution of the majority text of the B Aleph text is that such a revision is unknown to history. The whole scheme rests upon a supposition for which there is no historical evidence, and consists largely in making dogmatic assertions based upon uncertainties” (Terence Brown, *What is Wrong with the Modern Versions of the Holy Scriptures?* Trinitarian Bible Society, Article No. 41)

- The traditional text (received text) did not exist prior to the middle of the third century.

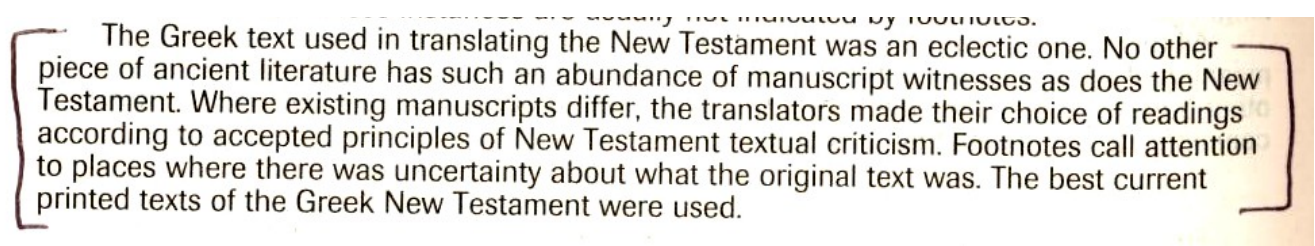
Westcott and Hort believed that the Received Text was only invented in the middle of the 3rd century, and did not exist before that. This is not true; among other things, writings of the Church fathers that predate the 3rd century contain thousands of quotations from it.

- Manuscripts that are characterized by contradictions should be preferred over those that are not.

Westcott and Hort believed that manuscripts that were full of contradictions and problems were the best ones to use. They avoided clean manuscripts and preferred to work with texts that were full of problems and errors!

- Textual critics can use guesswork to determine the true correct reading.

Westcott and Hort believed that the true reading could be determined *by guesswork*. All a critic had to do was look at the different readings and picked the one they liked the best. Lest you think I am making this up, I checked the translator's notes at the back of my NIV Bible. This is what they had to say:



The word “eclectic” means “selecting or choosing from various sources”. The translators of the NIV actually come right out and admit that the NIV is based on manuscripts that contradict each other. In order to arrive at a final reading, the translators actually say that they used the rules of *textual criticism* – the very rules that we just discussed! A group of translators picked the reading they happened to like the best and just went with it – and that is the foundation for *every single modern translation of the Bible*. The only translations of the Bible that are *not* based on textual criticism are ones that predate the 19th century, like the King James Bible and the Geneva Bible.

Two Different Philosophies

Despite what you may think, this is not about the King James Bible or the NIV Bible. The real issue is the two different manuscript families and the philosophies that are behind them. The Received Text is based upon the idea that God has preserved His word through the centuries and that we can trust the text that has been copied and recopied. It claims that the text of the Bible has not been lost but has

been divinely preserved. The King James Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Tyndale Bible are all based on this.

On the other hand, the Critical Text is based on the idea that the text of the Bible *has* been lost. It claims that the manuscripts we should trust the most are the ones that come from the Catholic Church – the very same church that spent *a thousand years* hunting down and murdering anyone who dared to own a copy of the Bible. It claims that while we can never really know what the Bible originally said, we can come up with a good approximation by applying guesswork and the rules of textual criticism – rules made up by two men who believed that the Bible was largely myth and that Christ's death did not atone for our sins. The Critical Text is missing more than 30 pages of text from the New Testament, including individual words, verses, and entire passages. All modern translations are based on this foundation, including the ESV, the NIV, the NAS, the New KJV, the HCSB, and so forth.

Let me say this one more time: the real issue is *the manuscripts that the translations are based on*. Some churches proudly proclaim that they are “KJV Only” churches and denounce all other translations as coming straight from Hell. Some claim that the KJV is a divinely inspired translation, while others bizarrely insist that the original manuscripts of the Bible were written in English and reject anyone who claims otherwise. All of that is utter nonsense. I use the KJV because it is based on the Received Text and because I trust the Received Text more than I trust the Critical Text. However, it is by no means the only translation that is founded upon the Received Text; other translations that use it are the Geneva Bible, the Great Bible, Matthew's Bible, the Coverdale Bible, and the Tyndale Bible. Even if you side with the Received Text there is absolutely no reason to be “KJV Only”; that is just going too far.

I have written this document for two reasons: first, so that you will understand why I use the KJV, and second, so that you will understand what the issues are surrounding the various translations of the Bible. When you choose a translation you are also choosing a philosophy. I want to make sure you understand exactly what choice you are making – because you *are* making a choice, whether you realize it or not.

Hasn't The KJV Been Changed Countless Times?

One common argument against the KJV is that it has been changed countless times. This argument is made so often that you would imagine it was true, but it is actually very misleading.

It *is* true that there have been corrections made for printing errors, typographical changes, and spelling updates. The punctuation has also been updated. However, these changes were quite minor and *do not affect the actual translation*. Changing a word because it is spelled differently now than it was 400 years ago is not a big deal. Likewise, there is no reason for anyone to panic just because the rules of punctuation have changed over the past four centuries.

Dr. Donald Waite of Bible for Today compared the 1611 KJV with the 1917 KJV. Out of 791,328 words, he found only 1,095 changes that affected the way that the verses sound. The vast majority of these changes were minor – “towards” was changed to “toward”, “burnt” was changed to “burned”, etc. There were only 136 substantial changes, most of which were printer's errors that were corrected within 28 years of the KJV's original publication. Some of these 136 changes are:

1 Samuel 16:12 -- “requite good” changed to “requite me good”
Esther 1:8 -- “for the king” changed to “for so the king”

Isaiah 47:6 -- "the" changed to "thy"

Isaiah 49:13 -- "God" changed to "Lord"

Isaiah 57:8 "made a" changed to "made thee a"

Ezekiel 3:11 -- "the people" changed to "the children of thy people"

Nahum 3:17 -- "the crowned" changed to "thy crowned"

Acts 8:32 -- "shearer" changed to "his shearer"

Acts 16:1 -- "which was a Jew" changed to "which was a Jewess"

1 Peter 2:5 -- "sacrifice" changed to "sacrifices"

Jude 25 -- "now and ever" changed to "both now and ever"

So no, the KJV has *not* been changed thousands of times. It is still the same as it was when it was released in 1611.

A STUDY OF FOOLS

The Bible has a lot to say about both wisdom and foolishness. A great deal of time has been spent studying wisdom, but I haven't seen a lot written on what the Bible has to say about fools. While it is a good thing to know what activities are wise, it is also a good thing to know what activities are foolish and should be avoided. If we don't know the characteristics of fools then we may find ourselves becoming one without even realizing it. The Bible strongly warns against foolishness, and we should take its warnings seriously.

It turns out that the word “fool” appears a *lot* in the Bible. There is no shortage of material! The picture that the Bible gives of fools is fascinating. One of the key themes of Proverbs is that fools should forsake their foolishness and get wisdom:

Proverbs 1:20: “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets:
21 She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying,
22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scornors delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?”

There are many people in the world – and even in churches – who do not value wisdom. In our day the truth is not prized. Many prefer fantasy over reality and would rather believe things that make them happy instead of things that are true. This is a grave error that has deadly consequences:

Proverbs 1:24: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;
25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:
26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;
27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.
28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:
29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord:
30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.
31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.
32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.”

Do not choose foolishness; instead, choose wisdom. Do not hate knowledge and do not despise the fear of the Lord. Run to Him, while there is still time. Reject foolishness with great passion and fervency. Do not demonstrate these characteristics:

Fools Deny God

Anyone who denies the existence of God is a fool:

Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good."

Psalm 53:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good."

As the old saying goes, God doesn't believe in atheists. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of both wisdom and understanding:

Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

Those who do not fear the Lord lack wisdom. They are blind, walking in darkness.

Fools Hate Wisdom

Anyone who despises wisdom and instruction is a fool:

Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Proverbs 1:22: "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?"

Proverbs 15:5: "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent."

Proverbs 17:24: "Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."

This next one is especially biting. All those who are seeking to "discover themselves" and "follow their heart" are fools:

Proverbs 18:2: "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself."

The Bible is brutally honest about this. Those who trust their hearts are fools:

Proverbs 28:26: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh

wisely, he shall be delivered.”

Why is it such an error to trust your heart? Jeremiah explains:

Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

Don't trust your heart; instead trust God and His Word. Why would you trust something that is deceitful and desperately wicked?

Another key characteristics of a fool is his utter hatred of wisdom:

Proverbs 23:9: “Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words.”

Proverbs 29:9: “If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.”

A wise man can be corrected by a simple reproof; if you point out the error of his ways then he will repent and change. There are some, though, who hate reproof and who refuse to be corrected. These people are so committed to their error that even beatings will not deter them. These people are fools:

Proverbs 17:10: “A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.”

Proverbs 27:22: “Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.”

People who hate wisdom and love error should be avoided:

Proverbs 14:7: “Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge.”

Why? Because fools are dangerous:

Proverbs 17:12: “Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.”

It is actually better to meet *an angry bear* than it is to meet a fool in his folly!

Then there are these two enigmatic verses:

Proverbs 26:4: “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.”

Proverbs 26:5: “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own

conceit.”

These verses seem contradictory, but you have to keep in mind that they are talking about two different situations. In the first case, answering a fool would make you like him so you should not answer him. In the second case, you *should* answer him lest he be wise in his own conceit. (How can you tell the difference between the two situations? With wisdom, of course. There is a time for everything: a time to rebuke fools and a time to *not* rebuke fools. The difficult part is to not confuse the two situations.)

Fools Are Characterized By Anger

Those who are quick to wrath, and easily angered, are fools:

Proverbs 12:16: “A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.”

Proverbs 14:17: “He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.”

Proverbs 27:3: “A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.”

Ecclesiastes 7:9: “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.”

Those who are characterized by a spirit of anger are fools. The wise take a very different approach:

James 1:19: “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

Fools Are Destroyed By Their Anger

It is a foolish thing to be quick to wrath. That road leads to destruction and even death:

Job 5:2: “For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.”

Fools Are Destroyed By Prosperity

It is a terrible thing for a foolish person to suddenly become prosperous. Prosperity will utterly ruin

those who are not wise:

Proverbs 1:32: “For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.”

This has been proven true time and time again by lottery winners. You would think that winning the lottery would make the rest of your life a dream, but that is not the case. Instead, those who win the lottery find that the sudden influx of millions of dollars has utterly ruined their lives:

Adams, who won the New Jersey lottery in 1985 and 1986 for a total of \$5.4 million, gambled and gave away all her winnings and by 2001 was poor and living in a trailer...Michael Carroll, who won about \$17 million in a lottery in England in 2003, said he only had \$3 million left in early 2006. He told the press, “I regret ever winning the lottery. I’ve spent \$2 million on drugs and given \$7 million to friends and family.” Karen Cohen, who won \$1 million in the Illinois state lottery in 1984, filed for bankruptcy in 2000 and in 2006 was sentenced to 22 months in jail for lying to federal bankruptcy court. Jeffrey Dampier, who won \$20 million, was kidnapped and murdered by his own sister-in-law and his boyfriend who targeted him for money. Ed Gildein, who won \$8.8 million in the Texas lottery in 1993, gambled away most of the money and left his wife with a slew of debts when he died in 2003.

(David Cloud, *Lottery Fever*)

Fools Love Evil

Those who love evil, or love doing evil things, or mock the idea of “sin”, are fools:

Proverbs 10:23: “It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom.”

Proverbs 13:19: “The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.”

Proverbs 14:9: “Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour.”

Proverbs 14:16: “A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.”

Proverbs 19:3: “The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord.”

Proverbs 24:9: “The thought of foolishness is sin: and the scorner is an abomination to men.”

The wise man fears God and departs from evil, but to a fool it is an *abomination* to depart from evil.

Fools Face Judgment

The foolishness of fools does not go unpunished. There are very serious consequences for despising wisdom and clinging to folly:

Psalm 5:5: "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

Psalm 107:17: "Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted."

Proverbs 3:35: "The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion of fools."

Proverbs 10:8: "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall."

Proverbs 10:14: "Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction."

Proverbs 10:21: "The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom."

Proverbs 13:20: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

Proverbs 18:6: "A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes."

Proverbs 19:29: "Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools."

Proverbs 26:3: "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

Proverbs 26:10: "The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors."

The wise will inherit glory, but the fool will inherit shame, suffering, and death.

Fools Lie About Their Hatred

This one is a bit odd. Those who hide their hatred with lies are fools:

Proverbs 10:18: “He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.”

Does this mean that it's better to be open about your hatred? Not exactly: as the verse goes on to explain, those who are open about their hatred and slander others are also fools. It's best to not hate your brother in the first place; God has called us to love one another.

We should keep this in mind, though:

Proverbs 27:5: “Open rebuke is better than secret love.”

This verse seems odd, but it makes perfect sense. If a fellow Christian is caught in sin and you openly rebuke him so that he might turn from his sin and be saved, then you have done your brother a service. However, if you just love him secretly and do nothing about it, then he is actually worse off than if you had rebuked him. A secret love that results in no actions is pretty much worthless.

Fools Will Serve The Wise

It should come as no surprise that those who are foolish and despise knowledge will find themselves serving those who are wise:

Proverbs 11:29: “He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.”

Fools Think Their Ways Are Right

One of the key characteristics of fools is that they do what *they* think is right:

Proverbs 12:15: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”

The wise man takes a very different course: he does what *God* thinks is right. A fool says “I think this action is right, so I will do it.” A wise man reads the counsel of God and obeys it. The Bible repeatedly warns us against doing that which is right in our own eyes. That road leads only to destruction.

Fools Proclaim Foolishness

Those who are constantly saying foolish things are, of course, fools themselves:

Proverbs 12:23: “A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.”

Proverbs 13:16: “Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.”

Proverbs 14:3: “In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.”

Proverbs 14:33: “Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known.”

Proverbs 15:2: “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.”

Proverbs 15:7: “The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.”

Proverbs 15:14: “The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.”

Proverbs 16:22: “Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly.”

Proverbs 18:7: “A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul.”

Proverbs 19:1: “Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.”

Wise men are easy to spot: they are the people saying wise things. All you have to do to spot a fool is listen to what he has to say.

Fools Cause Sorrow

A foolish child brings a great deal of misery and pain to his parents:

Proverbs 17:21: “He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy.”

Proverbs 17:25: "A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."

Proverbs 19:13: "A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping."

Proverbs 15:20: "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother."

A wise son makes his father glad; a foolish son brings his father a great deal of pain and suffering.

Fools Stir Up Trouble

The wise man seeks to put an end to strife. Those who seek to meddle and continue the argument are fools:

Proverbs 20:3: "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling."

Fools Cannot Handle Wisdom

When a foolish person somehow gets their hands on a bit of wisdom, the results are not pretty:

Proverbs 17:16: "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?"

Proverbs 24:7: "Wisdom is too high for a fool: he openeth not his mouth in the gate."

Proverbs 26:7: "The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools."

Proverbs 26:9: "As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouths of fools."

You would think that if you gave a foolish person a bit of wisdom he would become wise, but that is not the case. A foolish person cannot handle wisdom anymore than a raving drunkard can drive a car. If you try it, someone will get hurt. Wisdom can only help the fool after he has stopped being foolish; he has to change first.

What is the beginning of wisdom? The fear of the Lord. That is where the journey begins; it is the first step. That first step *must* be taken before anything else can be done.

Fools Cannot Handle Money

Those who know how to save money and store up wealth are wise. Those who waste it, however, are fools:

Proverbs 21:20: “There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.”

Fools Do Not Deserve Honor

Those who lead foolish lives do not deserve delight or honor:

Proverbs 19:10: “Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.”

Proverbs 26:1: “As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool.”

Proverbs 26:8: “As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool.”

Fools Cannot Be Trusted

If you put your trust in a fool then you will find yourself in a lot of trouble:

Proverbs 26:6: “He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage.”

Fools Return To Their Folly

Those who return to their foolish ways are fools:

Proverbs 14:24: “The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools

is folly."

Proverbs 26:11: "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."

Fools Speak Hastily

Those who speak hastily are fools:

Proverbs 17:7: "Excellent speech becometh not a fool: much less do lying lips a prince."

Proverbs 17:28: "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."

Proverbs 29:11: "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards."

Proverbs 29:20: "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him."

Ecclesiastes 5:3: "For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words."

Ecclesiastes 10:12: "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself."

A person will seem wise if he keeps silent, but once a fool starts talking he is easy to spot. His words give him away.

In Conclusion

Seek wisdom, not foolishness. Whereas the consequences of foolishness are devastating, the rewards of wisdom are enormous:

Proverbs 3:13: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.
19 The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.
20 By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.
21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion:
22 So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.
23 Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.
24 When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.”

FORGIVING THOSE WHO ARE NOT SORRY

One of the standard teachings of the modern church is that if someone wrongs you then you should forgive them, even if they're not sorry. If you ever hear a sermon on forgiveness, this is what you will be told. It's everywhere.

And yet, take a look at this:

Luke 17:3: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

This verse completely goes against the modern teaching on forgiveness. It clearly says that if someone wrongs you then you should *rebuke them*. If the person then *repents* then you are to forgive them, but that last step – the step of repentance – is required. There can be no forgiveness apart from repentance.

Does God forgive people who haven't repented? No, He does not. Does He let people into Heaven who have refused to repent of their sins and ask forgiveness? Absolutely not! The Bible makes it quite clear that repentance is a required part of salvation:

Matthew 3:1: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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

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."

Jesus preached a gospel of repentance, and He Himself said that He came to call sinners to repentance. Repentance is absolutely required in order to be reconciled with God. It is not optional. In order to find forgiveness you must repent.

Somehow the church has forgotten that repentance is a required part of reconciliation. They have come to see repentance as an optional thing that isn't really that important. They have overlooked the clear teaching in Luke 17 that repentance is a required component of forgiveness. If someone repents then we must forgive them – *but they do have to repent*. As Luke 17:4 points out, it may be that they will keep on sinning. However, if they do keep on sinning but they then turn around and repent of it, we must forgive them. But repentance is required.

This whole area of reconciliation has been sadly neglected. However, it is vitally important. Jesus said that reconciliation was so critical that it even impacts our ability to give gifts to God:

Matthew 5:23: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest

that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

Jesus said that if you have wronged your brother, don't even try to give God anything because He's not interested in receiving it. Instead go and repent of your wrongdoing and become reconciled to your brother. After you have repented you can then come and give your gift to God – but you have to be reconciled first. It may be that your brother will forgive you, or it may be that he won't; regardless, you have to repent and ask forgiveness. *It is required.*

This whole idea that “it doesn't really matter if they are sorry” is utter nonsense. Forgiveness is the canceling of a debt, and the debt *cannot* be canceled in the absence of repentance. God Himself will only cancel your debts if you repent. He will not forgive anyone who is not sorry and who refuses to ask forgiveness. God never says “I don't care if you're sorry or not; I forgive you anyway”. Repentance is mandatory.

Am I really supposed to believe that, even though *God Himself* won't forgive people who aren't sorry, that *I* am supposed to? I am supposed to be *more forgiving* than God? Really? I don't think so. That is not what Luke 17:3-4 teaches. If our brother sins against us we should rebuke him; if he repents we should forgive him. But *forgiveness is not possible without repentance.*

JOB

The book of Job is fascinating – and it's not as well-known as you might think. What most people know about it goes something like this: Job was an upright man, but Satan persuaded God to give him permission to destroy Job's life. After Satan destroyed his life Job complained a lot, then God talked to Job, then Job got all his wealth back. The End.

The trouble with this summary is that people usually skip the entire middle section of Job. They're familiar with the first two chapters and they know how the book ends, but the rest is sort of a blur. This is unfortunate, because the middle chapters of Job are really the heart of the book. When we act as if the book of Job is just three chapters long we shortchange ourselves. The other chapters are there for a reason, and it's not because the Bible was too short and God was trying to stretch it out.

What I'd like to do is take a look at the book of Job – the *entire* book of Job, not just the parts at the beginning and the end.

The beginning of the story is pretty well-known. Job was an upright man:

Job 1:1: “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.”

Job had 10 children:

Job 1:2: “And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.”

He also had great wealth:

Job 1:3: “His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.”

Given the fact that Job was already an old man when these events happened (Job 38:21), and that he lived 140 years after these events (Job 42:16), that implies that Job lived to be 200 to 300 years old. The only time in history when people lived that long was shortly after the Flood. Job was probably born sometime between the Flood (~2348 BC) and the birth of Abraham (~2056 BC). Given the lifespans of the people involved, it's possible that Job and Noah were alive at the same time. It's also possible that Job was still alive when Abraham was born.

Job was such an astoundingly good person that when Satan went to Heaven to present himself to God, the Lord asked the devil about Job:

Job 1:7: “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.

8 And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and

escheweth evil?"

There is a great deal that can be said about Satan's access to Heaven and his ability to accuse people before God, but since I've talked about that elsewhere I'm not going to repeat it here. The main point I want to make is that *the Lord was actually bragging about Job's righteousness!* God Himself said that Job was "perfect and upright" and that there was *no one else like him on Earth*. Job was literally the most upright person on the planet. (If Noah was still alive when this happened – and there's no way to know if that is the case – then that would mean that Job was even more upright than Noah.)

As we know, Satan claimed that he was not impressed. He said that Job was only serving God because God had given him great wealth. He asked God for permission to destroy Job's life, and the Lord granted it:

Job 1:9: "Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?
10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.
11 But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.
12 And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord."

Satan wasted no time. He immediately took away all of Job's possessions – including his servants and family:

Job 1:16: "While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.
17 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.
18 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house:
19 And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

One thing I'd like to point out is that the body count in these verses is quite high. Job's servants *and* his ten children were all killed in order to test Job's faith. The Bible doesn't tell us how many servants Job had (only that he had a "very great household"), but it's quite likely that dozens of people died here. These people were not killed because they had done something wrong; they were killed because God was using Satan to test Job's faith. Let me say that again: lots of people were killed in brutal ways (fire from heaven, the sword of the Chaldeans, etc.) in order to test *Job*. This opens up a whole world of possibilities: how many times has something happened to us because God is testing *someone else*? We often think that everything that happens to us is somehow related to us, but that

might not be the case at all.

To get back to the story – in one day Job lost everything, including his children. Interestingly, though, Job did *not* lose his wife. When Satan took away everything that was a blessing to Job, he did not touch his wife. The only thing we know about her is that she urged Job to curse God and die. Her entire testimony boils down to this: when Satan was trying to make Job miserable he left her alive, and she tried to get Job to sin. I know people have tried to defend Job's wife, but think about it: if she had actually been a blessing to Job then do you really think that Satan would have spared her? The fact that the devil took away everything Job had *except for her* is not a good sign.

As we know, despite this untold disaster Job refused to curse God. Instead, he actually blessed Him:

Job 1:20: “Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,

21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.”

Job clearly believed that God was in control of what happened and that God had every right to give him wealth and take it away. Job said that God was acting within His divine prerogative, and Job fell down and worshiped God. This is astounding and testifies to the genuineness of Job's faith. Job actually *blessed* God instead of cursing Him.

This did not go unnoticed. The next time Satan came to present himself to God the Lord again brought up the subject of Job:

Job 2:1: “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord.

2 And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

3 And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.”

One thing to notice is that in both cases *God* is the one who brought up the subject of Job – not just once, but twice. Satan did not single out Job for persecution; instead, God mentioned Job and essentially used him to taunt Satan. God told Satan that he was wrong: even though Job had lost everything he had, he was still upright and he still held on to his integrity.

Also, notice that God clearly says that Job was destroyed *without cause*. This is going to become a very important point. None of this happened because Job had sinned; all of this was just a test of Job's integrity.

To the surprise of no one, Satan did not admit he was wrong. Instead he said that God just hadn't cursed Job enough. He asked for permission to destroy Job's health, and God granted it:

Job 2:4: “And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.

5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.

6 And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.”

One thing to keep in mind is that God already knew how this was going to play out. God is omniscient; He has all knowledge. He knew what was going to happen when Satan did this and He knew how it was all going to end. God was *not* doing this because He wanted to see what Job would do. God was not curious or hoping to learn something.

The devil did not waste any time. He immediately struck Job with a very painful disease:

Job 2:7: “So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

8 And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.”

Job had now lost everything he had, and his health was destroyed as well. At this point his wife urged him to curse God and die:

Job 2:9: “Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.”

Despite all of this, however, Job still did not curse God:

Job 2:10: “But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

Job's wife asked him to curse God, and he refused. The Bible then says that Job did not sin with his lips. Does that mean that Job sinned in his heart, or perhaps in his thoughts? It's tempting to think so, but the text doesn't actually say that. It could easily have said “Job refused to curse God out loud, but he did sin inwardly”, but it doesn't. All we know for sure is that when his wife tempted him he refused. That is a point in Job's favor.

Notice also the argument that Job makes. “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” That is a remarkable statement! People just don't think that way anymore. When something pleasant happens to us we rejoice, but when we face a grievous trial it's a very different story. Very few people ever echo this verse. Instead people say “How could you do this to me God? What were You thinking?” The truth is that Job was right: God *is* supreme and has every right to send us pleasant things or difficult trials. We are His creation; He is the potter and we are the clay. As hard as it is, we must be willing to receive both good *and* evil from the hand of God. Even Christ had to endure the cross.

This is the part where people tend to skip over to the end, but we're not going to do that. Instead we are going to press bravely on. There are 39 more chapters to cover before we get to the end, and those chapters are *not* mere filler material.

Job was not left alone in his plight. When his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar found out what happened, they came to visit him. What they saw left them literally speechless:

Job 2:11: “Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him.

12 And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

13 So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.”

Job's suffering was so extreme that his friends didn't even recognize him. They were so overcome with grief that they sat down with him and said nothing *for an entire week*. They were deeply moved.

Eventually Job broke the silence and started talking. He cursed the day he was born:

Job 3:3: “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.”

He wished that he had never been born at all:

Job 3:11: “Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?”

Job asked why life was given to people who are in great misery and who long for death:

Job 3:20: “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul;

21 Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures;

22 Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?”

As we can see, Job was *intensely* unhappy. He was in tremendous pain and he wanted to die. His friends, however, decided to *not* comfort him. Throughout this entire experience they never said anything like “Oh, your poor thing. You must feel awful. Is there anything I can do to help?” Instead they tell Job over and over that *he* is the problem.

Eliphaz is the first friend to speak up, and he told Job that these things were happening to him because he was a bad person. No one who is innocent ever suffers. Only the wicked have problems:

Job 4:7: “Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?

8 Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.”

Now, you and I know that Eliphaz was completely wrong. *God Himself* actually said that Job

was perfect and upright, and that the disasters that fell upon Job happened “without cause”. Job actually *was* an innocent person who was suffering. Besides, Eliphaz' entire point is wrong: innocent people are killed all the time, while the wicked lead long and prosperous lives (which is a point Job will make later in the book).

Eliphaz, however, was not done. He went on to tell Job that the reason God killed all 10 of his children was because Job was a very wicked person. It was all Job's fault:

Job 5:2: “For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.
3 I have seen the foolish taking root: but suddenly I cursed his habitation.
4 His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them.”

After blaming Job for the death of his children, Eliphaz told Job that he should be happy that God was correcting him, because after Job repented and learned his lesson God would make everything better:

Job 5:17: “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty:
18 For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.”

Once again, Eliphaz was *completely* wrong. Job's children were not killed because Job had done something wrong. However, Eliphaz does illustrate why Satan chose to keep Job's friends alive: the three of them actually made the situation even *worse*. They just piled on to Job and made him even more frustrated.

Job responded by reminding his friends that he was a very unhappy person who was drowning in grief:

Job 6:2: “Oh that my grief were throughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together!
3 For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up.”

Sadly, Job's constant reminders that he was suffering never did any good. None of his three friends ever said anything comforting or supporting. All three of them just went from bad to worse. Job told Eliphaz that he had *not* sinned and that his friends were *not* helping:

Job 6:25: “How forcible are right words! but what doth your arguing reprove?
26 Do ye imagine to reprove words, and the speeches of one that is desperate, which are as wind?
27 Yea, ye overwhelm the fatherless, and ye dig a pit for your friend.”

Job repeated that *he was really suffering* and that he had lost all hope:

Job 7:5: “My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken, and become loathsome.
6 My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.”

7 O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good."

After this moving speech from Job, Bildad spoke up. He ignored everything Job said and told him that he was a liar:

Job 8:2: "How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind?"

Bildad insisted that if Job was truly a good person then God would be blessing him:

Job 8:6: "If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.

7 Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase."

Once again we see that his friends had no words of compassion for Job. Instead they called him a liar and accused him of being a very evil person. They will actually spend the entire book insisting that Job was a bad, bad, bad man. (With friends like these who needs enemies?)

Job maintained his innocence (because, after all, *he really was innocent*), and wished that he could somehow reason with God:

Job 9:15: "Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge."

Job wanted to bring his case before God and ask God why he was being treated this way. Why was God oppressing an innocent man? Didn't God know that it was wrong to oppress the innocent?

Job 10:2: "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.

3 Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?"

Job wanted to remind God that men were fragile and that life was short. He thought that God's eternal existence had caused the Lord to forget what life was really like:

Job 10:4: "Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth?

5 Are thy days as the days of man? are thy years as man's days,

6 That thou enquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin?"

Job thought it was bitterly unfair that God was oppressing him. What made it even worse was that there was no way to escape from God's power:

Job 10:7: "Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand.

8 Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me."

I'd like to make a few comments about this before I go on. First of all, notice that Job believed that God had somehow made a mistake, or done something wrong, or was just plain out of touch. Job knew that he was innocent but he could not understand why he was suffering; he therefore came to the conclusion that God was doing something wrong. He wanted to confront God in person so that he could tell God that He had made a mistake. This is the sin of Job and this is why God condemns Job at the end of the book. Job never comes out and curses God, but he does say "I am righteous, so therefore God must be wrong".

As we read this story thousands of years later it's easy to look at Job and condemn him. After all, Job *was* wrong and God *did* condemn Job. What we tend to overlook, though, is that *we do the very same thing*. How many people respond to tragedy by saying "God, how could you do such a thing?" When something terrible enters our lives we tend to react as if God had no right to do what He did, and that God is somehow unjust in treating us that way. We commit the very same sin that Job committed and we do it for the very same reason. This sort of thing happens all the time, but we rarely stop to think about what we're doing.

The truth is that God is completely righteous, holy, just, and good. Everything that He does is the right thing to do, no matter how much it might hurt us. All of His ways are right and all of His judgments are just. Just because it seems unjust doesn't mean that it actually *is* unjust. There was a great deal going on here that Job didn't know about. Instead of trusting God, though, he condemned Him, and we are tempted to commit the same sin.

Next, Zophar spoke up. He told Job that he was a liar and that God had punished him less than he deserved:

Job 11:3: "Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed?
4 For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes.
5 But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee;
6 And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth."

Furthermore, Zophar said that if Job just repented of his sin, God would make everything better:

Job 11:13: "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him;
14 If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles.
15 For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be stedfast, and shalt not fear:
16 Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away:"

He closed by saying that God was against the wicked:

Job 11:20: "But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost."

All three of Job's friends had now had a chance to speak, and not a single one of them comforted Job. Instead all three condemned him. They all insisted that Job was being cursed because he was evil, and that if he just repented all would be well again.

Needless to say, Job was not amused. He called his friends liars and asked them to be silent:

Job 13:4: “But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value.
5 O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom.”

Job wanted to know why God considered him to be His enemy:

Job 13:24: “Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?”

Notice the thought process here: Job believed that since God had taken everything away from him, God must be upset with Job about something. Job knew that he was innocent, so he wanted to argue his case with God and get Him to change His mind. He was convinced that God had made a mistake.

It's very easy for us to do exactly what Job did. As we know, God actually was *not* upset with Job; in fact, God was quite proud of him! The reason all of these things were happening was because God was testing him. Likewise, the reason Job's children were crushed to death was not because they had sinned; it was to test Job. It's true that God does judge sin, but sometimes God brings trials into our lives that are not connected to sin at all. Sometimes God allows things to happen to test our faith and see if we will trust Him when things are at their very bleakest.

Job, however, was not done. He said he was upset that death was permanent. He longed for God to resurrect His people:

Job 14:12: “So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.
13 O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!
14 If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.”

Interestingly, Job later said that he knew his Redeemer was coming and that God would raise him from the dead. Despite what he said here, Job evidently *did* believe that there was going to be a resurrection. I think these verses represent a time when Job's despair got the better of him.

One thing the Bible is quite clear about is that the dead *will* live again. Jesus plainly told us that those who believe on Him shall never die (John 11:25-26) and that God would raise him up at that last day (John 6:40). Through Christ we do have everlasting life. Job longed for a resurrection, and thanks to Jesus we know that resurrection is a certainty. God really has given us everlasting life. Those who believe on Christ *will* live again, and that is an exciting thing. We do not have to feel hopelessness.

Eliphaz spoke up again and called Job a liar:

Job 15:3: “Should he reason with unprofitable talk? or with speeches wherewith he can do no good?”

4 Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God.
5 For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou chooseth the tongue of the crafty.
6 Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee.”

He went on to say that he and his friends were a lot older than Job, so Job should just be quiet and listen to them:

Job 15:9: “What knowest thou, that we know not? what understandest thou, which is not in us?
10 With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men, much elder than thy father.”

Needless to say, Eliphaz was committing a logical fallacy. Being older does not automatically make your arguments true. Saying “Well, I'm older than you, so there!” is actually pretty childish. Job's three friends may have been old, but pretty much everything they said was wrong and God condemned them at the end of the book. Being old does *not* automatically mean that you know what you're talking about.

Eliphaz argued that Job couldn't possibly be righteous because everyone was a sinner:

Job 15:15: “Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.
16 How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?”

Now it's true that all have sinned, and it's also true that there are none who are righteous. However, I'd like to point out that the person who called Job righteous was *God Himself*. Eliphaz, therefore, was wrong.

After telling Job that he was *definitely* an awful person who drinks iniquity like water, Eliphaz explained that the lives of the wicked are full of pain:

Job 15:20: “The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days, and the number of years is hidden to the oppressor.”

Job's pain, therefore, was happening because he was such a wicked person.

Job told Eliphaz that he was wrong and that his friends were utterly failing to comfort him:

Job 16:2: “I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all.”

By now Job noticed that his friends had spent all their time painting him as a hideously evil monster and had not said a single comforting thing. He told them that if their positions were reversed he would be kind to them and strengthen them:

Job 16:4: “I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you.

5 But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief."

Job then resumed his complaints against God. He said that God had delivered him over to the hands of the wicked:

Job 16:11: "God hath delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked."

He wished once again that he could argue his case before God:

Job 16:21: "O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour!"

Job said that he had become a byword:

Job 17:6: "He hath made me also a byword of the people; and aforetime I was as a tabret."

He also added that all of his friends were idiots:

Job 17:10: "But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find one wise man among you."

As you might imagine, his friends were not happy about being called idiots. Bildad was pretty irritated about it and tried to defend himself:

Job 18:3: "Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight?"

I have to say that in this case I am on Job's side: throughout this entire event his friends showed a complete lack of wisdom and compassion. They would have been much better off if they had just remained silent.

Bildad went on to say that bad things happened to bad people. He apparently believed that if he just said it enough times Job would eventually agree:

Job 18:5: "Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine."

All three of his friends had been repeating the same thing: only evil people suffer, so since Job was suffering he must be evil. If Job repented then God would bless him and everything would be fine, because nothing bad ever happens to good people.

By now Job had pretty much had it with his friends. He asked them how long they were going to keep bothering him:

Job 19:2: "How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?

3 These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make

yourselves strange to me.”

Job then turned his attention back to God. He cried out that God had wronged him and no one cared:

Job 19:6: “Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. 7 Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment.”

Job said his life was so bad that his friends, his family, and even small children despised him:

Job 19:18: “Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me.”

Job begged his friends to have pity on him:

Job 19:21: “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me.”

For the record, his friends never did take pity on him. They insisted on condemning Job, right up until God Himself confronted them and condemned *them* for being fools.

Interestingly, Job wished that his words were printed in a book:

Job 19:23: “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!

24 That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!”

Job got his wish; his words (and the words of his friends) *were* printed in a book. Considering how the story turned out, I wonder if he regrets making that statement. If it was me I'd rather *not* have 39 chapters of the Bible dedicated to me and my friends making utter fools of ourselves. Don't get me wrong – I'm glad the book of Job is in the Bible; I'm just wondering if perhaps this didn't turn out the way Job expected. Job believed that God had wronged him, but in reality he was the one who wronged God.

Interestingly, despite what Job said earlier, he really did believe in the resurrection:

Job 19:25: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:

26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:

27 Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.”

Job knew that in the latter days his “redeemer” would come, and he knew that even though he would die he would see God “in my flesh”. There is an interesting tension here between Job's earlier cries of “death is the end!” and “after death I will see God in the flesh”. Once again, I think the earlier statement was just Job's despair getting the better of his judgment.

Zophar, however, was quick to squash Job's hope. He told Job that the triumph of wicked hypocrites like Job was short, and that he would perish forever:

Job 20:5: “That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?

6 Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds;

7 Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?”

Zophar said God would do this because Job had done incredibly evil things:

Job 20:19: “Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not;”

Apparently it wasn't enough for Zophar to call Job a liar; now he was accusing Job of terrible crimes – crimes for which there was absolutely no evidence at all. No one had any proof that Job had done those things, and in fact *Job hadn't done those things*. But that didn't stop Job's friends! They just made things up and charged him with every awful crime they could think of.

Job spoke up and asked if he could get a word in before they continued mocking him:

Job 21:3: “Suffer me that I may speak; and after that I have spoken, mock on.”

Job pointed out that despite what his three friends had been saying, the wicked led very comfortable lives and the hand of God was not against them:

Job 21:7: “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?

8 Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes.

9 Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.”

What Job was saying was that the entire idea that bad things only happen to bad people and that good things only happen to good people is actually completely wrong – *and Job was right*. There are many cases where good people (like Jesus Christ) suffered awful things (like being crucified), while terrible people led long and healthy lives. The entire premise of his friends' argument was wrong.

Job did add that ultimately the wicked would be judged by God:

Job 21:19: “God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it.

20 His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty.”

Job ended by telling his friends that they were completely wrong:

Job 21:34: “How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?”

Eliphaz, however, refused to listen. Despite the complete lack of evidence, he doubled down and said that Job's iniquities were infinite and that his crimes had no end:

Job 22:5: “Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?
6 For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing.
7 Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry.”

Eliphaz told Job that he thought he could hide his sins from God, but he was wrong:

Job 22:13: “And thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud?”

Eliphaz said that if Job just repented then gold would rain down from the sky and he would become wealthy again:

Job 22:23: “If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles.
24 Then shalt thou lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks.
25 Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver.”

As you can see, Job's friends were no longer merely wrong; they were now *ludicrously* wrong. They went far beyond accusing Job of sin and now accused Job of an infinite list of high crimes against humanity. They furthermore claimed that if Job just repented then God would bless Job with great wealth, because God always makes sure that all good people are extremely wealthy.

These arguments are utterly laughable, and that is exactly why Job was mocking them. Job knew what his friends refused to admit: that the righteous suffer, that some men of integrity are quite poor, and that there are wicked men who are powerful and rich. Job therefore ignored his friends and turned his attention back to God. He wished once again that he could argue his case with God. He was convinced that if he could just talk to God that God would fix things and strengthen him:

Job 23:3: “Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!
4 I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.
5 I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me.
6 Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.”

Interestingly, Job turned out to be completely wrong. God actually *did* plead against Job with His great power. God did *not* strengthen Job; instead He put Job in his place. God broke Job's pride and made him realize that he had no right to condemn God.

Job argued that he was a good person who highly esteemed God's commands:

Job 23:11: “My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined.
12 Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”

Job said he was scared of God because God did as He pleased and no one could stop Him:

Job 23:13: “But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth.
14 For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.
15 Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.”

As you can see, Job really wanted a God who was accountable *to him* – a God that Job could control. At the end of the book God reminds Job that the Lord has infinite power and wisdom, and that Job's wisdom and strength are utterly nothing in comparison. God will not be held accountable by anyone and does not have to explain His actions. Mankind may wish to judge God, but the Lord is the great Judge and He will judge us all.

After Job said once again that he was a good person who had done nothing wrong, Job talked about all the awful sins of the wicked:

Job 24:2: “Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed thereof.
3 They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge.
4 They turn the needy out of the way: the poor of the earth hide themselves together.”

Job said that despite all of this, the wicked often got away with it:

Job 24:12: “Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them.”

In other words, God allows the wicked to get away with all kinds of horrible sins and does nothing to stop them. He allows them to do terrible abominations and they do not suffer for it; instead they lead comfortable lives.

This does not last forever, though. Ultimately the wicked are judged:

Job 24:24: “They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn.”

Here Job is reminding his friends of a very obvious fact: the wicked are *not* always punished immediately for their sins, and in fact many evil people lead long and prosperous lives. His speech about the terrible crimes that the wicked get away with must have been quite convincing, because after this his friends don't have much to say. The only friend who speaks up again is Bildad, and his pitiful speech only lasts six verses. Bildad feebly protested that no one could possibly be considered righteous in God's sight, so Job *must* be a bad person:

Job 25:4: "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?"

Bildad might have had just six verses, but after this Job *really* goes off and talks for *seven straight chapters*. Job repeats yet again that God had taken away his judgment and vexed him:

Job 27:2: "As God liveth, who hath taken away my judgment; and the Almighty, who hath vexed my soul;"

Job said that he wished he was back in the good times, when life was grand:

Job 29:2: "Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me;"

Job said that now he was utterly despised by the lowest class of people:

Job 30:1: "But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock."

Job said that he obeyed God and served Him, but in return God had treated him with cruelty:

Job 30:21: "Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me."

Job finished by saying that he absolutely has *not* sinned, and he wishes that God would answer him:

Job 31:35: "Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book."

Job's final argument was a summary of what he had been saying all along: he insisted that since he was a good person, God was doing something wrong. He believed that the Lord had erred and he wished that he could talk with Him and set God straight.

Interestingly, Job's three friends never condemned him for this line of reasoning. In fact, they never responded to it at all. Since they had been unable to convince Job that he was an evil monster, they just gave up:

Job 32:1: "So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes."

After all of this Elihu speaks up. Elihu was not one of Job's three friends. The Bible says that he was someone who had been standing around listening but had been afraid to speak up because of his youth:

Job 32:6: "And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said, I am young,

and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion.
7 I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.”

Elihu said he decided to speak up because he realized that Job's friends were fools:

Job 32:9: “Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.

10 Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will shew mine opinion.”

The reason he was motivated to speak up was because Job had spent his entire time justifying himself *instead of justifying God*:

Job 32:2: “Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God.”

Elihu began by pointing out that Job has essentially been saying “I am a good person and yet God is against me”:

Job 33:8: “Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying,

9 I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me.

10 Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy,

11 He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths.”

Elihu condemned Job for this line of reasoning. He pointed out that God was not accountable to Job:

Job 33:12: “Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.

13 Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.”

Elihu said that God was greater and wiser than man, and He did not have to give an account of himself to anyone. Elihu went on to point out that Job had actually claimed to be more righteous than God:

Job 34:5: “For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment.”

Elihu said that Job's line of reasoning was utter nonsense because God was wholly righteous and never did evil:

Job 34:10: “Therefore hearken unto me ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity.”

Elihu said Job should have asked God to teach him the things he could not see and to show Job if he had sinned:

Job 34:31: “Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more:
32 That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.”

Elihu said that Job's real problem was that he had been condemning God:

Job 34:37: “For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God.”

Elihu added that it was utterly wrong for Job to claim that he was more righteous than God:

Job 35:2: “Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?”

Interestingly, Elihu urged Job to remember the unsearchable greatness of God by pondering His creation:

Job 36:26: “Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.
27 For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof:
28 Which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly.”

As we will see in a minute, God will later use this same line of reasoning. When the Lord speaks to Job He will use examples from His creation to illustrate His greatness.

Elihu finishes by reminding Job that God does things that we cannot comprehend, and His creation illustrates this:

Job 37:5: “God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend.
6 For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength.”

This is the last we hear from Elihu; he is not mentioned again, and if Job had anything to say in response it is not recorded. After this something unexpected happens: God Himself comes and talks to Job. All throughout Job's discussion with his friends he had repeatedly wished that he could talk to God, and after Elihu finished Job got his wish.

Now, it's worth taking a moment to stop and realize what God did *not* say. God never told Job what was actually going on. God never explained to Job that he was being tested or that Satan had accused him. The Lord does not encourage Job or explain what was going on. Instead He rebuked him:

Job 38:1: “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

God demanded to know where Job was when He created the world:

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?"

Why did God say this? Well, remember, Job's whole argument had been "God is out of touch and I know more than He does; God made a mistake and wronged me and I need to set Him straight." God is essentially saying "All right, Job, if you're so great then where were you when I created the world? If you really know everything then answer my questions:"

Job 38:16: "Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth?

17 Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?

18 Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all."

God then started talking about His creation. Is Job the one who created the animals? Do the birds fly by Job's wisdom?

Job 39:26: "Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south?

27 Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?"

God finished by saying that since Job was daring to instruct God, then let him answer these questions. If Job really thinks that he knows more than God then let him prove it:

Job 40:1: "Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said,

2 Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it."

Job was horrified. He realized that he had sinned, and he had nothing to say:

Job 40:3: "Then Job answered the Lord, and said,

4 Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.

5 Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further."

But God is not done. The Lord condemned Job for daring to condemn Him:

Job 40:6: “Then answered the Lord unto Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
7 Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
8 Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?”

God told Job that if he really was so great and powerful then he should step up and prove it:

Job 40:9: “Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?
10 Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty.
11 Cast abroad the rage of thy wrath: and behold every one that is proud, and abase him.
12 Look on every one that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked in their place.
13 Hide them in the dust together; and bind their faces in secret.
14 Then will I also confess unto thee that thine own right hand can save thee.”

Job, of course, could do none of these things.

God went on to talk about the astounding creatures He had made (the behemoth and the leviathan) and reminded Job that *everything* belongs to Him:

Job 41:11: “Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine.”

Throughout the entire book Job had stubbornly held on to his pride, to such an extent that he was willing to *condemn God Himself*. God, however, was not pleased. While He does lift up the humble, He resists the proud:

James 4:6: “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

Job's speeches utterly lacked any trace of humility. He proudly insisted that he was right and God was wrong. Because of this, when God met him He did *not* lift him up; instead He rebuked Job and reminded him that God was great and Job was very small, weak, and foolish. God utterly broke Job's pride. By the time He was done Job repented:

Job 42:5: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.
6 Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

But the story is not yet done. Job was not the only person that God was upset with; He was also angry with Job's three friends. God tells them that His wrath is against them:

Job 42:7: “And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job

hath.

8 Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the Lord commanded them: the Lord also accepted Job.”

God. Interestingly, God never condemns Elihu, the young man who condemned Job for condemning

After Job prayed for his three friends, God restored the wealth and prosperity of Job:

Job 42:10: “And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

11 Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold.

12 So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses.

13 He had also seven sons and three daughters.”

As we can see in verse 13, Job had ten more children. He lived for another 140 years and saw his children to the 4th generation:

Job 42:16: “After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations.

17 So Job died, being old and full of days.”

Interestingly, this is not the last mention of Job in the Old Testament. He is also mentioned in the book of Ezekiel, where the Lord holds him up as an example of a righteous man:

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.”

When the Lord wanted to hold someone up as an example of incredible righteousness, he chose Noah, Daniel, and Job. That is quite a testimony! Yes, Job sinned, and yes, Job condemned God – but he repented of it and became a wiser man.

MANSIONS IN HEAVEN

After Christ celebrated the passover with His disciples, and after Judas left to betray Him, Jesus had a few final moments alone with His followers. During that time He told them a great many things. One of them was 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.

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.”

A generation ago pretty much all Christians believed that they had a mansion waiting for them in Heaven. Today, though, few people believe it. The idea that we have a building waiting for us in Heaven is now seen as silly and ridiculous. It's just not believed anymore.

I looked up the word “mansion” in Strongs. It means pretty much what you would expect:

#3438 (“Mone”): a mansion, habitation, abode. Also related to monos – alone, only single.

In other words, the verse could also read “In my Father's house are many individual dwelling places”. The word seems to carry with it the idea of a place for one person to live. What Christ was telling His disciples was that in His Father's house there were many dwelling places; Christ was leaving His disciples so He could prepare a place for them, but one day He would come back and bring them to the place He had prepared.

Lately I've seen people claim that this is actually talking about our resurrection body and not an actual house. The idea comes from this passage:

2 Corinthians 5:1: “For we know that if our earthly house (#3614) of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house (#3614) not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”

At first this argument looks pretty convincing. I would be inclined to believe it, except for the fact that the word used for “house” in this passage is not the same as the one used for “mansion” in John 14:2. The word used for “house” here is:

3614 (“Oika”): a building, a house, a dwelling.

Both words mean “house”, but they're not the same word. More importantly, in 2 Corinthians 5

Paul makes it very clear that he's speaking metaphorically – but Jesus does *not* do that. Paul goes through a lot of trouble to explain that he is talking about our bodies, and not about our actual physical homes. What Paul is saying is that right now we live in a corruptible, fallen body, but one day the Lord will return and transform our bodies into something that is incorruptible and immortal. There is no question that 2 Corinthians 5 is referring to our bodies, and not to an actual house.

Jesus, however, offers no further explanation in John 14. All Jesus says is that He is leaving them so that He can prepare a dwelling place for them – *and He offers no hint that He is speaking metaphorically*. Jesus could have said “I'm going to prepare a new body for you so that you will be incorruptible and immortal”, but He didn't say anything like that. The disciples are given no reason to think that Jesus is *not* talking about an actual house!

This is important because Jesus had touched on this subject before. In the book of Luke we find this instruction from Jesus:

Luke 16:9: “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 (#4633).”

Here we find yet another Greek word – Skene. It means tent or tabernacle. Once again, it is *not* the same word that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5.

What is Jesus saying? Well, in Luke 16:1-8 Jesus gave a parable about a man who was about to get fired from his job. This man was worried about how he would pay his bills once he lost his job, so before he was fired he went around and did favors for people. That way, once he was unemployed, those same people would turn around and help him and he could survive. Jesus commended this person and said that Christians ought to use their worldly possessions to help others so that in the next life these people “may receive [them] into everlasting habitations”.

In this particular passage, interpreting “habitation” to mean “body” results in a very uncomfortable verse! Inviting someone into their physical body is a *very* different thing from inviting someone into their home. Given that the entire context is about someone doing favors so that he will *not be homeless* and would be received into other people's homes, it seems only logical to conclude that the habitation Christ spoke of refers to an *actual home* and not a body. After all, the only way people in Heaven can invite you into their home is *if they have a home in the first place*.

So when Jesus talked about Heavenly homes a second time in John 14, the disciples would have remembered this earlier parable. There is no way they would have been thinking about a letter to the Corinthians that hadn't even been written yet. As far as I have been able to determine, Jesus never used the phrase “Heavenly home” to refer to a person's physical body.

Which brings us back to the question: will we have homes in Heaven? Let me ask the question a bit differently: do you really think that the New Jerusalem will be populated entirely by homeless people? Is that our future?

We need to keep a few things in mind here. First of all, our eternal destiny is not to sit on a cloud somewhere strumming a harp. God has promised us a city:

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.”

This city is not a metaphor of some kind. We know this because in Revelation 21 we actually

see this city:

Revelation 21:2: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

The Bible spends quite a few verses telling us what this city is like. The New Jerusalem is a real, actual city – a *big* city that's 1500 miles wide and that covers more than *two million square miles*. This is the city that God has prepared for us, and it will be our eternal home. One day we will live in this city.

I'm not going to say a great deal about what it's like to live in that city because I've already done that elsewhere. The question I want to address is this: are we *really* going to be wandering around this giant city as homeless vagabonds?

Think about it this way: just what is a home? It is a shelter, yes, but it's more than that. After all, an umbrella can shelter you from the elements but an umbrella is not a home! A home is where you keep your possessions. It is your base of operations. It is the place where you invite friends over so you can spend some time with them. How, exactly, are we going to invite people into our homes if we don't have homes to invite people into?

What people are suggesting is that the great New Jerusalem, with streets of gold and the Lord God as its ruler, is filled with billions of homeless people. Even though these people live in the largest city that the world has ever seen, they don't have a single room or square inch of ground to call their own! Is that really reasonable?

For that matter, have you ever stopped to think about what it would be like to be homeless *forever*? Even though you had an endless life ahead of you, you wouldn't have a single bookshelf or end table to call your own. There would be no places where you could invite people over because you wouldn't own any places. You would just live in a great big area that isn't owned by anybody, where billions of people wander around as they please. For that matter, you wouldn't be able to own *anything*. After all, where would you put it?

People say “Well, you're not going to possess anything in Heaven. It doesn't work that way.” But Jesus said we should lay up our treasures in Heaven so that moths can't eat them (Luke 12:33). These treasures *cannot* be spiritual blessings because *moths cannot break into your closet and eat your spiritual blessings*. The only thing that moths can eat are *physical goods*. Christ is saying we ought to lay up our *physical goods* in Heaven so that we will still have them. This interpretation makes people uncomfortable, but it's what Jesus actually says! Jesus does not say “Turn your physical goods into spiritual blessings”. No, what He actually says is “move your possessions to a place where moths can't destroy them.” If you have possessions then that means you also have to have a place to keep your possessions. You could keep them in the bank, I suppose, but most people keep their possessions at home. It seems highly unlikely that we would have possessions but *not* have a home to keep them in!

Just imagine trying to live in a giant city and not having a home! Even *animals* have homes: as the Bible points out, birds have nests and foxes have holes. But yet I am supposed to believe that the redeemed children of God are doomed to wander the streets for eternity?

I am not concerned about the *size* of the home. What concerns me is this idea that *we will not have a home*. I think that what Jesus said in John 14:2 should be taken in a straightforward manner: Jesus has left to prepare a dwelling place for us, and one day He will return and bring us to the home He has prepared. It's that simple.

One thing I do know about God is that He is amazingly extravagant. During the creation week God decided that the Earth needed light, so He created *125 billion galaxies* in order to provide the Earth with a night-light. That is extravagance on a scale that boggles the imagination!

Jesus has spent two millennia preparing a home for His children. I don't think we're going to get there and discover that we're doomed to wander the streets for all of eternity. I also don't think we're going to discover that our Heavenly home is a dirty one-room hovel. God, after all, has infinite resources; He paves His streets with gold. It's foolish to believe that our earthly home is better than the one God has prepared for us in Heaven. No one is going to get to Heaven and wish that they were back at their home on Earth.

Our problem is that we think far too little of God. When we think of Heaven we tend to think that we will have much *less* than we do now. We may not say this out loud and we may publicly proclaim that life will be better there, but we don't actually believe it. We see Heaven as a place where we're going to miss out on all the good things of life, so we start assuming that we won't have any possessions, we won't have a home, and we'll just sit on a cloud somewhere bored out of our mind. We start dreading the idea of going to Heaven and we cling to our life as firmly as we can.

That sort of thinking is tremendously unbiblical and does not honor God. Heaven is not a place where we will live as paupers; it is a place where we will be “kings and priests”, as Revelation tells us. It is not a place of poverty but one of unimaginable wealth. It is not a place where we will have less, but where we will have very much more. It is *not* a place of boredom, endless tedium, and nothingness. We need to expand our minds and embrace the full scope of what God has promised us – because the things that He has promised are truly astounding.

THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

In the book of Revelation we're told that one day the Lord Jesus Christ will rule over the nations for a thousand years:

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."

This period is usually referred to as the Millennial Kingdom. Now, there are some people who reject the idea that the Millennial Kingdom is literal. They claim that it is a purely spiritual kingdom and that Jesus Christ isn't *really* going to return and rule over the nations as some kind of earthly political ruler. I think this viewpoint is incorrect. The Bible claims in numerous places that the coming Kingdom is not symbolic or spiritual but is very literal. For example, take a look at the book of Daniel. In Daniel chapter 2 the Bible tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him, and he demanded that his magicians tell him what his dream was and how to interpret it. Daniel did exactly that:

Daniel 2:31: "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.

32 This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass,

33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

After telling the king his dream Daniel then provided the interpretation. He explained that the statue represented four kingdoms that would control the world from the time of Nebuchadnezzar until the end of days. The fourth kingdom, however, would not last forever. Instead it would be broken into pieces by God Himself and would be replaced with an eternal kingdom that would never be destroyed:

Daniel 2:44: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without

hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

What I would like to point out is that the last kingdom – the eternal kingdom that God Himself establishes – *replaces* the kingdoms that came before it. It does *not* coexist alongside them as some sort of spiritual or symbolic kingdom. This last kingdom is also going to rule over the Earth just as the other four kingdoms did. This means that the Kingdom of God *cannot* be a purely spiritual kingdom. After all, it *violently destroys and replaces the kingdoms of the world*. The passage describes it as an actual, physical kingdom, not a spiritual one.

This final kingdom that God establishes is the Millennial Kingdom. Although people commonly say it will last for a thousand years, it actually lasts for all of eternity. The thousand-year period refers to the time when Satan is bound and the Earth enjoys a period of unprecedented peace:

Revelation 20:1: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.
2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,
3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

After the thousand years are over, Satan launches one last attempt to destroy the saints of God. This attempt, however, fails spectacularly:

Revelation 20:7: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,
8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.
9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.
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.”

After this the Great White Throne judgment takes place, where the lost are judged and cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity. Then the Lord creates a New Heaven and a New Earth – a place where there is no more death, crying, or pain, for the former things are passed away. However, the kingdom of Jesus Christ is not destroyed and it does not disappear. It endures long after the thousand-year period has ended; in fact, it endures forever, just as Daniel foretold. Jesus Christ will reign for all of eternity.

In fact, Jesus commands us to pray for the coming of His kingdom! This fact gets easily overlooked. Do you remember how the Lord's Prayer begins?

Matthew 6:9: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

What is the *very first thing* that we're supposed to ask for? That the Lord's Kingdom would come and that His will would be done on Earth. That is nothing less than asking for the advent of the Millennial Kingdom! Where does Jesus place this on our list of priorities? At the very top.

So what does the Bible have to say about the Millennial Kingdom? Quite a lot, actually. However, most of the information about the Kingdom is found in the Old Testament. The Book of Revelation does not have a lot to say about it, although the details that it does provide are important and are not found elsewhere. Revelation tells us that when it begins **Satan will be bound and unable to deceive the nations** any more (Revelation 20:1-3). It also says that **those who were martyred during the Tribulation will be resurrected** and will reign with Christ during the Millennium (Revelation 20:4).

Now, some might ask, what about the Church? Well, the Church was resurrected at the Rapture, which happened before the Tribulation began. We don't need to be raised from the dead at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom because our resurrection already happened. Revelation 5:10 tells us that we will also be reigning on the Earth:

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.”

This song is being sung by the 24 elders in Heaven, which represent the raptured Church. The Tribulation saints are not the only ones who will reign on the Earth; we will reign as well.

Although Revelation itself does not have a lot to say about the Millennial Kingdom, the Old Testament spends a lot of time talking about it. What I'd like to do now is go through a number of passages from the Old Testament and discuss the various aspects of life during the Millennium.

The book of Isaiah gives us several exciting glimpses into life during the Millennium. For example, there is this passage:

Isaiah 2:1: “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

This short passage contains a great deal of information. First of all, we see that during this time

the Temple of the Lord will be established in the top of the mountains. This Temple will be a centerpiece of the whole earth; all nations will visit it. People from all over the world will go to the Temple to learn God's ways, and they will obey His words. During this time the Lord Jesus Christ will reign from Jerusalem; verse 4 tells us that He will judge the nations and rebuke “many people”. In this era the nations will no longer fight each other. Instead they will take their weapons and turn them into farming equipment, and they will no longer learn the art of war. It will be a time of unprecedented peace.

The Temple of the Lord is going to be one of the prominent features of the Millennium. It is described in great detail in the book of Ezekiel, starting in chapter 40 and continuing on for eight more chapters. First, Ezekiel tells us that God will establish His sanctuary in their midst:

Ezekiel 37:26: “Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore.

27 My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

28 And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.”

The amount of detail that God provides concerning this Temple is staggering. I'm not going to repeat it all here, or even attempt to summarize it. Instead I'll just mention a few of the key details.

First of all, the Ark of the Covenant will be missing. The Ark was not included in Herod's Temple (which was the one that existed at the time of Christ) and it will not be in this one either. We are told this in the book of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 3:16: “And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more”

In other words, the time of the Ark of the Covenant is over. It will not be a feature of the Temple. It has served its purpose and it is no longer needed. The new Temple will not be a return to the Mosaic Law and the old way of doing things; instead it is a new Temple and the start of a new order.

One of the surprising things about this temple is the fact that there will be sacrifices offered. However, this will *not* be a return to the sacrifices described in the Law of Moses. Instead this is a new sacrificial system that has different rules and different offerings. It seems utterly bizarre that sacrifices will be offered *after* the resurrection and after the return of Christ, but Ezekiel is very clear about this. For example:

Ezekiel 43:18: “And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord God; These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon.

19 And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to minister unto me, saith the Lord God, a young bullock for a sin offering.

20 And thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put it on the four horns of it, and on

the four corners of the settle, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse and purge it.

21 Thou shalt take the bullock also of the sin offering, and he shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary.”

As you can see, the passage clearly describes burnt offerings during the Millennium in which animals are slaughtered in the Millennial Temple! There are other passages as well that describe Millennial sacrifices – both in Ezekiel and in other books of the Bible. So what's going on here? What possible reason could there be for resuming animal sacrifices? After all, doesn't the New Testament tell us that the time of offerings for sin is over? As a matter of fact, it does:

Hebrews 10:18: “Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.”

What this tells us is that the Millennial sacrificial system has a very different purpose from the Levitical sacrificial system. This can be seen from the fact that the two systems have different offerings, different rules, different holy days, and different procedures (something that is far outside the scope of this paper). It appears that the sacrifices during the Millennium are focused not on the forgiveness of sins but on removing ceremonial uncleanness. This is how one person put it:

Critics of future millennial sacrifices seem to assume that all sacrifices, past and future, always depict Christ's final sacrifice for sin. They do not! There were various purposes for sacrifices in the Bible. An overwhelming majority of sacrifices under the Mosaic system were for purification of the priests and objects used in various rites. This is why atonement can be said in the past to be effective, yet still need Christ's future sacrifice, because many of the sacrifices did atone ceremonially, cleansing participants and objects in Temple ritual. Just as we never finish the task of washing clothes, ceremonial cleansing was an ongoing need. The same is clearly the case in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 43:20 and 26, the atonement is specifically directed at cleansing the alter in order to make it ritually fit for sacrifice. The only other uses of atonement also refer to cleansing objects so that ritual purity may be maintained for proper function of further worship... Since all the sacrifices of Ezekiel relate to purification of the priests for Temple service, they do not specifically depict or represent Christ's atoning sacrifice. The presence and purpose of sacrifices neither diminishes the finished work of Christ nor violates the normal and “literal” interpretation of the prophetic passages. Nothing in Ezekiel 40-48 conflicts with the death of Christ or New Testament teaching at any point. The supposed contradictions between a literal understanding of Ezekiel and New Testament doctrine evaporate when examined specifically. (Dr. Thomas Ice, *Pre-Trip Perspectives*, June 2000, pg. 4-5)

In other words, the sacrifices in the Millennial Temple are not about obtaining forgiveness. Instead they are about **maintaining ceremonial cleanliness** and keeping the Temple and its contents from being defiled. The reason this is important is because God Himself is dwelling on Earth, and His glory is manifested in the Temple. Since a holy God is dwelling on a sinful world, there is a need for a way to maintain ceremonial cleanliness. That is the purpose of the Millennial sacrificial system.

Isaiah chapter 11 gives us another look at life during the Millennium. We are told that just as there is peace among nations, there is also peace in the animal kingdom:

Isaiah 11:6: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

Right now the animal kingdom is full of predators and prey, as one species hunts, kills, and eats other species. During the Millennium, however, that will change. Animals that used to be carnivores will become herbivores and “eat straw like the ox”. Lions and bears will stop hunting and will eat plants. On top of that, animals will no longer hunt man, and children will be able to play with deadly serpents and not be harmed. Life will be radically different from the way it is now.

Another important fact is that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”. This will be a time when the world is *saturated* with the knowledge of the Lord. These days very few people know the Lord and His ways. During the Millennium, however, that will not be the case. In that day the knowledge of the Lord will be everywhere, and men will walk in His ways.

We find another glimpse of life during the Millennium in Isaiah 65. At first it seems like this passage is talking about the Eternal State, because it mentions a “new heavens and a new earth”:

Isaiah 65:17: “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.”

However, that is not the case. This passage is speaking about the Millennium. The reason we know this is because during this time there is still sin and death:

Isaiah 65:20: “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.”

In the New Heaven and Earth that is created after the Great White Throne judgment there is no sin or death because they were done away with during the final judgment. Since sin and death still exist in Isaiah 65 then these verses must occur *before* the judgment – which means that they are speaking of the Millennium.

So why does God call it a new heaven and earth? Well, to understand that we need to back up a little bit. The Millennial Kingdom begins shortly after the Tribulation ends. During the Tribulation God will pour out His wrath upon the Earth and make the planet almost uninhabitable. I'm not going to go into all of the judgments that are listed in Revelation, but by the time they are over there isn't much left of the world. This passage tells us that the Lord is *not* going to spend the Millennium ruling over a planet that has been utterly destroyed. Instead He is going to create a new earth and rule over that.

Yes, there will still be sin during the Millennium. The Church itself will not sin, nor will anyone who has been resurrected, but those who survived the Tribulation and those who are born during the Millennium will sin. There will even be those who reject God and refuse to repent – and they will be accursed.

There will also be death during the Millennium. Death, however, will come at a later age than it does now. Those who die at the age of 100 will be considered to be just a child. This is reminiscent of the time before the Flood when men lived to be more than 900 years old. Lifespans will be greatly extended. (Of course, those who were resurrected will not be subject to death; they will live forever.)

The passage also tells us that the Millennium will be a time of tremendous joy:

Isaiah 65:18: “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.”

The Millennium will not be a time of pain, sorrow, or woe. Instead it will be a time of great rejoicing and gladness. We are told that in Jerusalem the voice of weeping and the voice of crying will not be heard. Those things simply will not happen.

It will also be a time when people will work and enjoy the fruits of their labor:

Isaiah 65:21: “And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.”

What will we be doing during the Millennium? This passage says that we will build houses and live in them; we will plant and reap the fruits of our labors. Our work will not be done in vain, and the fruits of our labor will not be taken from us by others. We will not have to worry about thieves and robbers stealing what we have worked so hard to obtain. We will enjoy the work of our hands.

It may come as a surprise to imagine people *working* in the Millennium and living in houses and planting things, but that is what the passage says – and it makes sense if you think about it. During the Millennium life will go on. Nations will still exist and civilization will continue. There will be work to do, businesses to accomplish, and lives to lead. People will still need to be fed. Since sickness, disease, and death will still exist, there will need to be doctors. People will still need jobs and will need to provide for their families.

Now we, as the Church, are in a different category altogether. We will be living on the Earth as immortals, dwelling in the midst of people who are *not* immortal and who have *not* been resurrected. We will have our glorified bodies, whereas the Tribulation survivors will not. We won't have to worry about doctors, hospitals, and death. The Bible also tells us that we will be reigning as kings with Christ. In other words, we will be part of the ruling class.

It is hard to say what that means or how it will play out. It may be that during the Millennium people will no longer elect their rulers. Instead Christ may place members of His Church (and the Tribulation martyrs) into positions of power over the nations. After all, Christ promised thrones 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.”

During the Millennium each disciple will sit on a throne and judge one tribe of Israel. The Lord may also give us thrones as well – not over Israel, but perhaps over other political jurisdictions. Time will tell.

Another intriguing facet of the Millennial Kingdom is that our prayers will be answered much more quickly than they are today:

Isaiah 65:24: “And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”

In other words, the Lord will answer some of our prayers *before we even have time to pray them*. Other prayers will be answered while we are still speaking!

But that is not all that the Bible has to say about the Millennium. The book of Zechariah also has some things to tell us. Much of the book discusses events during something it calls the Day of the Lord (which we refer to as the Tribulation), but Zechariah does mention the Millennium. One thing we are told is that before the Millennium begins the Lord will stand on the mount of Olives and tear the mountain in two:

Zechariah 14:4: “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 other words, the Mount of Olives will be torn in half and replaced by a great valley. Israel will then undergo a series of dramatic topographical changes:

Zechariah 14:10: “All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's winepresses.”

The topographical changes are necessary because the Temple Mount isn't big enough to contain the Temple that is described in Ezekiel. On top of that, the Temple will be located on the top of a mountain. As we can see, some pretty dramatic landscape work is going to be necessary before the Millennial Temple can be built! This passage describes some of those changes.

There will also be a stream of living water:

Zechariah 14:8: “And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be.”

Most importantly, however, the Lord will assume the throne and will take control of the nations:

Zechariah 14:9: “And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.”

Every year these nations will be required to come before the Lord and worship the King:

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.”

As you can see, not only will the nations be required to come to Jerusalem to worship God, but they will also be required to *keep the feast of tabernacles*, which is one of the feasts mentioned in the Mosaic Law. The Gentile nations will be required to come to Jerusalem *in order to keep one of the Jewish feasts!* That is remarkable. Every year during the Millennium the *entire planet* will make a journey to Jerusalem!

The Lord is quite clear that everyone is required to attend. The nations that refuse to come will be punished:

Zechariah 14:17: “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.”

This is another reminder that there will still be sin during the Millennium. Even though Jesus Christ is reigning from Jerusalem in all His glory, there will still be those who refuse to come and worship Him. There will be those who reject His commands and will not obey. In this age the Lord is patient and longsuffering and gives men an opportunity to repent. During the Millennium, however, He will reign with a rod of iron. Those who refuse to come will be punished, and the nations that will not obey Him will be sent a terrible drought. Jesus will not accept rebellion during His reign.

There is one more thing that Zechariah has to say about the Millennium:

Zechariah 14:20: “In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness Unto The Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.

21 Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and see the therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.”

What this passage is saying is that during the Millennium there will be a tremendous manifestation of holiness. The Lord God will dwell in the Temple and His holiness will saturate

Jerusalem and Judah. Even the smallest and most minor things will be as holy as the vessels on the altar. The nation of Israel will be absolutely saturated with holiness. It will be everywhere.

In closing, I'd like to point out that the Bible has more to say about the Millennium than what I have collected here. I haven't covered the land promises that God has made to Israel or the coming reign of David. The Bible also has quite a bit to say about how the Millennial Kingdom will be governed. However, I will leave those topics as a subject for another time.

What we can see from this study is that the Old Testament is filled with references to the Millennial Kingdom. The Millennium is not an idea that only appears in Revelation. It is mentioned by numerous prophets in the Old Testament, who had a great deal to say about its characteristics. The coming Kingdom is not figurative or merely spiritual; it is a real kingdom that will reign over a real Earth for a real thousand years. Jesus commands us all to pray that this kingdom would come and that His will would be done on Earth. I think it is time that we started doing exactly that.

PERSONAL WORDS FROM GOD

One thing I've noticed over the years is that Christians like to claim that God personally told them to do whatever it is they're doing. It's quite common to hear things like "God told me to preach this message" or "God told me to phone that person" or "God told me to make that decision". In each case people are claiming that they were not acting of their own accord; instead God Himself ordered them to do whatever it was they did. They were acting under Divine Command.

This phenomenon greatly disturbs me. Whenever someone begins a sentence with "God told me..." I inwardly wince. As soon as a person claims that they are acting under the direct command of God they instantly make themselves unaccountable. Any criticism of their actions becomes impossible. After all, it wasn't *their* idea; they were just doing what God told them to do! God said jump, so they jumped. You can't even have a rational discussion about what they just did because any criticism of them instantly becomes criticism of God. Saying "God made me do it" is an easy way to make sure that no one can question them; it grants complete immunity.

However, does God actually speak to people in that manner? Does God *really* talk to people today and send them Divine messages telling them what to do and when to do it? I am convinced that the answer is no. God speaks to us through His Word, and although He does guide our lives and watch over us, He does *not* speak to us directly. He may use our consciences to convict us and He may use our friends to remind us of the truth, but God is no longer in the business of talking directly to His people. That is not how He is working in this era of history.

What a lot of people don't realize is that the Bible is all the divine revelation that we need:

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 passage says that the Scriptures have been given to us so that we can be perfect. It tells us that the material it contains within its pages is enough to *thoroughly* furnish us for *all* good works. In other words, there are no good works that are outside its scope. The Bible says that it has 100% of the divine revelation that we need in order to live in this Age. No other revelation is necessary.

Now, the Bible's claim to be sufficient is either true or it is false. If it is true then we do not need a "personal word from God". We do not need God to divinely speak to us because He has already told us everything we need to know in His Word. God has *already* spoken; all we need to do is read what He has said.

However, if God does speak to His people today then 2 Timothy 3:17 is a lie. It means that the Bible is *not* enough and that we need additional information that God failed to supply. It means that the Bible does not fully equip us for life but instead leaves us unprepared for many situations, and our only hope is for God to speak to us directly and fill in the critical information that was left out of the Bible. Since this train of thought is utterly ridiculous (every word in the Bible is true, including 2 Timothy 3:17), then that means that there are no such things as personal words from God.

But, some may say, isn't it true that God used to speak directly to His people? Didn't God speak to men through dreams, angels, and so forth? Yes He did, but the Bible tells us that He no longer does that. His method of speaking to us has changed:

Hebrews 1:1: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;"

As you can see, things are different now. In the past God spoke in many ways, but now God only speaks to us through His Son Jesus Christ. The words and teachings of His Son can be found written in the New Testament. What was written is complete; we do not need anything more than what the Scripture provides.

People have this idea that all throughout time God has led His people by speaking directly to them, but that is not the case. Very few people in the Bible were ever spoken to directly by God. According to Dr. Sam Kurien, "The only individuals who heard from God more than twice in the Old Testament are Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Aaron, Joshua, David and Solomon. These eight and no more!" Hearing from God was not common; it was rare. There are large numbers of prominent Bible characters who never heard from God *even one time*, as Gary Gilley points out:

"Below are some of the important characters found in the Old Testament who never heard directly from God as far as we know: Caleb, Esther, Mordecai, Ruth, Joab, Hezekiah, Josiah, Jehoshapat, Jonathan, most of the judges, Ezra, Nehemiah, Shadrack, Meshach and Abd-nego (although they may have been comforted by the Son in the fire). In addition whole categories of key leaders never heard from God personally, including none of Jacob's sons except Joseph, none of the kings of Judah after Solomon, none of the judges except for Gideon, none of the returning exiles and none of David's mighty men or military leaders. This is just a sampling; many more could be cited." (Gary Gilley)

On top of that, when God did speak He did so in a very direct and obvious manner. As Dr. Sam Kurien pointed out, "When God spoke, it was in an audible voice, or on occasions through a vision or dream. There is not a single instance of God speaking to the mind or heart inaudibly through an inner voice." People today like to say that "God spoke to my heart", but *never one time in the entire Bible did God ever speak to anyone in that manner*. There is zero Biblical evidence that God communicates that way. The Holy Spirit does convict sinners and does help us understand the Scriptures, but even the Spirit is never depicted as whispering to a person's heart. There is not one case of that anywhere in the Bible.

Moreover, when God did speak in times past He talked about big-picture issues, not personal life decisions:

"When God did speak in Scripture it almost always dealt with the big picture of what God was doing in the outworking of His redemption program or the life of His people in general. You will search in vain to find God telling people what job to take, how many donkeys to buy, or what land to purchase — except as it was related to the bigger issue of God's dealings with His people." (Gary Gilley)

Today people believe that when they are faced with a decision they can ask God what to do and God will divinely speak to them and tell them what decision to make. The problem with this idea is that

the Bible simply does not support it. This type of divine advice is exceedingly rare in the Bible. There were a few men – like King David – who inquired of God, but few people had that privilege, and those who did only used it in the most extreme circumstances. It has never been an ordinary experience for the average believer.

You will simply not find any verses in the Old or New Testament that say “When you are faced with a decision, ask God about it and He will divinely impress the correct decision upon your heart.” God guides us, yes, but *not* through direct revelation; instead He speaks to us through His Word. God does shape our lives, but He does so by His divine power – the same power He uses to raise up nations and cast them down. God is not sitting in Heaven hoping that you will make the right decision so that His plans will work.

But, you might say, isn't all of this negated by the fact that person words really do exist? After all, God really does speak to people and tell them to do things – sometimes even audibly! People pray for guidance and then in their minds they suddenly know what to do. Sometimes people suddenly get the urge to call someone, and lo and behold something good comes of it. Isn't that proof that God really does speak to His children today?

I'm afraid not. You see, there is an enormous difference between “I suddenly knew what to do” and “God Himself told me which choice was right”. Likewise, there is a big leap between “I heard an audible voice” and “That voice was definitely God”. In each case *you* are deciding that the voice must be from God. You are ruling out the notion that it might be your own idea, and the reason you are ruling it out is because you believe that God talks directly to His children. Therefore, if you ask God what to do and you suddenly think of something, you are deciding that whatever you just thought of must have come from God. *But that is not the only possible explanation.*

You see, God cannot lie and God cannot be wrong. Whenever God speaks He speaks authoritatively. In fact, the way prophets were tested was by evaluating the outcome of their predictions. If they ever got *anything* wrong then they were false prophets and God demanded that they be executed:

Deuteronomy 18:20: "But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken?

22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."

So what about these “personal words from God” – are they 100% accurate? Absolutely not. Sometimes they work out and sometimes they don't. When something good happens people “know” it was from God, but when things go terribly wrong they say that they “misunderstood” – or they blame God for giving them bad advice! These “personal words from God” cannot be trusted 100% of the time, and that is bad news. A prophet that had that kind of track record was labeled a false prophet and was not to be trusted *at all*.

In other words, the Bible has a lot of negative things to say about these “personal words from God”. The Bible says that the Scriptures are all we need to thoroughly furnish us for all good works and that no other revelation is required. It says that God has stopped speaking to people through dreams and visions and direct revelation, and now speaks to us through His Son. It says that very few people in

all of history have ever heard directly from God Himself, and that God has never talked to anyone by directly impressing something upon their mind. It also said that anything that was not accurate 100% of the time was not the voice of God.

All of this very strongly implies that “personal words from God” are just our attempt to dodge responsibility for our own actions. Instead of being honest and saying “I decided to do that”, we claim that it was God's doing and we can't be held responsible. Instead of admitting that perhaps the vision was *not* from God or that perhaps the dream really was just a dream, we claim that God is giving us extra information that He did not include in the Bible – information that we somehow *have* to have, even though 2 Timothy 3:17 says the Bible is enough to cover all situations that we will ever encounter.

That last point often gets overlooked. If personal words from God exist, then the Bible is an open book that can be added to at any time by anyone who claims to have heard from God. It means that the Bible isn't finished but is a work in progress that is being constantly enlarged. After all, it's impossible for Jesus to speak with anything less than absolute authority! If Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, told someone something then whatever He said is absolute truth and we should add it to our Bibles. If Jesus gave someone a tour of Heaven and revealed all kinds of new information then we should add a new book to the Scriptures. After all, Jesus has spoken and every one of His words is flawless. It means that we should be busy collecting all of this new revelation and adding it to our Bibles so that everyone can know what *else* Jesus had to say.

This line of reasoning is ridiculous, but it is exactly where belief in “personal words from God” ends up. The Bible simply does not support the idea that the Word is an open book that can be added to as the need arises. We are told that we should contend for the faith that was *once* delivered to the saints:

Jude 1:3: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was **once** delivered unto the saints."

You can search your Bible from cover to cover and you will never find any verse that says “The Scripture is a work in progress and there is a lot more to add as time goes on, so stay tuned!” The Bible is a closed book; you cannot add a Book of Mormon or a Book of Things That Jesus Revealed To Me.

This is how one person put it:

“The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture does not imply that God cannot add any more words to those he has already spoken to his people. It rather implies that man cannot add on his own initiative any words to those that God has already spoken. Furthermore, it implies that in fact God has not spoken to mankind any more words which he requires us to believe or obey other than those which we have now in the Bible.” (Grudem)

Does this mean that God will never speak to His people again? Of course not. But it does mean that for now, in this Age and in this life, the Bible is all that we need. When we crave a “personal word from God” we are telling God that His Word is not enough – that God left out important information that we cannot live without. We are telling Him that His Word does not thoroughly equip us for all good works; we need something more in order to get by. That does not honor God or His Word.

In conclusion, I think it is a bad thing to say “God told me to make that decision”, and I think it is a grave error to claim new divine revelation. There are no personal words from God; the Bible is all that we have been given and it really is all that we need.

POLYGAMY

One common belief that most Christians seem to share is that polygamy is a sin. In fact, the only groups that promote polygamy (beside weird fringe cults) are the Mormons and Islam. People have a firm belief that polygamy is evil and that God hates it. Even non-Christians believe this, which is why polygamy has been illegal in many countries for a rather long time.

If polygamy really is a terrible sin then you would think it would be easy to find proof of this in the Bible, but that's not the case. In fact, what the Bible actually has to say about polygamy is quite unexpected – and I would like to spend some time talking about it.

Some people have argued that since God gave Adam just one wife, that proves that polygamy is wrong. After all, Genesis does say that the man shall cleave to his “wife”, not “wives”:

Genesis 2:23: “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

If that theory was correct then you would naturally expect there to be some provision in the Mosaic Law that prohibited polygamy. The Mosaic Law contains hundreds of laws, many of them prohibiting various types of sexual relations (such as incest and homosexuality). There are regulations about leprosy, about what to do if you find mold in your house, about the types of food you were allowed to eat, and even about the type of clothing that you could wear. Nothing was too small to escape notice, and yet despite all of that *there is nothing that prohibits polygamy*. In fact, the Mosaic Law actually allows for cases where a man might have multiple wives:

Deuteronomy 21:15: “If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated:
16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn:
17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.”

Notice that the passage does *not* say “No man should ever have two wives, period.” Instead it assumes that will happen and talks about the inheritance ramifications. Nowhere does it ever imply that having multiple wives is somehow bad.

The closest that the Mosaic Law ever comes to prohibiting the accumulation of wives is found in its regulations regarding kings:

Deuteronomy 17:14: “When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God

giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me;

15 Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

16 But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way.

17 Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold."

This may seem like a clear prohibition on having more than one wife, but it's actually not. King David had quite a few wives, and at one point God said that *He* was the one who gave them to David:

2 Samuel 12:7: "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things."

Let me repeat that: God Himself is the one who gave King David his many wives – and He then said that if they had not been enough *He would have given him more*. Deuteronomy 17:17 clearly does not limit a king to having just one wife.

Now, that does not mean that the prohibition had no meaning. King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, and the Bible criticized Solomon for that:

1 Kings 11:1: "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites:

2 Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart."

Solomon's 700 wives were a serious problem – but David's multiple wives were not. David's great sin was not polygamy; it was taking someone else's wife and murdering her husband. That is an entirely different matter.

You can look from the beginning of the Bible to its end and you will not find any verses that prohibit polygamy. The closest you will find are these verses from the New Testament:

1 Timothy 3:2: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;"

1 Timothy 3:12: "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their

children and their own houses well."

Titus 1:5: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:
6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."

There is a great deal of controversy over what the phrase "husband of one wife" means. I side with those who believe it is addressing faithfulness, and that its real concern is that church leaders should be faithful men who are not given to fornication or adultery. However, even if the verse is talking about polygamy (which I do *not* believe), these verses are listing the qualifications for bishops, deacons, and elders. That means that, whatever that phrase may mean, it applies only to *bishops, deacons, and elders*. Anyone who is not a bishop, deacon, or elder is not affected.

You might argue that "everyone should live that kind of life", but that is impossible. After all, one of the other qualifications is *being male*, and half the human race cannot meet that criteria! Bishops are also supposed to be "apt to teach" and many people do not have that ability. On top of that, we are told that church leaders should not be new to the faith. That cannot possibly mean that being a new Christian is a sin! The simple fact is that some Christians simply do not meet the necessary criteria for being church leaders, and that does not make them bad people.

There are many times throughout the Old and New Testament where fornication and adultery are condemned, along with a great many other sins – but polygamy is never mentioned. The Bible simply does not condemn it. The fact remains that one of the blessings that God gave King David was *multiple wives*. That pretty much rules out the idea that polygamy is a sin.

However, let me be clear about something: just because polygamy is not a sin does not mean that it is a good idea. It also does not mean that there are no problems associated with having multiple wives. There are quite a few people in the Bible who had multiple wives, and in each case it seemed to be a guaranteed ticket to a life of endless problems. Jacob had two wives and that led to an entire lifetime of family strife. There is also the very important fact that polygamy is illegal – not just in this country but in many countries around the world (although that may change in time).

If you want to argue that polygamy is a bad idea that causes a lot of problems, then that is fine. In a world where there is roughly the same number of men as women it is impractical for *everyone* to have multiple wives; that would be a mathematical impossibility. If a very large number of men had more than one wife then that would mean that many men would not be able to get married at all. I can certainly see a lot of potential problems with polygamy. However, the one thing you cannot do is argue that polygamy is a sin. The Bible simply does not support that assertion.

THE CURSE OF JEHOIAKIM

In Jeremiah 36 the Lord told Jeremiah to write down all of his prophecies:

Jeremiah 36:1: “And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,
2 Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day.
3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.”

Jeremiah obeyed, and Baruch read the words of the scroll to the people of Judah. When the princes heard about this they asked Baruch for the scroll and promised to give it to the king. When the scroll was read to the king, though, the king did not repent. Instead he burned it and then tried to have Jeremiah arrested:

Jeremiah 36:21: “So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king.
22 Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him.
23 And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.
24 Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.
25 Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them.
26 But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the Lord hid them.”

God was not at all pleased with the way King Jehoiakim had utterly despised His Word. He therefore cursed the king:

Jeremiah 36:29: “And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast?
30 Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the

heat, and in the night to the frost.

31 And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.”

At first this seems like just another sad story of disobedience. God warned a king that judgment was coming, but instead of repenting the king burned the words of God and tried to have the prophet arrested. God therefore cursed the king and promised to send judgment. It's the same tragic story of rebellion that is repeated so many times in the Bible.

This time, however, there is something critically different. Verse 30 says that none of Jehoiakim's descendents would sit on the throne of David. That was bad news, because the Messiah was supposed to come from that line. If none of his descendents could rule then that meant the Messiah could not come. If the Messiah could not come then that meant all was lost; salvation could not come and mankind could not be saved. This is why some Jews teach that the Messiah can never come – they say that the curse of Jehoiakim prevents it.

There is an answer to this, and it is fascinating. It is true that Joseph, the husband of Mary, was indeed of the line of Jehoiakim. We find this in Matthew 1, which lists the genealogy of Joseph:

Matthew 1:6: “And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;
7 And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;
8 And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;
9 And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;
10 And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;
11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:”

“Jechonias” is just an alternate spelling of Jehoiakim. Joseph was the son of David, the son of Solomon, and the son of Jehoiakim. However, thanks to the curse of Jehoiakim, neither Joseph nor any of his children could sit on the throne of David.

But Jesus wasn't Joseph's natural son; He was his *adopted* son. In Luke 3 we find Mary's genealogy. It turns out that Mary is also of the line of David, through David's son Nathan:

Luke 3:31: “Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David,”

Nathan's line was never cursed. Jehoiakim's line was cursed – but Jesus was adopted into that line. Since Jesus wasn't Jehoiakim's natural son He did not inherit the curse, and therefore He had the right to rule. Thus was fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah had foretold:

Isaiah 9:6: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah said “unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given”. What Isaiah is telling us is that the Messiah will come by birth and by adoption. Jesus was born into the line of Nathan and adopted into

the line of Jehoiakim. He thus fulfilled both requirements and avoided the curse of Jehoiakim. He came the only way the Messiah could possibly come.

To this day some Jews struggle with the curse of Jehoiakim. They do not understand how the Messiah could come and avoid that curse. They believe that their salvation is blocked – but it is not. God worked out the details a long time ago. Jesus really is the Messiah.

MUSINGS ON THE ETERNAL STATE

Most of the essays that I've written discuss what the Bible has to say about different topics. In my previous essays I've spent a lot of time studying passages and then drawing conclusions. The process is pretty straightforward and the results have been encouraging.

This time, however, I'd like to do something a little different. I want to spend some time speculating about what life will be like in the Eternal State – the endless period that begins after the devil has been defeated once and for all and after the Great White Throne Judgment has put an end to all evil. (You can read about this period in Revelation 21 and 22.) In this astonishing era all sin, death, and pain have been done away with, and we will live with God in the New Heaven and Earth. It will a glorious time of joy and peace – an *endless* time, in fact.

Now, to be sure, other people have spent a lot of time discussing what the Bible has to say about this, but I want to go a bit further. I would like to explore the implications of living in the world that the Bible describes. What will it be like to live through the endless ages of eternity? Based on the information that we've been given, are there any conclusions that we can draw?

One might ask, why bother speculating? After all, the Eternal State doesn't begin until after the Millennium is over, so it's at least a thousand years away. Why not just wait until we get there and then see what happens? Does it really matter?

I think it does matter, and I think it's worth pondering. Look at it this way: when people have a vacation planned they tend to spend a lot of time thinking about it, even if it's still months (or even years) away. They think about it, long for it, hope for it, and dream of the day when it will finally begin. The Eternal State is much more than a mere vacation; it is our eternal destiny. As exciting as the Millennium will be, it only lasts 1000 years and it takes place in a world that still has pain, sin, and death. The Eternal State is much better and it lasts *forever*. Given the truly unimaginable amount of time that we will spend there, I think it's certainly worth pondering.

Science

Science is not an evil thing. There is no reason to believe that scientific advancement will be confined to this Age or that it will stop when Jesus returns and establishes His Millennial Kingdom. Likewise, there's no reason to believe that science will cease to progress when the Eternal State begins. Despite what some people think, we will *not* automatically know everything there is to know the moment we are resurrected; our knowledge will always be finite and we will always have questions. (Only an infinite being can have infinite knowledge, and we are not and will *never* be infinite beings. God is the only God; there will never be any others.) Since this is the case, it's quite likely that people in the Millennium and the Eternal State will ask questions about the universe and will design experiments to answer those questions.

That being said, I do *not* believe that scientific advancement can continue forever. The laws of the universe are finite, and that means that if scientific progress continues long enough people will eventually arrive at a perfect understanding of all physical laws. Of course, people will still have to learn the full implications of those laws (along with how the laws interact with each other), and that

will take some additional time. Knowing the laws of physics will certainly help people understand how the Earth works, but the Earth contains a lot of very complicated systems and the laws interact in very complicated ways.

However, we should *also* keep in mind that the rate at which scientific knowledge is accumulating is continuing to grow. In a perfect world with perfect immortals, it is not unreasonable to speculate that this trend will continue. If science is the study of a finite universe with finite laws, then an ever-accelerating learning process will eventually complete its study of that universe. In other words, scientific research cannot last forever; one day it will come to an end.

Here's another way to look at it: it is possible to express physical laws as mathematical formulas. The universe is essentially a giant math problem. It's a very complicated math problem, but it's not an infinite one, and eventually it will be solved. If people continue to care about science and continue to pursue it throughout eternity then that math problem *will* be solved. It is only a matter of time.

I believe there will come a time when scientific research will, for all practical purposes, be completed. All physical laws will be known and all of their implications will be understood. We will know what *can* be achieved and what *cannot* be achieved, and we will know the best way to achieve any physical goal that is actually possible. Now, it may take a long time to reach that point, but given that we have all of eternity to work with I think that it is inevitable. I also suspect that diminishing returns will play a factor. We may still be learning new scientific facts 10,000 years from now, but I suspect that if you compared our scientific knowledge in 1 million AD and 10 million AD the differences would be relatively small.

What I am suggesting is that scientific advancement and discovery is a characteristic of a young civilization. Mature civilizations will master science to the point where it is a known quantity. Any civilization (alien or human) that is capable of scientific advancement will eventually reach a point where science is “done”. Therefore, we will not spend all the ages of eternity pursuing science; I suspect that is something we will only do in our youth.

Now, there are some caveats to this. If God creates new life forms then those life forms will have to be studied, and that will provide something new to learn. However, since these life forms operate under known laws, the amount of time it will take to fully understand these new creatures will drop as we march through eternity. Likewise, if God creates an entirely new parallel universe that has entirely different laws, then that will present a new challenge. Neither of those situations alter the core premise, though: this universe has a finite set of unchanging laws, and it is likely that those laws will be known and mastered long before we get very far into eternity. Science has an end.

Economics

Will the Eternal State have an economic system? Before we can answer that we need to understand what economic systems are for and why they exist. Once we understand what economics actually is the answer will become clear.

The purpose of an economic system is to efficiently allocate scarce resources. Any time there is a system that has scarce (or limited) resources, the laws of economics will come into play. This brings up a question: will the Eternal State have resources that are not infinite and that have a cost?

Let us suppose that when science is mastered it will be possible to obtain a limitless supply of energy at a negligible cost. (If energy never becomes free then that means it has a cost, and that means

it is a scarce resource – but for the purpose of this argument let's assume a best-case scenario.) Let us also suppose that Star Trek-style replicators become common and anyone can create anything that they want at any time, at no cost. If you want something – be it a meal, or a car, or a house, or a book to read – you can press a button and materialize it at no charge to you.

Even if that level of technology is reached, I believe there are still some resources that will always be scarce. For example, time is a scarce resource. Even though we will live forever we will always live one moment at a time, and in each moment we must make a choice about what to do. We may spend a given hour writing a book, or eating a meal, or talking to a friend, or walking on the beach – but we must make a choice. Barring some limited multi-tasking, if we are doing one thing then we are not doing something else.

This means that our potential creative output is limited by time. Take Bach as an example. Bach is a composer of music. If he is building a bookshelf then he is not composing music. New music from Bach is a unique thing; it is a scarce resource that no one else can provide. If civilization wants more music from Bach then it will need to find some way to persuade Bach to spend his time writing music instead of walking in the park. Bach's time is a scarce resource.

Since there are scarce resources, and since there are competing uses of those resources, and since civilization will desire some things more than others, that leads to the conclusion that there will be some sort of economic system in the Eternal State. Now, it's unlikely that the medium of exchange will be currency or precious metals; after all, if you can materialize anything you want then precious metals will cease to be valuable. The medium of exchange must be something that is also scarce; otherwise it cannot be traded for a scarce resource. I do not know what that resource might be, but it seems highly likely that it will exist.

This brings up another point. Since different people have different talents, and since some talents are more in demand than others, that means that some people's time will be more in demand than other people's – which means that their time will cost more. Also, since some people will benefit civilization more than others, that implies that some people will become wealthier than others. How that will work out and what that wealth will look like is unknown, but it seems a likely outcome.

Now, I am not saying that the Eternal State will have people who are poor or destitute. The Eternal State is a world without pain, suffering, death, or disease; no one will go hungry and no one will suffer. Poverty is a relative term here. If one person has \$10 million and someone else has \$10 billion then the millionaire will seem poor by comparison – but he's certainly not poor in an absolute sense. What I *am* saying is that since people are different, some people will be wealthier than others. In Christ's parable of the talents, some servants ended up with more and some ended up with less. There are economic reasons for this and I do not think that will ever change.

At the same time, I would like to point out that everyone is going to have an infinite amount of time to enrich themselves. Right now, in this world, people have limited lives and limited opportunities. In eternity, however, people will have endless ages in which they can pursue opportunities. I am not sure what kind of goods people will be accumulating or how wealth will be measured, but in an infinite amount of time people can accumulate an infinite amount of things. (It's really staggering if you stop and think about it.)

Population

One of the known characteristics of God's kingdom is that it will continue to increase and grow

forever, throughout all of the ages to come. This implies that there will be some type of growth in the Eternal State. Since Jesus said there is no marriage in Heaven and since Revelation states that we will reign throughout the Eternal State, that implies that God will create new creatures throughout the ages of Eternity. It is possible that He will create new beings or races that we will reign over – and that those creatures may reproduce in large numbers.

One thing we do know is that the universe contains a lot of unused space. Scientists estimate that there are roughly 350 billion large galaxies and 7 trillion dwarf galaxies – for a total of *30 billion trillion stars*. That is a great deal of space and could accommodate a staggering amount of growth! I admit that a lot of that space is uninhabitable by Earth standards, but I'm not sure that matters. God is certainly capable of creating life forms that don't need Earth-type conditions to survive.

The size of the universe does present a challenge, however. Even if you discount the dwarf galaxies and just focus on the 350 billion large galaxies, we still have something of a problem. To see why, imagine that when the Eternal State begins there are 100 billion Christians. (I admit that number seems extremely high, but for the purpose of this example let's assume a best-case scenario.) Once the Universe is fully populated, that would mean that 100 billion Christians would be ruling over 350 billion galaxies. This means that each person would be responsible for 3.5 galaxies, each of which contains billions upon billions upon billions of stars. Governing that much real estate would be a truly staggering task! On top of that, the growth will continue for all of eternity, so at some point the Universe will be full and additional universes will be needed. The amount that each person will need to govern will seemingly grow to staggering proportions.

This brings up a question: will people be asked to govern an ever-growing portion of the universe, or at some point will God change the rules so that mankind can have children again? I admit this is highly unlikely, but it should be noted that God has changed the rules in the past when one dispensation ended and another began. For example, before the Flood no one was allowed to eat meat, but after the Flood it was permitted. Before the Flood people were allowed to marry their siblings, but after the time of Moses that was no longer permitted. Some things have changed throughout time. At this point in history the people in Heaven (and in the Resurrection) do not marry. It may be that it will stay that way forever, but it's also possible that it will not. It's at least a possibility to consider.

God

One of the complaints I've heard about living forever is that eventually you would run out of things to do and life would become incredibly boring. Sure, there's a lot to do out there, but after a million years or so everything would be old and life would become a terrible pain. People don't want to die, but at the same time they think that eternity basically means you get to eat the same thing for breakfast for billions and billions of years, until you are sick of life and wish you had never been born.

Interestingly, God does not have this problem. God is eternal; He has always existed and will always exist. God is also complete: He never changes. God is not growing because God is perfect, and He is not learning because He knows everything (past, present, and future). Yet God is not bored. He is not craving something new and He is not bemoaning the fact that He will live forever. In fact, Jesus often advertised eternal life as a *good* thing, not a bad thing. He seemed to think that it was an incredible prize that was worth giving up everything for.

I believe that *God* will make eternal life worth living. You see, God is infinite; there is no end to Him. We are in a relationship with God; in fact, Jesus called His Church “the Bride”. We can spend a

billion years growing in our relationship with God and still have an infinite amount of things left that we do not know – and an infinite amount of time in which to learn them. We will never exhaust God and we will never learn everything there is to know about Him. There will never come a day when we will possess all of His wisdom and knowledge. It is staggering to think that no matter how much time we spend learning about God, there will always be more things about God that we do *not* know than we *do* know. There will always be more.

God is the real prize in Eternity. He is the source of all wisdom, the creator of all beauty, and the One who is infinitely good and infinitely holy. Nothing else that we ever encounter will even come close to comparing with Him. He is the Source that we will never tire of exploring and that we will never exhaust. God has told us that He intends to spend the endless ages to come showing us the exceeding riches of His grace, and that is a stirring thought.

The Westminster Catechism says that the chief end (or purpose) of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. It's a good thing that we have all of eternity to fulfill that goal, because we're going to need it! That is one task that will never end – and one that we will never get tired of pursuing.

SLAVERY

First of all, under ideal circumstances the system of slavery described in the Mosaic Law would not have been needed. God was clear that if the Israelites obeyed Him there would be no poor in the land:

Deuteronomy 15:4: “Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the Lord shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it:

5 Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day.”

However, since the Israelites did *not* obey the Lord there were poor people among them. Since God knew this was going to happen He established a number of provisions in the Mosaic Law that were intended to take care of the poor. For example, every seventh year the Israelites were supposed to leave their fields alone so that the poor could eat whatever grew in their vineyards and olive trees:

Exodus 23:10: “And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof:

11 But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard.”

Likewise, whenever they harvested their field in the other six years they were to leave the corners alone and not go back a second time to reap again. What was left behind was for the poor:

Leviticus 19:9: “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.

10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.”

Moreover, the poor were not to be charged interest:

Leviticus 25:35: “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee.

36 Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee.”

On top of that, every three years the levitical tithe was to be shared with the poor:

Deuteronomy 14:28: “At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates:

29 And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.”

Finally, and most amazingly, every seven years all debts were canceled:

Deuteronomy 15:1: “At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release.

2 And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the Lord's release.”

As you can see, the Mosaic Law had a number of provisions in it that were designed to take care of the poor. Every seven years all debts were canceled and all food that was grown was given to the poor. The poor could not be charged interest. Every three years the poor shared in the tithes that were given to the Levites, and every year they were given the food that was in the corners of the fields and the food that grew after the first harvest. This is how the poor were cared for under the Mosaic Law.

However, there were cases where these provisions were not enough. In that case the poor person could choose to sell himself into slavery:

Leviticus 25:39: “And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant:

40 But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile.

41 And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return.”

It is important to note that the poor in Israel sold *themselves* into slavery; they were *not* kidnapped and sold into slavery by others. When they sold themselves into slavery they took the money that they received for doing so and used it to pay their debts. Their purchase price went to *them*, not to someone else. They were to be treated as servants, not slaves. Slavery also did not last a lifetime: they were to be set free after a certain period of time.

The system of slavery that is described in the Mosaic Law is *completely different* from the system of slavery that was practiced in the United States. First of all, you could not kidnap someone and sell them as a slave, or force someone into slavery. That was punishable by death:

Deuteronomy 24:7: “If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you.”

Slavery was entered into voluntarily. You could not be stolen and sold. People who did such things were hunted down and executed.

Next, slaves were to be treated as hired servants, not as slaves. Mistreatment was forbidden:

Leviticus 25:53: “And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight.”

Masters were not allowed to kill their slaves – and if they did they were held accountable for it:

Exodus 21:20: “And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.”

If the master caused the servant any type of permanent physical damage he was required to immediately set him free:

Exodus 21:26: “And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.

27 And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.”

As you can see, mistreatment was strictly forbidden – but the law went even further than that. All slaves were required to take the Sabbath day off:

Deuteronomy 5:13: “Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work:

14 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.”

Moreover, when masters went up to Jerusalem to make sacrifices, partake in celebrations, or celebrate the various festivals, their slaves were to accompany them and partake in the celebration:

Deuteronomy 12:17: “Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand:

18 But thou must eat them before the Lord thy God in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.”

Finally, all slaves were to be set free on the seventh year, and when they were set free they were to be let go *with payment of money*:

Deuteronomy 15:12: “And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.

13 And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty:

14 Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.”

Not only was the person given money when he sold himself into slavery, but when he was set free in the seventh year he was to be given *additional* payment for his years of service.

It should also be noted that the slave could purchase his freedom at any time, regardless of whether the master wanted to set him free or not. Relatives of the slave could also purchase his freedom:

Leviticus 25:48: “After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him:

49 Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself.

50 And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him.

51 If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for.

52 And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption.

53 And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight.”

There is more. Slaves were to be treated as members of the household: they were to be given the same type of food that their masters ate, live in the same type of house, and sleep in the same type of bed. They were also allowed to own property. As Leviticus says, slaves were to be treated as hired servants.

I hope this makes it clear that the system of slavery described in the Mosaic Law is completely different from the system of slavery that was once practiced in this country. The two systems are completely different and should not be confused. When reading the Bible it is important to keep in mind that this was the system that was in place in the Old Testament. Context is crucial; if we don't keep the proper context in mind then we will jump to all sorts of erroneous conclusions.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit gets mentioned quite a lot these days, but despite this I believe that the Holy Spirit is not very well understood. People have a lot of misconceptions about the Spirit and a tremendous lack of appreciation for the marvelous gift that has been given to the Church. What I'd like to do is spend some time talking about the Spirit and going over what the Bible has to say about Him.

The first thing we need to understand is that the relationship we have with the Spirit in the Church Age is quite different from the way things were in the Old Testament. It's easy to forget the fact that the Spirit was a gift given to the Church by Jesus, and the reason He gave it was because He was leaving to go back to Heaven:

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.”

What Jesus is saying is that when He left He was going to give His followers something entirely new – *something they did not have before*. (After all, if they already had it then there would be no need to send it again!) He was going to send them the Holy Spirit.

That is exactly what Jesus did. The Spirit was given to the Church on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:1: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Here we see that “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost”, and that has continued to be the case throughout the Church Age. Whenever a person is saved they are immediately filled with the Spirit. We can see this in the case of the centurion Cornelius, who was saved and filled with the Spirit while Peter was still preaching to him:

Acts 10:42: “And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.”

The book of Ephesians tells us that we are not only given the Spirit, but we are sealed with it:

Ephesians 1:13: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

What Paul is saying here is that we have been promised an inheritance – one that we have not yet received. The Holy Spirit is “the earnest” of that inheritance. In other words, He is like earnest money. Whenever someone makes an offer on a house they are required to put up “earnest money”. This tells the seller that their offer is serious. The Holy Spirit is essentially “earnest money” from God, telling us that He is serious about the inheritance He has promised us.

Another key point in this passage is that it says “ye were sealed” with the Spirit. This means that the Spirit is sealed within us: we cannot lose it and it cannot be taken from us. We have it *forever*. In fact, this is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a Christian. Anyone who has the Spirit is saved, and anyone who does *not* have the Spirit is *not* saved:

Romans 8:9: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

If we have the Spirit we are saved and will be resurrected. If we don't have the Spirit then we are not saved and we will not be resurrected when the Lord returns. It is that crucial. That is the great gift that Jesus gave to His Bride, the Church.

However, I want to point out that this gift was given *only to the Church*. The Old Testament saints were not given this gift. They lived in a different dispensation – a different Age. Christ was very clear that the gift of the Holy Spirit was a new thing and that it was given *because Jesus was leaving*. This is not to say that people in the Old Testament did not have the Spirit, because some of them definitely did. What it does mean is that the Spirit was given differently and operated differently.

The first person the Bible describes as being filled with the Spirit was actually not a priest or a prophet but a workman named Bezaleel. We find this in the book of Exodus:

Exodus 31:1: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

2 See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah:

3 And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,

4 To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,

5 And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.”

God had just given Moses the plans for the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant – two very holy things that were going to be used to worship God. However, the Lord did not stop at just giving

Moses the plans; God also picked out the people He wanted to perform the construction work. In this case God picked Bezaleel and filled him with His Spirit so that he could build the Tabernacle and the Ark.

In other words, God wanted Bezaleel to perform a very special and holy task, so God gave him His Spirit so he could accomplish the job. We see this all throughout the Old Testament. God would assign tasks to certain people and then give them His Spirit so they could carry them out. Very few people were given the Spirit. It was a rare gift – which is something that Moses lamented:

Numbers 11:27: “And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!”

Moses longed for a day when all of God's people would be given the Spirit. That's exactly how things are today, but that was not the case in the Old Testament. In fact, the situation was even worse than that! Not only was the gift of the Spirit a rare thing, but those who had the Spirit had to act with great care because *it could be lost*. If a person sinned against God, the Lord might withdraw His Spirit. It was not sealed inside people the way it is today.

A good example of this is the case of Samson. Samson was born to begin delivering the Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines:

Judges 13:5: “For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”

Notice that the passage does not say that Samson would *deliver* the Israelites. All it says is that he would *begin* to deliver them. The Lord had a job for Samson, so He gave Samson His Spirit:

Judges 13:24: “And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson: and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him.

25 And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.”

We all know the life story of Samson and the mighty acts that he accomplished through the power of the Spirit. However, we also know how the story ends. Samson told Delilah the source of his power and she had one of her servants cut off his hair. The Lord was displeased and withdrew His Spirit, which caused Samson to lose his strength and be captured by the Philistines:

Judges 16:20: “And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.

21 But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house.”

In the Church Age we are sealed with the Spirit. The Lord will never take Him from us. But losing the Spirit was a genuine concern in the Old Testament. When Samson disobeyed God, the Lord departed from him. God withdrew His Spirit and Samson lost his strength. Even King David was troubled by this very same problem. After he sinned with Bathsheba he begged God to not withdraw His Spirit:

Psalm 51:11: “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.”

The Spirit cannot and will not be taken from us; in the Church Age that is not possible. But before this Age it was a very real concern and it did happen. We have been given an astounding gift and we don't even realize it. This gift has *only been given to the Church*. Once the Church is gone things will revert to the way they used to be – but I am getting ahead of myself.

So what does the Holy Spirit do? Well, quite a lot, actually. One of the big things that the Holy Spirit does is convict people of their sins and draw them to Jesus so that they can be saved. You see, no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws Him:

John 6:44: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Everyone who has ever come to Jesus has done so because the Father has drawn him. This is done through convicting people of their sin and their need for a Savior. God will not save anyone who has not repented, and before people can repent they must understand that they have sinned and are guilty before God. Only then can they cry out for forgiveness and mercy. In order to be saved the Father must draw you to the Son, and the Father uses the Holy Spirit to do that.

Salvation depends upon conviction. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of its sin:

John 16:8: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:”

The word translated “reprove” is the Greek word *elegcho*, which means to convict, convince, or admonish.

The Holy Spirit also 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.”

This is why we can understand the Bible, and why lost people find the Bible so impossible to understand. The Bible tells us that its truths are spiritually discerned; in order to understand them we need the Spirit. Since we have the Spirit we can understand what the Bible is saying. The Spirit teaches us all things, and in key moments of our lives the Spirit brings things to mind.

Did you ever wonder why the disciples found it so impossible to understand what Jesus was saying? Well, consider this: they did not receive the Spirit until *after* Jesus ascended into Heaven! That means that during the life of Jesus on Earth they were trying to understand Him *without* the indwelling

of the Spirit. We have a big advantage over them: we have the Holy Spirit teaching us all things. The disciples didn't have that until the day of Pentecost.

Another way to look at this is that God has given us a built-in companion. When you are sitting all by yourself reading your Bible, you are not really alone because the Holy Spirit is there within you. As you read the Word He will teach you things and guide you into the truth.

The Holy Spirit is your tutor. He is the one who reveals truths 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.”

I am not saying that it is impossible to learn anything from human teachers. In fact, God has actually blessed some people within the Church with the gift of teaching for that very reason. God *wants* you to learn from other people; if He didn't then there would be no teachers. But the point is that you can understand the Bible *yourself*. You don't have to depend on other people to tell you what it says.

This is a very important point. The Catholic Church teaches that only priests have the power to interpret the Bible. They say that lay people should avoid reading the Bible and should just believe whatever their priest tells them. However, the Catholic Church is wrong. *Everyone* should read the Bible. God commands everyone to study it, believe it, and obey it. You don't need a priest to interpret it for you – you have the Spirit! He will teach you all things, provided you actually sit down and study the Word. In fact, it is *your job* to critically examine the things that your teachers are telling you. Instead of just blindly accepting everything that they say you should read the Word and check the truth of their statements.

The Holy Spirit also 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.”

This part of the Spirit's ministry is not visible to us, but it is still a very important ministry. You see, Satan is more than just our adversary; he is our accuser. The Bible tells us that he is constantly attacking the saints and accusing them before God *day and night*. Job was not the only person that Satan has brought accusations against; he still does that today. (Satan will continue to do this until midway through the Tribulation, at which point his access to God will be revoked. You can read about this in Revelation 12:7-12.) The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit is interceding on our behalf. If Satan is the prosecuting attorney then the Holy Spirit is our defense.

Another thing the Spirit does is lead us:

Romans 8:14: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

This is something we see quite a bit in the New Testament. One manifestation of this is the way the Spirit sometimes gives specific counsel and guidance. For example, in the case of Philip and the

Ethiopian eunuch, the Spirit came to Philip and gave him a command:

Acts 8:29: “Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.”

Philip obeyed and went up to the chariot, and there he met an Ethiopian who was confused about an Old Testament prophecy. When Philip explained it to him, the Ethiopian was saved and went away rejoicing.

The Holy Spirit also sanctifies us:

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;”

Sanctification is a fancy name for “becoming more like Christ”. When Christ saves us He makes us a promise to perfect us, but that perfection doesn't take place at the moment of salvation. Even though our sins have been forgiven and we have been made right with God, we have *not* been put beyond the reach of temptation. We still struggle with sin. We have a new, holy nature, but there is still a sinful nature within us that puts up a fight and makes our lives difficult.

One day that will change. When the Lord comes for us and brings us home (whether that happens at our death or at the Rapture) we will be changed. Our days of struggling with sin will be over once and for all and we will finally be like Christ. That day will come, but until it comes – until we are with the Lord – we struggle with sin. The process of defeating that sin and choosing holiness over depravity is called sanctification.

We often think that sanctification is something that *we* have to make happen. We believe that it's up to us to learn how to do better, and that it's just a matter of trying harder. But that is not the case. We don't sanctify ourselves; that is something the Spirit does. He is the one who regenerates and renews us. When we conquer sin and achieve victory, that victory was achieved by the Spirit, not by us. He is the one driving our sanctification. When we face sin our response should not be “I'll just try harder next time”. Instead we should cry out that the Spirit would wash and regenerate us, that God would change us, and that Jesus would live His life through us. We cannot sanctify ourselves; only the Spirit can do that. Victory over sin is something that only God can provide. Our own efforts will always fail.

The Holy Spirit also rebukes the world, which is something that was touched on earlier:

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:

9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;

10 Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”

There are also the gifts of the Spirit, which is a subject that is far too large to discuss here. All I will say is that the Spirit has given different gifts to people within the Body of Christ so that they might minister to one another:

I Corinthians 12:8: “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;
9 To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;
10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues;
11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.
12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.”

There is a great deal that can be said about the gifts of miracles, tongues, and so forth. Some people believe that these gifts have ceased while others believe that they still exist. I don't want to get into that debate right now because it is a complicated discussion that is outside the scope of this paper. The point I want to make is that the Spirit has given different gifts to different people, and He intends those gifts to be used for the good of the Body. God gave each of us different abilities so that we can minister to one another's needs. We are not an army of clones where each person is exactly like everyone else. We are a Body, and a body has different parts that perform different functions.

There is also something called the fruit of the Spirit, which is mentioned in Galatians:

Galatians 5:22: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

Usually we see this as a to-do list. We read it and think “Ah, here is a list of character qualities that I need to develop. I'd better get started right away!” But that's not how it works. These are *fruits* of the Spirit. In other words, these are things that happen in your life *as a result of having the Spirit dwelling in you*. The Holy Spirit is the one who will accomplish these things in your life! As you follow Christ you will begin to see these things manifested. When you do you will know that they weren't accomplished by your efforts; they were the work of the Spirit.

A lot of people want to think that *they* are responsible for their holiness and that they have made themselves who they are. “Just look at me! Look at all of my great character qualities. Aren't I a wonderful person? I made myself this way through my own hard work and willpower. I'm holier than you because I'm *better* than you.” We might never say these things out loud, but it's easy to fall into the trap of believing these things. We want to think that we are responsible for our spiritual growth, but that's not the case. The Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies us, draws us closer to God, reveals the truth of the Word to us, and who works in our lives. We are the recipients of God's grace, *not* the ones who made it happen. Christianity is not a do-it-yourself religion. It is not the story of the great things we have done; instead it is the story of the great things that God has done for us.

As we've seen, the Holy Spirit does quite a lot: it teaches us the truth, reveals the deep things of

God, intercedes for us, guides our lives, sanctifies us, and gives us gifts so that we might minister to one another. That is quite a list. Notice, however, what is absent: there is no mention that the Holy Spirit restrains evil. Nowhere in the Bible do we find the Spirit tasked with that particular role.

The reason I bring this up is because a lot of people believe that the Holy Spirit is keeping the Antichrist from appearing. This idea is based on this verse from 2 Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 2:7: “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

In the King James Version of the Bible that verse is difficult to understand. What on Earth does “he who now letteth will let” even mean? Well, 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 verse is saying is that there is someone who is acting as a restrainer and keeping the antichrist from appearing. The antichrist will not appear until the restrainer is taken out of the way. People commonly assume that this restrainer is the Holy Spirit, but the problem with this view is that *nowhere* in the Bible does one ever see the Holy Spirit restraining demonic activity. This passage says that there is a restrainer, but it does *not* say who that restrainer is.

However, there is a class of beings who spends a great deal of time restraining demonic activity. Those beings are *the angels*. The book of Daniel gives us a glimpse into the warfare between the angels of light and the demonic angels. For example:

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.”

As you can see, the demons were successful in keeping the angel at bay, but when Michael came they were forced to yield. The Bible describes Michael as a tremendously powerful being who is highly effective at 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 tells us that during the Tribulation Michael will lead an army of angels and will 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, it seems quite clear that the *angels* are actually the ones who are charged with restraining evil in this world. The angel who seems to have the most power is Michael, who 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. The Bible contains numerous accounts of Michael restraining evil (and even resisting the devil himself), whereas there don't seem to be *any* accounts of the Holy Spirit doing that. 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. But that is a subject for another time.

Regardless of who the Restrainer is, the day is coming when the Holy Spirit will no longer be given out as it is today. That gift was given only to the Church. Once the Church is complete and the Lord returns and brings it home (an event known as the Rapture), the gift of the Spirit will cease as well and things will go back to the way they used to be. People will still have the Spirit and the Spirit will still draw people to Christ to be saved, but they will no longer be sealed by the Spirit. If they sin they will lose the Spirit and face terrible consequences.

We find this teaching in one of the parables of Christ – the parable of the ten virgins:

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.

13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

There is a tremendous amount of misunderstanding regarding this passage. People often apply it to the Church despite the fact that it has nothing to do with us – it is addressed to the Tribulation saints.

First of all, Christ is referring to His coming *at the end of the Tribulation*. At that point in history the Church will be with Christ in Heaven. This means that the Church won't be watching for the Lord's return; instead we will actually *be returning with Christ!* The only people who will be caught off-guard will be those who are still on Earth – in other words, the Tribulation saints. So this parable is aimed at them, not at us.

Second, it should be noted that the Bible is consistent in its use of symbols. The Church is always referred to as the Bride, not as ten bridesmaids. The bride does *not* have to worry about missing her own wedding, and the bridegroom is not going to forget his own bride and claim to not know her! That is simply impossible.

Who are the bridesmaids, then? They are the Tribulation saints. The Church – and *only* the Church – is the Bride. Before the Church came into being there were many Old Testament saints who were saved, but they were not a part of the Church and are not a part of the Bride. After the Rapture there will be many people who will be saved, but they won't be a part of the Church and they won't be a part of a Bride. They will still have a relationship with Christ but their relationship will be different from ours. We have a special position – one that is not shared by members of any other dispensation.

The other key to remember is that oil is always symbolic of the Holy Spirit. What we have here are ten Tribulation saints, five of whom were wise and had the Spirit and five of whom were foolish and lacked it. When Christ returned, half of these people were caught without the Spirit, and when they tried to enter they were turned away. The reason Christ told them to watch is because if He returns and catches people without the Spirit, He will not accept them. They will be turned away.

This is a situation that the Church does *not* have to worry about. When we were saved we were given the Spirit and it was sealed within us. We can't lose the Spirit and we can't lose our salvation. However, that is *not* the case for the Tribulation saints. They will not be sealed with the Spirit. They have to watch and be careful, lest Christ return and they are caught without it and damned forever. They have to exercise great care, lest they be rejected as Samson was.

This does not mean they are saved by works; far from it. They are still saved by grace. But the gift of the Spirit was given to the Church and not to anyone else. People in the Old Testament were also saved by grace and not works, but there were still times when God withdrew His Spirit from people. Here Christ is making it clear that if He returns and finds the Tribulation saints without the Spirit, He will not accept them. That is Christ's point and that is why it is so important that they watch for His return. Their eternal salvation depends upon their being ready when He arrives.

In the Church Age we have been given an astounding gift – the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit intercedes for us, sanctifies us, guides us into the truth, draws us to Christ, and is forever sealed within us. This very special gift has only given to the Church; it was not shared by the Old Testament saints and will not be shared by the Tribulation Saints. Moses longed for the day when all of God's people would be filled with His Spirit, and we now live in that day. We should be thankful and praise God for His indescribable gift.

THE LOST LETTER TO LAODICEA

At the end of Paul's letter to the Colossian church the apostle tells them that when they've finished reading his letter they should forward it to the church at Laodicea. They should then read the epistle from the Laodicean church:

Colossians 4:16: "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that **ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.**"

That in itself makes sense. Paul was not writing his letters solely for the benefit of the individual churches; he intended for his letters to be passed around (which is exactly what we do with them today). He wanted the Laodiceans to read the letter the Colossians had, and he wanted the Colossians to read the letter the Laodiceans had.

The problem is that as far as we know *Paul never wrote a letter to the Laodiceans*. The only letter to the Laodicean church is found in the book of Revelation, and it was written long after Paul was martyred. So what on earth was Paul talking about?

There are a couple different possibilities. First of all, it's entirely possible that the letter the Laodiceans had in their possession was not actually written to them. They might have had a copy of the book of Ephesians, and it may be that's what Paul wanted the Colossians to read. If Paul's letters really were being passed around then it wouldn't be surprising to find that they had a copy of someone else's letter.

Another possibility is that Paul really did write the Laodiceans a letter but it was just not included in the canon of the Bible. This may seem disturbing, but it wouldn't be the first time that the Bible referred to a book that was not included in its text. The Old Testament refers to a number of books that have been lost. 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.**”

There is also evidence that Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthian church that are not included in the Bible. As you can see, it's not unreasonable to think that Paul may have written a letter to the Laodiceans that was not preserved. It would not be the first time.

Keep in mind that just because a letter was inspired does *not* mean that it could not have been lost. Everything that Jesus Christ has ever said was inspired, but I'm positive that He said many things that are not included in the gospels. The Bible is *not* a complete collection of everything that has ever been inspired; instead it is a collection of inspired writings that God has decided to give to us and preserve through time.

If there really was a letter to Laodicea then we obviously didn't need it because *if we had needed it then God would have made sure that it did not get lost*. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that the Scriptures that we have been given are enough to equip us to do *all* good works. God did not leave out anything that we needed; He gave us a complete set of instructions.

This is one of those mysteries that we will never be able to clear up. Since this letter is only mentioned one time, there is no way to know what Paul was talking about. But we can know this: the Bible really does contain everything that we need. There is absolutely no need to go on a search for the “missing” books of the Bible.

THE MEEK

In today's culture the personality type that commands the most respect is the Alpha. An Alpha is someone who dominates his peers – by sheer force of personality, or by intimidation, or both. He is the center of attention and is able to bend others to his will to get whatever he wants, when he wants it. Alphas are concerned about their own desires and feel little empathy for others; they are experts at taking advantage of people. Thanks to their personality and their high intimidation factor, they can do terrible things and get away with it. Alphas are aggressive, self-centered, and inspire fear in others. They know how to game the system to make sure that they come out on top, and they don't really care about who they have to crush to get there. Alphas know how to aggressively use strength to get what they want.

These traits are highly prized by the world. People love selfishness and will gladly oppress others in order to enrich themselves. There are a great many people who wish they knew how to push people around and escape the consequences of their behavior. Since Alphas have seemingly mastered both of those abilities they are seen as some sort of hero.

God, however, has a very different opinion. The personality type that He desires is **meekness**. God has promised to guide and teach the meek:

Psalm 25:9: "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way."

He has promised to take care of the meek:

Psalm 22:26: "The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever."

He has promised to protect the meek:

Psalm 147:6: "The Lord lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground."

He has promised to give the Earth itself to the meek:

Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

Last but not least, *God has commanded us to be meek:*

Zephaniah 2:3: "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger."

Meekness is even one of the fruits of the Spirit:

Galatians 5:22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

Just look at the qualities listed in those two verses! They're quite remarkable. The Spirit does *not* produce people who are bullies, but people who are loving. It does not produce people who love confrontations and arguments, but people who seek peace.

The next item on the list is a big one. Today's culture loves people who are harsh and abrasive and who mock others in front of an audience of millions. Cruelty and derision are celebrated – but notice that the Spirit produces people who are longsuffering and gentle. TV shows that abuse their contestants and heap ridicule upon them are rewarded with big ratings because people *love* to see other people be humiliated. God, however, wants people to be longsuffering and gentle. He is seeking an entirely different kind of person! Our culture loves depravity, but God desires people who delight in goodness and righteousness. God wants people who believe in His word, not people who publicly mock it.

Finally, God desires meekness and temperance. Our culture celebrates people who have zero self-control and who go off on shocking rampages, but God hates that. He seeks temperance – the ability for a person to control himself and do what is right. The culture may see out-of-control behavior as a sign of power and bravado, but God sees it as sin.

The contrast is quite stark! On the one hand you have the bully – the one who stirs up trouble, who delights in putting down others, who is cruel and heartless, who oppresses the weak, who enjoys depravity, who has no ability to restrain his actions, and who lives for himself. While the world may celebrate this behavior, God condemns it and is using His Spirit to create a different type of people. God wants His people to be characterized by *love*, to seek peace, to be willing to suffer, to be gentle and kind, to seek goodness, to control themselves, and to be meek. The world loves those who are proud and arrogant, but God values the humble and the lowly:

Ephesians 4:1: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

The world *hates* lowliness. Our streets are full of people who say "Look at me! Look at how great I am! Be amazed at my greatness!" There are even Christian leaders who love to trumpet their "brand", as they call it; they make much of themselves and want everyone to know how great they are and what great things they have done. No one wants to be lowly or unknown or humble. We want to be Big and Important and Known and Respected.

But God seeks men who are lowly and meek. He hates pride and commands all men to be humble. He wants people to think little of themselves but think much of others:

Philippians 2:3: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

God desires people who seek the welfare of *others*, not the welfare of themselves:

I Corinthians 13:4: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

God wants people to be kind and not behave in "unseemly" ways. He has no respect for people who trash hotel rooms and destroy people's lives just to show how "Alpha" they are. God does not want His children to be self-centered jerks; instead He commands us to *not seek our own welfare* but instead seek the welfare of others. God takes no joy in those who are easily offended, but instead commands us to not be easily provoked. In today's world there are many people who enjoy depravity and hate the truth, but God seeks people who hate evil and love the truth.

Being meek does not mean that you are spiritless and tame, nor does it mean that you are weak. What it does mean is that you are *humble*. You think much of God and little of yourself. You have fully submitted yourself to God and you seek His will, not your own. It means that you love your neighbor and you seek his welfare – even if it costs you something.

The world will interpret your Christlike behavior as weakness and will despise it; they will see you as an easy target and will take advantage of you. History is full of meek men who were despised and abused by the world. The Bible tells us that Moses was meek:

Numbers 12:3: "(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)"

This particular passage records a time when Moses was unfairly criticized by Aaron and Miriam. When this happened Moses did not rail against them or try to avenge himself. An Alpha would have found a clever way to put Aaron and Miriam back in their place and make sure that they never caused trouble again. God, however, said that vengeance belongs to Him and taught that it is not our place to avenge ourselves. Since Moses did nothing, God Himself acted:

Numbers 12:4: "And the Lord spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.

5 And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.

8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and he departed.

10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became

leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous."

God saw the unjust criticism that had been leveled against Moses and He acted. The world may believe that refusing to avenge ourselves makes us weak, but they are mistaken. Vengeance belongs to God alone, and there is nothing weak about Him. Any revenge that man could conceive of pales in comparison to what God will do on Judgment Day. God is far more dangerous than any man.

Remember, Jesus described Himself as being meek:

Matthew 11:29: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Was Jesus weak? Was He spineless? Absolutely not! Jesus, after all, threw the moneychangers out of the temple:

Matthew 21:12: "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,
13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

He also condemned the Pharisees using rather shocking language:

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?"

How could Jesus be meek and still do these things? The answer is simple: meekness is *not* a synonym of weakness. God wants us to be meek *and* to boldly proclaim the truth. The apostles themselves prayed for a spirit of boldness:

Acts 4:29: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,"

Meekness does not mean that we must sit in a corner and do nothing. Numbers 12:3 says that Moses was the most meek man on the face of the Earth, and yet he defied Pharaoh and led the Israelites out of Egypt. The meekness of Moses did not stop him from leading Israel into battle. Likewise, Jesus was meek but He did not hesitate to proclaim truths that people found greatly offensive.

Nor does meekness equate to powerlessness. Jesus is meek, and yet all power in Heaven and Earth has been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). Our Lord is not powerless, but He is meek. The key is that Jesus uses His power to glorify His Father. He does not seek His own will, but the will of His Father (John 5:30). Jesus is kind and gentle. He is merciful to the weak and to the poor and He lifts up the fallen. He is longsuffering and slow to anger. He sought our welfare and came to die in our place so

that we might be forgiven.

What kind of person does God want us to be? The answer is simple:

Titus 3:2: "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men."

1 Peter 3:4: "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

Having a meek and quiet spirit may not win you many friends and it may not win you the acclaim of the world, but it is highly valued in the sight of God. The Lord wants His children to be quiet and humble, to serve others and to consider others to be better than themselves. He doesn't want us to dominate other people and force them to do our will; instead He wants us to love and serve one another:

Luke 22:24: "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."

God does not want us to be like the world. He doesn't want us to oppress others or find clever ways to take advantage of other people. Instead He wants us to serve others with love and gentleness. He wants us to pursue meekness and gentleness.

All of this goes against the grain of our culture, and it is a difficult thing to accept – but it is vital. I suspect that there are quite a few Christians who would find Heaven to be a very uncomfortable place. You see, there are many people who call themselves Christians but who spend their entire lives making much of themselves and making very little of God. Heaven, however, isn't like that. Heaven is not filled with billions of people who are all shouting "Look at me! Look at how great I am!" Instead it is filled with countless people who are spending all of their time talking about how great *God* is:

Revelation 4:8: "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Heaven is a place where *God* is glorified and where people will spend all of eternity honoring and praising *Him*. It is not filled with self-centered narcissists who spend their time talking about their

own greatness, or who spend their lives trying to win the praise of others.

I think it is time we stopped thinking like the world and started seeking to be the kind of person that God commands. The world may prize selfishness, but what the world prizes the Lord holds in very low esteem:

Luke 16:15: "And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

THE MOST DIFFICULT BOOK IN THE BIBLE

If you ask people what they think is the most difficult book in the Bible, many will say Revelation. That book is filled with symbolism and requires a great deal of effort to understand. There are also many different interpretations, and that has led to so much confusion that some people avoid the book altogether.

But if you ask me, I think there is a book that is even harder to understand than Revelation. As confusing as Revelation may be, it's possible to learn a lot from it even if you don't fully understand everything it is saying. Moreover, everyone agrees that the book *does* have a meaning; it's just a matter of figuring it out. I have never come across anyone who has said "Revelation is utter nonsense and has no meaning. The best thing to do is to skip the book entirely and move on. Just act like it isn't even there."

I say these things because there actually *is* a book in the Bible that some people think is utterly meaningless. Not only is it difficult to understand, but many people have wondered if it should even be included in the Bible at all! When they read it they gasp in astonishment and wonder who allowed it to be in the canon of Scripture in the first place. Some people have even suggested that reading this book makes you a worse person.

If you haven't already guessed by now, I am talking about the book of Ecclesiastes. This book ties scholars up in knots. The book of Revelation may be difficult, but at least that book has several well-established interpretations. When scholars discuss Revelation they spend their time debating which interpretation is correct. Ecclesiastes, however, is a very different story. That book is so difficult that scholars simply don't know what to make of it. Since commentators have nothing to go on they come up with all sorts of wild ideas. Some people think that the entire book is an example of ungodly, naturalistic thought. Others think that the book is uninspired. Some teach that Solomon wrote the book at the end of his life and that it is an example of his insanity. When it comes to Ecclesiastes there is an utter lack of unity and a great deal of confusion.

It is not hard to understand why this is the case. If you read the book it is easy to think that it was written by an atheist. Just look at what it has to say:

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?"

While I'm not surprised to hear someone complain that life is meaningless, I am surprised to hear *the Bible* say that. Life is meaningless? Really? That's a Biblical idea? Surely it doesn't really mean that! But if it doesn't mean that then why does it keep repeating it all throughout the book?

Ecclesiastes 2:17: "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for **all is vanity and vexation of spirit.**"

All is vanity and vexation of spirit, and all is a waste of time. The writer even goes on to say that it's better to be dead than alive, and not being born at all is better still!

Ecclesiastes 4:2-3: "Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more

than the living which are yet alive. Yea, **better is he than both they, which hath not yet been**, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.”

Solomon is not saying this because he is meditating on the wonders of the afterlife. Instead he is saying it because this life is meaningless and everything is a waste of time. His opinion of life boils down to this: “it’s just better off being dead”.

So is it any wonder that scholars shake their head at this book? It hardly seems like the sort of thing you would want people to read! Can you imagine a preacher telling his congregation that they would all be better off dead because their lives are a meaningless waste of time?

So what’s going on here? What is the point of this book? Why is it included in the Bible? How do we make sense of all this?

I think that there *is* a point here. This book is not utter nonsense and it is not uninspired drivel written by someone who desperately needed antidepressants. Ecclesiastes contains wisdom that we need to hear. The reason we have so much trouble understanding the book is because we don’t understand the question that the writer was trying to answer. Our problems with this book will melt away once we understand what he was trying to accomplish.

First of all, right in chapter one, we are told what the writer set out to do:

Ecclesiastes 1:13: “And I gave my heart **to seek and search out by wisdom** concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.”

The author examined all of life to see what was meaningful and what was not. The book is not a random collection of mindless ramblings; it is a unified picture of a man examining all the different facets of life, one at a time. Nor is the writer a lunatic. The end of the book points out that he is a wise man and sought words that were upright and truthful:

Ecclesiastes 12:9-10: “And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. **The preacher sought to find out acceptable words:** and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.”

At the end, after having considered everything, he concludes this:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **Fear God, and keep his commandments:** for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

His conclusion is that the duty and role of man is to fear God and keep his commandments. That alone was meaningful and worth doing. Everything else in life is folly. Some may claim that there is meaning apart from fearing God and obeying him, but they are fools. There is no meaning or worth apart from God.

Since we know that is his conclusion, we can work backwards and read the book in light of that thought. Doing that changes everything and offers a very different perspective.

In chapter 1, when he says “all is vanity” he does not mean “there is nothing in life that is

meaningful”. What he is trying to point out is that mankind is essentially building sandcastles on the beach, and the tide is coming in and is going to wipe them all out. He points out that a man can build all he wants, but one day he will die and turn it over to others and there is no telling what they will do with it. Moreover, the only things one can do are the same sort of things that previous generations have already done. Sure, you can amass great wealth, build great things, and do great wonders. But then you will die and lose it all and turn it over to someone else – “And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured” (Ecclesiastes 2:19). The author hated knowing that ultimately he would lose his life’s work and turn it over to someone else.

The conclusion that he draws from this is that labor, in and of itself, is not satisfying or meaningful. You will ultimately lose everything you spent your entire life building, and there is nothing you can do about it. If you are looking for meaning in your life then it cannot be found here.

Now before we go any further, I realize that in God life is very meaningful indeed. But the author is not examining life from an eternal, spiritual perspective. He is not asking the question “As we serve God, is our labor meaningful?” What he is asking is this: “All by itself, with no other considerations, is labor meaningful?” His conclusion is no, it’s not. It’s just vanity.

Can we agree with that? Absolutely. Life really is meaningless if it is not lived for the Lord – *which is the very point the author of Ecclesiastes makes* in the last chapter of this book. It is vital to understand that the author is examining the facets of life *all by themselves*, apart from God, to search for meaning. He is doing this so that at the end of the book he can point out that *only in God* is anything meaningful at all. When we read this book we tend to assume a spiritual perspective that the author was deliberately *not using*. He wanted to show the utter vanity of life without God.

For example, in chapter three he considers mankind itself and realizes that men and animals both die. Both grow old and return to dust. He therefore concludes that man has no preeminence above animals; both are of the dust, and both return to dust again.

Now, as Christians we know that there is a huge difference between people and animals. People who believe in Jesus will never die and will go on to inherit everlasting life. Once we bring God into the picture life becomes meaningful – but without God it is a very different story. If one excludes God from the picture and just looks at life itself, you are forced to conclude that mankind really isn’t better than animals. That is exactly the same conclusion that evolutionists have drawn: we all die, and ultimately we are just another kind of animal. If you exclude God you will always be forced into that conclusion. You simply *cannot* find any meaning apart from God. In fact, in a universe devoid of God you really *are* better off dead, because at least then you don’t have to suffer the many horrors that life can offer (which is another point that Solomon made).

Let me repeat this one more time: Ecclesiastes was not written in order to analyze life from an eternal perspective. It was written to analyze each piece of life *all by itself* to see if it had any *inherent* meaning. The author concludes that it doesn’t; apart from God there is no meaning to be found anywhere. Even wisdom itself is meaningless apart from God, because both wise men and fools die. Wisdom alone cannot save you. Wisdom is better than foolishness, but ultimately you will still die. Apart from God, death is the end; once you die you know nothing and can do nothing, and are utterly cut off from what goes on under the sun. Your work, your existence, and even your name are utterly lost as time wipes it all away. You led a meaningless life and now you are gone, and after a while you will be entirely forgotten and it will be as if you had never existed at all.

That is what the world looks like without God. Those are the conclusions that atheists will ultimately be forced to draw. When you stare deep into the well of godlessness you will find nothing but bleak despair. A world without God offers nothing but utter hopelessness.

The problem is that people don’t think that deeply about life. They just go on, consumed with

whatever they're doing, and never stop to think things through – so Ecclesiastes thinks it through for them. It points out the folly and futility of a godless life and urges them to stop and consider their ways while there is still time. The writer urges people to bring God into their life and find meaning and purpose there. With God life becomes worth living and the perspective changes, but without Him it is all in vain.

Ecclesiastes does not support the atheistic cause; it's actually a powerful tool against them. The book graphically shows where atheistic thought ultimately leads and even offers a cure for it. The book tells atheists that their life is meaningless and their labor is done in vain. They will die just like animals and their wisdom counts for nothing. This book refutes their attempt at finding meaning apart from God by showing that there isn't any meaning to be found. Meaning, purpose, and hope can only be found in God. That is the point of Ecclesiastes.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SEPARATION

These days it is common for Christian groups to join forces with non-Christian organizations in order to accomplish some social goal – be it protesting abortion, or feeding the hungry, or whatever the hot topic of the day might be. Christians will join with Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, Jews, and whoever else they can find in order to accomplish their goals. The supposed justification for this is that while we may have differences we can all agree on this one area, so why not work together?

The answer is simple: it's because the Bible forbids it. Our generation has forgotten (or rejected) the principle of separation, and the consequences have been devastating. The Church desperately needs to relearn that ecumenicism – the idea that we should all get along and work together no matter what we believe – does not come from God. In fact, God is so opposed to it that He promises to curse those who are involved in such things.

I realize that's a strong statement, so let's look at the evidence. In 2 Chronicles 18 we find the story of Jehoshaphat and Ahab. Jehoshaphat was a wise and godly king who the Lord gave great riches and honor. Ahab was an incredibly evil king who was married to the even-more-evil Jezebel. Despite their differences, Jehoshaphat thought it would be a good idea to join with Ahab and attack their common enemy:

2 Chronicles 18:1: “Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab.

2 And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramothgilead.

3 And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramothgilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war.”

This is exactly the sort of thing that the modern Church does. Jehoshaphat was good and Ahab was evil; Jehoshaphat worshiped the true God while Ahab worshiped pagan gods. Since they had a common enemy, Jehoshaphat thought it made sense for them to team up and work together. After all, the Syrians were evil and posed a threat to both kings. As the modern Church would say, this is the Lord's battle, and if we can get unbelievers to join us in our fight then so much the better!

Except the battle did not go well. If you read chapter 18 you will see that the prophet Micaiah warned against going to war at all and prophesied that Ahab will be killed. Sure enough, Ahab actually was killed. When Jehoshaphat returned home, the prophet Jehu rebuked the king for joining forces with Ahab:

2 Chronicles 19:1: “And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem.

2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.”

The Lord was *not at all* pleased that Jehoshaphat had joined forces with Ahab. Even though they had a common enemy and a common threat, Jehoshaphat was forbidden from joining forces with him. The Lord did not see it as attacking a common problem; He saw it as helping the ungodly and aiding those who hate the Lord. What the Lord focused on was the fact that *Jehoshaphat helped Ahab*, a king who hated God. What Jehoshaphat helped him do was beside the point. The Lord was upset that he had helped Ahab *at all*. Because of this, as the prophet Jehu said, “therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.”

Some may wonder, didn't the Lord command us to pray for our enemies and do good to them that hate us? Yes, He did. But the Lord did *not* command us to *join forces with them and help them accomplish their goals*. That is an entirely different matter. That is what Jehoshaphat did, and the Lord was very upset about it. The fact that the Syrians were evil and were also Jehoshaphat's enemy did not matter to God at all.

Let's look at another case. After Ahab died another king arose named Ahaziah, who was also very evil. Jehoshaphat thought it would be a good idea for the two of them to join forces and send some ships to Ophir to get gold (1 Kings 22:48). Once again we see a godly king teaming up with an evil king in order to accomplish something. Now, there was nothing wrong with going to Ophir for gold; King Solomon sent ships out and acquired great wealth. Jehoshaphat thought that by teaming up together both kings would be enriched.

However, the Lord was not pleased:

2 Chronicles 20:35: “And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly:

36 And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Eziongaber.

37 Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.”

As you can see, what upset the Lord was not the purpose of the voyage. No, what really upset God was that Jehoshaphat had teamed up with the evil Ahaziah. Because Jehoshaphat joined himself with a pagan, God-hating king, the Lord destroyed the ships they had made. The Lord *hates* it when His people team up with His enemies in order to accomplish something. It doesn't matter if their stated goal is something that is actually good. *He hates it*. In fact, He hates it so much that He promises *wrath* on those who dare to do such things. In the example above, God was so upset at the partnership that He actually destroyed the ships.

This same principle is repeated in the New Testament:

II Corinthians 6:14: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and

touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."

People commonly apply this to marriage, but *Paul was not talking about marriage*. Marriage isn't even mentioned anywhere in the chapter! What Paul is saying is that Christians should *not join forces with pagans*. As Paul points out, light has no communion with darkness and righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness. They are *different teams entirely* and they are not to be "yoked together".

How many times did the apostles join forces with pagans in order to accomplish societal goals? *Zero times*. How many times did the Church in the New Testament join with idol-worshippers to stamp out poverty, feed the hungry, or pursue some other goal? *Zero times*. Instead Paul stands up and condemns this practice – just as it was condemned in the Old Testament. God wants His people to be *separate* from the world. He doesn't want them building alliances with them; He wants His followers to "come out from among them, and be ye separate".

This principle of separation is no longer believed by the modern Church. We have rejected the clear teaching of II Corinthians 6:14-17. In fact, we think it's *great* when we can team up with God-hating organizations in order to get things done! We see that as winning. What God has to say about it is entirely forgotten – but God does not mince words about this:

II John 1:10: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:

11 For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

How does God say we should treat those who preach a false gospel? Does it say we should join forces with them and try to find areas of commonality so we can build agreements? Nope. What it actually says is that we shouldn't receive them into our home. In fact, we *shouldn't even bid them 'godspeed'*.

Now, when John says "receive him not into your house" he is not forbidding us from inviting them over so we can share the gospel with them. What he is forbidding is doing anything to help them, either in deed (by giving them a place to stay so they can keep preaching a false gospel) or in word (by bidding them godspeed). John is clear that those who help them, even verbally, become a "partaker of his evil deeds".

Sadly, this is a sin that the modern church *loves* to commit. I saw a case where one church learned that a mosque was undergoing renovations, so they invited the Muslims to *borrow their sanctuary* so they could keep worshiping their false god. That is exactly the sort of thing that John was condemning – but instead of being dismayed, we hold up such terrible sins as examples of "outreach" and "building bridges" and "true love". God, however, calls it *being a partaker of their evil deeds* and hates it with a passion.

Another common thing is to see famous Christians get up and praise Catholics and Mormons for their good works and their love of God. As I have said many times before, Catholics and Mormons preach a false gospel. Praising and encouraging them goes far beyond "bidding them godspeed" and is absolutely condemned by the apostle John, but somehow the Bible's disapproval doesn't stop us from finding people who "bring not this doctrine" of saving grace and then doing all we can to encourage them and make them feel good about themselves.

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate", the Lord says. That is the commandment. God repeats it in Revelation and adds a threat:

Revelation 18:4: "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

In this case the "her" is the evil Babylon, the mother of harlots and abominations. God is commanding His people to come out of that enemy of God and "be not partakers of her sins" – for those who *are* partakers of her sins will also partake of the plagues that God will send. How do we become partakers of her sins? By joining forces with them and helping them in word or deed. We become partakers when we refuse to separate ourselves from them.

The modern Church has decided that it is not interested in separation, and instead it eagerly tries to form alliances with as many god-hating organizations as it can possibly find. The Church has no idea of the great trouble that it is in. God did not hesitate to discipline king Jehoshaphat, and He will not hesitate to discipline us either.

THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN

Over the years I've heard a lot of talk about the unforgivable sin. There are all sorts of different opinions concerning what it is and what it isn't. Since there is a lot of confusion surrounding this topic I thought it would be a good idea to explain this sin in a clear and concise way.

The unforgivable sin is mentioned several times in the Bible:

Matthew 12:31: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."

Mark 3:28: "Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:

29 But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation."

Luke 12:10: "And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven."

As you can see, all of these passages talk about something known as blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Matthew tells us that if you speak a word against the Son of Man then that can be forgiven, but if you speak against the Holy Spirit then that is unforgivable. But what does that mean? Is this something that we need to be worried about? Are we in danger of committing this sin?

This is a situation where context is absolutely critical. There are many people who focus solely on Matthew 12:31-32 and who miss the surrounding context. In this case the context makes all the difference.

When Jesus said those words He was engaged in a discussion with Israel's religious leaders. By this point in Christ's ministry He had done many incredible miracles. He had healed people, He had cast out demons, and He had done many wonders. He had the attention of the people and multitudes followed Him.

Then Jesus did something that truly astounded the nation: He cast a demon out of someone who could not speak. This immediately made the nation think that Jesus must be the Messiah, the son of David:

Matthew 12:22: "Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?"

To understand why this miracle had such a large impact, you have to understand how Jewish exorcisms worked. In order to cast out a demon you first had to discover its name. Once you knew its name you could then order it *by name* to come out of the person. This worked fine if the person could talk, but it did not work on people who were mute. Jewish tradition taught that only the Messiah could cast a demon out of a mute man; no one else was capable of doing it. Therefore, when Jesus did it He was establishing His claim to be the Messiah – and the people recognized that.

Israel's religious leaders, however, had another explanation. They said that Jesus was doing His miracles through the power of Satan:

Matthew 12:24: “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.”

When the Pharisees said this Jesus immediately rebuked them – *and in every single case that rebuke included a mention of the unforgivable sin.* In fact, the book of Mark actually makes it crystal clear that the unforgivable sin was a reference to what the Pharisees had just said:

Mark 3:29: “But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.
30 Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.”

In other words, the reason Jesus warned them against the unforgivable sin was because they had just accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of the devil. *That was the unforgivable sin.* The religious leaders of Israel's day saw Jesus Christ, in person, doing miracles that only the Messiah could do, and they accused Him of doing them by the power of Satan. That was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, and that was unforgivable. They were looking at what was unquestionably the work of the Holy Spirit and they were saying it was a work of the devil.

It is no longer possible to commit the unforgivable sin because Jesus Christ is no longer here in person. Today we believe in Jesus by faith and trust Someone whom we have never seen. Israel was in a very different situation: they refused to trust in someone *who was standing right there in front of them.* None of us have ever had the chance to watch Jesus, in person, do mind-boggling miracles and then tell Him to His face that He was demon-possessed. That particular sin is no longer possible. There are a lot of very serious sins that are a real danger to you, but this is not one of them.

Yes, it is definitely a sin to not trust in Jesus. But refusing to trust in a Jesus who you have never seen is not quite the same as refusing to trust in a Jesus who you *have* seen. Refusing to believe in miracles that you have never seen is not the same thing as rejecting miracles that you personally saw Jesus perform. They are both sins, but they are very different sins.

There is one other unforgivable sin. Like the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, this sin is also impossible to commit during the Church Age. We find this sin discussed in the book of Revelation. Simply put, anyone who takes the Mark of the Beast is lost forever and will be damned:

Revelation 14:9: “And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,
10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

Everyone who takes the Mark will be lost. That act cannot be undone and it cannot be forgiven. It is permanent and it is fatal. If you receive the Mark you will face the wrath of God and you will be tormented with fire and brimstone *forever*. It is a one-way, irrevocable ticket to the Lake of Fire.

However, the Church will never be tempted to take the Mark. The Mark of the Beast does not appear until midway through the Tribulation, and the Rapture will remove the Church from the Earth before the Tribulation begins. By the time the Mark appears the Church will be long gone. The only ones who will be tempted by it are those who are still on Earth at that time (in other words, those who have been left behind).

The unforgivable sin is a very real thing with very real consequences, but it does not apply to the Church. We are spared of that temptation.

THE WORK OF GOD

Have you ever wondered what God is doing or why God allows certain things to happen? There are so many things in life that seem utterly senseless. Why did God allow that person to die who showed so much promise? Why did God prolong the life of that other person who has done so much evil? Why did God allow that opportunity to fall through, or that war to happen, or that disaster to take place? What is the sense in it all?

It is true that we do know some things about God's will. The Bible tells us that God is gathering a peculiar people for Himself out of every tribe and nation. We know that one day Jesus will return. We know that one day there will be the Millennial Kingdom, the Great White Throne Judgment, and the Eternal State. We know these things because God has revealed them to us.

But in our own everyday lives there is so much that just seems senseless. Sometimes we may eventually come across a reason, but other times it never makes any sense. It seems especially odd when you stop and consider that all events are orchestrated by God. The Lord guides the hearts of kings, raises up nations and tears them down, guides history, works all things together for good, and has even preordained good works for us that we should walk in them. History is not random a collection of random events that have happened to random people. It is all part of a grand tapestry of events that are woven together by God. So why does the tapestry seem so random and senseless?

There's a simple answer to this: it's because God doesn't want us to find out what He's up to. I'll even go ahead and spoil the ending: God is doing this to make us live by faith. If we knew why every event happened then faith would not be necessary. By hiding His purposes God tests His children to see if they will trust Him when disaster strikes and when life does not make sense. Do we really believe in a loving God, or will we abandon our faith in God the moment something happens that we don't understand?

But to get back to the subject at hand: the book of Ecclesiastes tells us that God has hidden His purposes from mankind:

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11: "I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that **no man can find out the work that God maketh** from the beginning to the end."

Do you see that last line there? We are told that *no man* can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end. In other words, it is impossible to know the full extent of what God is doing because He has hidden it from mankind. That idea is repeated a few chapters later:

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17: "When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God, that **a man cannot find out** the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, **yet shall he not be able to find it.**"

This is something that we instinctively know is true, and yet it's jarring to see it in print. When God does things He does not send us an email to explain why He has done them. Sometimes we see things working together and get a glimmer of understanding, but other times we never find out why something happened. Even when we think we have some understanding of events it is impossible to uncover the complete tapestry of history. As the passage above says, even if a man tries to figure it out he will not find it; a wise man might think that he knows it but he won't find it out either. God has taken His plans and cloaked them in obscurity.

Think of it this way: even when we think we know what's going on, do we really have all the facts? Can we see the entirety of history? Can we see all events and understand how each piece fits in with all the others? Without complete knowledge, all we have is an incomplete picture that can be very misleading. It's entirely possible that things we think are very important are actually not important at all, and things that seem minor are actually history-changing milestones. There is simply no way to know. There are so many factors that we can't see – and the factors that we don't see may have tremendous importance.

There is a point to all of this. There will be times in our life when it seems that events simply have no meaning. People's faith is often destroyed when some terrible disaster happens (such as the death of a loved one) and they then assume that the disaster means there is no God. There are others who are stuck in terrible circumstances and who don't see a reason behind it. Their suffering seems so pointless and arbitrary. Why doesn't God rescue them? Does He not see? Does He not care? God, after all, has all power and wisdom. Why would an all-powerful and loving God put someone in such a terrible situation?

The key here is that there is much more going on than what we can see. Our suffering is not pointless; it is necessary. We may not understand why, but God does, and God sees all and knows all. What God wants us to do is trust Him. When disaster strikes we need to trust God, who sees what we cannot see and who knows what we do not know. We need to stop thinking that we understand what is going on and start trusting the One who really does know everything. We need to live by faith, which is the whole point. God is glorified when we trust Him in spite of our circumstances and in spite of what we can see.

Life, in a very real sense, is a test of faith. When we don't understand why things are happening and when everything seems senseless, are we willing to step back and trust God? Are we willing to admit that we don't have all knowledge and trust the One Who does? Or will we instead foolishly claim to know exactly what is going on and curse God for being arbitrary and cruel?

One day God may reveal to us the panorama of history and explain how it all fits together. Until that day comes we need to hold on and have faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God.

THEOPHANIES

It is common knowledge that the Lord made a number of appearances in the Old Testament. For example, God spoke to Moses in the burning bush:

Exodus 3:3: “And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4 And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.”

God spoke to Israel from Mount Sinai:

Exodus 19:18: “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

19 And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.”

God spoke to Elijah in a still small voice:

I Kings 19:12: “And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

13 And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”

God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind:

Job 38:1: “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?”

There are more examples that I could give, but you get the point. Today I would like to talk about *theophanies* – visible manifestations of God in the Old Testament. While a lot of these appearances are quite well-known, I believe there are other appearances that are commonly overlooked. Sometimes the Bible is very obvious about an appearance of God and sometimes it's not. For example:

God Visits Abraham

About a year before Isaac was born, three men came and visited Abraham. The patriarch invited them in and fed them:

Genesis 18:2: “And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

3 And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:

5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.”

Despite the fact that this is a very well-known story, I think there's something going on here that is almost universally overlooked. Verse two tells us that “three men stood by him”. But who are these three men? Verse 1 gives us the answer:

Genesis 18:1: “And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;”

Who appeared to Abraham? *The Lord*. The three men were not ordinary men, and they were not angels either; God Himself came and paid Abraham a visit. The rest of the passage confirms this. Whenever Abraham talks to the men we are told that *the Lord* responds to him. 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.

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

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?”

The passage is very clear, but we completely miss it. Verse 1 tells us that the Lord appeared to Abraham; the Lord then speaks to Abraham throughout the whole chapter and then leaves in verse 33. God Himself paid Abraham a visit that day.

I believe that this is a theophany – a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. However, I don't think this is the only time that He appeared. That brings us to:

The Angel of the Lord

If you read through the Old Testament you will occasionally come across references to a being

known as the Angel of the Lord. This being has some rather unusual characteristics. For example, the Angel of the Lord accepts worship:

Joshua 5:13: “And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”

14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?

15 And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.”

One thing we know about angels is that they never accept worship. When the apostle John tried to worship an angel, the angel immediately rebuked him:

Revelation 19:10: “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

The apostle John did the exact same thing that Joshua did – but in Revelation the angel rebuked him for it. That tells us that the Angel of the Lord is not an angelic being, but is God Himself. One thing we need to keep in mind is that the word “angel” means *messenger*. Jesus spent a great deal of time relaying God's messages. In fact, He said this:

John 12:49: “For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.

50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.”

Jesus did not speak for Himself; instead He relayed the messages that His Father had given him. If the phrase “Angel of the Lord” bothers you, think of it as “Messenger of the Lord”. Jesus was certainly a messenger of the Lord.

I'm not trying to claim that all angels that appear in the Old Testament are really appearances of Christ. The Bible sometimes says that “an angel of the Lord” appeared, or “angels of the Lord” appeared. There really is a separate race of angelic beings, and they really do appear in the Old Testament. What I *am* saying is that when the Bible speaks of “*the* angel of the Lord” it is probably referring to Jesus Christ. As I have pointed out, “the” Angel of the Lord appears to be something altogether different.

The Angel of the Lord makes quite a few appearances in the Old Testament. He was there when Hagar fled from Sarah:

Genesis 16:7: “And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

8 And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.

9 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

10 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

11 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.

12 And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”

Notice that the Angel of the Lord says that *he* will “multiply thy seed exceedingly”. He doesn't say that God will do it; he says that *he* will do it *himself!* That's rather startling, isn't it? But if the Angel of the Lord is actually Jesus then it makes perfect sense.

The Angel of the Lord later reminded Hagar of this promise:

Genesis 21:17: “And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.”

The Angel of God didn't say that God would make Ishmael “a great nation”; he said that *he* would do it. That is a detail that we should not miss. It's more evidence that the Angel of the Lord is not simply an angel.

The Angel of the Lord also appears when Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac. In fact, the Angel of the Lord actually stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son:

Genesis 22:11: “And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”

Take a close look at verse 12. The Angel of the Lord said that Abraham had not withheld his son *from him*. It doesn't say “from God”, which is what the angel should have said if it was just an angel! The Angel of the Lord is acting like he is God.

The Angel of the Lord was at the burning bush with Moses:

Exodus 3:2: “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4 And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place

whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

Just as the Angel of the Lord told Joshua that he was standing on holy ground, so we see the same thing happening to Moses. On top of that, verse 2 says that the Angel of the Lord was in the bush, and then verse 4 says that *God* called to him out of the bush. The Angel of the Lord is actually referred to as God.

The Angel of the Lord also rebuked Israel in the days of the judges. Pay close attention to the pronouns that are used:

Judges 2:1: “And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swear unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you.

2 And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?

3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

4 And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.”

Verse 1 does say “an angel”, but verse 4 clarifies that the words were said by *the* Angel of the Lord. Notice, also, what the angel actually said. The Angel said that *he* made them go out of Egypt and *he* made the covenant with their fathers. The Angel is talking as if he was God.

The Angel of the Lord also appeared to Gideon and did some very odd things:

Judges 6:11: “And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

12 And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

14 And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?”

Verse 11 just mentions “an angel”, but verse 12 clarifies that this is the Angel of the Lord. When Gideon talks to him, verse 14 tells us that *the Lord* looked upon him and answered him. As if that were not enough, the Angel then accepted Gideon's offering and consumed the sacrifice:

Judges 6:20: “And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so.

21 Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord

departed out of his sight.”

No angel would ever accept a sacrifice – but this Angel did. Once again, this Angel is acting a lot like God. The Angel of the Lord later accepted another offering, this time from Samson's parents. He was the one who told Samson's mother that she would have a son:

Judges 13:3: “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing:

5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.”

When the couple offered a sacrifice, the Angel of the Lord accepted it:

Judges 13:17: “And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour?

18 And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?

19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord: and the angel did wonderously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.

20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.”

It's very interesting that the Angel of the Lord *refused to disclose his name*. This is a bit odd, as other angels were quite willing to disclose their names:

Luke 1:19: “And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.”

This was not the last time that the Angel appeared. King David once took a census of Israel, and the Lord punished him for it. During that punishment the Angel of the Lord came to destroy Jerusalem:

2 Samuel 24:15: “So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men.

16 And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite.

17 And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have

they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.”

As you can see, David actually saw the Angel. If the Angel was really Jesus then there is an impressive list of Old Testament people who glimpsed Him: Hagar, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and Samson's parents all saw Him. That gives Jesus' conversation with the Jews a new meaning:

John 8:56: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”

Not only had Jesus seen Abraham, but all those many centuries ago, *Abraham had seen Jesus*. In fact, Abraham actually had a meal with Him!

Now, that is not the last time that the Angel of the Lord appears in the Old Testament, but I'll let you discover the rest. There are more theophanies in the Bible than you would think. If you read the Old Testament carefully you may discover all sorts of unexpected and amazing things.

WAS C. S. LEWIS A CHRISTIAN?

One of the surprising characteristics of modern evangelicals is our willingness to give a pass to anyone that we like. We may hold our preachers to a high standard, but when it comes to our favorite writers we're willing to show a tremendous amount of leeway. The moment we find a writer that we like, all desire to critically examine their teachings goes right out the window. We interpret everything they say by what *we* would mean if we were the ones who said it, and when they say something really shocking we just gloss over it and move on. In other words, we treat them in a way that we would never treat our own pastor.

C. S. Lewis is a great example of this. Possibly the most beloved author in all of Christendom, he wrote many books and made a great many theological statements. Because we like C. S. Lewis and because he was a brilliant and engaging author, evangelicals have given him a free pass. It's very difficult to find anyone who has actually studied Lewis' writings from a critical point of view to see how orthodox he really was. In fact, the idea of applying critical thinking to his doctrinal claims doesn't even cross our minds. After all, we already *know* that he was orthodox. Why, he wrote *Mere Christianity*! Countless people were brought to Christ by his books. Why would anyone even bother to take a discerning look at his books? It's just a waste of time!

But is it really a waste of time? Is it a good idea to simply give Lewis a pass? I'm not asking "was Lewis a Christian?" as a rhetorical question, as if the answer is already known. I am asking it *because I want to know*. I have read almost all of his books, and there are things in them that deeply disturb me. If our pastors said some of the things that Lewis wrote we would be up in arms – but because Lewis said it it's somehow ok. There is a tremendous double standard here, and I think it's time for that to end. We need to examine *everything* we read.

It's very easy for us to gloss over the actual theology of our favorite writers. One example of this is J. R. R. Tolkien. Now, I enjoyed the *Lord of the Rings* books as much as anyone, and I understand why they're ranked as some of the greatest books of the 20th century. The fact is, though, Tolkien was a Catholic – a rather devout Catholic, actually – and Catholics are not Christians. The Catholic Church has specifically and passionately reject the idea of salvation by grace through faith alone, as we can see in the Council of Trent:

SIXTH SESSION, CANONS CONCERNING JUSTIFICATION: "If anyone says that justifying faith is ***nothing else than confidence in divine mercy***, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, **LET HIM BE ANATHEMA**" (Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 12).

SIXTH SESSION, CANONS CONCERNING JUSTIFICATION: "If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, **LET HIM BE ANATHEMA**" (Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 24).

Here we see a very clear, direct, and straightforward rejection of the gospel. The Catholic Church rejects the idea that we are saved by grace through faith alone. They reject the idea that our

works play no part and are “not the cause of its increase”. The Catholic Church teaches a works gospel and they are not embarrassed about it. These teachings were reaffirmed by Vatican II in the 1960s and they are still taught today. It is the very core of Catholicism.

The Bible, though, is very clear that we are saved by faith and *not by works*:

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

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;"

Romans 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith **without the deeds of the law.**"

In fact, Paul wrote the entire book of Galatians to combat the idea that salvation comes by works. He was quite passionate about it:

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Galatians 3:1-7

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for **if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.**" Galatians 2:21

God condemns the Catholic idea that we are made perfect by “good deeds” in the strongest possible terms. This is more than heresy; it is another gospel entirely. *You cannot be saved by a works gospel.*

I'm not going to go into a complete analysis of Catholicism here; I have already done that elsewhere. The point is that the Catholic church is not a Christian church. Tolkien was a devout Catholic; he believed in the false works gospel that the Catholic church teaches. Therefore, since he believed a false gospel, he was not saved. As much as we may like his books, the false gospel that he believed could not and did not save him. False gospels have no saving power.

Another example (although not quite as famous) is G. K. Chesterton. There are many evangelical Christians who love his writings, and it's easy to understand why. Chesterton was a brilliant and hilarious writer; his essay on chalk is one of the funniest things I have ever read. His Father Brown mystery stories are very clever and quite popular.

Chesterton, though, was a Catholic, and if anything he was even more devout than Tolkien. Since we like his books we tend to give him a pass and ignore his rather blatant heresy. For example, take his most famous character, the priest Father Brown. Brown is extremely likable, full of wit and

charm – but he's also a Catholic priest. What do Catholic priests do? They preach a works gospel that leads straight to Hell. John Calvin called such men a “murderer of souls”. Now, if Chesterton's stories were about a charming serial killer or a friendly abortionist then we would be appalled, but since Father Brown only *guides souls to Hell* instead of killing them then it's somehow ok. Because we like him we are willing to ignore what Father Brown does for a living and the gospel that his church teaches.

We are even willing to overlook the terrible way that the Protestant church is depicted in Chesterton's stories. For example, in the Father Brown story “The Hammer of God” the murderer turns out to be the local Presbyterian minister. The blacksmith – described in the story as a Puritan – is said to be “a good man, but not a Christian” (thus condemning Puritans to Hell!), and his wife is a blatant adulteress. That's a rather charming picture of the Protestant faith, isn't it? It's especially galling when you consider the fact that it was actually the *Catholic* Church that spent centuries hunting down and burning people alive for crimes such as owning Bibles or rejecting their gospel of works. Yet Chesterton tells us that *Protestants* are the real murderers and only Catholics can confront them and set things right.

I haven't even mentioned Chesterton's books on theology, but do I really have to? My point is that whenever there's a television show that depicts Christians as murderers, evangelicals are up in arms over it. When Chesterton does it, though, we just give it a pass. We will critically examine TV shows but not our favorite authors.

So what about C. S. Lewis? Well, as it turns out, Lewis did not consider himself to be an evangelical. His friends were largely Catholics and Anglicans. This is how one man put it:

“[Lewis] had no cultural connections with Evangelicals. He had no friends among them.... His friends were all Anglo-Catholic or Catholic.... Lewis, of course, has been adopted by the Evangelicals in America in a way that would have made him very uncomfortable. He didn't associate with them; he didn't think of himself as one of them.” (James Houston, *We Remember C. S. Lewis*)

Why would being associated with evangelicals make him uncomfortable? This is why:

“On point after point, Lewis taught doctrines contrary to Scripture. He denied the inerrancy of Scripture itself; he rejected the doctrine of the substitutionary, penal atonement; he set forth an odd view of the resurrection of the body, to name only three. In locus after locus of Christian theology, Lewis' views were unbiblical and anti-Christian.” (John Robbins)

That's a rather strong statement, so let's take a look at Lewis' writings to see if it is true. First of all, there are strong reasons to believe that Lewis really did deny the inerrancy of Scripture. If you have ever had the misfortune of reading Lewis' *Reflections on the Psalms* then you will know exactly what I mean. It becomes painfully obvious that Lewis has a low view of God's Word. For example:

“all Holy Scripture is in some sense – though not all parts of it in the same sense – the word of God.” (pg19, emphasis added)

That statement alone should raise eyebrows. Do we really believe that the Psalms are Scripture in a “different sense”, than, say, the book of Matthew or the book of Malachi? If your pastor said that on Sunday morning, how would you react?

A few pages later Lewis went on to explain what he meant by this:

“One way of dealing with these terrible or (dare we say?) contemptible Psalms is simply to leave them alone. But unfortunately the bad parts will not “come away clean”; they may, as we have noticed, be intertwined with the most exquisite things. And if we still believe that all Holy Scripture is 'written for our learning' or that the age-old use of the Psalms in Christian worship was not entirely contrary to the will of God... we shall prefer, if possible, to make some use of them. What use can be made?” (pg21-22, emphasis added)

“Against all this the ferocious parts of the Psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness and that it (if not its perpetrators) is hateful to God. In that way, however dangerous the human distortion may be, His word sounds through these passages too. But can we, besides learning from these terrible Psalms also use them in our devotional life?” (pg33, emphasis added)

If you read *Reflections on the Psalms*, that book alone should put to rest any thought of Lewis' orthodoxy. I'm not going to get into the countless errors in the book; there are many and they are disturbing. But do you see how Lewis viewed Scripture? What would you do if your pastor called the Psalms “contemptible” and “terrible”? What would you do if he said that the Psalms were filled with “human distortion” and that we had to try hard to hear God talking through them anyway? How would you react if he said that using the Psalms in church was not *entirely* contrary to the will of God? Would you overlook it or would you stand up and object?

The idea that the Bible is full of “human distortion” and that we just have to make the best of it is a very, very low view of Scripture. It goes far beyond denying inerrancy. It basically says “Here is a book full of trash. Just make the best of it and try to learn what you can.” The Bible *strongly* objects to the idea that it is “terrible” and full of “human distortion”:

Psalm 119:160: “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”

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

So you can see why Lewis would have been very uncomfortable around evangelicals. We have a completely different view of Scripture than he did. I just quoted two passages; I could have quoted many more. His astonishingly low view of Scripture permeates that book.

Lewis, however, went even further. In *Letters of C. S. Lewis* we find this statement:

“If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of Lights, then all true and edifying writings, whether in Scripture or not, must in some sense be inspired.” (pg479 – 480, emphasis added)

Is it a statement of doctrine among evangelicals that all edifying writings are “in some sense” inspired by God? If your pastor went down to the local Christian bookstore, purchased a book on theology, and urged you to read it because it was inspired by God, what would you do? Would you not

be horrified?

The idea that anything other than the Bible is inspired by God is anathema to evangelicals. You see, God cannot lie, or speak in error, or do wrong. When He speaks He *always* speaks authoritatively. There are not “degrees of inspiration” when it comes to God. God is either speaking or He is not. As Proverbs says, *every* word of God is pure. Lewis, however, rejected this. He did not really see anything particularly “special” about the Bible. Yes, God spoke through it, but he thought that God also spoke through other writings just as much. It really didn't matter to Lewis if the writings were part of the Bible.

The truth is that the Bible really didn't matter a great deal to Lewis. It was not the grounds for his faith, his teachings, or his beliefs – and we know this because *he said so himself*. In *Christian Reflections* Lewis listed the grounds on which he based his arguments. They are “the divinity of Christ, the truth of the creeds, and the authority of the Christian tradition”. The Bible *did not make the list*. Does the fact that Lewis himself claimed that he did *not* base his theology on the Bible, but instead based them on “creeds” and “Christian tradition” disturb you? It sure disturbs me.

That statement alone should cause us to stop and give a *very* critical look at Lewis' theological teachings. After all, once you accept the idea that pretty much *anything* can be inspired then you open yourself up to a world of heresy and nonsense. Lewis did not believe that all theology must trace itself back to the Bible, and he did not believe that it is the only source of divine revelation. He rejected the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura* and he believed that the Bible could and did contain numerous errors. He even rejected the books of Job and Jonah entirely – in spite of the fact that Jesus Himself said that the story of Jonah really happened and was true history.

But Lewis went even further than that. It was not enough to call some of the Psalms “devilish”, “petty”, and “vulgar”. In *Letters of C. S. Lewis* we find this:

“It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him.” (pg 428, emphasis added)

What would your reaction be if your pastor told you that the Bible was not the true word of God? How would you react if he told you that the Bible will only bring you to Christ *if* it is read in the right spirit and *if* you have guidance from the right teachers? That, by the way, is the Catholic view of the Bible. Catholicism teaches that the laity are unqualified to interpret the Bible and must trust the priests to interpret it for them. Only the priests are qualified; you must not read it on your own. What Lewis is saying is very close to that idea. The Bible, he tells us, is not the true word of God and is simply not enough. What you really need are “good teachers”.

But let's keep going. What do we know about the conversion experience of Lewis? Well, this is how he described it:

“I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus is the Son of God and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought.” (from *Surprised by Joy*)

That's a rather odd conversion story, isn't it? When Lewis got on the bus he rejected the idea that Jesus was the Son of God, but when he stepped off he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. Yet, according to him, he hadn't really given it much thought. His mind was simply changed by the time he

got to the zoo.

I have some news for you: according to James 2:19 the *demons* also believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and they tremble at the thought. The mental thought that “yes, I guess Jesus really was the Son of God” *is not a saving thought*. There is a universe of difference between thinking “yes, I guess Jesus really is God”, and “Jesus, please forgive my sins. You are my Lord and Master. I give my life to you.” I see no mention of repentance here, and I see no crying out for forgiveness and no change of allegiance. It's not even hinted at. Lewis just changed his mind about who Jesus was, and that is all.

Once again, suppose that a candidate for baptism came before your church and his entire testimony was “when I got off the bus I believed that Jesus was God”. Would you baptize him, or would you ask more questions to see if there was an actual conversion? I'm fairly certain that this testimony would not satisfy the leadership of any church that I have ever attended. And yet, that is *all* that Lewis has to say about it – and Lewis wrote books *on theology*. Don't you find that a bit odd? After all, we are not dealing with an inarticulate introvert; Lewis is one of the most famous writers of our time. He said what he meant and he meant what he said.

What bothers me is that we simply accept all of this uncritically, whereas if anyone else had given that same testimony we would have raised all sorts of red flags. We don't hold Lewis to the same standard that we hold everyone else. What makes this so especially bad is that, in all of his copious writings, Lewis *never talked about justification by faith*.

I have a massive book entitled *The Quotable Lewis*, which was given to me by a good friend of mine. The book is more than 600 pages long and has quotes from Lewis on every conceivable topic, but it does not contain any entries under “justification”. **Not even one.** Nor will you find one in *The C. S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia*, or *The C. S. Lewis Encyclopedia*, or *C. S. Lewis A Companion and Guide*. In all of his copious writings there is only a single mention of justification. It is found in *The C. S. Lewis Index*, and refers to a letter written in 1941 to Bede Briffiths. This is what Lewis said:

“You see, what I wanted to do in these [radio] talks was to give simply what is still common to us all, and I've been trying to get a nihil obstat from friends in various communions. (The other dissentient besides you is a Methodist who says I've said nothing about justification by faith.)” (emphasis added)

In other words, the only time Lewis ever talked about justification by faith – otherwise known as *the only gospel that can save you* – was in a letter saying he was criticized for never talking about it! Isn't that rather disturbing? Doesn't that make you stop and wonder if Lewis really understood the gospel? How could a famous Christian apologist go *a lifetime* without talking about justification by faith?

So what did Lewis believe about salvation? Well, we find his thoughts on the matter in the famous book *Mere Christianity*. This is what he said, and I quote it in its entirety:

Humanity is already 'saved' in principle. We individuals have to appropriate that salvation. But the really tough work – the bit we could not have done for ourselves – has been done for us. We have not got to try to climb up into spiritual life by our own efforts; it has already come down into the human race. If we will only lay ourselves open to the one Man in whom it is fully present, and who, in spite of being God, is also a real man, he will do it in us and for us. Remember what I said about 'good infection.' One of our own race has this new life: **if we get close to Him we shall catch it from Him.**

Of course, you can express this in all sorts of different ways. You can say that Christ died for our sins. You may say that the Father has forgiven us because Christ has done for us what we ought to have done. You may say that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You may say that Christ has defeated death. They are all true. If any of them do not appeal to you, leave it alone and get on with the formula that does. And, whatever you do, do not start quarrelling with other people because they use a different formula from yours. (pg. 156-7, emphasis added)

Quick question: do Christians really believe that salvation is a “good infection” that we will catch if we just get close enough to Jesus – or do we believe in something called “repentance” which this book doesn't even mention? In fact, nowhere does Lewis mention that we have a sin problem, that the wages of sin is death, or that we are facing an eternity in Hell if we do not obtain the forgiveness of God. None of that is even hinted at.

In fact, Lewis actually distances himself from a specific “formula” for how salvation works – something that would horrify any pastor. Do evangelicals really believe that the way you obtain salvation does not matter and that all ways are equally true? That is insanity! How can opposing formulas be equally true? Does Lewis even understand what the word “true” means? On top of that, can you imagine *anyone* reading the New Testament and coming away believing that the apostles didn't really care who believed what, or that they found all theologies equally acceptable? But that is what Lewis teaches.

There are two things I find disturbing about this quotation: what it *does* say and what it *does not* say. Do evangelicals believe that Christ did “the bit we could not have done for ourselves”? Doesn't the Bible actually teach that we were dead in our trespasses and sins and that Christ paid it *all* because we were incapable of doing *any* of it? Do we believe that we have to “lay ourselves open” to Christ, or do we instead believe that we have to repent and believe?

As I said earlier, repentance isn't mentioned *at all*, and Lewis actually downplays exactly how salvation works. He acts like the details aren't important and just urges us to find a formula that we happen to like and then move on.

Notice how completely different his view of salvation is from that of, say, Jesus Christ:

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.”

Mark 6:12: “And they went out, and preached that men should repent.”

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

Luke 5:32: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinner to repentance.”

Repentance is completely absent from Lewis' description of salvation *and from the testimony of his own conversion experience*. Lewis does not say “all men are sinners and are facing the wrath of God and eternal torment in Hell; our only hope is to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus who died in our place, and then we will be saved”. In fact, he doesn't say anything remotely like that. Christ spoke a

great deal about Hell, but in *Mere Christianity* Lewis failed to mention it. Christ urged men to repent, but Lewis does not. This should bother us, but it doesn't bother us because we happen to like Lewis. We are willing to give his utter failure to accurately describe the gospel a pass because we happen to like him. In fact, we will even go further and urge lost people to read *Mere Christianity*, even though the book fails to describe how to actually become saved! All they will discover is that salvation is a “good infection” that you catch by getting close to Christ. The actual gospel – the *real* gospel – is very simple, but Lewis doesn't go anywhere near it.

Do you see why I wonder if Lewis was actually saved? How can you be saved when you don't even know what the gospel is? Is anyone else bothered by this?

But Lewis is not done. *Mere Christianity* also tells us that faith in Jesus is not required for salvation:

“Here is another thing that used to puzzle me. Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is that God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him.” (p64-65, emphasis added)

In other words, Lewis believed that it was possible to be saved without ever knowing Jesus – something that evangelicals strongly deny. Lewis claims that God “has not told us what His arrangements are about the other people”, but that is a lie. God really *has* told us what those arrangements are, and they were made clear by none other than Jesus Himself:

John 3:18: “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.”

Jesus clearly said that those who do not believe *are condemned already for the sin of not believing*. This is very straightforward. Those who believe are saved, and those who do not believe are condemned. This is why mission work is so important – because if people die without knowing Jesus *they are condemned*. There is no salvation apart from knowing Jesus. None. This may seem “frightfully unfair” to Lewis, but it is what the Bible teaches and it was taught by Jesus Himself.

But Lewis goes even further than this:

“[H]ere are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God's secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ's birth may have been in this position.” (*Mere Christianity*, pg 176-7, emphasis added)

In other words, Lewis is saying that you don't have to be a Christian to be saved. You can be a devout Buddhist and still be saved. All that really matters is that you are sincere and that you follow goodness. In fact, it's actually possible to reject Christianity and “belong to Christ without knowing it”!

We know this is exactly what Lewis meant because in the final book of the Chronicles of Narnia, *The Last Battle*, Lewis provides us with a clear example. In chapter 15 we are told that Emeth, a soldier of Tash, is found in Aslan's country (basically Heaven). Tash is the sworn enemy of Aslan. Emeth joined with Tash to fight Aslan and conquer Narnia, the country that Aslan ruled. If Aslan was the picture of Christ then Tash was the devil. It would not be going too far to call Emeth a soldier in the army of Satan. After all, he spent his life in service to the devil, attacking the Christ figure and trying to kill as many of His servants as possible on the field of battle.

Emeth is therefore surprised to find himself in the paradise that is Aslan's country. This is what happens when he meets Aslan:

“But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me.” (pg 164, emphasis added)

Quick question: suppose you spend your life as a devoted Satanist and kill as many Christians as you possibly can. When you die are you going to be welcomed into Heaven, and will Jesus Himself kiss you and tell you that your service to Satan was credited as service to Jesus? I ask this because *that is exactly what Lewis is claiming.*

That is *not* Christianity. *It is not even close!* That is a particularly horrifying example of universalism – the idea that God will accept you no matter who you have spent your life serving. It doesn't matter if you were a Buddhist or a Satanist; as long as you spent your life doing good things then God will account those *good works* as service to Him and will let you into Heaven. (This is actually *exactly what Aslan tells Emeth* on the very next page!)

My point is that Lewis had a false view of salvation. His answer to the question “what must I do to be saved?” is not off by just a little bit; it is deeply false. If anyone else had taught the things that Lewis taught and made the claims that Lewis claimed, the evangelical community would be up in arms. But because we like him we are willing to give him a pass for *telling us that Satanists will enter Heaven because God will accept their service to Satan as service to Him instead.*

There is a great deal more I could say. I could talk about Lewis' view of Hell, or his acceptance of purgatory (he believed that purgatory was necessary in order to make us “pure enough for Heaven”, thus rejecting the idea that Christ's death was enough to make us pure in the sight of God), but this paper is getting much too long. Let me just close with this final thought from Lewis:

“I had some ado to prevent Joy and myself from relapsing into Paganism in Attica! At Daphni it was hard not to pray to Apollo the Healer. But somehow one didn't feel it would have been very wrong - would have only been addressing Christ sub specie Apollinis.” (C.S. Lewis: A Biography, Roger Lancelyn Green, p.276, emphasis added)

To put that quote into perspective: suppose that your pastor told you it wasn't really “very wrong” to pray to the pagan sun god Apollinis, because the sun god was just a sub species of Christ. Would you just accept that and agree, or would you be horrified beyond words that your pastor had just called a false god a subspecies of Christ? Wouldn't a statement like that tell you that your pastor was

incredibly mistaken about the person and work of God?

In closing, I am not going to definitively state that Lewis was not a Christian; I am not the judge of mankind. But do his statements sound like things a genuine Christian would say? Does the gospel he taught really sound like the actual gospel of Christ? Just going by what he taught and the way he described salvation, does it really sound like he believed in salvation by grace through faith alone?

Finally, is it really a good idea for evangelicals to be rallying around Lewis and promoting his works? Given what he believed and the way he thought, I think it would be wise to take a much more critical look at the things he said. Or are we instead going to continue giving him a pass because “he was C. S. Lewis”?

WAS JESUS TAUGHT BY ANGELS?

A number of years ago I read the book *Messianic Christology*, which was written by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum. One of the statements he made (if I remember this correctly) was that when Jesus was a child He was taught by angels. I had never heard anyone mention that before and I thought that was very interesting.

Today someone asked me about that very same subject. Since I no longer have that book (I have no idea what happened to it) and since I had forgotten where that verse was, I did a quick search for it online – and I found absolutely nothing. Apparently Dr. Fruchtenbaum had shared a very obscure piece of knowledge. It took quite a bit of digging to turn up the passage that he had referred to.

Before I talk about it, though, I need to set some things up. The book of Isaiah spends a lot of time talking about the Messiah who was to come. One of the passages that talk about the Messiah is Isaiah 50:

Isaiah 50:2: “Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst.

3 I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. . .

5 The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.

6 I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

7 For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

Verses 2 and 3 make it clear that this passage is talking about God. The Lord is the one who dries up the sea with a rebuke; He is the one who clothes the heavens with blackness. No one else has that kind of power. Verse 6 goes a bit further and makes it clear that this passage is talking about Jesus. He is the only person of the Godhead who gave His back to the smiters. He is the only one who suffered and died for us. There is no one else who has Godlike power and who suffered like that; Jesus is the only one. Therefore, this passage is talking about Jesus.

That brings us to verse 4, which I deliberately omitted. This is what it says:

Isaiah 50:4: “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.”

Here we are told that the Messiah was awoken each morning so that He might learn. Now, this is obviously not talking about Jesus before the incarnation; the only time He would have ever needed to learn anything was after He became a man and was born in Bethlehem. One of the things the Bible tells us about Jesus is that He never had any formal schooling. This was a source of amazement to the Jews because they could not figure out where Jesus obtained His wisdom. Jesus told them that He got it

straight from God Himself:

John 7:14: “Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.
15 And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?
16 Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.”

The passage in Isaiah tells us how God gave Jesus that knowledge: each morning God woke Him up and taught Him. It seems strange to think that Jesus had to learn, but that's exactly what the Bible says. This is how the book of Luke puts it:

Luke 2:52: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

Notice how the passage clearly says that Jesus *increased* in wisdom. This can only mean that there was a time in Jesus' childhood when He had less wisdom, and as He grew older He learned and gained more wisdom. (That is, after all, what the word “increase” means.) Before the incarnation Jesus knew all things, but when He became a man He had to go through the same childhood and learning process that all men go through. He had to grow up and He had to learn. He remained fully God and fully part of the Trinity, but becoming a man meant going through childhood and all that entails.

The fact that Jesus was fully man and yet still fully God is one of the great mysteries of theology. Theologians refer to this as the “hypostatic union”. There is a great deal that can be said about this, but my purpose today is not to plumb the depths of that mystery. My only point is that when Jesus was a child He had to learn, and the way that he learned was that God Himself taught him. Jesus Himself testified that His doctrine came from God, and that agrees with Isaiah 50:4.

So where do the angels fit into all of this? Well, during Christ's ministry there were a number of times when angels ministered to him. For example, after Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days and was tempted by Satan, angels came and ministered to Him:

Matthew 4:11: “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, about to be taken away and crucified, an angel came and ministered to Him:

Luke 22:41: “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,
42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.
43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.”

The passage from Isaiah seems to be saying that someone came to Jesus, woke Him up each morning, and taught Him. It seems unlikely that God the Father did this in person. The Bible says that God is a spirit and that no one has ever seen Him, and there is no evidence that the Father has ever taken a physical form and visited Earth. The same can be said for the Holy Spirit. If God taught Jesus but did not come and teach Him in person, then that implies that He used messengers – and angels fit

the bill perfectly.

Now, one could argue that God just spoke audibly to Jesus. It's true that God did that a number of times during Christ's ministry, but on each occasion there were other people present. As Jesus explained, the reason God spoke audibly was not for Christ's benefit but was for the benefit of others:

John 12:28: "Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.

29 The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.

30 Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes."

Another possibility is that God just spoke to Jesus' heart and taught Him that way. While it is true that God could have done this, it should be pointed out that God could also have done that in the Garden of Gethsemane – but instead God decided to send an angel. God could have personally ministered to Jesus after He was tempted by Satan, but instead God chose to send an angel. It is not unreasonable to think that when God taught Jesus each morning He did so by sending an angel. It does fit the pattern of how God interacted with Christ. After all, angels are messengers; is it really that unreasonable to think that God used them to relay messages to His Son?

To recap: we know that when Jesus was a child He had to learn, and we know that over time He increased in wisdom. We know that Jesus got His wisdom from God, and we know that God woke Him up and taught Him each morning. However, the Bible doesn't tell us how God actually communicated this wisdom to Jesus. Since it is unlikely that God the Father assumed physical form and paid Jesus a personal visit each morning, that leaves the angels as a prime candidate. I cannot guarantee that it's right, but I think it's a good guess.

What you make of this is up to you. I think it's at least plausible to say that God used angels to teach His Son, but I'm not going to be dogmatic about it. Unless some new bit of evidence turns up it's likely that this will remain one of those questions that can never be definitively answered.

WHEN “TIME SHALL BE NO MORE”

Back in 1893 a Sunday School teacher named James Black wrote a hymn entitled “When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder”. This hymn is so well-known that many people can recite the first verse from memory:

*When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more,
And the morning breaks, eternal, bright and fair;
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.*

This verse has convinced the world that time does not pass in Heaven. Countless people are looking forward to the day when “time shall be no more”. It is one of those things that everyone knows. The truth of the hymn's first line is simply not questioned – which is unfortunate, because the hymn is wrong.

It is true that the phrase “time shall be no more” is found in the Bible (although not quite in those exact words), but it doesn't mean what people think it means. The phrase can be found near the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation:

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.”

Yes, it is true that the verse does contain the phrase “there should be time no longer”. However, it is *not* saying that time itself will suddenly cease to exist. What it is saying is that when the seventh angel begins to sound, the mystery of God would be finished. The time of waiting would be over. In other words, the mystery would have run out of time because God had finished it.

This is made a great deal more clear if you read a version other than the King James. For example, this is how Revelation 10:7 is rendered in the English Standard Version:

Revelation 10:6: “and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay,”

“no more delay” is a much clearer rendering than “no more time”. This passage was never intended to mean that time itself would stop. That very concept makes no sense; after all, time is the interval between two events. If time stopped then nothing else could ever happen! You *have* to have time in order to have events.

This passage does raise interesting questions, such as who the seventh angel is and what the mystery of God is, but I want to focus on the matter at hand. Despite what people believe, time *does* pass in Heaven. Revelation itself testifies to this:

Revelation 8:1: “And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

If time didn't pass in Heaven then there couldn't possibly be a half-hour of silence.

I am very concerned that some of our favorite hymns have led us astray and taught us things that are not true. Despite what “When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder” says, there will *never* come a day when time itself will stop. Despite what “Hark the Herald Angel Sings” says, angels did not sing at the birth of Christ:

Luke 2:10: “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 Saviour, 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.”

The angels *said* their message; they did not sing it. A whole generation of Christians believes that angels sang at the birth of Christ, when a simple reading of the text clearly demonstrates that this was not the case.

Despite what “We Three Kings” says, the Bible never states that there were three wise men. Matthew 2, which gives the account of the wise men, never gives their number.

Modern hymns seem to have the same problem. For example, take the very inspirational hymn “Give Thanks”:

*And now let the weak say, "I am strong"
Let the poor say, "I am rich
Because of what the Lord has done for us"*

This same sentiment is echoed in the song “Savior King”:

*And now the weak say I have strength
By the spirit of power
And now the poor stand and confess
That my portion is served and I'm more than blessed*

The idea “let the weak say 'I am strong'” just sounds so *right* and so Biblical. It's uplifting, encouraging, and inspirational – at least, it is when this phrase is removed from its Biblical context. That particular phrase is found in the Bible, and it was said by God Himself in Joel 3:10. However, if you read the context of the verse you will discover that it doesn't mean what you think it means:

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.
 3 And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.
 4 Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head;
 5 Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things:
 6 The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border.
 7 Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head:
 8 And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the Lord hath spoken it.
 9 Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:
 10 Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruninghooks into spears: **let the weak say, I am strong.**
 11 Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord.
 12 Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about."

In this passage God is talking about the battle of Armageddon – the great conflict at the end of the Tribulation. At that time the Lord will draw all armies to Jerusalem, where there will be a terrible fight. During this conflict Jesus Himself will return from Heaven (in an event known as the Second Coming) and utterly annihilate the armies that have attacked His people.

When God says “let the weak say, I am strong”, He is actually mocking the invaders. He is telling them that they think they are strong, but they are actually weak. God is warning them that when they march with the Antichrist against Jerusalem, they are marching to their doom. Their strength is nothing. They are not marching toward victory but toward judgment.

In the context of the passage the verse is *not* inspirational. God is not encouraging weak people to stand up and be strong; instead He is doing exactly the opposite – mocking the strength of the mighty and calling them weak. This verse is not aimed at God's people; it is aimed at God's enemies and is a prelude to their utter destruction.

Joel 3:10 happens to be the *only* place in the entire Bible where you will find that phrase. The songs that use it are taking a statement uttered by God Himself and using it wildly out of context *to mean exactly the opposite of what God was saying*. Those uplifting, encouraging songs are brutally butchering the Word of God. This is what the Bible actually has to say about weakness and strength:

2 Corinthians 12:10: “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.”

Notice the subtle but *enormous* distinction. We can do all things through Christ, but we can do nothing without Him. What honors God is our weakness, not our strength. When we are reproached, troubled, tormented, and tried – when we have no strength of our own and are utterly empty – that is when the power of God is greatest in our lives. In the Old Testament God did mighty works through the tiny army of Gideon. He shows His great power through our weakness, not through our strength. The truth is that I am *not* strong, but God is. My only hope is for Him to show His strength through me.

There are other hymns that are an odd mixture of truth and error. For example, take the classic hymn “Days of Elijah”:

*These are the days of Elijah
Declaring the Word of the Lord
And these are the days of Your servant, Moses
Righteousness being restored
And though these are days of great trial
Of famine and darkness and sword
Still we are the voice in the desert crying
Prepare ye the way of the Lord*

CHORUS:

*Behold he comes
Riding on a cloud
Shining like the sun
At the trumpet's call
Lift your voice
It's the year of jubilee
Out of Zion's hill salvation comes*

*And these are the days of Ezekiel
The dry bones becoming as flesh
And these are the days of Your servant, David
Rebuilding the temple of praise
And these are the days of the harvest
The fields are as white in your world
And we are the laborers in your vineyard
declaring the word of the Lord*

Let's take a closer look at some of the theology in this hymn. For example:

*These are the days of Elijah
Declaring the Word of the Lord*

Yes, Elijah did declare the words of the Lord, and we should be doing that too. However, when the Bible talks about the “days of Elijah” it is talking about this prophecy from the last book in the Old

Testament:

Malachi 4:5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

Throughout the Bible the phrase “day of the Lord” is a reference to the Tribulation. At some point before the Tribulation begins, Elijah will be sent back to Earth to complete his ministry. (This is probably why he was taken up to God by chariots of fire instead of dying like everyone else; his work is not yet finished.) The days of Elijah will consist of Elijah actually being here, on Earth, preaching. Those days are not here yet. These are not the days of Elijah.

The song then talks about Moses:

*And these are the days of Your servant, Moses
Righteousness being restored*

Did Moses restore righteousness? Not exactly. Moses did give the Law, but Israel could not keep it. The Israelites constantly rebelled against Moses in the wilderness, and when Moses finally brought them to Canaan they refused to go in and take it – so God let them all die and raised up another generation. At the end of Moses' life God made it clear that the Israelites were not going to obey Him:

Deuteronomy 31:16: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

17 Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?

18 And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.”

Moses did not restore righteousness. In fact, Israel's most prominent characteristic during his lifetime was *rebellion*, not obedience. God gave them the Law and they could not keep it.

Then there is this:

*And these are the days of Your servant, David
Rebuilding the temple of praise*

You will not find the phrase “temple of praise” anywhere in the Bible. On top of that, King David did not build or rebuild a temple; the first temple was actually built by his son Solomon. God actually *prohibited* David from building Him a temple! David did a lot of great things, but temple building was not one of them.

Then there is this:

*Behold he comes
Riding on a cloud
Shining like the sun
At the trumpet's call
Lift your voice
It's the year of jubilee
Out of Zion's hill salvation comes*

The Bible does refer to Zion's hill. We find it in Psalm 2:

Psalm 2:1: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?
2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying,
3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.
4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.
5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.
6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

This Psalm is talking about the same events that are mentioned in Joel 3. At the end of the Tribulation there will come a day when the kings of the world will come together to attack Jerusalem. When that happens Jesus will return and destroy them. Christ will then literally reign as king over the world from the holy hill of Zion. Salvation will come out of Zion's hill. All of this happens at the Second Coming.

However, the time when the Lord comes "at the trumpet's call" is when He comes at the Rapture for His Church:

I Corinthians 15:51: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

At the Rapture Jesus will return at the sound of a trumpet to raise the Church from the dead. At the Second Coming Jesus will return with the armies of Heaven to defeat the armies of the Antichrist that are waging war against the Jews. (Revelation 19 discusses this event but does not mention any trumpets.) The song has taken these two distinct events (which are separated in time by a number of years) and merged them into one.

I am not trying to be argumentative here. The point I am making is that some hymns have an unfortunate tendency to play fast and loose with the Bible, taking things out of context or inventing things that the Bible just does not say. This has caused an entire generation of Christians to believe things that are not true.

I think it would be wise to be more careful about the songs that we are singing. After all, as Christians we are charged with rightly dividing the Word. Is it really too much to ask that our hymns be theologically accurate?

WHERE WAS THE GARDEN OF EDEN?

The other day I came across an article online that claimed that the Garden of Eden was probably located in what is now Iraq. I've seen this claim made numerous times, and since it doesn't appear to be going away I decided to address it. The record needs to be set straight: there is no Biblical reason to believe that the Garden of Eden was in Iraq – or anywhere else in the Middle East, for that matter.

The first thing we need to understand is that the famous garden that God made was actually put in a country called Eden. The reason it was called the Garden of Eden is because it was the garden *that was in Eden*. Eden was the name of the country, not the garden:

Genesis 2:8: “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

9 And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

As you can see, the Lord planted a garden *in Eden*. So what do we know about this country of Eden, and why do people mistakenly believe it was Iraq?

Well, the Bible says that a river came out of the land of Eden. That river subdivided into four other rivers, one of which was the Euphrates river:

Genesis 2:10: “And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.

11 The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;

12 And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.

13 And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia.

14 And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.”

People read this and think “Oh! That must be talking about the Euphrates River that's in the Middle East. Therefore that must be where the Garden of Eden was located!” That seems very clever, until you realize that *there was a worldwide Flood that destroyed the entire world*. The whole purpose of the Flood was to wipe everything out, and that's exactly what it did. It had a devastating effect, to the point where it even altered continents. After the flood waters subsided the world was a radically different place. The topography of the planet had been altered forever.

The modern Euphrates River is not the same Euphrates River that was mentioned in Genesis 2. It is not one of four rivers that all come from the same source; that tributary system was destroyed by the Flood. After Noah and his family left the Ark and began repopulating the world they named a new river after a river that had existed before the Flood. It is just like how the American city of New York is named after the old English city of York.

It is impossible to know where the old land of Eden used to be because it was completely

destroyed in the Flood. It could have been anywhere on the globe – including in areas that are now covered by oceans. There is no compelling reason to think that it was in the part of the world that is now the Middle East.