



Difficult Things in the Word of God Explained

(Plus: Innovative Answers to Commonly Asked Questions)



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Foreword

Typically, Christians avoid discussing passages that appear to be too difficult to explain. This is not an indictment of their devotion to the Lord, their love for scripture, or their commitment to fulfilling the great commission. It simply is a factual observation that most Christians are not thoroughly equipped to address the more difficult issues of scripture. Most Christians are not theologians, nor do they aspire to be.

The average Christian is concerned with knowing the basic teachings of the Bible so that they might share them with others. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, their faithfulness is laudable. They faithfully attend their place of worship, sit under good teaching and preaching, read their Bibles daily and have a regimen of prayer. They support their local assembly and exercise their spiritual gift(s). If all believers did this, the world would be a better place.

Even those who commit themselves to regimental, quantitative study of the Word of God seldom pause long enough to find the meaning in certain difficult passages. They move past those verses, confident that while they may not fully understand what is being said, God made no mistake in including it, and accept it as being accurate. There is really nothing wrong with this either. For me, rather than viewing this as lackadaisical, I see it as evidence of faith. The basis for all that a Christian believes is faith. We take God at his word and believe him. Accepting the passage that we do not understand is the purest exercising of that faith, and very commendable.

That notwithstanding, this book is offered to assist those who would gain a better understanding of some of the greater and lesser difficult passages in scripture. I felt the need to compile these entrees because my personal experience has been that when I have asked others for answers, they either could not provide one or avoided the question altogether. Indeed, even when consulting some of the more renowned commentaries available, I have found that the authors themselves skipped over the difficult verses and passages.

This was most frustrating during my formative years as a young Christian. But it was also motivational. The inability of others to explain, or their unwillingness to do the work so that others could benefit from their effort, provoked me to perform my own research and study.

As you might have already guessed, a substantial portion of the things I found “difficult” was merely due to my being a novice in the word. Through faithful, daily study of the Word of God, sitting under good teaching and preaching, and reading what others had to say on certain topics, matured me as a believer.

Consequently, in time, the gaining of knowledge and experience brought me a spiritual renaissance and I no longer viewed many of the passages as difficult. In fact, I often

muse over how very simple they are to understand. It was just a matter of growing in my faith and familiarity with the Bible.

That is not to say that truly difficult verses and passages do not exist. They do, and in considerable number. We will discuss as many as I am aware of in the following pages and provide you with explanations and conclusions that hopefully will resonate with you and satisfy your own doubts and misgivings.

I am not suggesting that God's Word is lacking in its presentation in any way. Nor am I suggesting that I have all the answers. The Word of God is perfect and the true understanding and answers are there for any believer to find. I have found many of them and am eager to share what I learned with others seeking their meaning; but I know that I am just a man and my explanations and conclusions should be prayerfully weighed. I can and have made mistakes.

My purpose in this book is to give readers a short cut to the study process in hopes it will kindle in them a desire to study more. True success in life comes for believers comes from knowing and adhering to the things God has said.

Introduction

Why should believers look at difficult passages of the Bible? What purpose does it serve for us to understand them? It would be very easy to simply ignore them. Who would know? Who would care?

And if the Bible was just a book written by men, Biblicists such as me might be inclined to do just that; ignore them. We would feel no responsibility to educate and enlighten ourselves, or others. We would have no passion to publish the things of God, because we would really not be certain the Bible was the word of God.

Ah, but that is the cornerstone of our faith. We believe that the Bible is not just a book; it is the supernatural revelation of truth from God, the transmitted thoughts of the Almighty. It was not written by men per se. It was written by men who were breathed upon, moved and guided by the Holy Spirit of God. It is the Word (and words) of the one who created us and the earth we find ourselves standing upon.

It stands on its own merit and in its own power. It does not need anyone to lend it credibility for it to be credible, applicable and timely. Many have tried to prove the Bible false, and in their attempts been converted under its awesome authority. Men will point out that it is full of contradictions, but are not able to show where. They will claim there are errors, but cannot articulate why they believe them to be errors. Their unregenerate bias is all the proof they need or want.

Knowing there are those who feel this way about scripture, one would think that I would be reluctant to discuss difficult and sometimes seemingly contradictory passages. It would be tantamount to airing dirty laundry, giving skeptics more ammunition in their condemnation of the Bible. But I am neither reluctant nor apprehensive. I have no problem identifying and discussing such passages, because it is not dirty laundry at all; and all are understandable.

Perhaps it would be prudent for me to qualify what I mean when I use the term “difficult passage”. Simply, I use the term to identify verses or groups of verses in the Bible that are not clear in their meaning, especially when there is potential for controversy or a claim of contradiction. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

I recently completed a semester in a secular college to acquire needed credits. Though apprehensive about what the curriculum might include in a secular university, one of the courses I decided to take was Old Testament Studies.

My apprehensions proved to be apropos. The professor was a godless, self-absorbed blow hard who could not allow one session to go by without calling God a bully and using his name in vain. Oddly, he was a devout atheist (how is that for an oxymoron),

but failed to see the hypocrisy in calling God a bully when he did not believe he existed. Nor did he see the disparity of being an atheist and teaching a course on the Bible.

I was told by other students that he represented the mainstream thinking in Biblical studies in that college. Others told me that his anti-God behavior was normal in secular institutions of higher education. Almost without exceptions, the professors and their assistants were unbelievers. Again, I wondered why they would dedicate their time to teaching on a topic they did not embrace in faith. By the end of the course (which was one of the most difficult undertakings I ever completed in my life) it was clear that their purpose was to pull as many away from religion as they could. How sad. How very sad.

During the course, the approach the Professor used to realize his objective of undermining any faith his students might possess, was to identify and exaggerate what he considered difficulties in the Bible. More accurately, he keyed on what he considered contradictions, problems and difficult passages and concepts in both the Old and New Testaments.

His ideas of difficult passages do not match mine. Most of what he discussed was unfounded, undocumented, pre-fabricated misconceptions. Indeed, in some instances he ignored historical documentation and made-up his material; or propagated the erroneous teachings found in the atheist handbook (class textbook) he used.

It was most unsettling to me; to see these erroneous, baseless ideas being taught to young, unsuspecting minds. No doubt most of the students took this particular course to learn something about the Old Testament. What they got instead was an introduction or rather indoctrination to atheism.

Some of the things he taught were outrageous. For instance, the textbook completely eliminated the term “BC” or “Before Christ” and replaced it with “BCE”, an acronym for “Before the Common Era”. It is important to note that the most successful deception is falsehood that closely resembles the truth. By using the acronym “BCE” one perceives that the change to “BC” is merely an update and is therefore acceptable. It is not. It is an outrageous and egregious assault on the deity of Christ.

The deception also included changing the Red Sea to Sea of Reeds, which is a swampy area near the Fertile Crescent area of the Mideast. This body of water, if you can call it that, is very shallow and easily crossed. No divine intervention was needed in order for Israel to cross, so this deception was tailor made for a class like this.

In another class session, he refused to accept that God used what modern Christians refer to as “successionism” in his revelation. In other words, God would say something and then later on expound on it in another passage or book in the Bible. A good example of this is creation. In Genesis 1:1 we are told *“In the beginning, God created the heaven and earth”*. We are not told why or how in that passage. But later on in scripture he tells us the exact details of what he created each day. Even later we are given other details about the how and why.

He presented the progressive revelation of creation as separate and conflicting accounts. They are not. There is no contradiction of facts in any of the passages he referred to in class, but he would not hear counter arguments. Class participation was allowed only if you agreed with him.

I do not wish to belabor this point. Suffice it to say that these are not my ideas of Bible difficulties. The only difficulty here is the difficulty that resides in the hearts of those who would attack the Bible and the God who wrote it. My purpose in this book is to discuss actual difficulties that may hinder those who have adopted a regimen of study of the Bible; not to refute those imagined by those who reject the Bible.

Additionally, I am going to pass on discussing many misunderstood doctrines of the Bible, such as tongues and being filled with the Spirit. No doubt these are topics where newer believers sometimes have difficulty grasping or discerning. But they are not in and of themselves difficult; they are just new to the reader. So like me, they will have to go through the process of growing on a daily basis as the Bible directs. Eventually their understanding will come.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the milk and meat of the Word of God. Infants in the faith can only handle so much, doctrinally speaking. There is a wealth of life-altering information in the Bible, enough for more than several lifetimes. One must start with the milk, or the easier to understand things. In time, Paul said, they will be able to stand the weightier things or strong meat.

An example of this might be the concept of wine. There are many young (in the faith) Christians who read that Jesus turned the water into wine and think it is therefore okay to drink wine. The problem is that other places in scripture denounce drinking wine and strong drink. So there is a dilemma, or at least an imagined one.

In these cases, the rule that must be applied is never, never, never does the Word of God contradict itself. If there is an apparent contrast in the conclusion you arrive at with other portions of the Word of God, then the interpretation is wrong and you must start over again until every verse on the topic aligns with the others. It is really that simple.

In the case of wine, it is not for me to tell anyone what is right or wrong. It is for them to discern. If they will take the time and prayerfully research the topic, they will find that it is a matter of fermentation. Sometimes the Bible speaks of fermented wine and other times it speaks of grape juice. Both are often referred to in scripture as "*fruit of the vine*". It takes time and considerable effort in study to arrive at the conclusion that God never encourages strong, fermented drink. But try telling that to a new Christian who reads that Jesus turned the water into wine.

There are a host of such things in scripture where simple research will lead the inquirer to an answer. So I do not want to address those here. Rather, I want to look at passages and

concepts where an answer or explanation is not as easily found and where one might be inclined to just give up and accept it.

Now, there is nothing wrong with just accepting what God has said by faith and moving on, but the Christian faith is a “*know so*” faith and knowledge empowers. So for those who would like to have a better understanding of some difficult passages in scripture, the following chapters are offered.

Difficulty in understanding a passage does not discredit what is being said. The fact that we cannot immediately understand or explain the difficulty away does not mean it cannot be solved with proper research and prayer. Sometimes that research takes a long time and sometimes it does not. Sometimes an understanding only comes after one grows to spiritual maturity.

As I admitted earlier, in my formative years as a Christian, I came across many difficult or hard to understand passages in my studies. Indeed, some of what I read seemed illogical and sometimes even impossible. Years later, those same passages pose absolutely no difficulty for me whatsoever, and they are easily understood. I have developed as a Christian and come to know the Bible in a much more intimate way.

It is the superficial reader who adds calamity to a difficult verse. They read something that they do not understand or assume cannot be and they panic. The seasoned, faithful Christian reader knows that understanding will come in time after appropriate effort is invested in researching the perceived difficulty.

Too often young Christians get bogged down trying to understand or explain something that they simply are not capable of discerning at their present experience level. I have seen worry about a small issue like those cited above completely consume a person. They run around like Chicken Little in a panic, until someone straightens them out by explaining what the passage means.

So we will look at these and other perceived difficulties in the pages ahead and we will see that they are not difficulties at all. There was always a convincing explanation available, but it takes time and effort to reach that level of understanding.

And two very valuable points need to be made here about understanding the Bible. First, too many fundamental churches allow new converts to the faith to flounder on their own without any comprehensive Bible training program where they can learn at least the basics of the faith. Most will learn by osmosis or not at all.

I do not condone blindly indoctrinating someone, but I am a big proponent of organized and planned training. If a person is left alone to struggle with trying to understand basic Bible truths, they will either: tire and give up; or they will miss important truths that help shape their preparedness to minister and serve.

The second point is related to the first. Often in those programs where training is provided to new converts, the training is lacking. That is not just my opinion. My military service afforded me the opportunity to attend churches all around the country. I can tell you that there are a lot of good programs available for Sunday school or Bible training and many churches are using those programs to comprehensively train people in the things of God.

But there is still a lot of weak or silly Bible training going on. And I am not talking about the false teach of cults. There are a lot of good, fundamental, God fearing, Jesus loving, Bible believing, Bible preaching churches that are not paying attention to what is being taught in their Sunday Schools. More accurately, they are not paying attention to the people they put in teaching positions.

For example, I attended a church in Texas for a short time in the 1990s. Two men, two very nice and devoted Christian men, were sharing the middle-age adult Sunday school class. I forget now if they alternated Sundays or each took two Sundays in a row, but they basically balanced it so each taught on half of the Sundays in a year.

Again, these were nice fellows, very personable and likable. And both were capable teachers. But it wasn't how they taught, but what they taught that was bothersome to me. They taught topical classes and there is nothing wrong with that. But the topics they chose were purposeless.

By that I mean, the topics did nothing to edify or challenge those being taught. Each lesson was comprised of nothing more than "filler" material to take up the allotted time for the Sunday school hour. Admittedly, the classes were at times fun and entertaining, but no one left there armed with a new resolve or purpose. No one left the class with a new vision or burden.

Charles Spurgeon once predicted that our churches would become places of entertainment one day. He said that in his day (nearly 150 years ago) the signs of this were already present and the church had begun climbing that proverbial slippery slope. Today we have books that teach us how to have "Seeker Services", how to set up worship services so people are entertained and drawn back.

There are mega-churches claiming to be Christian in persuasion popping up everywhere, drawing in the masses with plays and concerts and other entertainment-based endeavors. The situation is so bad, one beloved man of God of national renown asked "*Are we supposed to feed the sheep or entertain goats?*"

What is the purpose of entertaining people? It is hard enough to get people to come out faithfully to Sunday school (or church for that matter). When they do, we ought to take advantage of those occasions to teach solid, useful, and timely Bible lessons. Instead, what people often get is entertainment. Spiritual growth is very satisfying and also a grand motivator. Entertainment entertains. It motivates no one.

Let me give you an example of one of the classes conducted by these two individuals. On this particular occasion, they taught in tandem, both taking part of the class. The lesson was about how to raise children the Bible way.

Now, that sounds like a very timely lesson right? And it is, if you have people in the class who are raising children. But of the 35 people in the class, only one man had children living at home and they were 16 and 17 respectively. The rest of us had grown children and many of us had grandchildren.

We had already raised our children. It was a little late to be telling us how to do it. Anyway, it became evident during the class that many of us had vastly more knowledge about raising children than the two young men teaching the class, one of which was married, but without children.

The valuable time available had been squandered. No one had gained knowledge from the class. No one left edified or challenged in any way. Familiar material makes for a boring class and the class was indeed bored. The only time there was any interest shown at all was when it became evident what the topic was and everyone looked around at each other with a puzzled look.

This unfortunately proved to be the norm. The next week one of the men discussed sex and what the Bible says about it. It actually got pretty risqué. You could tell by the steady increase in silence that people thought it was an inappropriate topic. It just so happened that my 25 year old daughter and her husband were visiting from out of town and the topic was a bit embarrassing for them and my wife and I. It was just a bad topic and bad idea.

I think I recall one of the men premising the lesson with *“I prayed on what to teach today and God led me to this”*. I felt like blurting out *“Please pass the bread, the baloney has already been around”*. I learned long ago that well-meaning believers often do what they want to do and qualify it by saying it was God’s will.

Another topic considered whether God had a sense of humor. I suppose for some people this is something that is nice to know, but what possible spiritual application can one make toward growing in the Lord and serving him better? Almost all the topics that were addressed were of almost no spiritual consequence. The class, who seemed open and ready for spiritual growth, was now geared toward being entertained each Sunday.

The topic selection was not the only problem. Classes were usually conducted as open discussions. In other words, the teacher would not teach, but simply ask questions and let the class attendees provide public answers. Open discussions allowed participation from everyone and I normally have no problem with that. But in this situation, the teacher would yield the floor and not get it back for 15-20 minutes.

Everyone was afforded the opportunity to give their opinion, whether they were regulars or visitors. Often a visitor of a different faith would participate and express unbiblical

views. The teacher never had the opportunity to share what he had prepared, if indeed, he had prepared. I say that only because he jokingly had mentioned that he often did not prepare because he did not know where the discussion would lead in class. How very sad.

On top of all this, there were about as many versions of the Bible in class as there were families represented. An air of confusion always existed because someone would not be able to keep up with the version that was being read from. Additionally, there was no real scripture memorization program, no dissecting verses to see what they meant (because each version set forth different meanings).

After being asked by the Pastor (who was never in this class) to preach several Sunday morning services in the main church, the lead teacher in class asked me if I would help in their teaching rotation in class. I gladly accepted.

I know that I am going to probably come across as proud, smug or judgmental, but I assure you, that is not me. I do not consider myself better than anyone. I do not think that I am smarter or wiser or a better teacher. I merely am a steward, as the Bible instructs me to be. I see the Lord's resources and time being misused or I see opportunities being missed and I have to say or do something about it.

And so, I decided that since I had one Sunday a month to teach this class, I was going to try to steer them back to a conventional class blueprint where they could grow in their Bible understanding. As it worked out, the other men apparently needed some time off, so I wound up getting several weeks of teaching in a row each month.

I began with a very strong lesson on reverence toward God and his word to hopefully give the class a more appropriate perception of God. I did not mention the other men, their lessons, or how I felt about those lessons, but rather just portrayed God in the virtuous light he should be seen in.

In almost no time, people were not concerned about whether God had a sense of humor or not and we were not discussing embarrassing topics. We were learning to revere God and his word in a way they had never been taught before. We discussed the importance of having a daily regimen of prayer and reading the Bible.

This led the class to ask me about the trustworthiness of the Bible. I gave them a quick overview of the Bible and the next Sunday taught a class on the Inspiration and Preservation of the Bible. Soon everyone was using the same version of the Bible and we were able to start open class readings of scripture and a memorization routine.

The more they learned, the more they wanted to learn. Perceiving this, I moved into a series covering major doctrines and distinctive of the Bible, the Epistles and our responsibilities as believers.

The class was seeing the Bible's greatness for the first time, not because of me, but because it is indeed great, wonderful and alive. They could see its perfection, its authority and power and now found a new reverence for it. And in so doing, they had also found a new reverence for the Lord and a thirst to learn about him and to serve him.

It was the two-edged sword of the word that was motivating them, not the teaching abilities of this writer. They were getting useful, practical and serious instruction from the Word and it was something they could grasp and apply to daily life. The Holy Spirit had awakened many of them and put a spiritual thirst within. Soon they were asking me questions.

I could see their growth. Their questions were becoming more and more sophisticated, even complicated. I soon found that I had to be on my toes. When they started asking me about the topic of this book, difficult Bible passages, I knew it was time to choose from among them to help me with the class.

And I said all that to simply say the reason I teach lessons (or write them) on the difficult and confusing passages of the Bible is because serious believers want answers to the questions these passages present. Knowing the answers is useful and practical to them. When the class realized that they could arrive at answers about real things in their lives, when they figured out that what God wrote applied to them today and not just Christians a thousand years ago, it revolutionized their faith. There was no topic they were no eager to tackle.

Understanding the hard things of scripture is like being on spiritual steroids. When a believer can field questions from inquisitors about the very tough verses in the Bible, it gives them a victorious credibility. Too many Christians want to shy away from the difficult questions posed to us by the world about the Bible. We want to hide our heads in the sand and hope the question will go away. This looks bad to those seeking truth and it ought not to be.

There are answers and the Lord says we should have them. He admonishes us to:

"be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh...a reason of the hope that is in you..." (I Peter 3:15).

In II Peter 3:16, we are told that some things in the Bible are hard to understand. Specifically, it says:

"As also in all his (speaking of Paul) epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures..."

God openly tells us through Peter that some of the things written in the Bible are hard to be understood. Why are they hard? Is it because God purposely wanted to hide them

from us? Is it because God is playing some sort of game with us? No. The answer is found in verse 18, which says:

"But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

In keeping with all the other passages that tell us to "*study*" or "*prepare*" or "*learn*", we are told to "*grow in grace*". The only way to grow is to read the manual (the Bible) and to do the things it says, following the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life. But doing cannot take place, and the Holy Spirit cannot lead, apart from the Word of God. You must, must, must read it in order to do it.

Increasing your knowledge in the Bible is like any other thing you learn; you must study and learn in order to grow and excel. That is precisely why it is important to address these difficult passages and to learn what they mean. If we shy away from them, our confidence in the word will wane and our regimen for study will eventually wane as well. If that happens, we become ineffectual as witnesses for the Lord.

And so, we are about to begin a comprehensive look at confusing or puzzling passages in the Bible. It behooves us to address just a few peripheral thoughts to ensure we have a clear vision of what we mean by "difficult". I do not want to further confuse an already confusing issue by mixing up terminology. A difficult passage can be something that is just that; difficult to understand, unclear, ambiguous.

But it can also be averse with an incorrect word, or a verse that appears to be in contrast or conflict with other portions of scripture. Let me give you an example: Solomon, who God endowed with the greatest wisdom that any man has possessed, had 300 wives and 700 concubines (mistresses).

Okay, I can hear some of you men saying "*Well that wasn't too wise all by itself, now was it?*" That may well be, but fortunately I do not have to comment on that as we are not actually discussing his wisdom. Rather, I want to show the contrast this verse has with other portions of scripture.

In Genesis for example, when Adam and Eve were joined together as man and wife by God, he said they were to be one flesh. The intent was that they should remain one for life. In the epistles the one man for one woman for life principle is reinforced. God intends one man and one woman to remain together.

So then, we have contrasting ideals. On one hand we are told to be married to one woman or one man for life, but on the other hand we have it reported that Solomon had 300 wives and a whole bunch of girlfriends. And many of his wives were outside of the Jewish faith. This is problematic, to be sure. However, the problem is not with conflicting instructions from God, but rather disobedience on the part of Solomon.

Solomon did not have some special permission to marry multiple wives. He chose to do it. It had become common practice in Israel. Most were the forging of political alignments more than a physical union. It was not uncommon for a man to not even know some of his wives. No matter, secondary and beyond marriages were wrong, and Solomon knew they were wrong. Eventually, his pigeons came home to roost and this landed him in idolatry. He wound up following the false gods of his pagan wives.

You see, the two pictures that scripture gives us on marriage were not difficult to discern. It was just a contrast in ideals, but the contrast was there because of man, not God. But there are also contrasts in the Word which God has placed there; and not without reason.

For instance, in Ecclesiastes 1:4 it says "*the earth abideth forever*". But we know that this cannot be because in Revelation 21:1 we are told the earth passes away. Both truths were given to us by God. Both are indeed true. But they are definitely in contrast with each other. So how do we reconcile these two thoughts?

If we look at Ecclesiastes more closely, and in context with all that is said, it is clear that the passage means that the earth will not pass away through the reign of man on earth. Solomon's whole case, though breathed supernaturally from God, reflected a man's perspective. But from God's perspective, he shall one day do away with the earth and make a new one.

Another example will show a God-intended and man-imagined contrast. It is found in Ephesians 2:8-9, which basically says that we are saved through faith, and James 2:17-26 which seems to say our salvation has to do with works that we do.

The passage in Ephesians should be taken at face value. It means exactly what it says about faith being the catalyst for salvation. But take a closer look at the passage in James. It does not say that good works save us. If you back up to verse 14 (and I will paraphrase here), it says "*you believe in God - big deal - the devils do too - put your money where your mouth is and show me your faith by producing good works*". It is saying that if your faith is real, men shall recognize your faith by the good works that you do. But the passage preserves the truth from Ephesians that salvation comes through faith and faith alone.

It would probably be best to say that the view of salvation in Ephesians is from God's perspective. He sees the heart and knows what has happened inside. In James, the view is from the eyes of men, who do not know your heart. In order for them to see your faith, they need to see the fruit of faith, which is works. The contrast is imagined. There really is no contrast.

Nevertheless, the Bible does have its share of contrasting truths. They are there, not to confuse, but to enlighten, not to cause darkness, but to shed light. The greatest contrast of all is a Holy God loving sinful mankind. He reveals his infinite wisdom and ideals to us and exposes our finite and corrupt ideas. He condemns our flesh, but regenerates our

spirit. He doesn't need us, we need him. God's relationship with us is based upon contrasts.

In any other setting, contrasts would undermine and diminish the credibility of the writer, but God uses them to draw us to him in trust and to show not only his infinite wisdom, but his understanding of human nature. He shows the contrast of our limited lives to his eternal life so that we might reach out to him. How marvelous.

And now we shall look at some of the puzzling and difficult passages as promised.

CHAPTER 1

The Bible



I believe it fitting in this presentation of difficult passages of the Bible that we begin by discussing the Bible itself. For many, their only Bible difficulty is in knowing what version or translation is right. It does make a difference. Each translation is based upon a particular manuscript and uses different words and sometimes widely-varying interpretations. Words mean things. The way you translate a passage can completely change what God said.

There are more than 300 versions or translations available. It is my opinion that most are untrustworthy. By that I mean that the authors or producers were not faithful in ensuring their interpretations were accurate. Often bias trumped over details.

Some translations do not wander too far from accuracy, while others are simply abominable. In fact, many of those are not worth the paper they are printed on. Too many liberties have been taken in their production, too many baseless presumptions applied, with little attention to fact.

There are a handful of translations that are acceptable, but even most of these have their share of problems. Again, my opinion, but I believe that there is only one translation that is the faithful preservation of God's word. That does not mean that other translations are not useful. It simply means that this one stands alone in faithful reflection of the original Textus Receptus or Received Text, which we shall discuss later in this chapter.

Before I identify that translation and give justification, let us first eliminate the obvious fakes and forgeries...those versions that have twisted the very core of God's revelation to mankind. I speak of course of those versions that insist that God is a woman, suggest that Jesus was married or a homosexual, includes vulgar curse words for emphasis, or that sets forth any number of other ridiculous or irreverent ideas. And there is no shortage of them. Most are condensed versions, but versions nonetheless.

I won't bother to name these foul works. I think that most people are aware of their existence. Suffice it to say that these are obvious heretical works and I will not address them beyond what I say in this paragraph. They are unholy attempts to ridicule God and bring him down to mankind's level so that those who reject God's holy nature may feel better about themselves and their own twisted sense of morals and values. Enough said.

I would also like to eliminate others that were written originally in Latin; not because I have something against Latin, but because Latin was not one of the languages that were used in the times of the giving of the books of the Bible. I am not discounting a

translation into Latin for the use of a Latin speaking people, should such a people still exist. I openly encourage reaching all peoples of the world in their own tongue. This of course was a commission given to the disciples of Jesus Christ and demonstrated on the day of Pentecost. Rather, I merely am discounting Latin as a foundational language for manuscript basis as it was not one of the languages used in association with the original text or illuminated copies and translations of that text.

The languages used in the writing of the original text were Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek (Koine). Latin came later and was the language of the educated and cultured. Early translations in Latin were made with that in mind, reflecting the political bias of the aristocracy in power in those days.

Many of the more modern translations are tainted by the same political considerations (i.e. changing the "*him*" for God to "*her*" to appease political activist groups of the twentieth century, etc.). It is quite unsettling to know that people who claim to have an affinity for a Holy God will purposely slant or change his word to accommodate their own unholy bias, but such is the product of human nature.

I do not want to go into great detail about the many manuscripts and translations of those earlier times. I have neither time nor space for such an undertaking. Rather, I will spend both of those commodities providing you justification for my selection of what I consider to be the most faithful translation available. However, along with that disclosure, I will provide a brief general introduction as to why I reject so many translations from earlier times. I could hardly select one translation over the others if I did not.

It is important to first discuss the contributions of two industrious men during that period, namely, John Wycliffe and William Tyndale. These two men, though not contemporaries, opposed Romanism and tried to forge English revival. Wycliffe believed that all people should be afforded the opportunity to explore the Word (and therefore words) of God. Accordingly, and at great risk to himself and his family, he translated the Latin version of the Bible into English in the late 1300's.



Practicing one's religion or faith in those days was quite different from today. Today, we have almost complete freedom in practicing our faith. We think it nothing to pull our Bible out and read it in private or public. We have Bible software loaded on our computers. We have all types of electronic apparatus, electronic Bibles, and cassettes and CDs with celebrities reading scripture for us.

But it was not always so. For nearly 300 years, Wycliffe's work stood out as revolutionary. It was a great help to the common citizen, but during his life and long after, Wycliffe was a hated man by established religious hierarchy.

Nevertheless, his brave endeavor led to others taking up the cause. Another great man, William Tyndale picked up the struggle left by Wycliffe. Tyndale wanted to make the Bible even more accessible. He wanted to make available to the general populace a Bible

that was translated directly from the original Hebrew and Greek and not from a Latin version translation. And so he did.

At the same time, Martin Luther was at work on a German translation, while also involved with breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church. Then other translations came, such as Matthews Bible (1537), Taverner Bible (1540), the Great Bible (1560), the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Bishop's Bible. Even the Roman Catholic Church, under pressure from every corner of the globe to provide the Word of God to the common man, developed the Rheim-Douai in the very early 1600's, so that the average parishioner could possess a copy. It differed from the others in that it was based on the Latin Vulgate rather than original Hebrew and Greek, but it was a victory for the common man.

It is difficult for us to assimilate to the hardship and oppression that early believers faced in terms of religious expression and practice. Back then it was an act of religious treason for someone of the laity to want to read the Bible for themselves, let alone have their own copy. So the undertakings by Wycliffe, Tyndale and others were significant.

Returning to our elimination process, and to what I am sure will be the disappointment for some, I also want to discount the Apocryphal books, which are included in the Latin Vulgate and some other early Bible versions. I am not abandoning or putting these books down. Many, if not most of these books (numbering around 50, 15 of which appear to be the most commonly used) are good historical references. They provide some interesting information and perspectives. But they are not canonical.

They were not delivered under the inspiration of God's direction and they are not mentioned specifically in the other 66 books of the Bible. I am not ignorant to the arguments made in support of these books, but the basis for those arguments is heaped in political and religious bias, much like many of the earlier manuscripts and translations.

Some lay canonical claim to the writings of their denominational founders or other books thought to be inspired, but none of these have stood the internal and external examination that the accepted 66 books have undergone. Nor will they stand the eternal examination by God. Every imaginable scrutiny was placed upon the 66 books of the Bible and they have easily weathered those examinations and continue to project the supernatural authority imposed upon them by God.

The Lord Jesus himself supported only the 66 books in Luke 24:27 where it says:

**"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded
unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself"**

It says that Jesus addressed "all" the scriptures. If you search the words of Jesus, you will not find him identifying anything but the books that comprise the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. In fact, Old Testament and New Testament books are mentioned over 2,000 times in the New Testament, but no mention is made of any of the other books some denominations claim are inspired.

There are actually many other reasons for my position on denying inspirational status to the Apocrypha, but again, there is neither time nor space to explore them in this chapter. I think it is important to note however, that there is a lot of confusion and conflict concerning these historical books. Some sects recognize all of the 50 books, while others of the same denomination recognize only a few, and reject others. Still other groups do not recognize any of the 50 books at all.

When it comes to the traditional 66 books of the Bible, there is no such conflict. All factions of Christendom accept them. God is not the author of confusion, and that is exactly what exists because these Apocryphal books have falsely been assigned the label of “inspired”.

I am sorry if this observation has offended anyone, but the facts are the facts. And the bad news does not end there. Putting aside for a moment differences in manuscript and canonical books, we have modern day translations that are universally accepted, but that fall far short of being accurate and faithful.

For instance, the New International Version (NIV). The NIV is for the most part, a pretty good version, but it is lacking. In the 40 plus years of its existence over 40,000 changes have been made to correct translation errors. Most of these errors were numerical deviations and other minor problems, but some were of major importance. Nevertheless, 40,000 errors is an unsettling factor to say the least. If such haphazard care was shown in the small things, are we to trust that the more important things were given more care?

Similar claims can be laid against other translations or versions of the Bible. Great damage is done to the essential doctrines of the Bible, so much so that the entire revelation from God is lost and a new gospel is preached. Instead of repentance and reconciliation with God, we hear the gospel of financial prosperity or social redemption of the whole of man (whatever that means).

For instance, in one version in the book of John, chapter one, only a couple of words are changed, but it completely undermines the gospel message and strips Jesus Christ of his deity. The Bible says “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God*”. The “Word” used here is Jesus Christ. In essence we are told that Jesus was in the beginning before mankind came on the scene and that Jesus is God. And that is a faithful and trustworthy translation.

But in the version mentioned above, the text reads “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was a god*”. Two very tiny changes are made. The word “a” is added and the capital “G” is changed to a small “g”. So why is that so bad?

Simply, by referring to Jesus Christ, the actual Son of the Living God as “*a god*”, this translation is rejecting Jesus as the Christ. Instead of Jesus being God, he is now only one of many gods. Then, the small “g” in scripture always has the connotation of a false

God. So, in essence, the producers of this translation are denying the deity of Jesus Christ and are purposely labeling him a false God.

Coincidentally, this twisted translation goes along perfectly with the false doctrines that they teach. Subtle changes, but deadly.

Apart from the enormous negative spiritual impact of such versions, there is also a detriment to different versions being used in a congregation. The wording of different translations is often so vastly different that public congregational reading and memorization programs in Sunday school are often impossible to have. To hear 20 people reading scripture out loud from different texts sounds more like a congregational argument than a concerted reading.

Additionally, when reading scripture as the Bible teacher in class or from the pulpit, confusion prevails with students who are reading different versions. Students are caught up with looking around with blank stares rather than absorbing the truth that is being taught. These reasons alone are enough for the congregation to agree to one standard translation. But that is only a side issue. The real issue is trustworthiness. Is the version you hold in your hand trustworthy and true? You are letting a lot ride on it.

One rule must be followed when measuring the value of a translation - the same rule that the translators ought to have employed; appropriate exegesis. When interpreting or translating, one must consider all other scripture that relates to that topic, at the same time considering what is being said, why it is being said, who is saying it, who it is being said to, what the circumstances were to cause it to be said and so on and so forth. If at any time the interpretation does not line up 100% of the time with all other scripture on that topic, the interpretation or translation is flawed.

With many translations researchers apparently found it easier to change the text rather than doing the hard work of making arduous comparisons to ensure continuity. It is hoped that these egregious miscues were borne from laziness and not perpetrated purposely to change what God had said, but I fear both the former and latter are true.

One might question why the men God used to write the Bible were thought to be immune to such error or bias. God used between 35-40 men to write the Bible, but there was only one author, God himself. Written over a period of approximately 1900 years, the Bible maintains a continuity of theme, thought and purpose that could not be passed on from human vessel to human vessel. The only one who could maintain that continuity of theme was God himself.

The first writer is commonly recognized as Moses, who wrote Genesis through Deuteronomy (though Job might have actually been written first). The last writer to be used was the Apostle John, who was used to pen the Book of the Revelation. There are 66 books that comprise the record or Bible that God inspired and preserved for our use, 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. Most of these writers were not contemporaries, not even close; and yet the continuity is as if they worked in tandem.

This then is the effect of involuntary inspiration...God breathing through his chosen vessels.

In **II Peter 1:21** we are told that this is how scripture was delivered to mankind. It establishes in just a few words the authorship, authority, power and duration of the Bible. It also sets a gauge to be used for evaluating translations, despite the fact there was only one translation in that day. The verse says God literally breathed through these men (Greek "theopneustos" or "God-breathed"):

**"For this prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but
holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost".**

Let's evaluate the claim that God himself makes here. He says that he moved through or "*breathed*" through men. And not just any men, but HOLY MEN; men who worshipped and revered God, men who were faithful to God and who sought to honor him through holy living, often men who denied themselves the pleasures and self-indulgences that normal people enjoy in life.

These men kept themselves single-minded in their devotion to God and as pure as possible so that He could use them. They would never dream of changing what God had said to represent their own petty bias, if indeed they possessed any. And lest anyone suppose that these "*holy*" men were somehow special men given over exclusively to ministry and a life of religious seclusion, let me give you an idea of the cross-section of society God used. These were people just like you and me. Even the Old Testament Prophets were often men who toiled for a living.

To name a few of the writers used:

- Paul, a Pharisee, tent maker and killer of Christians
- Matthew, a tax collector
- Nehemiah, a cupbearer or table servant
- Joshua, a military man
- Daniel, a slave, prisoner
- Peter, a fisherman
- Moses, a man trained in Egyptian culture
- Amos, a rancher
- Luke, a doctor

These men were used to pen the word (or words) of God. They did not volunteer, though again, I am sure they were willing. They were chosen by God. They were enlisted to the task involuntarily. And most importantly, they wrote what God wanted them to write and were not guilty of inserting their own bias as many are today.

God opened up and revealed exactly what he wanted for us to see and know through his living word. What he gave us was the inspired word. That word is preserved today and it is preserved in a translation. But what translation preserves it? I submit to you that it is

the King James Version. I understand that there is considerable controversy surrounding this translation. I address those concerns and provide justification for my claim below.

The controversy as to whether the King James Version of the Bible is the inspired Word of God or not has raged over many generations of Christians. Some believers reject it all together and claim King James never authorized it (as if that mattered). Others unwaveringly claim it is the very inspired word and others hold just as strongly that it is not. Occasionally, the opposing views can be so vehemently embraced that it causes schisms in the body and ministry suffers.

That something so fundamentally important and so theologically easy to have right can bring Christians to loggerhead is difficult for me to understand. We who love the Bible can understand when un-believers stir up controversy about scripture, but are perplexed when it comes from those who have been regenerated and enlightened by the Spirit of God.

Regardless of one's position, for a member of the body of Christ, charity and harmony should always prevail. Though we are to be separate from the world, we can safely borrow from the secular cliché "*we can agree to disagree*". Harmony to accomplish the great commission is paramount. Differing or varying views on a version of the Bible should not circumvent the publishing of the gospel.

Before charity and harmony are sought however, it is important that a Christian has done everything possible to explore all available evidence before arriving at their position on this matter. We are admonished as was the prophet, to "*search out a thing to ensure that it is true*". When we give due diligence to discover the truth, we leave no room for conflict in the body.

Now let me shock some of those whose camp I am in. In this matter of inspiration the search reveals that the King James Version simply cannot be the inspired Word of God. Sorry if that bursts anyone's bubble, but the fact is that no version or translation can be the inspired Word of God. To arrive at an opposite conclusion than this is to ignore the facts, which I will momentarily present below.

Before we do that however, I think it is important to note that the problem might just be semantics. Many believers use the word "*inspired*" when they actually mean to say "*preserved*" and vice versa. So the controversy might just be a matter of clarifying each position and not actually a theological disagreement.

Let's briefly look at the difference in these two words "inspiration" and "preservation", and let's keep it simple. Too often so-called Bible scholars get so deep that we common folk cannot understand what they are talking about.

Inspiration was a one time, never to be repeated act of God whereby he transferred his thoughts and will to paper by using the hands of holy men that he selected to write. He searched and knew their hearts and employed them to this holy task. These men were

sometimes contemporaries with each other, but often lived during different periods of history over several centuries of time.

God revealed his thoughts according to his time table in the format and way he wanted. This is best evidenced in the continuity of thought and purpose of scripture. As I alluded to earlier, he used approximately forty men to deliver the complete canon of scripture over a period of some 1900 years, but clearly the finished product is the work of one author. There is a consistent, holy progression and signature to each entree. Each of the 66 books compliments the others and gives the complete revelation that God wants mankind to have.

We can allow some wiggle room for those who claim that these men wrote with their own flair, but even this concession borders on being dangerous. To infer that these men had any latitude whatsoever to write what they wanted is simply preposterous folly. II Peter 1:21 tells us: *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"*.

The statement could not be any clearer. The *will of man* was not involved in any way. The will of God was affected through men by the moving of the Holy Spirit in and through them. Picture a large sailing vessel becalmed in a bay, its sails hanging limp from the masts. Though they want to get underway, the men on the ship can do nothing to cause the ship to move. They are powerless and without recourse.

Suddenly a strong breeze comes up and the sails begin to rustle. The wind picks up to a steady pace and the sails fill. The ship begins to move. The men rush to their stations. The ship comes about and swiftly leaves the bay, rising and falling on the waves as it reaches open water. The men on the ship were not responsible for the ship's movement. They did nothing other than to be where they were supposed to be. The vessel also did nothing. It moved involuntarily to the will of the wind.

So too, the men God used to pen his word did nothing more than make themselves available to his will. Though they were willing vessels, they wrote involuntarily as the Spirit of God breathed through them. Often they did not understand the things they wrote. They simply wrote as directed.

Again, this was "Inspiration", a one-time, never to be repeated act of God. God breathed through men he selected to write the words he wanted. It is what the Bible claims to have happened. It is the basis for our faith.

The manuscripts and translations that followed many years later were not inspired. They were not written involuntarily, but were the deliberate and purposeful acts of men and women. They were academic undertakings, often by those who loved and revered God, but not always. There are several translations borne from hatred of God, that attempt to strip him of his deity, depict Jesus as a misguided fanatic or fool, effeminate God, or that present a host of other ridiculously irreverent slants.

While it is true that God does commonly and routinely speak to the heart of his children (those who have been regenerated through the blood of Jesus Christ), these are not instances of inspired revelation, but simply a father influencing his children to do his will in their personal lives. Without exception, these are always leadings that conform to the already revealed Word of God and never deviate from the rules and principles he has already established for holy living.

And when God speaks to his child, it is not in an audible voice as he did to the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Rather, it is how he spoke to his prophet who was in hiding in a mountain cave, through a still, small voice; an inaudible, yet undeniable impression of His will for them.

I will say it clearly again, we no longer have the inspired word of God. Frequently you will hear someone try to qualify their ideas and conclusions about the meaning of a certain portion of scripture by saying "*Well, if you check the original...*" That person is at best, not well-versed on canonical history, and at worse, a fool.

The fact is that the original, known as the Autographa (from the root word autograph), Majority Text or Textus Receptus (Received Text) no longer exists. The original, or rather originals (as each book was given at different times in history) are no longer available. The Autographa simply does not exist on this earth as some would suppose or have you believe. Inadvertent and deliberate destruction, aging and other factors have taken its toll so that no one can honestly claim that the original is available for consultation.

However, that is not problematic, because as I alluded to previously, God tells us that he has preserved his word for all time so that all generations can know his truth. The word of God is preserved in a translation. I believe that translation to be the King James Version and I will now give my reasons for this claim.

I think it is important to note right up front that those who hold to the King James Version being the inspired word of God are in error. I say that with great compassion and without malice or arrogance. I am in their corner in that I revere the King James Version and consider it the most faithful translation available.

But it is not the original. It is therefore not the inspired word of God. The inspired word has been lost. No amount of wishful thinking is going to restore it. But it need not be restored, because the thoughts and will of God once transmitted by inspiration have been preserved for us. The King James Version is that preserved word.

How can we be sure that it is not the inspired word? We know by simply looking at the difference between the two concepts of inspiration and preservation. The inspired word was perfect and flawless. The preserved word or the King James Version is not. It is certainly superior to any other translation, but it is no longer perfect as was the inspired word.

In your service to the Lord you may have heard people say "*Oh everyone knows that the Bible was written by men*". By this declaration, they mean that men had latitude in the development of the Bible. This was not true of the inspired word as we have already seen. Holy men wrote involuntarily without personal latitude.

However, there is a modicum of truth to this statement when it comes to the preserved word. Men did have some latitude. This is why there are so many inferior and unfaithful texts. Men have taken liberties with interpretation that was not theirs to take. Other men have compounded the error by taking even more liberties, thereby exacerbating the problem and giving us some of the inferior translations we have today.

Truthfully, the fact is that the King James Version of the Bible, or the preserved word, also has flaws. The difference is that men have not taken liberties in interpretation, but have merely made transliteration errors. They are men after all and men make mistakes. There are at least four miscues made by the translators that come to mind, and if I gave it more thought, I could probably come up with several others. But the errors are insignificant.

Here is one example; in II Thessalonians 2:2 the term "*day of Christ*" is used when it should read "*day of the Lord*". There is a huge difference in these two events, but the mistake really has no profound impact on one's faith. It is an obvious, but unintentional error on the part of those who had the responsibility of translating and preserving the inspired word.

Some might drop their lower jaw at this revelation and allow their faith to be injured, but this should not be the case. These miscues present no negative ramifications to major doctrinal issues or positions. They are benign and easily corrected by any Christian who is asked to explain the discrepancy.

The King James Version is a unique translation and far superior to any other translation. Let me show you why. Virtually all but a handful of more than 300 translations have come from a manuscript written by two men by the name of Wescott and Horte. Very briefly, Wescott and Horte developed their manuscript from a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy (and so on) of a manuscript that came from a copy of a copy of a copy (and so on) of the Autographa.

In contrast, the King James Version came from a copy of a manuscript developed from the Autographa. That is a simplistic explanation, but a more detailed account would yield the same facts. Most versions came from the efforts of men, men and more men over a long period of time; men who may or may not have injected bias. The King James Version came from no such long progression of many human hands.

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, in later writings, these two men (Wescott and Horte) are on record denying the deity of Jesus Christ and saying some rather crass things about those who hold him as the Son of God. For that reason alone (but there are other reasons) their manuscript and translation work is more than suspect to me.

This underscores the importance of Christians being aware of more than just what is in the Bible. We need to know where we got our Bible. If we are serious about representing the Lord as he directed us to do, then we need to know which version is his preserved word and why.

We are the final link in the chain of preservation of the word. Inspiration brought us the perfect word of God. Translation began the preservation process. The King James Version continued the process by putting the preserved word into the hands of believers. The believer, in the Bible-directed role of priest, is to vigilantly protect the preserved word. It is just that simple.

But believers can hardly fulfill their responsibilities of preserving the Word of God if they are ignorant to the facts of inspiration. Christian soldier, study and learn, stand and hold.

CHAPTER 2

The Gap Theory

Chances are very good that you have never heard of the Gap Theory, so let me give you a brief overview. Basically, those who subscribe to this theory believe that there is a whole undisclosed segment of mankind's history wedged between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. They claim that the earth bears strong evidence that a great cataclysmic event took place in pre-historic, pre-human times. Then, loosely fitting some obscure passages from various Old Testament books, they build a case for a pre-Eden civilization. Quite possibly this theory contributed to science's concept of cavemen.



I have a few problems with this theory. It presumes that God is in the business of keeping important information from us. That concept is in complete contrast with the fact that God gave us the Bible to reveal. He revealed himself to post-Bible time generations. He revealed his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He revealed the current lost state of all men. He revealed how reconciliation with him is realized. And the list is endless. The purpose of the Bible was to reveal, not to hide or obscure.

The theory also presumes that man has the ability to second-guess or know better than God by adding filler between verses so it tells us what God should have told us in the first place. In other words, God left us blanks in his revelation and we somehow have the infinite wisdom and authority to fill in the blanks.

There are many other objections I could raise, but I think the presumptiveness of man is the real issue here. That some of us could arrogantly edit the Word of the Almighty fueled by only circumstantial evidence, ironically serves not that cause, but rather underscores our need to reconcile to him.

But let us forego that argument and address the substance of the presumption itself. If such a civilization did exist, and God knew that men would discover it because of the physical evidence left upon the earth, why would he not provide us with the details of it? Would he not at least make passing mention of it so there would be no confusion or conflict? That makes sense to me; more sense than believing God purposely hid something in the book that was meant to only reveal.

I am not suggesting that God is under some obligation to make sure we know everything he knows. Quite the contrary; his thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways; they are higher and greater. He is omniscient and our knowledge, even our capacity for knowledge, is quite limited. But when it comes to the history of mankind and this planet, God is very forthcoming in other places in his Word, so why be tight-lipped in this?

He tells us, for instance, that before the universe we are part of was created, there was nothingness, an empty void. He took that nothing and made the great something we have today out of it. It was a stupendous undertaking. He goes on to explain how he made the earth and populated it with people and animals. He gives us a picture of the first habitat and relationship he had with us in the garden. We are told how mankind fell out of fellowship with him and how the earth was cursed from that moment on.

We then learn lineages and see how the earth was settled. God records prophetically the history of mankind that will unfold and in this modern day we look back upon those prophecies and see that it was so. It is so out of character that God would explain so many minute details to us about the forming and populating of earth and leave out such a huge detail.



In his account of history, God tells us of a great flood. He not only made it to rain for 40 days and nights, but he said “*the fountains of the deep were open*”.

Obviously the waters of the earth rushed upon the dry land as the entire world was submerged. Is it not conceivable to those who imagine this great pre-human cataclysmic event, that the rushing in and then receding of these great volumes of water could have left the scars on the earth that they point to?

The second problem I have with this theory goes hand in hand with the first of God not keeping important information from us in his word. Some would have us imagine that there are things so deep and hidden in God’s word that one needs a string of degrees behind their name in order to decipher them.

That is not in keeping with what the Bible declares of itself. It tells us that anyone who is born again is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Understanding the spiritual things of God requires the discernment that the indwelling Spirit gives you. But anyone can understand the simple facts and details given in scripture. There is no magic ring or secret handshake needed to understand those things in the Word of God.

The Bible is not a book of mysteries. It is God’s revelation of himself to mankind. He tells us of himself and his Son so that we might know him. If he was going to keep information from us, is anyone so presumptuous to think that he would inadvertently or accidentally make mention of some pre-Adam and Eve civilization? God is not human. God is God. He is perfect and everything he does is perfect. The words inadvertent, mistake, accident and oversight do not apply to him or anything he does. There can be no hidden story between verses.

Finally, and also connected with the other two ideas above, we see the purpose of God’s revelation, to tell us that our sin has separated us from him, that we need a savior, and to

offer us reconciliation with him through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Once we understand that this is the whole purpose of God toward his creation man, we cannot accept that another civilization existed without the benefit of his Son's sacrifice for sin. There could be no reconciliation for them and that would be in direct contrast with the divine nature that God has revealed to us in this very Bible. It states clearly that "*God is not willing that any should perish...*".

For these and other reasons, I find it hard to swallow that God would hide such important information as another population of people from us. It simply is not in keeping with his desire to reveal and reconcile and it is out of character for him as he has revealed his character to us.

Still, some who subscribe to this Gap Theory have made a strong case in support of it, and I think we need to discuss it a bit further. Ultimately those cases fail, as I will show in the pages that follow.

As with all my more contemporary writings, I will keep what I say as simple and as interesting as I am able. I have learned a valuable lesson about brevity and simplicity. Years ago, while regularly teaching a group of about 300 teenagers in chapel, I earned the infamous title of "Mr. Dictionary".

Initially I thought it was an honor the kids had bestowed upon me. I concluded that they were impressed with my oratory skills and word-smithing. But at the dinner table one evening, after proudly referring to myself as Mr. Dictionary, my teen-age daughter set me straight. It seems that the title bestowed upon me simply meant that if someone was going to listen to me, they needed to bring a dictionary to class. It was not an honor at all; just the opposite in fact.

Though my pride took a big hit that day, all I could think of was "*from the mouth of babes...*". Suffice it to say I now keep my presentations, written and oral, as simple or real-life as I possibly can. And I confess, talking up to people is much easier than talking down to them.

And so let me simply say that the Gap Theory is nothing more than that; a theory. Most fundamental Christians, especially those of significant academic renown, give no credibility to the theory and reject it. I stand with them. Faith is required to believe in the things God tells us, not in the things he does not tell us.

One great man of God who embraced this theory was Reverend C. I. Schofield, creator of the very well-known and very well-loved Schofield Reference Bible. It is the primary version that I have used my entire Christian experience and it is a superior product. I am not knocking it in any way.

Nevertheless, Dr. Schofield, in some of his writings, including his notes and comments in the reference Bible that bears his name, put forth his argument as to why he believes that

there was a population of beings before the literal creation act of Genesis. He does so unapologetically and with a matter of fact emphasis.

I realize that his notes (or anyone else's) are not part of the Word of God and that they lack inspiration. They are merely offered for explanation or amplification based upon the knowledge and experience of the writer. Nevertheless, we will refer to a mixture of his notes and the scriptures he refers to in order to determine the plausibility of this theory.

Dr. Schofield tries to tie in several passages of scripture into his theory. He uses the record of the fall of Lucifer (Satan) in Isaiah chapter 14, Satan's part in the fall of mankind in Ezekiel chapter 28, the judgment of Israel in Jeremiah chapter 4, and the recounting of God's creative act in Isaiah chapter 24, tying them all to Genesis chapter 1. He also uses some lesser references, but these are the core of his case.

The note he uses in Genesis reads "Jeremiah 4:23, 25, Isaiah 24:1 and 45:18 clearly indicate that the earth had undergone a cataclysmic change as a result of a divine judgment. The face of the earth bears everywhere the marks of such a catastrophe. There are not wanting intimations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels. See Ezekiel 28:12-15 and Isaiah 14:9-14, which certainly go beyond the kings of Tyre and Babylon.

Then in Jeremiah chapter 4, his note reads *Genesis 1:2 'without form and void' describes the condition of the earth as the result of judgment which overthrew the primal order of Genesis 1:1".*



His contention, in a nutshell, is that some primal order of people, not angels, existed before Adam and Eve, and that they were eliminated by God's holy judgment and wrath. It is important that I made note that his theory does not encompass angels in any way as there are also those who use these same referenced passages to promote erroneous theories of angels and humans uniting to spawn offspring. Dr. Schofield should in no way be associated with these.

But regarding his own theory, the only evidence that Dr. Schofield's seems to need are the marks of the earth, whatever that refers to. He says the marks are everywhere, but

does not describe what they might be. I have performed considerable internet and other searches in an attempt to identify these evidences, but I have not found anything that cannot be attributed to the flood God told us about.

Scientists claim meteors have hit the earth in the past and when they show me the craters and raw magnetic material, I can believe them. Historians tell us that Pearl Harbor was bombed. I lived at Pearl Harbor and fished around the Arizona Memorial. I saw the bullet holes from Japanese Zero machine guns in the buildings on Hickam Air Force Base. I believe the evidence. But I see no evidence that suggests that there was a great war on earth before God created human beings. And yet, Dr. Schofield says that the evidence is everywhere?

I am not going to reflect all that he wrote here. It will be very easy for you to find his comments and notes. You don't even need to purchase a Schofield Reference Bible. The internet has everything you need. Here are a couple of web addresses to get you started, but there are scores of others that you might want to check out as well.

<http://bible.org/article/gap-theory-genesis-chapter-one>
<http://www.beaconmbc.com/articles/thegaptheory.htm>

You will see the impact that his theory has had on some believers since the early 1900s. It has injured the faith of some and given fuel to the evolutionists, allowing them to have somewhere in scripture to insert their millions and billions of years ideas. Indeed, Schofield's theory is probably the catalyst for Theistic Evolution, the theory that each day of creation was millions of years in length.

Now, I will be the first to admit that Dr. Schofield's argument seems strong in some places. But, I credit his persuasive way, rather than the substance of the scripture he uses to make his case. His persuasive way makes the case strong. The evidence alone is very weak.

Indeed, when you really compare his in-depth contention that there was a pre-Adamic race with my face-value contention that there was not, the best Schofield can hope for is a draw. He cannot prove his theory, but those who embrace it need no other proof. So how do we disprove the theory to them? What is left to do?

The answer is the same for just about any question on scriptural things. We hold the theory up to the light of the rest of the Word of God to see if we can discover any contrast. By that I mean we look at other teachings in scripture to see if the theory remains compatible with them.

It does not! In fact, without even applying too much effort we find that Schofield's theory runs into several walls in scripture. Take for example Romans 5:12. Paraphrasing it, we are told that sin entered the world by one man, Adam. If this is true, and we know that it is, then how could a race that existed before Adam have sinned? Sin did not enter this world until Adam. If there were other people, they would have been sinless. So why

would they be judged? Why would the wrath of God come down upon them? God, according to what he has revealed to us, judges and punishes sin only.

Here is another problem; in John 3:16 we are told that God gave his ONLY begotten son for this world. God allowed his only son to die for the sins of the inhabitants of this world. Old Testament people and persons under the law, looked ahead in faith to Messiah. New Testament, post crucifixion people look back on the cross of Messiah in faith.

What then would become of these who were created under no testament? God has only one son. Hebrews tells us Jesus cannot be crucified again. God has no other begotten Son to offer.

So we can only conclude that this pre-Adamic race had no opportunity at reconciliation with God. He made no provision for them and they had no hope. So not only did they not sin, but if they did, they were given no opportunity to repent of it, and were judged unfairly for it, even though "it" did not exist. Wow, that gets confusing!

How presumptuous all of that is. It presumes that God suddenly changes and acts out of character. Instead of being the loving and just God that he claims to be, he is portrayed as being unfair and impulsive. Perhaps he was not always loving and fair? Perhaps he has himself evolved into the loving God we have today. But then the Bible tells us that he is immutable. He not only does not change, he cannot change. He is what he has always been. He is holy, loving and just.

The theory just does not jive with many principles and known absolutes in scripture. The standard we used earlier was that in order for an interpretation or understanding of scripture to be accurate, it must line up with all other associated passages and principles. Dr. Schofield's theory falls far short of that standard and must be rejected.

Dr. Schofield was a great man of God. He was a scholarly gentleman and devoted believer. But this weak theory of his proves that none of us are or can be perfect while housed in this earthly flesh. We all make mistakes. Even the best of us can take the wrong rabbit trail in spiritual things.

Had Dr. Schofield realized that his example of sliding a theory in between verses would be a technique later used by the ungodly to support their anti-creation ideas, he probably would have kept his theory to himself. I am sure that he would be saddened greatly to know that others have used his theory to try to prove the Big Bang and Intelligent Design or Theistic Evolution.

I appreciate Dr. Schofield as a great man of God. I love the reference Bible he authored and seldom use any other. He was ten times the man of God that I ever hope to be and in no way should my comments here reflect on his contributions as a whole. He has much to be rewarded for. In this theory, however, Dr. Schofield was wrong, wrong, wrong.

CHAPTER 3

The Creation of the Sun



If you are a Christian, you might be wondering what possible difficulty there could be about the creation of the sun.

Sure there are those who discount the creation account altogether, but for those who believe that God created all things, believing that he created the sun is just a part of the whole. So where is the controversy or difficulty?

Actually, there is a difficulty in the account of the creation of the sun, and sadly, it is not a misunderstanding exclusive to unbelievers. There are believers who find the creation account confusing. Many of them allow this apparent disparity shake their faith. And this ought not to be.

Genesis chapter one, verse one catapults us right into the creation account. We are told "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*". If that was all that was said, it should be enough. We are told that God took care of business, the business that only God could take care of. But as we pointed out earlier, this is God's revelation to mankind. He wants to give us a full understanding of what he did. And so he continues.

In Genesis 1:3 he adds "*And God said, let there be light: and there was light*". This was the first day of creation. God took the dark void of nothingness and flooded it with light. He illuminated our universe. Nothing became something because of the light.

Although I admit the following is a very weak illustration, I liken this event to being in a very, very dark room and switching on a light. The light drives the darkness back and away and gives dimension and shape to everything inside of that room.

That is similar to what happened here, except before God turned on his light, there was nothing there. Nothing existed at all. It was not a dark room or area; it was absolute nothingness. God took nothing and injected something into it...light. Then he undertook to create all that our eyes now see.

We often skip over this account, taking it for granted and do not truly realize what a significant accomplishment this was. Most people have some artistic talent. They can take a piece of clay and mold it into some shape. Or they can take a paint brush or crayon and draw a picture. It may not be very good, but it is creative, and actually quite simple. You take something that exists (i.e. clay or paint, etc.) and you use it to make something else.

But that is not what God did. God did not shape raw materials into something. He took nothing and made something out of it. He used no pre-existing materials. He had no example to follow. There was no blueprint. He merely willed it to be and it was so. If

you allow yourself to dwell on that thought, it is utterly mind-boggling and almost unfathomable. That is the greatness of God.

Okay, so where is the problem? All I see is that someone must believe that God did it. That poses no problem to most people. God created light and it was light.

The problem, for those who imagine a problem, arrives when they recognize that God did this great act of injecting light into this universe on the first day of creation, but, according to his account, did not actually create the sun and moon until the fourth day. In verses 14-15, we are told *"And God said let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so"*.

For clarity, let us understand that the "heaven" spoken of here is not the heaven where God dwells. Rather, it is the physical universe that surrounds our planet. And that is not to say that our planet is the center of the universe, but rather only the center of focus of the God who created it.

There are three heavens described in scripture: the first is the atmosphere that surrounds earth (i.e. the stratosphere, ionosphere, etc.); the second, the rest of the universe outside Earth's atmosphere; and the third, God's place of dwelling. These verses speak to the first and second.

Now then, how do we account for this apparent discrepancy in the Bible? How can there be light before the Lord made the sun? Many scholars contend that the sun and moon were actually made the first day and that the wording used on the fourth day really means to "appear". They claim that the sun and moon were already in place, but that the vapor blocked out their light, and that on the fourth day the vapor had dissipated enough so that the light then was visible.

I cannot agree with those of this persuasion. To do so, I would have to take the opposite stand that I took earlier regarding the Gap Theory and God saying what he wanted to say. I would be saying that God wasn't capable of articulating to our level of understanding. I would also be saying that God was unable to chronologically keep track of what he did. Not only will I not say that, but I do not believe it either.

I am inclined to believe that God did exactly what he said he did in the chronological order he recorded, without trying to find ways around a perceived difficulty. It is so irritating to me to see learned Christians attempt to "cover" for God, as if he made mistakes and needed someone to cover for him. And if I am irritated, about it, I wonder how God feels?

On day one he simply created light. He does not need a gaseous sphere to do this. He is not bound by the laws of physics. He is God. He had but to will it and it was done.

We are not told that there is a sun in heaven (the place where God dwells) and yet heaven is described for us as the place of eternal day. There is no night or darkness. It is lit by complete and unfaltering light. It is such a perfect light that not even a shadow is cast there.

Undoubtedly, the light is the very majesty and radiance of God's essence. It illuminates all of heaven. In John chapter one, we are told "*In the beginning was the light*". God is light. God was that light in the beginning.

Could some be right that the sun, moon and stars had already been created and on the fourth day the vapor, which previously obscured them, lifted to allow their light to shine? As I read verse 14, it is clear that this was not the case. God then and only then created these bodies that would give light. In fact, he assigns them the task of providing light and dividing the night and day in these verses. Formerly he had performed this task himself, but was delegating that work now to the sun and moon.

It doesn't get any more difficult than that. If we buy into the imaginations of some "scholars" so-called, we have a problem that must be explained away. That is the trouble with "deeper life" scholars. They find ways to complicate the simplicity of God and confuse those who truly want to understand.

God says of some "*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*". There is a lesson to be learned from what God says. We should not apply our own wisdom and deeper life understandings to something God has stated in simple terms. Don't look for what isn't there. Yes God is great and his thoughts are far above ours, but he speaks in simple terms to make it easy for us. Don't look for more.

Here is a good example of what I mean; let me use my studies on animals and the afterlife to illustrate this point. As a result of thorough study, much prayer and what I feel is reverent exegesis of all pertinent passages, I have concluded that animals are eternal creatures. My research is solid. The books and articles I have written theologically mature, award-winning endeavors.

I have had a lot of "scholars" agree with my conclusions and ideas, but perhaps at least an equal number who do not. They are quick to attack my work and delve into deeper issues about the "soul" and "redemption", when those issues do not even come into play in my writings. I have been accused of saying that animals must be redeemed. How preposterous. I have said nothing of the sort.

I can play their game; I have overwhelming "deep" evidence if they want it. I have meticulously spelled my case out in my books and documented every possible aspect of the topic. But honestly, I prefer to rely on the simple proofs of God's word, namely, that God shows us his great and everlasting concern for all his creatures throughout scripture, from his original plan that they would live forever, to his claim that all of them will one day stand and praise him. Why do we need to go any deeper than the surface on this or any other non-essential topic?

Yet, with my work, as well as with many other topics, the deeper life scholars want to presumptuously explain the simple truths away. And almost invariably, their greater understanding of what and why God wrote about something, leads us into problems and schisms within the body.

Again, if we accept what these scholars say about the sun and moon, a problem is created; a problem that did not exist until they questioned the simple things that God said. Now that problem must be dealt with and the confusion explained away. And no matter how well you explain something, it is hard to overcome the seed of doubt that was planted. If however, we accept the creation account at face value, in its simplicity, we have no problem and doubt does not raise its ugly head.

Please understand that I am not trying to put down legitimate questions that lead to reverent study. Rather, I am saying beware when simple concepts are made complicated by deep explanations. Ask yourself where these writers obtained their greater understanding? Question their motives and their goals.

But let this one thought control...that irrespective of fame or reputation, no matter how great the person in question, the work and writings of men must always, always, always be suspect until it lines up perfectly with what the Word itself says. No man is above error. This applies to my own writings as well. If it appears I have said more than scripture intended, you go with what scripture said every time.

In this study, there can be no doubt but that the sun and moon were made on the fourth day. The light that flooded the universe on day one was the light of God himself. God is light. It is as simple as that.

CHAPTER 4

The Great Misquote

I realize that when you describe or label something as the "great" anything, it suggests that it is well known and that you would be hard pressed to find someone who had not heard about it. Just the opposite is the case here, but I decided to label it great just the same. This was one area of the Bible that I really struggled with and for me, a man with the kind of unshakable faith that I have, to struggle with something the Bible says is huge (or great).

I doubt that more than 1 in 500 Bible students are familiar with the misquote I am about to discuss, but make no mistake, there is a misquotation in the Bible. The reason most Bible students are not aware of it is probably because Christians in general do not want to think about, much less admit, that there are difficult passages in the Bible. They undoubtedly worry that admitting the Bible has some problems will undermine their efforts to win people to Christianity.

I understand, even empathize with their thinking, but I cannot wholly agree with it. Worrying about the credibility of the Bible is tantamount to saying you are worried about its authenticity and authority. This is not something Christians need to concern themselves with. The Bible stands on its own authority. It is God's Word and he is sufficiently able to look out for his own interests.

While we have a responsibility for preserving the word as Priests, we do not have to spend one minute worrying about defending the authority scripture. It takes care of itself. Never has a book declared its own authority as assertively and appropriately as the Bible. In Hebrews 4:12 the Bible says *"For the word of God is quick (alive) and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"*.

In essence, the Bible is not like any other book that has ever existed. Not only is the authority on all things that mankind should know, but it claims to know all of mankind. The things that God has written in it, pierce into the soul of a person and exposes the inner thoughts and intents of one's heart. It is truly the word of the living God, the one who created us and who knows the stuff that we are made of.

So sharing an obvious misquote of one of the writers is not a big thing for me. Everything in the Bible is there because that is the way that God wanted it. We may not always understand why, but we can rest assured that it is there on purpose and not by mistake.

And let me say clearly that while the Bible is perfect and without flaw, there are numerous instances where what is said is not true. Before you write me off as a heretic, let me explain. Just because you read something in the Bible does not make it true.

Often the Bible records the sentiment of people. That the person said it is true, but what they said may not be. God simply had the error recorded because it was what the person actually said.

For example, in Isaiah chapter 14, Lucifer (now known as Satan) declared that he was going to be like the most high. In a passage commonly known as the “Five I Ams” he declared all the things he was going to do. Essentially, he declared that he was going to overthrow God and usurp his authority and sit in God’s place. He couldn’t, he didn’t and there never was a possibility that he might have. God put his rebellion down without effort. That he said it was true, but what he said was bogus. And yet, it is recorded for us to read.

There is no shortage of examples of sentiment being recorded. Peter told the Lord that he would not deny him, but he did. The disciples said they were going to die with Lazarus, but they didn’t. Forty men took an oath to kill the Apostle Paul, but they did not. I think you get the idea.

Then there are instances where something was written as a quote, but there is not enough evidence to prove that who was being quoted actually said it. That notwithstanding, in many cases it is still reasonable to assume the writer was correct; first because God directed the quote to be written and second because it is completely within the realm of possibility. Such is the case with this great misquote. I will be addressing other such instances in the Bible later on, but let us examine this one immediately.

In Matthew 27:9-10, the disciple Matthew writes:



"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, and they took up the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value: and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

No doubt your reaction is: *“So what is so difficult about that? Matthew quotes Jeremiah prophetically addressing the 30 pieces of silver that would be paid for betraying Jesus. What’s the problem”?*

The problem is that if you search the book of Jeremiah, you will never find where Jeremiah said this. He does speak about the Potter's field in chapters 18 and 19, but no mention is ever made of the silver. In fact, it was Zechariah the prophet who spoke of the price, in chapter 11 of the book he was employed by God to write.

Well, is that a mistake then? It absolutely is not. I know it seems difficult to accept. But it is not as hard to figure out as you may think. Remember, God’s word is alive and powerful. You can rest assured that when something doesn’t seem to make sense, it does.

Nevertheless, this is a riddle and riddles need solving. The answer is going to take a little faith, I admit, but when studying the Bible one principle I have learned to apply is faith. Faith in God opens doors. God rewards faith with the gift of understanding and a settled mind. Faith revolutionizes one's religion and one's relationship with God.

Sometimes it takes a little faith and sometimes it takes more than just a little. Sometimes just applying faith leads to a better understanding. Sometimes, constant study of the word will replace your faith with solid understanding of a thing. And sometimes, faith remains just that...faith. You never really understand the thing and probably won't until kingdom come and the Lord sets all things right, including our understanding.

An example of this is God's love. Do I understand it? No, I really do not. I do not understand how someone who we rebelled against, who we hated, whose only begotten son we murdered, can love us. I think that if someone slew my son, I might forgive them if it were an accident and they were truly repentant, but that would even be a stretch to my capacity to forgive. But even if I could forgive, could I love them? I cannot imagine that I could.

So how God can love me when it was my sin that purposely, not accidentally, but purposely sent his son to the cross is beyond me. But, I accept it on faith. I believe it. Without God's forgiveness and love, I am lost. It is the cornerstone to my hope. It is the substance of my faith.

True faith always finds in favor of God. If you trust God, then faith is not a hard thing to apply to things that are difficult to understand. At the risk of sounding a bit irreverent, let me say that God is trustable. He alone is good, righteous and holy. When he says something, we can trust that it is true. Our understanding of a thing lends nothing to its trueness. Faith always recognizes that God is right and all that he tells us in his word is true.

In this case, we have an apparent misquote. Matthew says that Jeremiah spoke about the thirty pieces of silver. But nowhere in Jeremiah can we find that he spoke to that issue. In fact, we find the silver comment in the book of Zechariah. We certainly have a riddle. But once again we can apply the principle that we just learned, God's word is true. I submit to you, therefore, that it is not a riddle at all.

Let us consider the nature of Old Testament Prophets and New Testament Apostles. Do we think that these men spoke only those words that are recorded in scripture? Wouldn't it be more likely that they spent a great deal of time expounding on the inspired word that they were used to write in their own words and paraphrasing? Indeed, I would say that the lion's share of their preaching, teaching and discussions occurred after the Lord used them to write his word.

Remember that inspiration was a one-time, never to be repeated act of God. If one of the writers that God used later recounted or even quoted himself, more than likely he paraphrased or used similar words. These men were not themselves inspired. They were

used to pen the inspired words of God. So later on, when they preached the word, it was in their own words, not God's.

The Apostles would do much like I do when I speak about a portion of scripture; I paraphrase what was said and add some detailed explanation, as I am here in these pages. My words are not inspired, though I hope they are inspiring. And yet, I am careful to make sure that what I say captures the intent of the words of God. So too, the prophets/apostles speech was not inspired. They taught and explained in their own words, careful not to lose anything God intended to say.

Now then, this is probably what happened. Zechariah mentioned the 30 pieces of silver. He was probably quoting Jeremiah from when Jeremiah was speaking in a public setting and not as a vessel of inspired revelation. The men God used to write his word did not just disappear after he used them. They lived normal lives, interfacing with people, teaching and preaching from their hearts as God led them.

It is not unreasonable to think that Zechariah probably heard Jeremiah teaching or preaching in public on the topic of the silver and simply quoted him. Zechariah often quoted Jeremiah, as can be seen in Zechariah 1:4 and 7:7. In fact Zechariah was given to quoting Jeremiah so often that there was a saying about him among the Jews...*"The Spirit of Jeremiah is upon Zechariah"*.

It seems appropriate to accept that Mathew was merely giving credit to the prophet who Zechariah probably had quoted. Matthew had never met either of these prophets. He probably knew little about them, but then he did not need to. He was not writing his words down; he was writing what God directed him to write. Do you think God knew that Zechariah was quoting Jeremiah when he breathed the words through Matthew? Of course he did. Riddle solved.

Again, it takes a little faith to accept this, but not very much. I initially was perplexed by this passage when I read it, but I accepted by faith that it was not an error. At that time I had no idea about any of the things I mentioned above, but through daily, earnest study of the word, I arrived at this understanding many years later. Perhaps the future holds even a more perfect understanding of this difficult passage for me. It would not surprise me at all.

CHAPTER 5

The Offering of Isaac

There is no doubt but that the world we live in is a beautiful place, with many breathtaking landscapes, crystal blue oceans, and vivid scenery. At the same time, it can also be an ugly and evil place to live. Horrendous things go on all over the globe; murder, terrorism, genocide, abductions, rapes, thefts, atrocities and injustices of every sort. People live in fear and their fears are often justified.

People do terrible things to other people. It seems as long as they do not know you, it is okay to steal from you or do you harm. But people even hurt and murder their own loved ones. Almost daily, our newspapers carry stories of tragedy and suffering. It is not an evil world, but it is populated by some evil people. Some are wicked by choice, others are motivated by mental illness or drug abuse.

Then there is the occult where unbelievable things are perpetrated against the innocent. My mind was boggled by a television documentary about the occult, where a woman said that she conceived babies for the sole purpose of using them for human sacrifices. According to her testimony, she watched without emotion as her babies were slaughtered.

You may be skeptical. I certainly was. But I cannot deny that human sacrifices have happened. They are not a new evil to our world. We know that uncivilized cultures often sacrificed people to their gods. The Mayans, Polynesians and others incorporated this evil into their misguided worship of whatever deity they imagined.

Even more educated and arguably more advanced cultures like the Egyptians were not above perpetrating such wickedness. Woe unto you if you were the slave of a Pharaoh who had passed away. You were buried with him! People complain about their retirement plans today. I don't think there was ever one quite as bad as theirs.

I could describe in great detail outrageous pagan practices of human sacrifice from all around the globe that still take place in these modern times. Such practices that take place in backward jungle settings might not shock us, but we don't have to travel abroad to find this level of evil. We have it right here in supposedly advanced and enlightened American cities and towns.

From ritualistic serial killers to occult sacrifices, America has its share of wickedness. We could describe in detail the atrocities that are perpetrated on innocent children and animals. We could point to the ever-growing pornography industry and the immoral exploitation of women in sex slave undertakings. We could go on and on about the many ills of society, but I will restrain myself, because Ephesians 5:12 says that these things are so wicked that *"it is a shame to even speak of those things they do in secret"*.

But there is a point to be made and it is this; many have asked me about the accounts of human sacrifices in the Bible. From the world's perspective, they wonder how we can

condemn the evil of the world that I briefly mentioned above when our own Bible gives us accounts of human sacrifice. They think that the Bible shows that God allowed human sacrifices and they want to know if I think it is wrong.

This may surprise you, but I actually consider this a reasonable question and I want to address it. To do so, I would like to look briefly at two accounts of human sacrifice in the Old Testament to determine if the accusations made by people against God and the Bible are valid. The first is the offering of Isaac by Abraham, which we will discuss first in this chapter.

This case is especially important, because Abraham is the central figure in Christianity, second only to the Lord. He may be an Old Testament character, but it is his expressed faith that Christians are told to emulate. Indeed, he is called the father of the faith and with good reason. So we will look at his offering of his Son Isaac first.



The second example we will look at is the offering of Jephthah's daughter, a very disturbing and moving account. That will follow in the next chapter. I want to separate Jephthah's story from Isaac's because there are some significant differences. Additionally, In Jephthah's case, there are other factors that need to be examined.

Of all the topics I present in this book, this might be the least interesting, but based on the amount of requests I have received over the years to explain the Bible position on human sacrifice, I feel it prudent to give space and time to it. I have no desire to give a long, drawn dissertation on this topic, but I hope what I offer clears up the confusion expressed by faithful readers.

Christianity is often referred to by unbelievers or agnostics as a slaughterhouse religion. The label is an attempt to disparage Christianity of course. The idea that the blood of Jesus Christ is necessary for one's atonement is offensive to some. Often when someone disagrees with a religious or political position, they opt to disparage rather than to understand. Hopefully, this examination of the offering of Isaac can cast a better light on the doctrine of atonement for those who have trouble understanding it.

Did God require or condone human sacrifice? My answer may surprise you. The answer is "yes", he did. Before fellow believers angrily rebuke me and write me off as some crazed fanatic, let me add that the answer is also "no", he did not.

Now, I am not fence-straddling. We are just faced with one of those contrasting truths again. And here is perhaps the most confusing thing I will ever say, so read it carefully...the reason God does not require human sacrifice is because he did require a human sacrifice. What? What on earth does that mean? What kind of double talk is that?

Let me explain. God required that his Son, the God man, Jesus Christ, be sacrificed for the sins of the world. Romans 5:8 says "*But God commended (demonstrated) his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*".

Christ dying did not happen by chance. God directed that Jesus would become flesh and that he would be sacrificed in our place in a most hideous way. One might argue that Jesus was only part human, and I cannot disagree with that. But he was human. He was the God/man. He was sacrificed and God not only condoned it, but was the architect of it. So in essence, God required that his Son, then in human form, be sacrificed.

Too many believe that Jesus was murdered. He was not! I do not deny that men killed him, but they killed him because he allowed them to. He said he could bring legions of angels to rescue him off the cross if he were so inclined, but he willingly laid down his life and no man took it from him. I have heard many a preacher say "*If he had to, Jesus would have nailed himself to the cross for our sins*". I believe that to be so. He came to die for us.

That sacrifice was orchestrated providentially. It ensured that no other human sacrifices would be needed. So God actually required a human sacrifice so that he would not have to require human sacrifice. I hope that now makes sense to you.

Now then, one might argue that Jesus' death was during New Testament times and God may have required human sacrifices in the Old Testament, such as Isaac. In response, one must remember that God is omniscient and knew ages before that one day his son would have to be sacrificed.

Jesus death may have been news to the world at the time, but before the world was formed, before the first man took his first breath, Christ was already crucified in the heart and mind of God. He alone can look into the future and he knew mankind would fall and need a savior. Sending his Son was the only way to provide reconciliation to the people he would create and who would disobey him.

That does not mean that human sacrifices did not occur throughout the history of man. Of course they have, but they were neither directed nor condoned by God, with the sole exception of Isaac. God did direct Abraham to sacrifice his son. But did God really want him to do it?

Let's look at it in Genesis 22:1-2. It says "*And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt (test) Abraham and said unto him, Abraham: and he said 'Behold, here I am', and he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest and get thee into the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of*".

Now, based solely on these two verses, what was the reason for God giving these instructions to Abraham? I don't think anyone can arrive at any other conclusion but that God was simply testing Abraham's faith. And for the record, God does not test us so he

can know how we will react. He already knows. He tests us so that we may know how we will react and what we are made of. It is a tool of self-examination to help us to grow.

There are two key elements in God's instructions to Abraham. First, God purposely reminded Abraham how much he loved Isaac by saying "*whom thou lovest*" to bring to the surface all the emotions that Abraham felt for his son. He had waited so long for this promised son. God had finally delivered on the promise and Abraham loved Isaac deeply. Now, the Lord wanted to take him away. It pierced him to the quick.

God purposely put Abraham in conflict to test his faith. I imagine that when Abraham heard God instructing him, his heart began pounding, his emotions welled up inside of him and he wanted to scream "*Oh no Lord, not Isaac. I waited so long for your promise to be fulfilled, he is so dear to me, please do not require this of me*". But Abraham subdued his emotions and trusted God.

Genesis, chapter 15, tells us that "*Abraham believed God...*". God had promised Abraham that his seed would be like the stars in the sky in number, all from this one son, Isaac. Abraham was in great turmoil internally, but he believed the promise God made and knew he would keep it. He did not allow the circumstances of his life to undermine his faith in God's promise.

Second, and quite possibly the reason Abraham was able to muster the faith he needed for this task, God never said to take Isaac and slay him. Rather, he said "*offer*" him. Now I may be splitting hairs here, but it seems to me that Abraham would have mulled over and over again God's instructions to him. He would have examined every word that God spoke. It was an emergency situation for Abraham and he would undoubtedly labor to discern exactly what God had meant.

Hebrews 11:17 tells us that Abraham "*offered up Isaac*", so we must assume that Abraham decided in his heart that God would keep his promise and that he had nothing to fear or worry about. My guess would be that in his heart Abraham hoped that God would not make him go through with it. But the reality was that Abraham probably thought God was serious, that he would have to sacrifice his son. Regardless, there can be no doubt but that Abraham was going to be obedient and knew that God would raise his son.

And so we see in verse three "*And Abraham rose up early in the morning...*" and he went about doing what God had told him to do. He was faithful to God because he believed God and took him at his word.

The fact that we are told that Abraham "*rose up*" tells me that he was not all that concerned about what would happen. He trusted God, so much so that he felt comfortable enough to sleep the night before. He was not worried about losing his son. He apparently had his heart settled that no matter what God was asking him to do, it would all work out the right way.

This is further evidenced in verse five where it says "*And Abraham said unto his young men (the two men that accompanied him and Isaac), 'abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you'*". Abraham was a man of honor and truth. He would not lie. He told the men that he and Isaac would both be back, because he knew they would.

Hebrews 11:18 gives us more information about Abraham's state of mind during this event. It says "*Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead...*". Clearly, this tells us that Abraham was prepared to take his son's life. He raised his hand with the knife in it to slay Isaac, but was stopped by an angel at the very last moment. A ram suddenly appears on the scene and he is used as a substitute sacrifice.

God was not looking for a human sacrifice. He never has. He states clearly in the New Testament, "*I will have mercy and not sacrifice*". He was looking for faithful trust. Without doubt then, Abraham was ready both in heart and deed to obey God.

The offering of Isaac was an example of how believers should trust in their Father God. Abraham was flawless in his faith. He trusted God. More importantly, he believed God and because of that we are told "*Abraham believed God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness*". He remains the symbol of faith for believers.

It was also a picture of the coming Messiah. Like Abraham, God would offer his only begotten Son as a sacrifice for sin. The difference would be that God would follow-through on his own Son's sacrifice. As Isaac was tasked with carrying the wood for his own sacrifice, so too Jesus would bear his own cross, on which he would be sacrificed.

God has only required one human sacrifice, that of his own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6

The Words of a Fool

This chapter is a continuation of the last. It is the story of a foolish man named Jephthah, who was the Ninth Judge of Israel. I do not mean to be irreverent to the man with the accompanying characterization, but his impulsive act, captured in scripture, was nothing more than the act of a fool. It is the second example of human sacrifice that we find in the Bible. We shall get to the scripture reference in Judges chapter 11 in a moment.



Most people consider their word their bond. If they give their word on a particular thing, they sincerely intend to keep it. There was a time in the United States when a person's word and handshake were all the ingredients needed for an implied contract, and there were few legal actions needed to enforce those agreements. People did not give their word easily, but when they did, it was as good as gold.

Nevertheless, sometimes, no matter how hard we try to keep our promises, unforeseen circumstances prevent us from doing so. Other times we may have the best intentions, but we overestimate our ability to do a thing, and so we fail to do it. That is part of being human, of being finite, of being limited by our own lack of strength. I am not making excuses for breaking our word, only being candid and factual. There is not one among us who has been able to keep their word every single time they gave it, even though they had every intention of doing so.

Despite our own failings, we seem to have no problem holding God to a much higher standard. God simply must keep his word. He cannot fail. He cannot take something back. He cannot change. He is God, after all. He claims of himself, "*I am God, I change not*". And we hold him to his word.

And I whole-heartedly agree with this, not in an irreverent "*In your face God*" way as some do, but with reverential trust. I depend upon God's promises. My present life, my faith, my future eternal existence, all depends upon God keeping his word. That is what faith is after all; taking God at his word; and I do.

I have been scoffed at and mocked for relying so heavily upon the promises of scripture, and therefore the promises of God. But I ask, what else can I do? Where else can I turn but to God? In whom else would I place my trust? Would I turn as some have to science or education? What can they do for my soul?

How about philosophy? What of money? Is the President of the United States able to guarantee my eternity? He is not. Is some religious leader able to ensure that I am reconciled to God? He (or she) is not. They are not able to guarantee their own futures. They cannot add one minute to their own lives. So why should I trust them with mine?

I trust the Bible, which tells me "*Let God be true and every man a liar*". God does keep his promises, every last one of them. He lives up to our expectations and then some.

But we were talking about us. Our record of keeping our word is not quite as impeccable as God's. We frequently fail to do that which we have promised. But God does not condemn us for failing. Instead, believers are given more grace and more mercy; more opportunities to get right.

I am over-simplifying this to be sure, but despite our shortcomings, essentially God looks down upon us and still feels great compassion. He knows the weakness of our flesh and how we easily fail. We do not deserve clemency or mercy, but constrained by the great love he has for us, he is longsuffering toward us. Understanding this principle of God's love and grace is important to this story about a fool.

As I said earlier, most of us consider our word our bond. We do not give it easily, because we know our reputation is attached to it. We want to be known as someone whose word can be trusted. Despite our best intention however, there is not one among us who has been able to keep our word every single time that we gave it.

It behooves us then to be cautious in the promises we make to each other, and especially to God. We must not be impulsive and careless when we make personal commitments to him. Impulse leads to failure and enough failures can render one flippant with their word. We cannot allow ourselves as believers to become flippant with God.

And that is just what the man in our second example did. The main character in this story is a man named Jephthah. He was a Judge over Israel. In what I can only imagine to have been a weak moment, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord to do something that simply made no sense. I would go as far as to say that it was folly. We will discuss the specifics of that vow in a moment.

God had not asked him to make this vow. None of his assistants are on record suggesting he make this vow. He simply got caught up in the heat of the moment and impulsively made this extraordinary vow to God. He did keep his word, but what he promised was far outside of the will of God and quite disturbing. He was flippant and reckless in the giving of his word, and I hope we can all learn a lesson from his poor example.

Let us not forget that the purpose of discussing this event is to prove or disprove the idea that God required (or at least condoned) human sacrifices. If we can at the same time learn a lesson about not making promises that we cannot keep, so much the better.

Let me share with you some sobering words written by Solomon about making vows to God. Remember, the Bible is God's word. Solomon wrote these words as God led him to, so this is really God's sentiment about making vows. They are powerful and indicting words that each of us should take seriously and grasp as a guide for our conduct.

"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou has vowed"

Ecclesiastes 5:4

The meaning is clear; God does not want us to make promises to him that we cannot keep. I will go a step further and say he does not want us to make promises that we probably know we cannot keep. He says that those who do this are fools. You can interpret that as you may, but if you search out what God means when he uses that word "fool", you will find that each time it appears, it indicates a denying of God. So simply stated, if you make a promise to God and you do not keep it, you are denying him.

I believe that most promises that are made to God are quid quo pro; or, made in the form of a deal (i.e. "*Lord, if you will do this, then I will do that for you*", etc.). You know this is true, for you have done it yourself. So have I. But the truth of the matter is that God does not make deals.

Before I came to know the Lord, I thought he did. It was a natural assumption. I saw characters in movies making deals with God and it worked for them. I heard ministers tell stories about their making deals with God. And so it seemed that it was an acceptable practice and that I could do it too.

I remember all too well how on one occasion I did exactly that. I was a teenager at the time and I made a humdinger of a deal with God. My girlfriend's mother had gone to a psychic and had gotten some bad news. She was told that her daughter, my girlfriend, would soon be raped and murdered by two drunken men. As a side observation, I think you will agree that this psychic probably didn't get very much repeat business.

When my girlfriend told me about her mother's psychic adventure, it bothered me terribly, as you might expect. I was quite shaken. My first thought was to tell her mother to go back and tell the psychic to take it back, but I knew that was not how things worked.

Today if someone was to tell me something like that I would laugh it off and never give it another thought. I am not only aware of the condemnation by God of such mediums, but have sent a few running for cover in my day after they initiated an argument about God being behind their "gift". What hooley!

But back then, in my youthful inexperience, I was not prepared to reason through such a traumatic revelation. I was worried; greatly worried. I didn't know anything about God then, let alone psychics or soothsayers.

Of course I doubted the psychic's credibility, but I wasn't taking any chances. I felt that I had to do something. And all I could think to do was to make a deal with God. And so I did. I told him that if he would protect my girlfriend and not let this prediction come true that I would read the entire Bible for him.

Now, in retrospect as an adult, I wonder what possible benefit I thought God would derive from my reading the Bible. I mean really, what was in it for God? Reading the Bible would help me, not him. He already knew what it said. But that is usually how a deal goes with God; people negotiate both sides of the deal and for some odd reason they benefit on both sides. But that is not the point I wanted to make, so let me continue.

Needless to say, I was enthusiastic. I had made a deal with God! I was somebody now. I was negotiating with God. I knew he would keep his end of the deal and I was determined that I was going to keep mine. I hit the ground running. Man, I read through Genesis.

Wow, what a big book this was! And wow it was hard to keep my mind on reading, but I plowed ahead; I was keeping my part of the bargain. Then I read through Exodus and got about a third of the way through Leviticus when it dawned on me that I had no idea what I was reading. It was hard. It was work. It was painful reading, because it was not making any sense to me at all.

It appeared I was going to fail. But I was resourceful. It took me almost no time at all to amend the deal and get out of that commitment. I simply deferred reading until I was older and could understand. Since God was a silent partner in the original deal anyway, I figured I didn't need to consult him on the change. How easily we can justify things in our hearts and minds.

While there are many morals to this story, the bottom line is that I had broken a promise to God. And whether you break a genuine promise or a shady, one-sided deal, everyone does it. Even many avowed (no pun intended) agnostics or atheists, when the chips are down and a loved one's life hangs in the balance, find themselves on their knees asking God to make a deal.

We all do it. And we break those promises almost as quickly as we make them. We are much too flippant. That is why our lead verse above indirectly prompts us to consider wisely the vow before we make it. There is an embedded warning in this passage and it should never be taken lightly. The topic of making a vow to the Lord and the responsibility for keeping it is well-documented in the Old Testament. Other passages you might refer to are:

- Deuteronomy 23:23
- Numbers chapter 30
- Jonah 2:9

Clearly, there is a mandate from God that if you make a promise to him, he expects you to keep it. And he wants you to make that commitment only after carefully considering your ability to perform it. That is not to say that there is not a remedy if you fail. God is always merciful and exercises great compassion toward us. We will discuss this more at the end of this chapter.

Our story of Jephthah is found in Judges, chapter 11. He was a Judge of Israel, the 9th Judge. His name is probably not as familiar to readers as some of the other Judges, such as Sampson, Gideon and Deborah, but he was a Judge nonetheless.

Briefly, the function of a Judge was to be an interim leader of the people of Israel during the period from Joshua's death to the selection of their first king, Saul. Their commission is found in Judges 2:16-19. Their role as leaders was complex as they were to serve as military leaders (as seen vividly in the lives of Sampson and Gideon), as government officials and as spiritual guides. To accomplish this, God empowered each of them in various ways, not the least of which was wisdom. But as we will see from what follows, they did not always exercise or employ this gift.

In Judges 11:30-31, it gives us the account Jephthah's foolish vow. It says:

"And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, if thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt offering"

Jephthah made a deal with God. He made a vow. As far as we can tell, God had no part in it. He didn't ask Jephthah to make the deal. Jephthah just took the initiative and made a vow.

Now, given his position of being tasked with ensuring the physical safety of Israel, I understand what motivated him. Charged with the welfare of the Jews, he appropriately sought the help of the Lord. I know I would have done the same thing. I would have fallen on my face and begged the Lord to protect us and to deliver our enemies into our hands.

But Jephthah did not stop there. He decided that asking was not enough. He wanted to provide God with an incentive for helping them, and that is where he and I part company. God needs no incentive to take care of his people beyond his own love for them. The land was God's, the people were God's, and therefore the battle was God's. I think laying it at his feet in faith was all Jephthah needed to do.

Somehow, Jephthah was listening to a different drummer. He felt it necessary to make a deal with God, and the deal was one of the most irresponsible things a man of God in the Bible ever did. That he did not have to make the deal to begin with is evidence enough of this irresponsibility, but it gets worse. Jephthah offered to sacrifice whoever came out of the doors of his house upon his return.

How very foolish. Just who did Jephthah think would come walking out of the door of his home; some pagan priest, an enemy, or maybe the greedy landlord? That would not be a reasonable assumption. It was more likely that someone he knew and loved would.

Perhaps from the wording (i.e. "*whatever cometh...*") we can assume he was speaking of an animal of some sort. That would be more reasonable, but the assumption itself was a bit flippant, as we know it was not an animal that came out.

It would be more reasonable to think that some family member would come out. And later in Judges, chapter 11, we see that it was indeed a family member; his own daughter.



And not only his daughter, but his much beloved only child. If he loved his daughter as much as I love mine, she was the brightness of his day.

And then, and only then, did Jephthah realize his folly, and the calamity he had brought upon himself. Only then did he realize how utterly irresponsible he had been in his oath to God. He was vexed deep in his soul. He was undone and very sad. The wording in the passage makes it sound like he almost blamed his daughter, but he did not. He blamed himself.

But here he was with this self-made dilemma. He had made a promise to God and by his own admission in verse 35 he admitted "*I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back*". He knew what scripture said and he was not going to rebel against God. Despite his own grief, he was determined to do that which he had vowed. He was going to slay his only child and offer her as a burnt offering unto the Lord.

Would God allow this? Would God allow an innocent child to be made a burnt offering for him? It seems he would. The Bible says in black and white in Judges, chapter 11, verse 39 that Jephthah offered her.

Still, there are not a few Bible scholars who believe that she was offered figuratively and not literally. I am not one of them, but in fairness, we will discuss that view in detail in just a moment.

Before we do that, I want to remind you of what I said earlier about sentiment recorded in the Bible. When sentiment is captured in scripture, it is not always true. Sometimes it is, but often it is not. One of the examples I used earlier was when Peter told the Lord he would never deny him. I am sure Peter meant what he said and had every intention of standing by and for the Lord. But the fact is, he did deny him. So what he said was untrue.

Another example is when Thomas said he would not believe the Lord had risen until he personally was able to feel his nail-pierced hands or thrust his hand into his side to feel the wound. That expressed sentiment also proved to be not true, because when Thomas saw the Lord, he did not need proof. He immediately recognized him.

Let me take this truth a step farther. Sometimes, when the Bible reflects the sentiment of a person, it can be true, but that does not mean that God is necessarily in agreement. Similarly, when a person's intentions are recorded, that does not mean that God always approves of or agrees with it. It is just a record of what happened.

And we have such a record with Jephthah. He was a Judge of Israel, a spiritual leader. You would expect as such that the things he said would first be weighed spiritually in his heart and then great wisdom exercised before uttering them. But his impulsiveness trumped all of that.

He was weak and not very in tune with the will of God. Whether he offered his daughter or not is yet to be proved, but one thing I am certain of is that his vow or deal was unacceptable to God.

Let's investigate the matter, and let us start by taking a good look at why Jephthah believed he had to keep his vow. As a faithful Jew and especially as a spiritual leader, he was well aware of God's laws and statutes. No doubt he was thinking of the book of Numbers, chapter 30. It is too lengthy to copy here, so I ask that you refer to it and read it in its entirety at your leisure.

On initial reading it is very aggressive and seems to leave no wiggle room from the rule that is laid down about making a vow. You make a vow, you keep that vow, or else. However, as with any Old Testament topic, in order to fully understand the meaning of it, we must look at everything that is said on this topic throughout scripture, comparing exactly what is said, why it was said, to whom it was said, etc. - weighing the thoughts collectively so that there is no misunderstanding.

If you do not rightly divide the word of truth in this fashion, you can easily arrive at a false understanding. Cults have been established based upon a false understanding of a passage of scripture, or by pulling out one verse from a passage to support their erroneous beliefs. That is even more egregious than not keeping one's vows.

If we accept only what Numbers chapter 30 says and ignore the other Old Testament references I gave above, not to mention myriad New Testament verses, we could conclude that God is just being hard-nosed when he said: "*You promise me something and you had better keep your promise* (paraphrased)". This would not be an honest or fair representation of either the scripture or God's character.

If we allow ourselves to be governed only by Old Testament teaching without the benefit of New Testament revelation, we would be legalistic in our application. In order to understand this Old Testament teaching more perfectly, we must consider the whole counsel of God's Word, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to bring discernment and understanding to our effort.

I am not saying that Jephthah should have been aware of New Testament teachings, for that would have been impossible. They were not available in his day. What I am saying

is that God is immutable. He never changes. So what the mind and will of God was then, is the mind and will of God now and vice-versa.

More specifically, what truths apply today concerning God's mercy and forgiveness, applied back in Jephthah's day. All a believer had to do was seek the Lord's forgiveness and repent and his sin or error was forgiven him. Jephthah only had to humble himself and ask God's mercy. That would have taken care of the dilemma he faced.

But he did not do that. Jephthah made the same mistake that a lot of today's believers make. He followed the letter of the law. He knew very little about God's grace and mercy. A contrite spirit and prayer of repentance is all God requires when we err. It erases the mistake or sin as if it was never there. Jephthah missed this opportunity because he felt the law was absolute.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. If we were to apply an absolute legalistic understanding to the Ten Commandments (as many incorrectly have), we could conclude that in order to be right with God, we would have to keep those commandments, every one of them, every day of our lives, without ever breaking one. Anything short of that, even the slightest infraction, would be violation of the law.

Now truly, we ought to strive to keep the Ten Commandments. We should never be of the attitude that it is okay to break them. But we all know that we can't keep them. No one has ever kept them and no one ever will, save the Lord Jesus himself when he dwelled among us.

Even the Apostle Paul sinned. In fact, he called himself the chief of sinners. In Romans, chapter seven, we see the great struggle Paul had with his flesh and sin. Never was there a man as sold out and devoted to the Lord as this man from Saul of Tarsus. He suffered beatings, lashes, stonings and being thrown into the ocean for Jesus. And yet, he struggled to keep himself from breaking the commandments. In his lamentation in Romans chapter seven, he cried out from the struggle "*Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*"

My point is this, if God required us to keep that which we were not able to keep (the law) in order to be right with him, then none of us would ever be right. God would have set an unattainable goal for us to reach when he knew all along that we could not attain it. And if that were the case, then God could be considered to be unfair. Life would be a set-up for failure and any judgment would be unjust.

In no way do I mean to be irreverent to God. I would never knowingly do that. I am just trying to show the nonsense of a legalistic position. Certainly God has rules to follow, but knowing we are not capable of keeping them perfectly at all times, he grants us mercy and forgiveness. We live not under the legalism of the law, but rather in freedom under mercy and grace in Christ Jesus.

Again, God's desire is that we strive to live in conformance to his will and word, but he did not want us to adopt a legalistic approach to our relationship with him. That is not at all why God gave us the commandments. Certainly he gave them to us who believe so that we might live righteously, but there is much more to it than that.

Knowing our nature, knowing how we are prone to sin, God gave us these commandments to keep us from doing things that would bring calamity into our lives. He knew that if we were to steal, it would hurt us, not just the person we stole from. We would ruin our reputation and damage our own character.

The Ten Commandments are not negative, they are positive. They were given to keep us from getting into situations that would hurt us and others we know and love. It was a warning of danger rather than an edict of legalism.

God reiterated the concept in the New Testament when he said there were just two commandments. The first was to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. The second was to love thy neighbor as thyself. If we do these, there will be no false idols, no stealing, no murders, no false witness, etc. The Ten Commandments are a road map to victorious living.

Numbers, chapter 30 was given in the same sense. It is a chapter addressing vows. It gives warnings of caution for those making them. Those warnings are found in the New Testament as well. Matthew 5:33-37 indicates that we should be extremely careful when we swear by something. In fact, it is intended to dissuade us from swearing or vowing at all. All intended to help us to avoid problems, not to conform us to a legalistic mindset.

Then, if we return to the chapter we first looked at, Ecclesiastes, chapter five and verse two, we are told:

**"Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter
any thing before God: for God is in heaven and thou upon earth:
therefore let thy words be few"**

Wow, if that doesn't peg Jephthah's folly perfectly, nothing does. How different his life would have been if he would have employed this concept before he was "*rash with his mouth*" and made that senseless vow.

God has given us perfect instruction in this matter. We are to be cautious in what we promise or vow. We are to consider it well before committing. If we read what he has to say, apply logic and discipline to prevent what is going on in our mind from flippantly winding up on our tongue, we will do well. This will keep us from making silly promises and deals with God and save us a whole lot of heartache and stress.

But, we know too that the tongue often lives up to its infamous reputation in James and we are sometimes going to allow it to control. It is our nature, and sometimes even the most seasoned and mature Christian can allow their old nature to speak for them. But as I

understand the word of God, he does not expect us to compound one error with another. We may get angry at someone and explode into a flurry of hurtful words, for instance (which is not a good thing), but we shouldn't make it worse by striking that person.

So too, making a flippant vow or promise to God is a very bad thing. It could temporarily strain your relationship with God (though you can never fall from grace). But you would make it much worse by following through and doing the stupid thing you promised. Would it not be easier and better to just exercise the other principle of asking God's forgiveness for your flippancy?

Jephthah called what he did a "vow", but I do not agree with his assessment. And please remember, I am disagreeing with the sentiment of Jephthah, not the word of God. The reason I disagree is that as I read the word, a vow is a promise that is borne from either:

- gratitude toward God for something he has done in your life;
- being moved by the Holy Spirit; or
- because of an inner urging in one's bosom.

A vow is a submission of one's self to the Lordship of God without any conditions or strings. It is subordinating yourself to the Lord willingly in something he has probably moved your heart to do. Examples:

- *"Lord I know I am not pleasing you with my constant angry outbursts and I vow to exercise more self-control because I know it will please you"*
- *"Lord I know I should be in church and I have been skipping for silly reasons, but I promise I am going to try to be more faithful from this day forward"*

These are self-expressed vows, presumably because the individual was burdened in their heart to make them. They felt the need to express themselves in this way from a spirit of gratitude or duty. There was no "gimmie" attached. There was no deal.

This is not what Jephthah did. I have no doubt but that he had Israel's best interests at heart, but if he was tuned into God the way he should have been as a Judge, he would have known that God had Israel's best interests at heart too. He did not need to convince God to help by providing an incentive. All he needed to do was lay it at the Lord's feet and ask for help. He tried to barter with God, letting his tongue take precedence over sound judgment.

It might be asked, *"Why would anyone make such a foolish promise?"* Who knows? I certainly do not. But I know that we all do foolish things. When we act impulsively, invariably we eventually regret doing so. We humans have this habit of looking back and knowing better after the fact; and often after the damage has been done. How does that cliché go *"Hindsight is 20/20"*? Unfortunately, our vision is not as keen at the time we do these foolish things.

In Jephthah's case, we have some indicators as to why he felt the need to barter with God. He lived a hard and very lonely life. He was a social outcast, as often men of God and their families are. He finally had an opportunity to shine in the eyes of Israel. It was his fifteen minutes of fame. For once, he could be a big man if God would just allow him to get the credit for this victory. It was his chance to be somebody.

I am sure this worked on his emotions and fed his ambition. He wanted so badly to be a hero instead of the goat he had so often been. And so, in a weak moment, he let his guard down and let his tongue do his thinking. He made a rash vow to God.

But nowhere do I see God agreeing to Jephthah's deal. It isn't recorded in his word. And it couldn't be, because God does not contradict himself. He said "*Thou shalt not kill*", and the fulfillment of this vow of Jephthah's would be just that, a killing. It wasn't the punishment of an evil doer, war against an enemy, self-defense or even an accidental death, which are all acceptable according to scripture. Rather, it was the willful killing of an innocent. Performing this vow would be a violation of God's law.

The nerve of Jephthah to try to involve God in this sordid deal! God is not in the mafia that he should be making deals. It is not his business. God is in the reconciliation business, the answering prayer business.

Allow me to offer my conclusions on this matter of whether Jephthah offered his daughter or not. As I said earlier, Bible scholars are divided. Not a few of them offer that Judges, chapter 11 seems to suggest that Jephthah's daughter was *figuratively* offered, in that she bewailed her virginity for two months and took an oath of celibacy for life. This, in their opinion, was an offering in and of itself. They use as support the five words in verse 39 that say "*...and she knew no man*".

Most scholars however (and I stand with them), believe she was indeed offered. As I read the account, I think it leaves no doubt. Psalms 106:34-38 evidences that this pagan practice of human sacrifice was not uncommon among the people, because they (the Israelites) had disobeyed the Lord and allowed their enemies to live when God delivered them into their hands. The consequence was that the chosen people of God adopted the pagan practices of the land, which often included human sacrifice.

The Psalm reads:

"They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan..."

What a shame. What a terrible shame. That people who knew the power and presence of Almighty God in a way no other people had, turned from him to the false idols and

wicked practices of the pagans they were supposed to have eliminated. And then they took the children God blessed them with and offered them as human sacrifices to dead, lifeless idols that were nothing more than pieces of wood and clay.

If God condemned them for these practices (and he did), then he could not condone Jephthah doing the same thing, even under the guise of a burnt offering to the true and living God.

If you read the response of Jephthah's daughter to her father's disclosure of the vow, it pictures for me a wonderfully faithful and God-fearing young lady with great virtue. What a waste. What a terrible waste.

In summary, I feel compelled to point out that there is nothing wrong with making a vow to God. When you fall under strong conviction and are stirred by the Holy Spirit to commit another part of your life to the Lord, take action upon it without reservation or regret. Just do not make hasty and emotional vows as so many people do. They usually fail or lead to deal-making. Deal making is not pleasing to God. Don't be a Jephthah.

CHAPTER 7

Joshua Makes the Sun Stand Still

In Joshua chapter 10, verses 12-14 we are told:

"Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel and he said in the sight of Israel, sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies..."



This could prove to be one of the more complicated passages that we will examine. If you were not previously aware of the contrasting interpretations of this portion of scripture, you will be introduced to at least two of them here, and that is where the complexity comes in.

Both views have merit and both are quite interesting, but one is a bit more interesting because it is radical. I have flip-flopped back and forth on which account I think is most probable, but after much study and much contemplation on what is said, I have come to the conclusion that I lean toward the more traditional interpretation.

The traditional view is that the sun stood still for almost an entire day and that this miracle of God scared the enemies of the Israelites so much, that they were defeated. The moon also stood still, but since the moon is merely a sun-reflector, I am going to confine my thoughts to the sun only.

Those who embrace this interpretation also point to this Biblical account of the standing still of the sun as the reason for the nearly 24 hours of time rumored to be lost over the centuries of recorded history. If you want to know more about this anomaly in time, you will find myriad accounts on the internet.

Perhaps one of the most interesting, if not thrilling of internet offerings is the NASA story. Allegedly, at the Goddard Space Flight Center in Green Belt, Maryland, scientists were calculating orbits of planets and stars in our solar system 1,000 years into the future to ensure non-conflict with satellites.

They were running computer measurements forward and backward over the centuries for precision, when the system halted unexpectedly. The error code indicated that either incorrect information had been input into the system or that the results were not compatible with the established standards.

Successive attempts resulted in the same freezing of the system. Subsequent study of the error codes indicated that nearly an entire 24 hour day was not accounted for in the search data. Technicians were called in, but nothing seemed to be wrong with software or hardware. It was just one of those head-scratching moments.

One of the team members, who happened to be a Christian, mentioned that once in Sunday school he had heard that a prophet had made the sun stand still for almost a whole day. Of course, his idea was met with chuckles, but with no other ideas, someone asked for him to find this story in the Bible so they might read it.

He had some difficulty finding it, but finally located the passage in Joshua (our text above), along with the rest of the text that we have not reflected in this short space. The scientists read the passages with great interest.

They concluded that this could indeed be the missing day they were looking for. The system seemed to get hung up around the same time in history. Armed with this information, they reset the computer data, accounting for the Bible day, and found that it fit.

But the fit was not perfect. I cannot explain the technicalities of their computations, but suffice it to say that they decided that the passage in Joshua accounted for less than 24 hours. In fact, it was 40 minutes short, calculating at 23 hours and 20 minutes. This is in keeping with the scripture which actually says "*about a day*", and not specifically a whole day.

While much of their problem was solved, the missing 40 minutes still presented great danger for future space travel. Multiplied over the years as applied to projected orbits, 40 minutes can mean great deviations 1,000 years from now. So they were basically back at square one.

The Christian employee thought about the things he had learned in Sunday school and suddenly remembered that there had been another account in the Bible relating to the sun's movement. He wasn't certain, but he thought the lesson was about the sun going backwards in the sky.

Again, though chuckling at such an obvious breach of known physics, the scientists asked him to find this passage. After a laborious search, the man found the passage in II Kings. Summarizing what transpired according to the passage, a man by the name of Hezekiah was on his death bed. He was visited by the prophet named Isaiah, who told him that he was not going to die at that time.

Hezekiah asked for a sign to prove what the prophet was saying to him. Isaiah told him he would make the sun go forward 10 degrees. Hezekiah told him that it would be more believable if he would make the sun to go backward 10 degrees. Isaiah agreed and the sun went backwards 10 degrees. 10 degrees is exactly 40 minutes!

Moving on, in all my study of the Bible, I cannot think of anyone (except Jesus himself) who had the Lord hearken unto them in such a way as Joshua did this day. In fact, verse 14 emphasizes that there had never been a time like this before. Other great men of God had great response from God; Moses certainly had God's ear, and Abraham, and scores of others. But this man Joshua spoke to God and immediately one of the most significant miracles ever performed took place. Science is still marveling at it to this day.

Joshua, the successor to Moses, leader of the chosen people, was a man of great faith. He revered and believed God. When the other Israeli spies gave a bad report of the land they were to subdue, Joshua and Caleb alone gave positive and faithful reports. He was a man with a persevering spirit and total faith in Jehovah.

I have no doubt but that when he asked God to make the sun stand still (whatever we determine that to mean in this study), he knew without doubt it would come to pass. What a magnificent example of the type of power that is available to the believer if we would just live our lives by faith, revering God and trusting him to supply our needs. Christians everywhere should find inspiration in this example of faith in action.

If it isn't already a well-known fact and therefore moot, I think that it is important to note here that science dismisses such Biblical accounts, much as they do fairy tales. Science cannot accept God or understand faith. They cannot see God. They cannot measure faith. Therefore, they are fables, crutches for the weak.

Such was the attitude at NASA in the story we relayed. This is often the status quo for science. It is also the mindset of academia. For example, early 20th century historians vehemently balked at the Bible account in the book of Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar had been the king of Babylon.

They ridiculed the Bible, saying that it was unquestionably wrong, that records showed that this man had never even been to Babylonian province. Many decades later, when the ruins of Babylon were uncovered, archeologists found that not only had Nebuchadnezzar been to Babylon, not only had he been the King of Babylon, but they found that almost every brick in the city had his name emblazoned upon it. How foolish to doubt the Word of the Living God.

In almost every area; archeology, history, science, humanities, culture, mathematics, etc. the world takes issue with Bible accounts, in particular accounts of miracles. If they cannot absolutely deny an acclaimed miracle, they will explain it away. For example, Sampson's strength was the result of an adrenalin rush, the Red Sea was crossed at a point where it was very shallow or was actually a shallow body of water called the Sea of Reeds, the lion David killed with his bare hands was probably sickly, and so on.

When even a modicum of faith is needed to accept something the Bible teaches, science lifts its hands in rejection and says "*whoa*". There is immediate conflict and skepticism. Usually that rejection is passive, but passive or aggressive, it is always dismissive. There just is no room in science for the unexplainable.

But nowhere does the Bible and science come into greater conflict than it does here in this book of Joshua. Here science says vehemently, "*Impossible! The sun and the moon cannot stand still. It is against the laws of physics. It just could not have happened*".

They contend that if this event had actually taken place, it would have created great chaos in nature. The sun standing still would have had the following effects:

- the tides would halt
- heat exchange from land to sea and vice versa would not occur
- there would be over-evaporation
- there would be an overabundance of ultra violet light
- the ozone layer may very well have been burned off
- everything would be out of balance
- life on earth would be irreversibly impacted

I find all of that to be very hypocritical. These same scientists that claim the world could not stand up to 8-10 hours of extra sun, allow that the earth stood up under many years of no sun. They claim that a giant asteroid once hit the earth causing the earth to go dark for several years and yet the earth seems to have weathered it. Their problem is not with what the Bible says, but rather that it is the Bible that said it.

But the point is that on one hand they lay claim that this cataclysmic asteroid event happened without the usual strong evidence science requires in such matters. They base their acceptance upon one big dent in the earth (the Gulf of Mexico) and not much more. And it may not even be a dent. In fact, it seems an asteroid of that size would have split the earth into pieces. But then I am not a scientist so what do I know?

No one is sure it is a dent. There is no asteroid. There are no fragments of that asteroid. No radiological readings. No explanation how animals and plant life could have survived two or more years without the sun. There is nothing; no direct evidence whatsoever. But we are expected to accept it as fact.

Then, on the other hand, they are quick to deny the very account of creation and all the miracles of the Bible as fables. As in all the claims of the Bible, in this case of the sun standing still they have an expert and unimpeachable eyewitness; God. And still they deny that this event took place, concluding "*It couldn't happen. The earth would never recover*". How odd that an event where the sun shone for an additional 8-10 hours is so devastating to the environment, when two years of no sun is inconsequential.

If God could create this world (and he did) from nothing, how difficult would it be for him to stop the sun for a few hours without any detriment to the environment? You see, if we believe that God had the power to create, we can believe that he has the power to sustain.

But I find myself addressing peripheral difficulties and not the difficult passage at hand. Let us return then to giving the alternate view on what happened this day. Again, in my mind, the traditional view is the only plausible understanding. I am a simple guy. God speaks simply through his word so that people like me have clarity. I don't think there are any purposely hidden things in God's word. It is simply written for all to grasp if they so desire. Accordingly, taking the account at face value is the most prudent approach for me.

Having said that, let's now discuss the other popular view. It is a radical view to be sure. It asks the reader to deny the straightforward language of the Bible and to embrace something a bit more abstract. Still, at times, the theory makes sense, so I feel presenting it is the right thing to do.

I am going to state the facts emphatically, almost as if I were making the case as the spokesman for this viewpoint if you will. But I am not. In fact, I do not agree with this viewpoint at all.

Specifically, this view is that the sun did not stand still at all. Rather, the claim is that the language suggests that the sun went dark. The logic behind this theory alleges that if the sun merely stood still, the miracle would hardly have been noticed in the heat of a battle. Eventually some might have noticed that the sun hadn't moved, but the focus on preserving one's life would understandably preoccupy the moment. Therefore, having the sun stand still would not have the immediate impact of confusion and fear on the enemy. I have to be honest, although I do not buy into the theory, that one point kind of makes sense to me.

According to the theory, the sun moves so slowly through the sky that if it suddenly stood still, there would be little apparent difference. The event would have to have been a little more obvious and overwhelming to be considered miraculous and to negatively impact on the enemy. Remember, the premise for Joshua's request was that this miracle of God would unsettle the enemy and discomfort them.

Let us recall the words of Joshua. He said "*Sun, stand though still upon Gibeon*". Now, I am not going to burden you with all the babble about Greek and Hebrew not translating into English well because some words have no English counterparts. While there is some truth to that, English is a very capable language and any thought or idea can be adequately conveyed using the words that comprise our western vernacular.

Nevertheless, those who embrace this theory claim that there is a transliteration failing here in some manuscripts. To make a long story short, they say that if we were to remain true to what Joshua actually said, it would read "*Sun, be thou silent upon Gibeon*". And I agree with them on this point as well.

This is a very peculiar thing to say, wouldn't you agree? In fact, so peculiar that I can understand why someone would have opted to have it read "*stand thou still*". That makes more sense at face value. But consider this; that these words have two meanings in the

Hebrew language. Moreover, the words are interchangeable, despite being at some variance with each other. Of the 13 other times the words appear in the Old Testament, nine times they mean "*kept silent*" and four times they mean "*held his peace*". I am not going to list them all here, but a simple word search in a good concordance will take you to them.

The point is this, despite the obvious face value meaning we quickly assign these words in this portion of scripture, isn't it unusual that all the other times they appear they mean something completely different? Consider for a moment that the words actually mean "*be thou silent*".

The logical question then is "*How can the sun be silent? That doesn't make any sense at all*". I agree; because even though the sun makes a tremendous amount of noise, perhaps the loudest noise in our galaxy, it is too far away for us to hear. The noise largely is due to solar flares. A solar flare is a huge explosion of burning gas. When I say "*huge*", I mean huge; perhaps a quarter-million of a miles out into space.

I know something about exploding gas, as do most men. When I have to burn leaves, brush and logs in the backyard and everything is wet, my first thought is to pull out the lawnmower gas container and let fly about a half-pint onto the pile of wood. I am the typical stupid man when it comes to such things. We don't think; we just do.

When I light it off, the resulting "woooooosh" is overwhelmingly loud (not to mention it often knocks me off my feet and singes my arm and facial hair). A solar flare is certainly tens of millions times the size of my small back yard flare and the noise must be deafening from even thousands of miles away. But since the sun is over 92 million miles away, we never hear any of that noise. So to strictly interpret these words to mean "*be thou silent*" just doesn't work. So how can the sun "*be silent*?"

Considering the other occurrences of these words, a more faithful interpretation can be applied. It appears that the actual intent of Joshua was for the sun to "*stop*" or "*cease*", and if you will allow me, to "*stop or cease its function*".

And what does the Bible say of the function of the sun? Genesis 1:15 says "...to give light upon the earth". Revelation 1:16 makes a comparison to Christ's appearance, using the sun, in this way, "...and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength". The function of the sun then is to give light and heat. I do not see that heat comes into play here, but light certainly does, if you subscribe to this alternate theory.

Israel had enjoyed many victories against their enemies and often the victories came from night battles, where being greatly outnumbered, the cloak of darkness gave them some advantage. Verse nine of Joshua chapter ten shows that Joshua had previously used the night to his advantage against this particular enemy. Joshua may well have been thinking along these lines when he petitioned the Lord about the sun. Consequently, it appears that Joshua was simply commanding the sun to stop its function, or to withhold its light.

Now, we are not talking about a solar eclipse, heavy overcast or a sky blackened by a plague of locusts. Science can feed you that baloney. Rather, it is clear that those who hold to this theory believe that God performed a mighty miracle that cannot be explained by science. They believe that Joshua asked God to darken the sun.

Now, he could have waited for nightfall to fight, but by asking God to darken the sun, this would immediately impact upon the enemy. They had heard stories of this great God Jehovah of the Jews and they feared him. This would psychologically unsettle them and neutralize their military threat.

As I commented earlier, this theory has strength. I don't think that having the sun stand still and shine longer would not have an intimidating or immediate effect on the enemy. Moreover, it would not give Israel the advantage they had enjoyed previously under the cover of darkness.

Indeed, it would disadvantage them because they were greatly outnumbered and could not rely on the element of surprise that darkness afforded them. It makes sense that Joshua asked for the cover of darkness and that he imagined that his enemies would scatter and be easily subdued if God was to darken the sun.

Still, I am a face-value type of theologian. I do not like to read in things that require effort to understand. I just do not see God hiding truths. It is not his nature. He is not the author of confusion. His word and words are plain and simple.

Take for example the 23rd Psalm. Here is a portion of scripture that even atheists know in part. It has been embraced by Jew and Christian alike through every generation. Millions have memorized the words. Other millions have found great comfort and purpose in these few verses. These powerful words have changed the lives of multitudes. They dry the tears of the grieving, stay the fearful and encourage almost all who read them.

And yet the words are written with such simplicity that a child can understand them. Of the 130 plus words that comprise this magnificent psalm, 95% of them are simple, one-syllable words that say exactly what they mean. No hidden agenda, no complexity. God wrote it as he writes in all his word, with simplicity, reaching out to all who will embrace it.

So, despite the strong evidence for this radical view, I must hold to the simple explanation. I cannot explain how the sun standing still had an immediate impact on the enemy of Israel, but I know it did. Perhaps the Jews sent word that Joshua petitioned God to do this great miracle and enough time passed before the battle that the enemy could tell the miracle had happened.

I would imagine that knowing what they knew about this great God Jehovah, seeing that he stopped the sun for the Jews would have unsettled them significantly. But whatever

actually happened, we know that god made sure it worked as Joshua had hoped and Israel routed their enemy.

And there you have it. I have given you both major views with hope that this presentation will help you to decide for yourself.

CHAPTER 8

The Song of Solomon



The Song of Solomon is one of the most difficult books in the Bible to grasp for Christians, especially for newer converts to the faith. For those who do not share the Christian faith, it must be almost incomprehensible. In fact, in his reference Bible, C. I. Scofield writes in his preamble of this book *"Nowhere in scripture does the unspiritual mind tread upon ground so mysterious and incomprehensible as in this book..."*.

I remember as a very new Christian reading the initial few passages of chapter one and feeling very intimidated. My first thought was that this book had somehow been mistakenly included as part of the Bible, when it was not intended to be. It seemed more like a private love letter between two lovers rather than a holy book. As in almost all things spiritual, it took time for me to grow in the faith sufficiently to understand the preciousness of this song and the tender application it has in the believer's relationship to Christ.

But even for the seasoned believer, a small problem is posed in some of the language used. The poetic presentation is a picture of the love that is shared between Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom, and his bride, the church (all true believers from every age). The language used (i.e. *"My beloved, thou whom my soul loveth"*, etc.) is in keeping with that relationship and projects the tender love of our master for us and the type of response we should have toward him.

The language fits this relationship perfectly, until we reach chapter four. In verses nine and ten of this chapter, there is a shift in the words used by the Bridegroom, where it is written *"Thou has ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse..."*. The natural inclination when one reads these words is to think of something dirty and reprehensible. That the Lord would call his bride both his sister and his spouse is unsettling and suspect to the unregenerate mind. Shamefully, the unskilled Christian mind often has the same reaction, as I attested to earlier.

But one cannot make a natural or sensual application to what is being said. The application is spiritual. The Lord is showing his closeness to his church, a closeness that has not been enjoyed by any other group of people, not even the chosen people, the Jews.

Christ died for his church. God never died for any other people. You may contend that Messiah came to the Jew and you would be correct. But in truth, Christ died for his church, which is comprised of both Jew and Gentile, rightly converted. He died because he loved us even before we knew him. We are called after his name...Christians.

He said of our relationship that he would be closer to us than a brother. I have seen some very close brothers in my time. I remember as a lad a farm family that lived next door.

The brothers were close - all 16 of them. If you fought one, you had to fight them all. They stuck close to one another, like brothers. But Jesus says he is closer to us than even that.

Emulating his expressed love for us, those who comprise his church, those of like faith, often address each other as "*brother so and so*" or "*sister so and so*". It is a spiritual relationship. We are not related to one another by a bloodline, but by the blood of Christ. We are members of the family of God and joint heirs with Christ.

The closeness expressed by the Bridegroom to the Bride is not sexual or sensual, but holy and spiritual. His tender love extends to each member of his church and that love is expressed as sweetly as imaginable in the terms of "*sister*" and "*spouse*".

Later in the book, in chapter five and verse one, he adds another dimension to this relationship. He says "*Oh friends...oh beloved*". The sweetness is seen in the response from the church in verse 16, where the terms are echoed back to the Bridegroom.

The Bridegroom takes all the wonderful, meaningful relationships we know on earth and combines them together spiritually to show us how close our relationship with him is. It is greater than the sum total of parental, sibling, and spousal love. But so we understand, he uses terms we are familiar with, terms we ascribe our greatest warmth for.

Even though I am not able to fathom this great love that God has for us, when I contemplate all that his love motivated him to do on our behalf, from the ark, to the cross, from the cross to the grave and from the grave to the right hand of God, it is easy to understand that the depth of God's tender love for each of us is deep and everlasting. It surpasses any love that we have ever known on Earth.

This Song of Solomon makes me think of the years Israel spent in the wilderness and how God led them by day as a pillar of smoke and at night as a pillar of fire. And not just any smoke or fire, but the Shekinah glory, the very essence of God's presence rising up above the camp, and yet remaining in the camp with those he loved. Why did God want so much to be close to his people? Simply, he loved them and desired to fellowship with them.

When one considers the depth to God's demonstrated love throughout the centuries of man's existence, one is compelled to view the Song of Solomon as a book of beauty, picturing the perfect relationship that God wants to establish with each of his children. It is a song of sweet love, pure and undefiled.

I hope you will look at this book in a different light. The only difficulty that this wonderful, beautiful book should pose to a believer is the difficulty of understanding how God can love us as much as he does.

CHAPTER 9

Was Jesus Crucified on Good Friday



theme.

Has it ever occurred to you that of all the holidays that we celebrate in the western world, only those that have to do with the Lord Jesus actually stray from the theme of what is being celebrated? The patriotic celebrations of Presidents Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King Day, Veteran's Day, etc.; all stay true to theme. The characters we dress as, the music we play, the people we honor all are true to

So too other non-patriotic observances, such as Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, May Day, Labor Day, Halloween, and New Years are celebrated true to the theme of the day. All the customs, costumes and celebrations make it clear as to what day is being observed.

But when it comes to what I consider the two biggest observances, Christmas and Easter, somehow they are cluttered with characters and themes that have nothing to do with the reason those days are set aside. And the "clutter" of those holidays actually detract from what the celebrations are all about.

Santa Claus, Frosty the Snowman, the Grinch, reindeer, elves and the like are not only mythical, but lend absolutely nothing to the theme of Christmas, which is the birth of the savior, the Son of God. Indeed, though everyone and their brother seem to quote the old cliché "*remember the reason for the season*", in reality the real reason is never really remembered by many.

Similarly, Peter Cottontail, his chocolate candy relatives, Easter eggs, baskets and the like, cloud the true message of Easter. I doubt that the average child involved in an Easter egg hunt could tell you that this day celebrates the promise of resurrection pictured in the rising of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is very tempting to say more on this assault that has been waged on these extremely holy Christian days, for much evidence exists to show that the assault is not only secular, but has satanic origin. But I will resist that temptation and get to the topic of Good Friday, where seems to be much confusion.

Some think the celebrating of Good Friday is restricted to just one denomination. Not so. It is true it originated there, but many denominations and many in corporate America also recognize this day as the day that Christ was crucified. Was he indeed hung on the cross on Friday? If not, then what day did he die? How long was he in the grave? When did he arise? Is it important? Can we know for certain from a Biblical study?

The answer to the last two questions is an emphatic “yes”. It is extremely important to know the answers to these and other questions; and we absolutely can find the answers in scripture. I want to clear away the bunnies, eggs and basket hay, and take a look at the only thing important about this day we call Easter.

I am not sure that what I just said emphasizes strongly enough how important knowing the facts on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is. It is critical to know the truth. If he did not die when the Bible said he did, then he was not buried when the Bible said he was. If he was not buried when the Bible said he was, then he did not rise when the Bible said he rose, or perhaps did not rise at all. If he did not rise, then he is no different and no greater than any of the others throughout time who claimed to be God. Even the Apostle Paul, giant of the Christian faith, conceded this when he wrote in I Corinthians 15:13-19:

"But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and our faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ; whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable".

Most miserable indeed! If we have placed our faith in Jesus the Christ and he is not risen, if he lies dead and motionless in his grave like other so-called religious icons, then he was never God, our faith was ill-placed and we have no hope.

But thank God for the very next verse that he moved Paul to write. Verse 20 says:

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept (died)"

Jesus did rise from the dead just as he promised he would. He did so to the fulfillment of myriad prophecy in scripture. Not only did he arise to prove himself true, but he completed the scriptures to prove them true as well. And it is scripture we rely on for the facts about his resurrection.

Unfortunately, the importance of these truths and the impact they should have upon each individual who breathes the air that God created, has itself been obscured. I am not speaking only of the commercialization of this day by the business world or the obvious attempt by darker powers to take the attention off of the message this day brings us. There are other factors that add to this confusion as well.

Myriad celebrities of various denominational affiliations readily give their take on what Easter is all about. Some of the things they say are so foreign to scripture that it boggles

my mind how people can have their ears tickled by them and not have the hair on the back of their neck stand up. Others conduct services more faithful to the resurrection theme, but then lose credibility by doing the bizarre.

One fellow on television, for instance, conducted a good service and said the right things to point to the significance of this great day, only to undo all he had said by inviting guests to the fellowship hall to observe a “stripper for Jesus” and to consume alcohol. What on earth goes on in the mind of such an individual?

Another gentleman, became weirdly and fanatically demonstrative, actually having himself crucified to show his allegiance to Jesus. And there are many, many more of these misguided oddities that we could point to, but will not. Suffice it to say that this day we call Easter, the day we celebrate the vicarious death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, is tainted with both supernatural and man-made confusions.

In this chapter, I want to straighten out all of the confusion on this day of such great importance. Not only is it the most important day of the year for Christians, but it is a very important time for the Jew as well, a time of Passover. I will be tying together the Passover and Easter in a way that should convince everyone that they belong together. I will not try to refute the commercialism and fanaticism any more than I already have, because I think these things are both self-revealing and undeserving of any further attention.

Let us focus now on the death and burial of Jesus; and let’s start with the traditional Roman Catholic and Protestant view of Good Friday and Easter. Easter is held by all to be on the first day of the week, Sunday (Saturday is the Sabbath). There is no dispute to this as virtually all denominations are in agreement on this point.

So the question we are left with is, *"Is the celebration of Friday as the day that Jesus Christ was crucified correct or not"*? If you believe the majority, it would seem it is. In some states this day is given so much credibility that it is considered a holiday at the discretion of employers. So many people cannot be wrong, can they?

Strict Biblicists (of which I am one) hold that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday and not Friday. How is that possible? How can there be such a disparity in views? Well, with a quick glance, Friday as the day of crucifixion makes sense to the average person...Friday, Saturday, Sunday - 3 days. But I will show that to be fuzzy math and also show that the Bible is much more specific about this event than that.

In Matthew 12:38-40 the Bible says:

"Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee" (speaking to Jesus). But he answered and said unto them, "an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights

in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth".

Now let's be honest, as far as the world is concerned, the day selected by Catholics and Protestants to recognize the crucifixion is just fine. It isn't important if they are right or not. Like Christmas, the actual day of the event does not matter, as long as we pay due reverence on the selected day.

But I submit to you that it is important. In fact, it is absolutely critical that Jesus died and rose again at precisely the time God prescribed, or his death was for naught. Let me shock you with a bold statement; if Jesus was not crucified at precisely the time and on the day the Bible said he was to be crucified, then he was an imposter and not the Son of God!

But of course, he is the Son of God, so he must have been crucified at the precise time prophesied. Therefore, let us explore the disparity between the day called Good Friday and the Wednesday that I mentioned above to see what the Bible has to say about it. And please do not take anything I say as disparaging to any denomination. I am only covering the facts of the topic at hand.

According to Roman Catholic tradition, Jesus was:

- crucified on a Friday;
- died between the hours of 3 pm and sundown;
- spent 3 days and 3 nights in the earth (grave); and
- rose from the dead very early on Sunday morning.

Okay, let's do the math. Friday is 1 night, Saturday is 1 day and 1 night and Sunday is a part of 1 day. So we total that to show 2 nights and 1 day and a small part of another day. Hmmmmmm, seems as though we have put our finger on the disparity. It is in the traditional view. It is very hard to argue with math. Figures do not lie. The traditional view comes up 2 days and 1 night short.

Now, some traditionalist commentators try to explain this difficulty away by saying that in ancient times the Jews counted part of a day as a whole day. When I hear that I have to say "*please pass the bread, the bologna has already been around*". Even if we were to accept that weak argument, it still does not add up.

At this point you may want to read at least one of the gospel accounts of the crucifixion in one of the following chapters: Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; or John 19. If you are very ambitious, please read them all. However, please make it a point to read Mark 15:34-43. Please pay specific attention to verse 42. It says:

"And now when the even (evening) was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath..."

The day that Jesus was crucified was the day BEFORE the Sabbath. You say *"Well okay then - you just made the traditional case, you admitted that the Sabbath is Saturday and now you point out scripture that says Jesus was crucified the day before Saturday, which is Friday...duh"*.

That is partially true; Friday is always the day before the weekly Sabbath or Saturday. But there are other Sabbath days identified in scripture apart from the weekly Sabbath. Sabbaths were routinely observed by the Jews of old. And the Sabbath mentioned in verse 42 is NOT the weekly Sabbath. Let me prove this.

This was the week of the Passover celebration. The first day of Passover week is always a high Sabbath day; always, no exceptions, no matter what day of the week it falls on. But numerically speaking, the high Sabbath day is always on the 15th of Nissan or April. You can check this quickly against the following scripture references: Exodus 12:16-18; Leviticus 23:5-6; and, Numbers 28:16-17.

Now watch closely. The Passover Sabbath for the year of the crucifixion fell on Thursday. There is no dispute with this. It is an easily verifiable fact. It was on Thursday.

So, which Sabbath was Mark speaking of; the weekly Sabbath (Saturday), or the Passover Sabbath (Thursday)? This is clearly spelled out in John 19:14, one of the referenced portions of scripture that I gave you that describes the crucifixion. Here it says:

"And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour; and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King".

It was the preparation of the Passover Sabbath, not the weekly Sabbath. He said this while Jesus hung on the cross. The Passover Sabbath was Thursday and they were preparing for it. In other words, the day that Jesus was crucified was the day before the Passover Sabbath, which was Thursday. So the day was Wednesday. And lest you think I have finished making my case, this is just the beginning. There is so much more to know about this day. Please read on.

The verse said *"and about the sixth hour"*. What time was that? Well, if we were using the Jewish time table, it would have been noon. But John was using the Roman time table. You can confirm this in Mark chapter 15, verse 25, where Mark used the Jewish time table. Mark said it was the third hour. Clearly, it was 9 a.m. in the morning.

There is no contrast in these reports. John used one time table and Mark another. They are in harmony with their report. Jesus was crucified on Wednesday at 9 a.m. in the morning. He did not die at 9 a.m. - that was when he was nailed to the cross and raised above the earth in open shame for our sin. He would spend several hours suffering before he passed away, declaring: *"It is finished"*.

The important thing right now is to remember what day Jesus was crucified on. Is it really that important? Does it really matter what day Jesus died? Yes, it is absolutely critical to our faith and to the trustworthiness of scripture. There is much at stake in Jesus dying at precisely the time that he did. Easter is not at all like Christmas. December 25th is not really the day that Jesus was born, it is merely a day that was randomly selected and is traditionally observed by those of Christian persuasion. The day of his birth was relatively unimportant and not critical to our faith. It was important THAT he was born, but not WHEN.

The exact day of his crucifixion does matter however, and here is why:

- if Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, the 14th of April...
 - ...prophecy was fulfilled;
 - ...tradition was followed;
 - ...the Word of God is correct;
 - ...God's order is reflected in it; and
 - ...the Word of God is in harmony with itself.
- if Jesus was crucified on Friday, the 16th of April (or any other day)...
 - ...prophecy did not come true;
 - ...God's Word fell short of its prediction;
 - ...we cannot trust the Word of God to be accurate;
 - ...Jesus is not the Son of God;
 - ...he did not rise from the dead;
 - ...your faith is in vain;
 - ...the Bible was probably written by men and not inspired; and
 - ...there probably is no afterlife, and therefore no hope.

Is it important? You bet! It is one of the most critical building blocks of the Christian faith. The fact that most people do not know it is important does not diminish that importance. The timing of this great event, the greatest event to ever take place on this earth throughout all time...the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world, is seriously important.

Let's do some more proving. The rules for Passover were given to Moses and Aaron and recorded in Exodus 12:1-13. These rules were to be the rules that governed the Passover for all time until Messiah came. Indeed, the reason for this is because the Passover was a type of Christ, or, if you prefer, a picture of the Christ to come.

A lamb without blemish was to be slain and the blood used to "cover" those who believed God by striking it on the two side posts and overhead post of the door where they dwelled (vs. 7). When a household did this in faith, the Lord would pass over that household and his plague would not come upon them (vs. 13).

This whole act was a picture of the Christ who would come in the future. Jesus Christ was identified by John the Baptist (John 1:29) in this way: "*behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world*". It was the perfect, precious blood of Jesus that would be applied to the heart of the trusting sinner, so that the Lord would pass over that individual when he sends his wrath in the last days.

The only difference in the original Passover and trusting in Christ is that the former was something that needed to be renewed and observed each year, whereas trusting in Jesus Christ is a one-time event that covers the trustee forever.

I direct your attention to verses 1-3 of Exodus chapter 12:

"And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, this month shall be unto you the beginning of months (April is the first month on the Jewish calendar): it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, in the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house".

The Passover lamb was to be selected and presented on the 10th day of the month of April. There was no room for deviation, no alternate plan, no rain date. It was set down as a rule by the Lord and Israel had to observe it as prescribed by God. The consequences at the first Passover are obvious. Had they waited another day or two, it would have been too late and the firstborn of each Jewish household would have perished.

Jesus was the perfect lamb of God, to be sacrificed once for all time. He was already selected because he is Messiah. He was presented to the people as the lamb of God in accordance with the Passover law, on the 10th of the month, which we call Palm Sunday. John 12:1 & 12-13 says:

"Then Jesus six days before the Passover (Sunday the 10th) came to Bethany where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead".

Under traditional Passover rules, the lamb was to be kept until the 14th and slain in the evening (see Exodus 12:5-6). Don't forget that the Jews had rejected Jesus as their Messiah and were still observing the old Passover. Jesus was slain in the evening of Wednesday, the 14th, which was the day before the Passover, Thursday, the 15th. He was slain at precisely the exact moment that the Passover lambs were being slain by the Jews. Isn't the Word of God amazing!!!

Just as an aside issue, in Exodus 12:45 and Numbers 9:12, it was prophesied that not a bone of Messiah would be broken. It was common practice for the Romans to break the legs of crucified individuals. I suppose this was to ensure that they had actually expired and not just fainted from the ordeal. Breaking their legs would prevent them from

escaping. Although the Bible says that his bones were out of joint, (probably from hanging for so many hours with so few points of leverage) Jesus' bones were not broken in the customary way.

Truths of the Bible are usually revealed to us in "types". As I mentioned above, the Passover was a type or picture of Christ. Types are used throughout scripture for the purpose of revealing God's truths when the time is right. For example, the children of Israel passing through the Red Sea, with water all around them, can be viewed as a type of baptism; the children of God obeying God by going into the waters.

The ark is another type. It is a type of Christ as was the Passover. The ark carried the faithful of God to safety above his wrath. Christ Jesus carries the believer above the wrath of God.

Another example, and perhaps more appropriate, would be the brass serpent in the Old Testament. The brass serpent that the people were to look at if they were bitten by a fiery serpent was a type of Christ. The brass serpent was raised high on a staff by Moses and when someone was bitten by a serpent, all they had to do was look on this brass serpent in faith and they were healed.

In John chapter 3 we are shown a correlation between the serpent, raised high for the children of Israel to see, and Christ being lifted above the earth on a cross for all to see. Any who are bitten by the serpent of sin (and that includes everyone according to Romans 3:19) can look to the crucified savior for healing and forgiveness.

God uses "types" to reveal a truth at the time he selects. The crucifixion was the time he selected to reveal the truth that his son was the savior, that his blood, which was typed in the Passover, was the only way for anyone to avoid the wrath of God for sin.

If we accept that Jesus was slain the day before the Passover Sabbath, rather than the day before the weekly Sabbath, the "type" is marvelously fulfilled and implemented. If we do not accept it, then nothing fits or makes sense.

Let's put it all together:

- Jesus was crucified on Wednesday, late in the day (the ninth hour or 3 p.m.)
- it was almost sunset
- sunset signaled the start of Thursday (the Jewish day ran from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.)
- having passed away at 3 p.m., taking into account that it took time to...
 - beg for the body
 - retrieve his body from the cross
 - bathe him
 - apply ointments and spices to the body (as was the custom)
 - wrap his body in cloth
 - pray over his body
- ...it was easily Thursday before they were able to lay him to rest in the grave

He died late on Wednesday, but was buried very early on Thursday (just after 6 p.m.). So here is the way the math figures:

- Thursday is 1 day and 1 night
- Friday is 2 days and 2 nights
- Saturday is 3 days and 3 nights
- And very late on Saturday (before the sun came up), Jesus rose from the dead
- On Sunday morning he was gone and the angels asked the disciples "*whom seek ye*" and when they said they sought Jesus, they answered "*he is not here for he is risen*"



He rose exactly 3 days after he had died. Mathematically and prophetically, he had to be crucified on Wednesday, the 14th. There is overwhelming support in scripture to prove this and absolutely none, nada, zero, zip to support that he was crucified on Friday, as tradition claims. Now, the world's traditional claim seems innocent enough, but it undermines the truth and importance of the Word of God. This is a day, this is a person, where our understanding needs to be right.

CHAPTER 10

How Did Judas Iscariot Die

In Matthew 27:3-10 we find a remorseful Judas, lamenting his betrayal of Jesus Christ. Apparently the burden of what he had done had become too much for him. And who could he turn to? He had betrayed the Lord of Glory. Those who he was closest to (the other disciples), who he might turn to for support, knew of his treachery and no doubt rejected him. His remorse led to depression, which ultimately led to his death. We are told that he hanged himself. He committed suicide.



But then in Acts: 1:16-19 we are told something else about his death. It tells us that his bowels gushed out. This is not something normally associated with hanging one's self. There instantly appears to be a disparity between the two accounts. It now appears that Judas may have done himself in by disemboweling himself.

So what is going on here; why the two varying accounts? What is the answer? How can Matthew tell us one thing and then Luke turn around in Acts and tell us something very different?

First, some background is in order. We have the foretelling of Judas' betrayal, the silver that would be paid, and some detail about the Potter's field that was to be bought in Zechariah chapter 11 and Psalms 41. There isn't much said about the betrayal of the Lord in these chapters, but it is mentioned. It is important to note that in these times betrayal was considered a very evil thing.

Eastern and mid-eastern cultures frowned upon betrayal and dealt harshly with it. Very often, betrayers were punished with death. There were many methods used to put someone to death, but one of the more popular customs was to disembowel the perpetrator and to let their insides gush out. It seems that this was a more humiliating and dishonoring way for one to be put to death. It wasn't enough that one should die; their reputation and honor had to also die with them.

I think it is important to consider the motive of Judas for his betrayal of the Lord. It would appear that his actions were governed simply by greed. Greed often causes men to do things they would not ordinarily do. When Judas came to himself, when the glitter of self-gain fell from his eyes, he realized what he had done.

In a more stable state of mind, he tried to right his wrong. By his own admission he knew he had caused the shedding of innocent blood and tried to give back the silver. Despite his dastardly act, it appears that Judas largely believed the Lord was who he claimed to be, the Son of God. His remorse for what he had done is strong evidence that he held the Lord in higher esteem than his act of betrayal suggested.

Whether he was born again or not is not at issue. I honestly do not know. What I do know is that any faith he had in Christ was outweighed by his fear of the Jewish elders and priests and his greed for money. He could see that Jesus was headed for a collision with the Jewish leaders and he knew it would probably spell death for Jesus and any who associated with him. He could extricate himself from the situation and make a profit at the same time. And so, he turned state's evidence, if you will, against the Lord Jesus.

I have spent most of my adult life in the military and seen some combat. I also have seen a lot of emergency situations (i.e. plane crashes onboard an aircraft carrier, fires, search and rescue, hurricanes, etc.). I cannot say that I was brave in these situations. Neither can I say I was afraid. I had a job to do and I did it. Looking for or retrieving bodies in heavy seas was always dangerous and uncomfortable, but it was a task that needed to be done. And most did it without much thought.

But there were usually some who were afraid of dangerous situations, and it would show in their reluctance to put themselves in harm's way. Sadly, these people were usually teased and ridiculed by others of the crew for their behavior. Often they were labeled cowards and ostracized.

I never understood this. I think some people just cannot help feeling their fears and phobias. Fear is something one normally cannot control. We should not hold anyone in contempt for being afraid. Most of us have a phobia of some sort and we should be able to understand and accept when someone else has them.

One of my dearest cousins is a draft dodger who went to live in Canada during the Viet Nam war. He was afraid of war. He is still there, despite being granted immunity. I joined the service the same year he avoided the draft. I was not drafted; I enlisted voluntarily. In fact, I joined the Naval Reserves the year before I was eligible to ensure I would be able to join when I turned 18.

Draft dodgers were labeled cowards and unpatriotic by the news media in those days. They were made to feel like traitors and unwelcome in their own country, even after amnesty was granted to them. I never held my cousin's decision against him. We are all different. We all have different fears. He had to be who he was. He didn't hate our country. He did not wish our armed forces ill. He just did not want to risk his own life. Some people just cannot overcome their fears in certain things.

Judas was afraid. I can accept that. I can almost understand it. He was also greedy, and that is much less acceptable. But when his head cleared, he realized what he had done and was genuinely remorseful. There was time and opportunity to act on his remorse and go to the Lord and repent and ask forgiveness. But he chose not to. Because of that, all the wrong he did remained on his own shoulders and he had to bear the burden and blame alone.

He was trusted with a part in the Lord's earthly ministry and he fumbled it away. He was trusted as one of the closest associates of the Son of God and he betrayed him. He not only did the wrong, but he caused it to happen. He concocted the evil in his heart, he put it into action, he led the party against the Lord and he even pointed him out. And on top of all that, he was paid for it.

When his conscience kicked in and the Holy Spirit brought the betrayal home to his heart, he wept bitterly and was very, very remorseful. When the realization hit him that he had betrayed the Lord of Glory, he shook to his very core. He wanted to die. He was miserable. His sin was heavy upon him and the only way he knew to deal with it was to end his life. So he found a rope, and he did just that. He hung himself. The account in Matthew chapter 27 then is correct.

So, how do we explain the reference to his bowels gushing out? That should prove to be a simple task. As mentioned earlier, it was the custom in those days and in that culture, that traitors were to be subjected to disembowelment. It was not something that Judas would have done himself, for I doubt he had the courage.

For that matter, I doubt it was courage that moved him to hang himself. Depression and guilt are very strong motivators. I can imagine that Judas just wanted the guilt and pain of what he had done to stop, and this was the only way he could think of to do that.

We must speculate then, and I think safely so, that someone else performed this traditional practice of disemboweling Judas. It is not obvious to me that the disciples took care of this chore, as some suppose, but as I read their comments in Acts chapter one, I would not put it past them. I prefer to imagine that they were more spiritually minded than that and knew that vengeance was not theirs to exact.

Still, my guess would be that it was another disciple or follower of Jesus (not of the eleven) who performed this act. It is difficult to imagine that someone who did not care for Jesus would be bothered by his having been betrayed. Indeed, Judas might have been held as a hero in their eyes, rather than the cultural scoundrel that another would be considered to have been.

It might also have been a priest. Though themselves complicit in Jesus' death, they had no love for Judas. Not only was he a former disciple of this trouble-making would-be Messiah, but he was a betrayer. Though blind to their own corrupt behavior, they had little patience for character flaws in others.

Whoever did the deed, they were surely motivated by cultural mandates regarding betrayers. As Judas hung between heaven and earth, they took it upon themselves to perform this ritual and Judas' bowels spewed out. In all probability, they did this openly without fear of reprisal as it was the accepted custom. The dishonoring of the corpse of a traitor was the socially accepted thing to do.

I do not want to seem heinous or insensitive, but there is another camp of thought or theory that I feel compelled to share. This theory also successfully marries the two accounts of scripture to show that there is no disparity. It is supposed, and with merit, that after Judas hung himself, his corpse was purposely allowed to hang for several days, during which time his body decomposed sufficiently enough that his decaying abdomen could no longer hold in his bowels and they burst forth.

I say there is merit to this theory, because in these modern times we have seen insurgents in Iraq hang Iraqi citizens from bridges and other structures and leave them so hung for several days. The practice was meant as a warning to civilians to not side with Allied Forces. In the unbearable summer heat the bodies quickly decompose and expel their bowels.

Regardless of which scenario you lean toward, the imagined disparity in the two accounts given in scripture has been remedied.

CHAPTER 11

The Maniac of Gadara

Before we get into this lesson, I would like to remind you of the benchmark I suggested you adopt when considering difficult or hard passages in the Bible. Do you remember it? It is simply, "*Faith finds in favor of God*". If we cannot figure something out, faith tells us that it is not because the Bible is in error, but it is due rather to our own inability to comprehend at our current level of spiritual maturity.

In some situations, time and study help clear up the mystery. As we study the blessed book, we gain more knowledge and more experience and things once dark become clear. In other situations, prayer is the solution. We petition God for knowledge and he answers in the affirmative. By that I do not mean that a bolt of lightning strikes us with instant intelligence; rather, God directs our study and exposure to others who already have come by that knowledge. And sometimes, the answer just is not forthcoming in this world. That is where faith comes in. We accept what God said without really understanding.

In rare cases, we can sometimes apply human reasoning and logic to find an answer. The situation with the man of Gadara may be one of those situations. In Mark 5:1-5, we are introduced to this possessed man of Gadara, commonly called the maniac of Gadara.



Luke and Matthew also write about this man. Their accounts are basically similar, but Matthew throws us a curve ball. In chapter eight, verses 28-29, he refers to the maniac in the plural, specifically "*two*". This certainly presents the reader with a small dilemma. Were there one or two individuals?

The initial thought is that there was a translation error. Not so. What was said is what was said; the accounts were translated correctly. So, there must be another explanation. Perhaps Matthew miscounted? No, Matthew did not miscount. He was a tax collector after all and theoretically good with figures.



There has to be a better explanation. This is where the logic I spoke of comes in. My logic tells me that there are only three possibilities: first, the one already alluded to...that the translators made an error; second, the disciples were intoxicated; or, third, the disciples did not observe the same thing. Since the first we have already asserted to not be true, and the second is preposterous, let us focus on the third possibility.

Sometimes in the body of one verse, events that occurred over periods of years are squeezed into a few sentences. The period covered may also be measured in days or hours. Anyone familiar at all with the Bible knows this to be true.

It is quite possible, perhaps probable, that the disciples were present at different times during that day. For whatever reasons: serving and caring for the multitudes; praying; or attending to the Lord's needs, they may not have all observed the maniac(s) at the same time. When Luke and Mark were present, there was one man, but when Matthew later came on the scene, there were two.

Another possibility is that the disciples emphasized differently. They were all men of God, but they were also all individuals. We see differences projected throughout the gospels. We see a variance in the chronology of events, indicating the emphasis each individual assigned to what they wrote. And yet they all account for the same things.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. I brought an elderly man to church one morning. His name was Bill. Bill was 78, but he was in pretty good shape. He walked 12 miles every day. He was a bit unkempt and admittedly a little strange if you engaged him in conversation. However, he was a man who loved the Lord, who spent great amounts of time in the Word and was able to quote more scripture than any man I ever knew, myself excepted.

I met Bill after I retired from the military and began a remodeling business. I remodeled mobile homes. It was more a hobby to keep my busy, but it turned out to be quite lucrative. My biggest accumulation of units was in the mobile home park where Bill lived.

I was working on a mobile home next to Bill's one morning and he stopped by to say hello. Before I knew it, we were involved in a lengthy conversation about, well just about everything. I perceived that he was lonely and looking for a friend. He lived alone and most of the other tenants avoided him. Even the park manager, who treated me like his own son, would mock and ridicule the old man behind his back.

I suppose they all had reason to feel that way about Bill. He was a bit eccentric. He would often say things that did not make a lot of sense and filed complaints against his neighbors (not me) for the silliest things (i.e. someone dropped a banana peel on the road, the metal on someone else's mobile home reflected sunlight into his living room, etc.).

He was quite shabby too. He wore old clothes; not worn, but outdated and far from current fashions. I don't think he owned a comb; his hair literally looked like he had just dropped out of a tornado. But he had a good spirit and he was a fellow believer and I got along with him very well.

Once we became friends, he felt comfortable enough so that he would come and sit and talk with me for hours while I worked. He never offered to help mind you, just sat and talked. It was not a problem for me as I was my own boss and on no set schedule. I enjoyed talking to him about the Bible and the Lord and a variety of other things. Often he would bring his guitar and sing hymns. He loved singing and he had a pretty good set of pipes.

After his visit to my church, however, people came to me and asked "*Who was that weird old man*"? and "*What was going on with his hair*"? Others said "*Man, he really got into the singing service*". and "*He seemed so light-hearted*". Still others didn't even notice that he had visited at all.

You see, people see (or do not see) different things because different things are more important to them. Several people gave me unsolicited critiques on my visitor and their assessments were greatly varied. Some honed in on appearance, while others paid attention to deportment.

The same is true with the disciples; they observed different things, because different things were important to them. And the Lord allowed their observations to be recorded verbatim. I could not tell you why that is, I only know that it is.

It is possible that Mark and Luke observed two individuals just like Matthew did, but Luke, being a physician, judged only one of the individuals to be a maniac. His opinion influenced Mark and both recorded their experience that way. Matthew saw it differently.

As I alluded to earlier, these three disciples were used to write three of the gospels. As you read through each gospel, you realize that there are differences. Matthew emphasizes one thing and Mark and Luke another. Yet all stay on topic. That is why they are called the "synoptic" gospels. They may vary on emphasis, but the view and the facts are the same.

For example, look at their accounts of what was written on the sign put over Jesus' head. Matthew wrote "*This is Jesus the King of the Jews*"; Mark wrote "*The King of the Jews*"; Luke wrote "*This is the King of the Jews*"; and while we are at it, John wrote "*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*".

The explanation for the differences is easy...the inscription was written in 3 different languages and each language varied ever so slightly in its meaning and translation. If you do the math, there were 4 gospel accounts, 4 different inscriptions, but only 3 different languages. Which language each disciple chose to recount and how they translated it (depending upon their personal emphasis) is what mattered. The emphasis of each man is different, but the message is the same.

Now, having said all that, I want to add a disclaimer or word of caution here. I have heard it said many times that the writers God used, wrote in their own "flair" or "style". I do not buy that and I am not saying that here. These men wrote as God dictated to their minds and hearts. It was involuntary. If their flair or style or emphasis was applied, it was God who chose to use it and apply it, not them.

God chose the view that each of the writers of the gospels would have. He directed Matthew to view "*Christ as the King of the Jews*", Mark as "*Jesus the Servant*", Luke as

"Christ the Son of Man" and John as *"Christ, the Son of God"*. The emphasis was different, but the facts and message were the same.

The different accounts of the maniac of Gadara are undoubtedly due to observation and emphasis, not error. You can find a similar scenario concerning the two blind men mentioned in Matthew chapter 20. Two blind men were what Matthew saw and was moved to write about. In Luke chapter 18, the same account alludes to only one blind man. Then in Mark chapter 8, again one blind man is mentioned, but in this account we are given the name of that man. We may not understand God's purposes in moving these men to record the same event with a different perspective, but we can rest assured that the perspectives are merely different and not contrasting.

CHAPTER 12

Jonah and the Whale

The story of Jonah is a difficult story for many to believe. That a man could be swallowed by a whale (actually translated “*great fish*”) and survive inside it for three days; well that is quite a bit to swallow (pardon the pun, it was intended).



In fact, it is very hard for some to believe. In a poll of tens of thousands of people who claimed to be Christian in faith, at hundreds of churches of varying denominations, there were two miracles in the Bible that those polled found hard to believe. The story of Jonah was one of them. It actually came in second, behind another Biblical miracle that is believed even less.

While I personally have no problem accepting what God has told us about Jonah, I can understand people doubting this account; it is hard to believe that a man could be swallowed by a whale and survive for three days. We will take a closer look at this account in a moment. Before doing so, I would like to just briefly mention the miracle that came in as the number one least believable. I think it will surprise you.

The least believed miracle among polled Christians is the virgin birth. In other words, people who claim they believe in God; who believe that Jesus is the Son of God; who revere the Bible as the Word of the Living God; reject the idea that Jesus was born of a virgin. They reject Old Testament prophecy and New Testament declarations totally.

When I read those statistics I was aghast. How can anyone claim to be a Christian, with all it entails in the realm of faith, and discount that the Lord came into the world the way the Bible says he did? Accepting that the Messiah’s advent was accomplished in this way is fundamental and foundational to the Christian faith.

I could camp out and spend hours on this topic. It is that important, that fundamental to one possessing true, saving faith. Alas, exploring this any further must wait for another day for in this chapter we are focusing on the account of Jonah.

It is not the account of what happened to Jonah that I am going to discuss here as a difficulty, but one aspect of the event. As I said, I have no problem believing anything the Bible says about Jonah. If the facts were reversed, if the Bible said that Jonah swallowed the great fish, I probably would have no trouble believing that.

Some consider that blind faith; that I am trusting God when there is no proof to warrant that trust. To them I must extend a warm “*thank you*”. That is what I was going for; and that is exactly what it is, faith. Faith is taking God at his word. I blindly believe that if God could take nothing and make this world, that if he could take a handful of dust and breathe life into it, if he could hang the planets and stars on nothing, he is probably able to make sure his very own revelation to us is accurate.

Still, I understand the skepticism. I understand how hard this account is to believe. As a young convert I had difficulty with it. Somewhere along the way, many years ago, faith slew my skepticism in this and so many other matters. My life with faith is so much sweeter than when I was a skeptic. Accepting the things of God as true brings a “*know so*” peace to one’s soul. Faith is a seed that grows in the soul, maturing into a strong cedar of assurance that cannot be shaken.

Despite my unshakable faith, I can still remember what it was like to be skeptical. Accordingly, I would like to share another story with you that I think might give you the wherewithal you need to set your skepticism aside. It will illustrate just how worthy and trustworthy the Word of God is.

Have you heard of a ship’s log? Do you know much about them? As a 33 year veteran of the Navy and Coast Guard, and being very acquainted with Admiralty and maritime law, I can tell you that a ship's log is the most important document to mariners. I do not mean to sound condescending; I am sure many readers know this, having served in the armed forces themselves. This was for those who are not familiar with the military or maritime torts and law.

I have never been aboard a ship of any registry but where the ship's log was available and prominent. Without exception, logs are legibly and meticulously kept and entries made of every significant event, from changing of the watch, to sightings of debris in the water. International law demands that these documents be well-maintained and that entries never be erased or blotted out. Mistakes are to be readable. They are to have a single line drawn through them and initialed by the person lining them out so potential investigators can read all that was entered.

It has been this way for centuries, and law-abiding vessels comply with this maritime law without exception. Sailors have been imprisoned for falsifying these logs. Enormous legal settlements have been granted based upon entries. Many a courts-martial have been decided based on log entries. In short, it is a very big deal.

I said all that to say this...in the ship's log of a vessel called the **Star of the Sea**, a whaler out of London in the 19th century, the log reflects the following story, which is paraphrased for brevity. There are sworn statements on file in British maritime archives from eyewitnesses to the events I am about to share with you.

Early in the morning, the Star of the Sea came upon a pod of whales. They lowered boats to pursue the pod. The lead boat reached the pod first and sunk its harpoon into one of the whales.

The beast, angered and afraid, instantly slapped the boat with its tail. The boat overturned and just before the whale sounded (dove) it rammed one of the sailors who was treading water. Both whale and sailor disappeared beneath the waves.



The main ship picked up the beaten boat crew and salvaged what was left of the boat. A brief search was made for the sailor, but it was clear that he had been lost. An entry was made in the log that this sailor had drowned and that despite an intensive search his body had not been recovered.

Two days later, late in the day, the crew successfully located and killed another whale. Many hours later after they had drawn the creature to the main ship and were butchering it, they came to the gullet. One of the sailors let out a shout that he saw a man's legs in the gullet.

Like an army of ants, the crew quickly converged on that area and began cutting away the meat and blubber to get at what they expected to be the corpse of their lost shipmate. It took several hours to get to the body so that they could confirm their suspicions.

Finally they reached the body and indeed, it proved to be their fallen mate. His body had been bleached white by enzymes and salt water, but it was intact. Sorrowfully, they pulled him from the esophagus of that great creature and passed him from shipmate to shipmate until he reached the level of the main deck of the ship.

As they laid him on the wooden deck, to their amazement the corpse suddenly coughed and choked for air. The man was alive! After almost three days in that great fish, under the water, he was alive. Eventually, he made a full recovery. He remembered almost nothing of the ordeal because he was unconscious most of the time, but there was no denying that he had endured the ordeal.

The legal record, the ship's log, reflects the facts and it is a matter of public record. Several sworn, signed statements from the man's mates are similarly recorded and on file. It is a matter of British history and legally documented.

You know what is coming now, so let me waste no time making my point. If a man can survive inside of a whale for three days by accident, how much more can a man exist if he is put there by God? Sadly, I suspect that if I were able to take a poll of these same skeptics as to which of the two accounts (Star of the Sea or Jonah) was more believable, I am afraid they would say the former rather than the latter.

Earlier I told you that it was not the story of Jonah that people rejected as true. Rather, they struggle with whether he actually survived the ordeal. There struggle stems from Matthew 12:40, where Jesus says:

"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's (great fish) belly; so shall the Son of man (Jesus) be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Remember when we spoke about "types" and how the Bible offered us examples of things to come? In this case, Jonah's ordeal was a type or picture of Jesus' death and burial, a picture he could use to illustrate to his disciples what would happen to him. Jonah was swallowed up (buried) for three days and then lived (rose) again.

Because of this illustration, many make the assumption that Jonah, like Christ, must have died. When you consider that it was a picture of Jesus' death and couple that with how impossible survival under those conditions seem (until we hear the Star of the Sea story), it is natural to assume that he must have been dead. Is that possible? Well, quite frankly, yes, it is possible, Jonah may have died. But it is not probable.

What was God's purpose in preparing a great fish to swallow Jonah? There are probably many reasons, but the primary one was that God wanted to break Jonah's will and get his attention. He had a job for Jonah to do and Jonah did not want to do it.

If Jonah actually died, what was the sense of his being in the great fish? How would God get his attention if he were not conscious of what his situation was? God was looking to adjust his attitude, and death would not have accomplished that. Now I realize that the man from England in our story did not remember anything of his experience, but that does not mean Jonah did not. I am quite sure he was painstakingly aware of every moment he spent in that fish.

And here is why; in chapter two, verses two and five, we are told that Jonah cried unto the Lord. He was awake and alert. He was suffering. He was scared, uncomfortable and undoubtedly desperate. Clearly, he could not experience these things if he were not alive and conscious.

In summary, there really is no difficulty in this account. The only difficulty is the same difficulty with any passage of scripture; whether you believe it or not.

CHAPTER 13

The Voice

Most people are familiar with the Bible account of Saul of Tarsus (later to be known as the Apostle Paul) meeting the Lord Jesus while on the road leading to Damascus, so we won't bother going over all that. If you are not familiar with this miraculous encounter that Saul had with the Lord, please turn to Acts chapter nine and read it. It is a most amazing account of how Paul, while on a mission to kill Christians, was himself converted to Christianity.



What we will discuss instead, is the apparent disparity in the account of those who were with Saul when the Lord spoke to him. Remember, the purpose of this book is to identify and explain difficult passages in the Bible.

Let us review the passages that seem to be in contrast.

- Acts 9:3-5 & 7

"And as he (Saul) journeyed, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* And he said, *who art thou Lord?* And the Lord said, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest...*and the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

- Acts 22:6-9

"And it came to pass that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground and heard a voice saying: *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.* And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

It appears that in the first account, Luke records that those men who accompanied Saul (of which he was one) heard the voice. Then later on in the Book of Acts, Paul himself is quoted as saying that the men with him "...*heard not the voice*". There certainly is a disparity in their accounts that we need to remedy and understand.

Can we chalk this up to there being different emphasis, as we did earlier with the Maniac of Gadara? No, we cannot. The circumstances are different. Mark and Matthew were speaking for themselves. Both Luke and Paul are speaking for others. They had no way of knowing what those individuals experienced except the Spirit of the Lord revealed it to them in telling them what to write.

So who is right, Luke or Paul? This is a very tricky question, because while there are two different accounts in the book of Acts from two different men, both accounts were penned by one man, Luke. Certainly if he was writing in the power of Luke, the accounts would be the same. Since they are variance with each other, we can safely assume that he was writing in the power of God. And because of that, the disparity is genuine and calls for a remedy or answer.

The answer lies where it usually lies when there is an apparent conflict; in the Greek, or rather, in the translation of the Greek. The Greek word for "*heard*" can be genitive (pertaining to the source, or the message of the voice itself); or, it can be accusative (pertaining to the message, the declaring of that message, usually a second hand account).

In other words, the "source" would be the actual words spoken to Saul. This is the genitive. The accusative would be the receiving of the message from other than the source, for instance, hearing it from Saul. For example, when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, those of us who watched it on national television were experiencing the genitive. When we later had children and told them what Armstrong had said, they were hearing about it in the accusative.

So, when Saul recounts what he himself actually heard (i.e. the very words of Jesus), his account is genitive. He was there. The words were spoken to him. But when Luke tells us in Acts 9 that the men heard the voice, it is in the accusative. It is likely that Luke and the other men heard the sound of the voice as one would hear muffled voices in the next room coming through the wall, but did not discern what was being said. And why should they; God was speaking to Saul.

But then later on, the men were told by Saul what had happened and what was said and it made sense to them. They no doubt believed the account of Saul because they knew something big was going on, what with the blinding light and muffled voices.

I would say mystery solved, but there really was no mystery to begin with.

CHAPTER 14

The Priest Melchisedek

This is one of my favorite difficulties to explain. To be fair, it isn't actually a difficulty, but rather a variance of opinion about who his Priest named Melchisedek was, or perhaps better state, is.

We are first introduced to him in Genesis chapter 14. Here we are not told much, other than he was the King of Salem (or Peace), that he was a priest of God and that Abraham tithed to him. We do not learn a whole lot more about him personally until we get into Hebrews chapter seven.

There we are reminded of those three facts in Genesis, and then given more information about who he is (and I used the present tense intentionally for reasons you shall see below). In verse two of chapter seven it says that he is the King of righteousness, without father or mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God. The rest of the chapter associates the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ to this priesthood.



As a very young Christian, one of the first questions I had for my pastor and the other spiritually seasoned men at our weekly men's prayer meeting was "*Who was this man Melchizedek*"? The answer that I was given was that he was a man who was a very high priest. The response was not condescending, but it was dismissive. And it was not the answer I was looking for. I was hoping for something that I didn't already know.

I don't like being dismissed. It was bothersome. I was eager to learn more about this new faith I had found. I had questions and I knew some of these men had the answers. How dare they dismiss my inquisitiveness! I was upset. In fact, their apparent lack of interest in my question irritated me so much that I blurted out "*Well thanks for stating the obvious*".

I didn't have a lot going for me in terms of being diplomatic. I was young, rebellious, a military man, karate instructor; none of which played into being patient or particularly easy to get along with. I wouldn't say that I had a chip on my shoulder, but I was pushy. My conversion was monumental in my life and I had questions that I needed answers to, and very little patience for people who seemed to want me to just go away.

Their reaction to my outburst was predictable; deafening silence. The silence seemed to say "*Who does this guy think he is? Where does he get off talking to us like that*"? I wanted to respond by saying "*I'll tell you who I am; doesn't the Bible say that you older Christians are supposed to instruct us younger ones and help us to grow? Well go ahead and instruct; answer my question.*", but I realized nothing had actually been said to me, so I held my peace.

Well, I held it temporarily anyway. With their attention still on me, I added "*Well, don't you think he was the Lord Jesus*"? Their continued silence and puzzled looks, peppered with a few shaking heads and faint chuckles told me that they did not think so. But I pursued it and finally got one man to respond, if you want to call it that. He gave me the standard blow-off answer that I would come to receive many more times in the future, "*Now don't worry Brother, you will understand better when you have been a Christian for awhile*".

Well, I wasn't about to settle for that placating answer, so I spoke up again and someone else responded by explaining that Jesus wasn't in the habit of appearing and reappearing on earth, that this man Melchizedek was just a very high priest. I did not like that answer either and I did not agree with it, but at that time I knew so very little about scripture that I just could not argue my point. For that matter, I wasn't really sure what my point was.

Now, 35 years later, with Bible College and many tens of thousands of hours of personal Bible study under my belt, I do know what my point was and I can argue it theologically. This man Melchizedek could not have been a mere priest or man. The details of his lineage preclude that. That Abraham tithed to him immediately signals to us that he was more than human. Man tithes only to God. This man was God. More specifically, this man was the Son of God.

As for the man who said Jesus was not in the habit of appearing in the Old Testament, he could not have been more wrong. Oh how I wish I could have known all I know today back then; not for vengeance, but for correction. Christians have a responsibility to nurture new converts in the faith and not shoot from the hip with answers to their questions. If you do not know, do not hazard a guess.

Had he done this, he would have discovered that throughout the Old Testament, God manifested himself in what we modern day Christians have labeled Theophanies; or the manifestation of God in a specific form (i.e. angel, pillar of fire, burning bush, etc.). When God wanted to speak to men, he did so through an angel or manifestation of his essence; a theophany.

Then there were Christophanies. These were where Christ manifested himself in the Old Testament, such as in Genesis chapter 32, when he wrestled with Jacob. Too many believe that Jesus appeared strictly in New Testament times, but that is not true. My goodness, we are told that he was the one who created all things and he certainly had to be present "*In the beginning*" to have done that.

We believe in the trinity of God; that there are three distinct persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But the foundational truth is that God is one. We must not just give lip service to our belief that Jesus is God. He is one with the Father. He is God. He has lived forever. He is the express image of the eternal God. He has always been and always will be. He is not a created being; he is the being that created.

People of faith in the Old Testament placed their faith in God's promise of Messiah, just as believers of our times do. We look back on the cross and see the savior; they looked forward to the savior or Messiah. Their faith was as real as ours. They looked for the Christ of God.

Take Moses for example; look at what is said of Moses in Hebrews 11:26, the chapter commonly known as the "hall of faith". It says:

"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt..."

Moses was looking ahead to Messiah, the Christ. He was trusting in Messiah. Even in that early time, way, way before Calvary, Moses knew that to align with Messiah was to bring reproach to one's self. The Bible says he weighed the pros and cons and placed his faith in Christ. No doubt he knew the story of Melchizedek well, since God used him to record it in Genesis. No doubt Moses knew that Melchizedek was a Christophany. Even his words "*...like unto the Son of God*" evidence this.

That Melchizedek was the Lord of Righteousness (Jesus) is firm in my mind no matter what others may say. No other can claim to be the King of Peace; only Jesus. No other can claim to be the King of Righteousness; only Jesus. No other can claim to have no descent; no father or *mother, no beginning or ending of days; only Jesus.

No other is likened unto the Son of God. No other is worthy of tithes from a man, especially a man as great as Abraham. There is only one who fits this description; the man, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. This priest, this man Melchizedek, is no other than the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*That Mary was to become the vessel mother of the incarnate, human Jesus is not in dispute. This description speaks to Jesus God, not Jesus man. God has no mother.

CHAPTER 15

Where Did Cain's Wife Come From

In this business about Cain's wife, we have perhaps the most commonly asked question about the Bible. It is an intelligent question and should not be taken lightly. Reading the record of how we are told Cain knew (was intimate with) his wife, one can scarcely be expected to just accept at face value the presence of a woman when one had not been previously mentioned. Indeed, only three short chapters precede this announcement and those are almost exclusively dedicated to the act of creation and the relationship of Adam and Eve to each other and to God.



It is expected then, that anyone reading this portion of scripture should find that this omission creates a difficulty, one that they would want explained. Having a woman just pop-up like that without being previously introduced in scripture is confusing. Where did she come from? Who is she? Why wasn't she mentioned before?

Someone needs to fill in the blanks with the right answers, because too many have tried to fill the blanks in with some very wild ideas. Some suppose that Cain's wife was a left-over from a pre-Adamic race, which we discussed in detail back in chapter two. Others contend that she might have been an angel; never mind that the Bible says angels are genderless beings. And yes, you guessed it; still others contend that she must have been a space or time traveler.

Fortunately, the correct answer to the question is not that difficult to arrive at. It may be difficult for some to accept, but not to answer. Obviously, Cain's wife was either his sister or a niece. My guess is that the former is more likely than the latter, but either is possible.

As I said, the answer itself is difficult to accept and presents other questions and difficulties that we must address. The first question that comes to mind is "*But if Cain married his sister or his niece, then weren't they committing incest? Everyone knows God forbids incest in the Bible*".

Well, yes and no. Yes, God forbade incest, but no, they were not committing a violation. God did not invoke laws against incest until many years after Cain took his sister (or niece) to be his wife. Incest laws came much later. They are given in the book of Leviticus.

Until that time, incest was not unlawful or wrong. It did not carry with it the lawful penalty that God attached to it later on. And until God did put those laws in place, the physiological ramifications associated with offspring from such a union were not a threat.

If you think about it from a logical standpoint, how else could God have propagated the human race starting with just two individuals? Obviously sisters and brothers were going

to have to be joined in marriage to produce offspring. It is appalling to think of that now, because the laws against it have been so long embodied into our moral values. But back before there was a rule or law against it, it was not appalling at all. It was acceptable and commonplace.

I liken it to a stoplight. Humor me for a moment as I take a stab at an illustration. If you are driving and you come to a corner with a stoplight and the light is red, what do you do? You stop of course. That is the law and you know the law very well. It has been that way all your life.

Now what if the government came out with a new law that mandated that you stop not on the red, but rather the green light? It would completely upset your apple cart, would it not? It would confuse everyone so badly that we would deem the law to be wrong.

Well, in a similar way we balk at the way things used to be regarding incest, because we are used to the way they have been during our entire tenure on Earth. It just seems so wrong to look at incest in any other way but the way we do here in modern times. But this was not always so.

Abraham, who is considered the Father of the faith and who is called "*The friend of God*" married a woman named Sarah, his half-sister. It was not wrong, not frowned upon, not taboo and not corrected by God. They were not outcasts of society and their child did not have birth defects. In fact, God blessed Abraham and Sarah and gave them a promised son who became a prominent figure in the Old Testament.

Their joining was not illegal or immoral at the time. It was blessed by God and recognized valid by all. As wrong as it may seem to you and I in this day and age, marriages between siblings and close relatives were necessary in order to procreate in the early times of our history.

I can only offer a logical guess at this, but I think that once the gene pool was sufficient to allow for it, God brought into play laws against incest. The law was probably difficult for many to grasp, given that they had lived without any taboo for so long, but it eventually took root in society and became the standard. The law was observed faithfully by the Jews, rightfully adopted by Christians, and remains part of human culture today.

A harsh reality for 21st century people, but I think the perceived difficulty has been satisfied.

CHAPTER 16

Will There Be Night in Heaven



In Revelation 7:13-15 it says:

"And one of the elders answered saying unto me (John), what are these which are arrayed in white robe? And whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple..."

Words mean things. If they didn't, we could not communicate coherently, let alone successfully. Words allow us to articulate in pin-point fashion what we are trying to convey to others. How a word is placed or used can change the meaning of something being said.

For instance, if someone says "*I am going*", they communicate that they are about to leave the place they currently occupy to go somewhere else. Where they are going is not known, but we know they are leaving. By adding the words "*to the store*", we get a clearer idea about where they are going. The words helped convey thoughts more clearly.

In our passage from Revelation it says "*...and serve him day and NIGHT*". The word "*night*" means something to me. During my life on Earth, I have come to know that word to mean a time of darkness. God knows this. He was the one who divided the day from the night, the light from the darkness. So when God used that word in this verse, he knew what meaning it would have for me.

And the meaning of this word makes this passage difficult for me. That there is no night in heaven is an established fact in scripture that cannot be refuted. Heaven is a place of eternal light with no darkness whatsoever. Our understanding of the light of heaven is that it is the illumination caused by the glory and power of God, not by a sun as we have on Earth.

In fact, we are told that with God there is no shadow of turning, which can only mean that there is no darkness or night to be found, not even a shadow. His light is constant and omnipresent and leaves no room for the darkness we know as night.

So why did he use the word here? Some have supposed that this verse speaks of the New Jerusalem, that these martyred believers from the tribulation will be serving in the New Jerusalem that sits above the earth and during that time there will still be day and night. But I cannot see how they arrive at that conclusion; for the tribulation is not yet over at this juncture, and the New Jerusalem is not yet in place.

The verse speaks rather to them serving the Lord then, at that present time, not sometime in the future. So we must take it at face value and assume that the elder who was speaking meant to use those words and meant to apply them to heaven.

Does that mean there will be night? No. It does not. And the explanation is rather simple. The elder was using terminology that John could relate to. The intent was that the martyred believers would serve the Lord all the time. But had the elder used the appropriate measure of time, he would have said to John "*...who serve him all day*".

And though the elder meant an eternal, unending day, John was accustomed to be providentially spoken to in earthly terms, so he undoubtedly would have thought that he meant just one earthly day. In other words, John might have been confused if the elder had not used earthly measurements. John could relate better to the measure of time he was accustomed to on earth.

I know some will think this a very simplistic and immature explanation, but I find the Word of God to be simple in almost all it says, else I would not understand it. When you consider all that John and the other Apostles were being required to comprehend from the Lord, I am confident he made it simple for them when he could. I could be wrong on this one, but that's the way I see it.

CHAPTER 17

That Man of Sin Who Will the Anti-Christ be?

The topic that I will cover in this chapter is very complicated. In order to do it justice, I am going to have to discuss several side issues that contribute to understanding the prophecy of the coming of Anti-Christ. In doing that, I might temporarily confuse the issue, but I promise to bring it all together in a comprehensive and understandable way if you will hang in there with me.

There is an evil man coming to this world. We do not know when, but the Lord told us that we would see the signs. and many believe he is already

Today those signs are everywhere alive and growing to manhood.

He is known by many names; Son of Sin, and Anti-Christ, to name a trinity spoken of in the Bible, Satan and the False Prophet. evil upon earth. I will discuss and provide a good profile. Based on available evidence, I will also pinpoint who this person will be.



of Perdition, the Abomination, Man few. He will form the unholy whose other two members shall be Together they shall perpetrate great below some of the things to expect

In Mark 13:5-6, Jesus warns his disciples to beware of false Christs who will come saying they are Messiah. Specifically, the Lord said:

"Take heed lest any man deceive you: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ: and shall deceive many..."

Jesus said they would "*come in his name*". He did not mean that they would come representing him as his disciples have been commissioned to do. Rather, he meant they would come claiming to literally be the Messiah. There have been not a few who have stepped up and fulfilled this infamous prophecy of the Lord. Invariably, they are not hard to recognize as their message is not reconciliatory, but a "pie in the sky" religion, luring many with promises of great wealth and abundance.

These days, cable television is full of many who preach this financial gospel. Their tell-tale earmark is their assertion that above all else, God wants you to be wealthy, or at least financially well-off. They use Bible words like "*abundance*" and "*stewardship*" in an attempt to give their message credibility. Oddly and unfortunately, invariably, the way to be a good steward and to ensure that God blesses you with abundance is to bless them by sending them your money.

To be fair, most of them do not claim to be the Christ, only to represent him; but if you represent someone, you are effectively an echo of the issues and causes that are important to the one you claim to represent. I am unable to recall Jesus asking for money or telling

his followers to seek wealth. In fact, he warned against falling into the trap of letting the pursuit of wealth become an obsession. Wealth and abundance of things was never his message.

Asking for money from sources outside the local church was never taught by the Lord or his Apostles either. The plan the Lord established to finance church ministry and administration was for members to tithe and bring offerings as he instructed and led them to do. The key to obedience to the Lord's will and plan is that the tithes and offerings are given through the local assembly. That church was to be under the authority of the pastor who was called by the assembly.

The problem with most television ministries today is that they are not subject to any local assembly or pastoral authority. They are maverick ministries that support those in charge and are run however those in charge see fit without the benefit of the local assembly hierarchy the Lord established and blessed.

And when you folly in ministry away from the Lord's matrix, you are asking for trouble. We have seen over and over again misuse of donations, sexual promiscuity, and other outrageous behavior by those who claim to be representatives of Jesus. Money that was sent in earnest to help win souls has been spent on lavish homes and automobiles, air conditioned dog houses and hookers.

Still, I must admit that while many on television are deceiving the masses for monetary gain, they are not actually deceiving people by claiming to be Christ. They are merely exploiting the people of God to sell their books or videos or other religious paraphernalia to support their celebrity lifestyle.

But there are those who are preaching another gospel. There are those who portray themselves to be "the" son or "a" son of God, sent here to lead people to God. They claim that God gave them another revelation and that they are the new Messiah. Invariably, these characters are easy to identify and avoid. Their way is always a way that differs from the Word of God.

Take for example one well-known fellow who declares in his writings that "*Jesus bungled the job God sent him to do and God has sent me to be the new messiah to fix things*". I may not have quoted that exactly right, because I have seen it in writing several times, each a bit different from the others; but that is the shameful gist of it. And of course, as you might have guessed, he has become rather wealthy from the support of his many misguided followers.

First of all, Jesus did not bungle anything. He is not capable of bungling. He is God and is perfect in all his ways. He finished the work he came to do and the work remaining has been given to his disciples. He said that we would do "*greater works*" than he, signifying of course, quantity rather than quality, because of our sheer numbers. We are to be out spreading the gospel message of reconciliation with God, not financial freedom, gain or abundance. And we are definitely not to exalt ourselves for any reason.

Second, no one has been given authority equal to that of Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God, the ONLY begotten of the Father. The Bible says that HE is the express image of the Godhead. It says that all things were created by HIM and for HIM and without HIM was nothing made. HE is the way, the truth and the life and no man cometh unto the Father but by HIM. HE and HE alone is worthy. These usurpers may have their day now, but their day standing before Jesus is coming.

It may seem that I am straying from the topic of this booklet, but I felt it important to lay foundation to show that the spirit of anti-Christ is already at work in the world, in a way that should be obvious and real to believers. Unfortunately, to many of us it is not and that is because these deceivers are very good at appearing to be "*angels of light*" as per the warning by one of Jesus' apostles:

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works".

II Corinthians 11:13-15

The Apostles were given special and unique abilities and gifts, for the purpose of attesting to the truth of the gospel they preached. That was because the Bible was not available in their day to where they could readily site or quote it. People knew that what they said was true because of the miraculous works that followed. They knew by the witness of their wonderful works that they were sent by God.

Today we can preach what the Apostles preached and if anyone questions the validity to what we say, we need only point it out in the Bible. The Bible is the authority. It is God's word. Once the Bible was delivered and available, those special powers to attest to the truth being spoken were no longer needed. Today the Word of God is the only witness or testament needed to attest to the truth of the gospel message.

Then, other disciples, of which I am one, are empowered by the Holy Spirit of God to do certain jobs in the church. We are given gifts, often several, in which to perform the ministry that the Lord has called us to.

I am a disciple of Christ, and I revere the Lord with all my heart. I have several gifts that are available to me for administering and ministering in the faith. But I do not possess such power as did the Apostles; not even close. It simply is not available to Christ's disciples any longer. That is because the abilities were given in lieu of the powerful and living Word of God, pending the arrival of that Word. It was not given to afford Christians an opportunity to show off and brag, as so many try to do today in these so-called television ministries.

And that is one of the foremost claims of those who come claiming to be the Christ - that they have the authority of God and special "gifts" and "powers". **They do not!** For a mere man to usurp the position of the Son of God and claim to be the new messiah or Christ, is to immediately qualify them for the title of "deceiver". They are exactly who Jesus was talking about in Mark chapter 13. They are evil deceivers who falsely represent themselves as the Christ or Messiah.

Jesus further says of these men (and sometimes women) that they have the spirit of Anti-Christ. He does not say that they are the Anti-Christ, but rather that they have his spirit, or are controlled and influenced by him. There is only one who shall actually be this person Anti-Christ, the one the Bible calls the "*Abomination of Desolation*", that "*Man of Sin*"

Now then, I am not claiming to have cornered the market on ideas of who the Anti-Christ might be. There are many who have performed in-depth research into this person and considered prayerfully who he might be. Dr. Richard De Haan, a great man of God of the pamphlet "Our Daily Bread" and the television program "Day of Discovery" fame, was one such person.

Dr. De Haan was a reputable and credible theologian. He believed, and gave good justification for his belief, that he knew who the Anti-Christ would be. He thought it would be a resurrected Judas Iscariot possessed of Satan. As I alluded to, Dr. De Haan was a devoted and knowledgeable Christian who was well-loved and deeply respected for his Godly walk with the Lord. So, I read his theory with great respect, anticipating that he would build a very strong case for his belief. I was not disappointed.

He pointed out that Judas was once himself called the "*Son of Perdition*", a moniker by which the Anti-Christ is known in scripture. There is no willy-nilly in the words and phrases used in the Bible. God makes no mistakes and his attention to detail is perfect and flawless. Dr. De Hann points out that referring to Judas in this manner was purposeful and meaningful. And that fits right into his theory.

He also observed that the Bible says of Judas that "*He went to his place*". The use of this phrase in this manner clearly speaks of Hell. Since we know that Hell is a place that the Lord made for the devil and his angels (i.e. fallen angels, demons, etc.), we have a strong indication that Dr. De Hann's supposition that a resurrected Judas would be possessed of Satan is plausible.

He further qualifies that thought by pointing out that Judas was the only person mentioned in scripture who had actually been indwelt by Satan himself. Others were possessed by demons, but Judas was possessed by Satan himself. The Anti-Christ, whoever it turns out to be, will be possessed and empowered by Satan.

Dr. De Hann takes the sum of this evidence to lay out a very good case for his theory. But make no mistake; it is just that, a theory or an opinion. There are many who have

opinions, most with good justification and enough research ammunition to give one pause to consider seriously their respective positions.

But in the end, one must be able to reconcile all the facts that scripture gives about this person to their theory or their opinion fails. I could not do that with any of the theories I had read, including Dr. De Hann's. There were just too many unanswered questions and too many loose ends.

If I was going to know if the Bible told us who the Anti-Christ would be, if I was going to develop my own opinion, I would have to do my own research. Long story short, I did just that and emerged from my studies with a very solid idea of just who this evil individual would be. I checked and rechecked all known facts against my opinion to ensure they matched; and they did.

I do not mean to mislead you. I am not going to give you an actual name. No one on this earth can tell you exactly who the Anti-Christ is until he actually arrives on the scene. But I think I can tell you something very specific that should limit the possibilities it to just a few potential candidates. And I can pretty much assure you that it will be one of those individuals.

To begin, let's look at what we know about when he will come and what we should be looking for in terms of the facts and assumptions set forth in the Bible. There is a wealth of information given that I have seldom seen considered in the aforementioned theories. I don't know why that is, because not only are those facts easy to find in scripture, but they afford us wonderful insights. They help us narrow down the possibilities and eliminate baseless theories and ideas.

Now then, the time of his coming is as much a mystery as his identify, but we are given some pretty good clues. The signs of his coming are listed in Mark chapter 13, following the verses we used above, which you may read at your leisure. I will paraphrase, but for detail, I recommend you refer to that chapter.

The signs do little to pinpoint the actual date, but as I stated earlier, there is such a preponderance of signs that it seems impossible that the end times are not nearly upon us. The Lord tells us that when these things are upon us, then we shall see the "*Abomination of Desolation*" or Anti-Christ.

Are these things upon us more than at any other time in human history? I believe they are. We are told that many will come in Christ's name saying they are Christ and that they shall deceive many. We spoke about this earlier. This is already happening. The assaults on the blessed name of Jesus Christ, coupled with the attempts to usurp his authority, are widespread and growing.

Another warning is that of wars and rumors of wars; that nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. When taken with other passages, the indication is that the

focus of these wars would be geographically in the Mideast. Need we enumerate the many wars and struggles that have and are taking place there?

Finally we are told that there will be earthquakes, famines and troubles of every sort. There shall be legal and social chaos, apostasy, turmoil among families and religious persecutions. Can anyone deny that there are scores of examples we could give for each of these elements to Christ's warning?

One might surmise from current events that the signs of his coming are all around us and I would be foolish to argue an opposing view. In fact, I am personally of the opinion that the time is near. But, signs of the times have always seemed to suggest it was the end times. The Apostle Paul, interpreting the signs of his era, thought it was the time of Anti-Christ in his day. We know now that it was not.

No doubt Christians throughout the centuries, in particular those who endured the time of butchery during the reformation, have held similar beliefs, as the evil of their day seemed to fit the chaos prophesied in scripture. They surely expected the evil one to rise to power in their generation. But again, it was not the time.

World War II was a time of great chaos and distress for this planet. Nation rose against nation. Millions died in battle. Millions more innocents were murdered during the holocaust. Surely it must have seemed to that generation of believers that the Anti-Christ's arrival was imminent. But yet again, it was not the time.

So too today we feel the time is close, and it very well may be. I must concede that it appears that the prophetic signs fit our time like no other period in history. We have the wars and rumors of wars that other generations have had. We have the pestilences and diseases that equal, if not surpass some of the worst plagues in history. We have earthquakes and natural disasters. We are even tracking asteroids that may impact the earth in the very near future as the book of the Revelation predicts.

Admittedly, none of this really sets us that far apart from other times, but there are other factors present today that those before us did not experience and I will discuss those as the basis for my opinion in the following pages. I realize that my opinion is just that; my opinion. You may assign it the weight you think appropriate or reject it altogether. It is of no consequence to me for it will remain my opinion.

My hope, however, is that you will see that I am as passionate and sure of my conclusions as was Dr. De Haan and others who built strong, persuasive cases for their respective theories. I also hope that you will give my conclusions honest consideration in light of the facts presented in God's Word.

I think fellow Christians will find my ideas revolutionary and thought-provoking, but admittedly, depressing. Certainly, it will cause us all to be more aware of just how close the Lord's return is and how we ought to be about the Master's business.

Regardless of the impact this chapter may have on believers, it is imperative that we remember that we are not looking for the Anti-Christ; believers watch for the Lord Jesus Christ. In context then, by seeing the depressing signs that Anti-Christ is near, we ought to rejoice in knowing that his arrival is preceded by the return of the savior for his church.

For those skilled in the Word of God, forgive me if some of this presentation is basic and elementary. I am writing to reach the novice and those unfamiliar with scripture. The steps of getting to my point may be more than you need to take, but when we arrive at my conclusions, they should prove to be provocative to you as well.

Let us start with II Thessalonians 2:3-8, where we are warned of the Anti-Christ's coming:

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in this time. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

This "*Wicked*" is yet to be revealed. No one knows who he is or when he will come, but because God said it would happen, we know without doubt that he will come. A man supernaturally empowered by Satan will stand upon this earth and be the Anti-Christ, if he isn't standing already. He will be the epitome of evil and will fulfill the wickedness the Bible speaks of regarding him.

We know that he will be well received by a good portion of the world. Some suppose he will be a political dynamo. Others think he will come from a heavy religious background. Still others think he will be someone who can heal the economy with a business background. Honestly, we simply cannot know for sure, but we can be sure that whatever the world is looking for in a leader, he will satisfy that need and be largely well received.

The Bible does not reveal exactly who he is, but that does not mean we cannot make an educated guess. Dr. De Haan did. Many other Bible scholars have. They made very good cases for their opinions, but ultimately, they were wrong.

And I am no different than these gentlemen in the sense that I have an opinion and am able to make an educated guess. Like them, I have arrived at this opinion after many years of study and am confident that I am right. I allow for the possibility that I am not, but I will be very surprised if that turns out to be the case.

I have made a checklist of qualifications from scripture and the individual I have selected fits every qualification perfectly. The case is unimpeachable from a scriptural standpoint. And yet, while I am sure who it will be, I cannot give you a specific name. I know that sounds confusing, perhaps even contradictory, but I think when I finally identify who it is I am speaking of you will understand what I mean.

If my guess is right, you will also be very disappointed in what I have to say; not because I failed to make a solid case for what I claim, but because you will be disappointed to learn who it is that I make the case for. It will upset and depress you, perhaps even shake you, but I think the evidence will speak for itself and you will not be able to deny it.

One side encouragement; never lose sight of the fact that we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus and the ultimate victory is his, no matter how depressing current events might be or what the future may hold. The victory for believers is already won by the Lord. Nothing can undo that. It is important to keep sight of that when we study the depressing topics of Anti-Christ and the great tribulation.

Now that we have established the Biblical mandate of Anti-Christ's appearance and pseudo-reign, we need to look at some of the specifics the Bible offers on this man of sin. As we look at prophecy, may I encourage you to do so with the right spirit? Prophecy is given that we might know about things to come. Too many people are afraid of prophecy and avoid it, somehow assigning a measure of mystery or superstition to it that they should not. They feel they cannot understand it, that it takes a scholar to discern what God is saying.

Nothing could be further from the truth of discernment. One cannot read scripture and come to that conclusion. It is a myth perpetrated by those who hold formal education higher than regeneration of the individual.

Now, there is nothing wrong with formal Bible education. I heartily recommend it. But discerning the word of God and understanding the truths thereof come from one being born again and indwelt by the Spirit of God. It has nothing to do with education, except perhaps that one needs to know how to read.

Being regenerated by the Spirit of God is the only prerequisite to discernment and it can be satisfied by prince or pauper. In the 1980s, seven of the ten fastest growing Sunday schools in America were run by people who did not have a college degree. I know. I was one of them. Back then I did not have a college education. I waited until after my career to pursue one. But I certainly understood the Bible's admonishment to allow the Holy Spirit to use me.

In my situation, I was Deacon and Sunday School Superintendant at Lanakila Baptist Church in Waipahu, Hawaii under Pastor Don Stone, who remains a close friend to this day. In less than a year we took our Sunday school from 150 students to approximately 550. I am not claiming credit for this growth. I had 42 teachers who were serious about

ministry. Most of them did not have a college education either, but they had a passion to serve the Lord and that is the prescription for success in ministry.

The Apostles are evidence of this truth. They came from diverse backgrounds, and while one was a doctor, most were uneducated. Still, each was used of God as they believed and yielded to his Spirit. And they were used in a BIG way. They were used to write the New Testament, not so only educated scholars could understand it in the future, but that all who name that wonderful name would have the promises.

The Word of God was written for the reader, whoever that may be, from whatever walk of life, from whatever time in history. God wrote it to be quick and alive so that it would reach down through the ages to every heart that would accept its truth. But God also wrote it in simplicity so that even someone like me could understand what he had to say.

Many, today and in times past, take the position that the Word of God is for the elite, educated or chosen clergy only. They could not be more in error or out of step with God. God himself declares that he is no respecter of persons and that those who seek pre-eminence are far from him. He transmitted his will and his word to us so that all might hear and heed. In fact, if he favored in any direction, one would have to conclude he leaned more closely to the poor and outcast, the downtrodden and undone.

But God does not exclude anyone. He loves all and desires that all come to repentance. That repentance comes only from hearing the Word of God. Accordingly, God ensured simplicity and straightforwardness so that anyone and everyone who wanted to know his word would be able to. Even the bamboo and iron curtains have not prevented the living word of God from getting to those who desire it.

God wants his word to reach all who will receive it. It is also clear that he caused it to be written in simplicity so that all who received it would be able to understand it. Prophecy is not excepted from this rule. Prophecy is often awesome and overwhelming to read, but it is usually straightforward and easy to understand. There is no trick to it. No one needs to order a special decoder ring, learn a secret handshake or employ mystical 3-D glasses.

The only prerequisite to understanding prophecy is the same one that applies to understanding any scripture; that the reader be born again of the Spirit of God. Anyone who has trusted Christ as their savior by asking him into their heart has all they need to discern prophecy. Some may claim that you need four years of Bible College and two years of Seminary, but all you need is the Spirit of God and a love for his word.

My Christian restraint is tested when I hear someone say "*We cannot understand everything in the Word of God; it is not for us to know*". That is hooey (and I admit that I don't know what 'hooey' means, but you get my drift)! Everything in the Word of God can be understood. I am not saying that I or anyone else understands it all. I am saying that God wrote it so that we could understand it.

Who did God write the Bible for? He wrote it for us. How preposterous to think that God would write something for us and not give us the capacity to understand it. What would be the sense of that? Indeed, he says "*These things have I written unto you...that you may know...*". (I John 5:13)

In II Timothy 3:16 we are told:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine".

In other words, scripture is given to us so we know what to believe. We are to formulate our beliefs based upon the things taught in God's word. We can only do that if we understand what he wrote. And it is important to note the measurement; God did not say "**some** scripture". He did not say "**much** scripture". He didn't even say "**most** scripture". He said **ALL** scripture. That means that all scripture can be understood.

Without doubt, we can know what God wants us to know and become apt and able keepers of the Word. The most scholarly Christians I know are not those who went to school to learn what others had to say about what God had to say, but those who spent vast amounts of time in prayer and reading the Word daily, making it not only a part of their routine, but part of their lives.

I am not saying that a good Bible education is not important. Attending a good Bible College is a fantastic idea. If God leads you that way, it is where you ought to be. I learned much in Bible College, but I learned a lot more in my own personal studies alone with God.

Bible College is wonderful, but your formal Bible training should be supplemental. Your primary source of Bible knowledge and experience must, must, must come from a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ through regular, prayerful reading, study and meditation of his word. College regimen forces you to study. It is almost involuntary. But, when you desire to know the Bible, when you voluntarily spend great amounts of time in it, it is then that God can best speak to your heart and teach you.

When you have a love for the Word and are faithful and systematically spending time with God in his word, you find it almost easy to apply prophecy to real world events in order to know the specific who, what, when and where of a thing.

And that is the mindset we will apply with this lesson. We are discussing Anti-Christ, who he is and when and where he will appear. To do that, we need to look at prophecy and to do that we have to understand that it is given for us to discern and know, and not reserved for the elite with a title behind their name or a religious crown upon their head.

For time and space sake, I am not going to recount every scripture reference to the anti-Christ here, but assume you will be enthusiastic enough in your studies to open to the chapters and verses I mention. I am going to skip references that lend no detail to the questions of who and when or that are redundant in the detail they give. Finally, I will

also skip most of the references in the new testament that speak to the spirit of Anti-Christ. I will stipulate for the record that his spirit is already here and doing its evil, unlike the actual person of Anti-Christ, who is yet to come.

Let us turn first to my favorite Old Testament book, the book of Daniel. In chapter two of this great book, written over 2,600 years ago, we have the account of a dream of a pagan king named Nebuchadnezzar. I am not going to rehearse the entire story here for sake of space and time. You may review that portion of scripture at your leisure. You will also want to visit chapter seven, eight and eleven as we will be discussing facts set forth in these chapters as well.

Paraphrasing briefly what happened, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. He was so bothered by the dream that he broke from his sleep. He sent for the Chaldeans, which were his magicians and astrologers. When they arrived, he told them to interpret the dream for him. They were willing to interpret the dream for the king if he would just tell them what he had dreamed.

But the King threw them a curveball. He could not remember what the dream was about. All he knew was that it had upset him and made him afraid. He wanted to remember what it was. So he demanded that they recall what the dream was and that they interpret it. He was so bothered by the dream that he impulsively laid the threat of death on them if they did not recall it for him.

Obviously, they were in quite a fix. They were frightened for their lives. They could not accommodate the King's wishes. Who could? It was an impossible task for any man or woman to know such a thing. To know what thoughts danced across the King's mind as he slept? Impossible!

Fortunately, it is not impossible for God. God revealed the dream to Daniel and gave him the meaning of it. Daniel lickety-split over to King Nebuchadnezzar and revealed the dream to him and Nebuchadnezzar was a happy man. I imagine the Chaldeans were too.

The dream was of a great image that was terrible in appearance. The image was diverse in its components and extremities. It is accepted without argument that each of the components of the image identified by Daniel represented a future kingdom that would rule the world. The interpretation was that there would be four kingdoms, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and finally Rome.

Later on we learn that Rome would fall, but in the end times would be restored as the final Gentile rule. The reign of Nebuchadnezzar, which was already in place, signaled the beginning of a period known in the Bible as "*The time of the Gentiles*", when a Gentile ruler would rule over the earth.

According to prophecy, it was during this final period of Gentile rule that the Anti-Christ would come. We will re-visit this thought a little later in the study, because there are some startling ramifications to this fact that many have not considered. Suffice it to say

now that the time of the Gentiles began with a Gentile king who God would judge and punish (Nebuchadnezzar) and it would end with a Gentile king that God would judge and punish (Anti-Christ).

In Daniel chapter seven, Daniel himself had a dream. His dream was a continuation of the image dream that Nebuchadnezzar had, recorded in chapter two. Indeed, it reaffirmed the king's dream. Briefly, the image components of both dreams combine to establish that the:

- **lion** represents Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar;
- **bear** represents Media-Persia under Darius. The three ribs represent the three conquered nations of Babylon, Libya and Egypt;
- **leopard** represents Greece under Alexander. The four wings represent the four generals who took over the kingdom after Alexander's untimely death. The four heads represent the conquered kingdoms of Methodonia, Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor; and
- **fourth beast** represents Rome under the Caesars, and ultimately the Anti-Christ.

The Fourth Beast, the anti-Christ, is described as dreadful and terrible, strong and different from all the other kings before it. In fact, he is dreadful and terrible because he is not just human, but supernatural as well. As Christ was the God-man, this Anti-Christ is the Devil-man, if you will. He has supernatural power, unlike the power of those who kings that preceded him.

Again, the final kingdom of Rome would rule the earth with an iron fist, but its days of power were numbered. If you examine the description of the beast image in Daniel chapter two, you will note a deterioration of power represented by the progressive description (i.e. two legs of iron leading to feet and toes only part iron and then part clay, signifying a weakening).

Eventually the kingdom was compromised on so many fronts that it simply faded into oblivion and history. And this is an important fact to note; it only faded, it did not disappear. Like a volcano waiting to erupt, it merely slipped into a dormant state and waits. According to prophecy, Rome will rise again; of that we can be certain.

And when it rises, it will have at the head of the resurrected kingdom, the Anti-Christ. In fact, the kingdom will actually be under the control of the unholy trinity of Satan, Anti-Christ and the False Prophet. We will not discuss Satan and the False Prophet in this chapter as we are concerned only with Anti-Christ at this time.

He, the Anti-Christ, is the "*Little Horn*" spoken of in Daniel Chapters two and eleven, but should not be confused with the "*Little Horn*" mentioned in Daniel Chapter eight. This "*Little Horn*" was an actual man named Antiochus Epiphanes, evil in his own right to be sure, but not the Anti-Christ.

He (Epiphanes) is also mentioned in Daniel 11:21-35, immediately before the Little Horn Anti-Christ is addressed. If you mix the two up as many have done, you will not have a clear picture of Anti-Christ. It will be obscured, and you will get confused and probably give up in frustration. So please exercise caution when reading chapter eleven.

Now then, when Rome rises again with the Anti-Christ or Little Horn as its head, it will not be the geographical Rome of the past, but the supernaturally controlled kingdom of the Anti-Christ. There will be a historical tie to the ancient Roman kingdom, but the new Rome will be embodied in a ten nation confederacy. The ten nations are mentioned in:

Daniel 7:7

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns.

The ten nations are mentioned as ten horns in Daniel's vision and also as ten toes in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. These are parallel verses identifying the same kingdoms. If you read the entire text, you will see that seven of the nations willingly submit to the leadership of the Little Horn (the Anti-Christ), but the other three have to be forcibly subdued by him. Ultimately, he has control over all ten.

Many believe that this ten nation confederacy is the current Common Market. I do not know if that is so or not, but it is likely. The fact that there are thirteen members in that union at this writing does not preclude a reduction in member nations for any number of reasons in the near future to satisfy the ten nation prerequisite of scripture.

This union today is the European power cartel that controls land, economies, politics and the general mood in most, if not all of Europe. They have already managed to break down borders and established a Euro-dollar, among other initiatives. Individually there are no true powerhouse nations among them, but collectively they are a formidable power. It is this power the Anti-Christ will control.

I think it is interesting, if not noteworthy, that the headquarters for this union is currently in Brussels, Belgium and that in that city they have what was once considered the largest computer in the world, housed in a facility covering an entire city block. The computer is affectionately known as "*The Beast*". Coincidentally, this is another name that the Anti-Christ is given in the Bible. In fact, during his reign in the period known as the Tribulation, he will be known by that name.

So who is this Little Horn, or rather who will he be? Some think he has already come. One idea is that it was Nero. Some think it will be a renegade Pope. Others think it was Julius Caesar. Some believe Dr. De Haan's theory that it was Judas Iscariot. I simply do not know for sure, but my opinion is that it will not be any of them. Don't think I am

messing with your mind; I know I promised to tell you who it will be. I will get to that soon.

Another common belief is that Anti-Christ will be a Jew. They base this upon Daniel 11:37, which says in part:

"Neither shall he regard the God of his Fathers...."

I can understand how someone could jump to the conclusion that he would be a Jew in light of this verse. The capitalization of God in this verse means it is speaking of Jehovah. I conceded this. But, that does not mean that the Anti-Christ will be a Jew. Christians also believe in Jehovah. The difference is that unlike the Jews, we recognize him as a triune God; Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Most Christians are gentiles, not Jews. So the Anti-Christ could certainly be a gentile from a Christian nation, who does not believe in the God (Jehovah) of his fathers. And this happenstance would fit the prophecy perfectly, whereas, if we imagine him to be of Jewish descent, it does not.

This man is not going to be a Jew. When you read the above verse in concert with Daniel 7:8 and 7:24 and especially Revelation 17:10-11, you can come to no other conclusion but that this wicked individual will be a Gentile and not a Jew.

Remember that the time of the Gentiles was to be bordered by two Gentile kings. To qualify as a king during the time of the Gentiles, one must obviously be, well, a Gentile. The first king during the time was a Gentile. His name was Nebuchadnezzar. The last king during the time of the Gentiles will also be a Gentile. He will be the Anti-Christ. It is clear to me that this man will be a Gentile.

Let us now turn to the other details and indicators that help us to determine who this evil person might be. I will list these in no particular order and then discuss them in general in the pages that follow.

We can determine from scripture that Anti-Christ will:

- not endorse any existing religion;
- be intelligent;
- not desire women (more about this to follow below);
- be a world ruler;
- be a persuasive orator and politician;
- be charismatic;
- speak of peace (but seek to conquer); and
- be an expert middle-roader (diplomat).

Now let's get into the meat of the facts. In all other studies of the Anti-Christ that I have read, an important element of his rise to power is never discussed. The writers never say

anything about the Anti-Christ's country. You are probably thinking "*Country? What country? The Bible doesn't say anything about that*".

You are correct. It is not mentioned in scripture, per se. But it is assumed. But when it comes to those who develop a theory on who the Anti-Christ will be, it simply is not addressed. And that is most unfortunate. I believe knowing this is critical in discovering who the Anti-Christ will be.

Obviously, there has to be an Anti-Christ nation. He cannot accomplish what he will do all by himself. How could he overthrow the three dissenting nations? In order to intimidate the seven and overthrow the other three, the Anti-Christ is going to have to have a nation behind him. And that nation is going to have to have more military and economic clout than the collective ten.

And to be just stronger than the ten is not enough, The nation behind this man will have to have enough clout to keep the rest of the world in fear of his power. What nation could this be? Russia? No, that super power is now disintegrated into several smaller, less powerful entities. Israel? No, because we are told that the Anti-Christ and his nation are going to make a covenant with Israel. China? No, as they fit prominently into prophecy later on that excludes them from serving in this role. So what nation?

Well, before we venture a guess, let's mix another factor into the equation to try to help us pinpoint the answer. Let's do this by asking another question. What is meant by the term "*Little Horn*"? There must be some significance to the purposeful description of the size of the horn.

It is a little or small horn. Does this mean that the nation that backs him will be a small nation like Cuba or Kuwait? I don't think so. They lack the resources and power that will be required. Does it mean that the Anti-Christ will be a little fellow like Napoleon, James Cagney or a jockey? Again, I don't think so. The size of an individual is irrelevant and there is no need to emphasize physical stature.

What then does the size of the horn signify? Let's put on our thinking cap a moment. I believe that God is giving us a very easy clue to discern. When an animal has a little horn, what is indicated? Sometimes it depicts gender (i.e. female horns are smaller than males). Sometimes it indicates a renewal, as in animals which shed their horns annually and begin growing them anew.

But without exception, there is a situation where all animals, male or female sport horns that are small. It is when they are young. I think the size of the horn suggests age. A larger horn would mean an aged animal. Conversely, a small horn would indicate that the animal is young. With animals that have horns, the young always have the little horns.

So, is God, who speaks often in types and symbols, trying to tell us that the Anti-Christ will come from a young nation, relative to the age of the other ten nations? I believe he is. In fact, I am sure of it.

And there are not too many young nations around. But there are a few, so we need to refine our search criteria. So let us do so by asking a series of questions from facts reflected in the Bible regarding this Little Horn to see which nation fits best:

Which nation:

- is younger than all the other ten nations;
- has its origins in those other ten nations; *
- is a predominantly Gentile nation;
- is stronger than all the ten nations combined;
- is a friend to Israel and could affect a covenant with them; and
- has ties to the old Roman Empire?

* Daniel 7:8 and 24 indicate that this Anti-Christ nation was "*among*" and "*after*" the other nations, indicating roots and origin.

Which young nation meets the prerequisites? It pains me to say that there is only one nation now in existence who meets all of the criteria above. Sadly, it is America! The United States of America is going to be the Anti-Christ nation. After serving this country for over 30 years in the military, and loving it from shore to shore, it is particularly difficult for me to come to this realization, but the facts cannot be denied.

Early on America was comprised of immigrants largely from the other ten nations, and those roots are alive and well in this country today. We are definitely much younger than all of the nations these immigrants came from. Our nation is predominantly Gentile, and we certainly are a friend to Israel. We have 60% of the world's wealth and resources and therefore the most political clout and by far the strongest military in the world.

The Anti-Christ must have the backing of a strong nation. America is going to be that nation. It is the only nation that meets the criteria set forth in scripture. It only follows then that the Anti-Christ will have to be a future President of the United States. Of course I do not know which President it will be, but it appears it will be one in our immediate future.

I know many will be upset and disappointed at this conclusion, just as I am greatly disappointed to report it, but the Anti-Christ has to come from somewhere and he has to have the power to take control. There is no other nation on earth that fits that bill; America.

Now perhaps you understand why I said I knew who it would be, but not exactly who. I am certain it will be an American President, but I just do not know which one. There

have been several Presidents who have been the devil to endure, but none who qualify as actually being of the devil.

And no doubt you understand too why I said you would be disappointed to hear my conclusions. How can any American not be disappointed? It upsets me to think that this great country; founded on Christian-Judeo doctrines and beliefs; used of God to spread the Gospel message; and keeper of world peace, will have gone so far away from God so as to receive the Anti-Christ as its leader.

But the times do not lie. If you look at the signs of Anti-Christ's coming, you cannot deny that they are present in our society today. America has been so tarnished by the liberal, humanist and progressive crowds that the signs are not signs at all, but common every day happenstances.

The very moral fiber of our society has been eroded. Criminals are treated as victims. Child molesters are set free by activist judges and make millions of dollars in book deals. The constitution is pushed aside by our jurists and hated by progressive politicians. God is under attack along with his followers. He has been expelled from schools that now invite false gods to sit in session. Christian and Jewish symbols are being eradicated from public view in an attempt to completely dislodge righteousness from our society.

Two very big factors are at play in our society that will have monumental impact in ushering the Anti-Christ to power. At the risk of being controversial, I have to address them, but please know I do so to be factual and will try to avoid expressing personal sentiment.

The first factor that will play big in the rise of Anti-Christ is homosexuality. Both as candidate and President, the Anti-Christ will be quite sympathetic to current homosexual issues, such as civil unions and marriages. We have seen a progressive lean toward this position with several past presidents. But the Anti-Christ will put the issue square on the public table and will be a champion of these causes.

In fact, the Anti-Christ will probably himself be a homosexual. The Bible says he will not desire a woman. I think the implication is very clear. I am not one of those theologians who look for deeper, higher or hidden meaning. I operate on the premise that God wrote his word for us and it would not make sense for him to write in a manner that would confuse us or encourage opposing views.

So I anticipate that this man of sin will be a homosexual. If not a homosexual himself, he will be very pro-homosexual, because God is against homosexuality. Avoiding the morality issue of homosexuality, it is important to understand this distinction because the Anti-Christ will be exactly that; "anti" Christ.

All that Anti-Christ is will be the opposite of what Christ himself was and is. Anti-Christ represents Satan or the Spirit of Error, while Christ of course represents God and the Spirit of Truth.

Here is a quick glance at some of the primary contrasts between these individuals:

<u>Spirit of Truth</u> (The Lord Jesus Christ)	<u>Spirit of Error</u> (The anti-christ)
Represents the Word of God	Misrepresents the Word of God
Came in God's name	Comes in his own name
He was despised by men	He will be exalted by men
He did his Father's will	He does his own will
He came to save mankind	He comes to destroy mankind
He is the Holy One	He is the Lawless One
He is the Son of God	He is the Son of Perdition
He is the sacrificial lamb	He is the ravenous wolf
He will glorify his bride the church	He will kill his harlot wife the false church
He is God who made himself man	He is man who will make himself God
He represents the Spirit of truth	He represents the Spirit of error
He loves man	He hates man
He will be exalted	He will be destroyed

Now, I am not picking on homosexuals. God loves the homosexual as much as the heterosexual. He hates the sin of the heterosexual as much as he hates the sin of the homosexual. God sees us as individual people and we are responsible to him for ourselves and no one else. We need to come to God on his terms, stripped of all our own causes and ideologies, reconciling to him as an individual and not the member of a group or religion.

So my point is not a stab at homosexuality. I merely am showing that the Bible indicates this man of sin will be a homosexual, or at the very least, pro-homosexual, which will play a big part in his rise to power.

Homosexuality, however you may view it, is a rebellious movement against mainstream society, which in the west has been built upon Christian-Judeo doctrines and beliefs, which in turn recognize God's condemnation of one practicing homosexuality. In other words, rebellion against societal values is rebellion against Christian-Judeo and Bible values upon which western society was founded.

Homosexuality is no different than any other movement seeking change in that regard, but because it is also a Bible taboo, it takes on a larger dimension than other causes. Because of increasing public interest, it will become another weapon in the Anti-Christ's arsenal to foster his rebellion against God when he is rising to power. And since America leads the world in celebrating this movement (as we usually lead the world in all things), homosexual issues is a great platform to launch the political career of the Anti-Christ.

Remember the contrast of truth and error above. The Anti-Christ is the agent of Satan and if you know nothing else of this wicked personality, remember this one unchanging thing about him; **Satan hates the things that God loves and loves the things that God hates**. The nature of the devil is just that simple. If you apply this rule to any question about your beliefs, deportment and societal ethics, the result will be the same; if you know God is for it, you can bet Satan is against it and vice versa.

I can only conclude therefore, that the recent upswing in popularity in homosexuality, and society's increasing tolerance toward it, are issues that will play right into the hands of Anti-Christ. If for no other reason, it is the flaunting in rebellion of something God hates by his nemesis.

My point is that homosexuality is going to be used by the Anti-Christ for political gain. It is already a hot ticket issue in politics. Every state, every legislature, every level of government, is embroiled in the issues of civil unions, gay marriages, don't ask/don't tell, and so on. There have been hateful acts, including bloodshed on both sides and it is only going to get worse. I wish that were not true, but I fear that it is.

Again, this is not an ideological or moral statement or stand. Rather, it is an observation on what political hot potatoes are on the horizon that will pave the way for someone to step in and say "*I have the solution*". Both sides of this issue (and other issues) will gravitate toward this seemingly political magician and thus will begin the reign of Anti-Christ on the earth.

Moving on, another important factor in the rise and reign of Anti-Christ will be oil. Actually, it is the economy, but oil is the driving force behind the world's economy today. The Bible teaches that when the end times near, the cost of living will soar like it never has before. I know that we have had inflation problem after inflation problem here and abroad, but the inflation that is coming in association of the advent of Anti-Christ is going to be beyond anything previously experienced in our modern world. It will be of Biblical proportions. A loaf of bread will cost a day's wages, assuming you are fortunate enough to have a job.

I recall a tour my wife and I took of Hoover Dam in Las Vegas. As we passed a convenience store, the bus driver told us that the cost of bread in that particular store was one of the highest in the world. Of course we bit and asked him how much. "\$102.00" was his reply. Then after grinning for a few minutes he added *"On average, people that go into this store to buy a \$2.00 loaf of bread wind up spending \$100.00 on the slot machines"*.

We all laughed at his clever humor, but the truth is, one day bread will actually cost nearly that much everywhere. The cost of living is going to soar, and I mean literally overnight! Oil (gas) will be unreachable. We have seen gas at the pumps going over \$4.00 a gallon already. What will we do when it is \$10.00 or \$20.00?

Oil figures prominently into our economy and virtually every other economy in the world. Our country lives on oil. If we cannot acquire oil, our cars stop, our airplanes don't fly, trucks and trains do not deliver goods, our houses are not heated, the food factories cannot produce, our ships cannot sail the seas, farmers cannot harvest, and on and on and on.

Already those who control some of the world's largest deposits of oil are squeezing as much out of us as they can get. I remember when gas was 19 cents a gallon and when you filled up you got your oil checked, windshield wiped, tires checked and a special reward from the gas station (i.e. a steak knife or kitchen towel, etc.). Today gas is over \$4.00 a gallon in some places and going up and they could care less about customer service. But we pay the price. No matter how much we complain, we pay the price. If it goes to \$20.00 a gallon, we will pay it. We have to. It is what drives our economy (pardon the pun).

And there is worse news on oil. Not only are the oil producers squeezing as much out of customers as they can, they are squeezing as much out of the earth as they can. Scientists differ on the prognosis. Some say we have 25 years of oil left in known reserves, while others say we have 50. The variance in their predictions is the result of not knowing how much oil emerging world powers will use as they industrialize their nations (i.e. China, India, etc.).

Already China is growing faster in their industrial revolution than the United States did in ours. Of course that makes sense as their population is significantly larger than ours was. It seems likely then, that in the next generation or two oil wells will go dry. As supply goes down and demand goes up, so too will the prices of oil rise. Already oil is a hot button ticket in politics. It will only get hotter.

Of course necessity is the mother of invention and as hard times come, some will step up and try to introduce alternatives to oil. Some are already here and work well on a small scale, but they are not truly viable alternatives due to the expense required to produce the product in great quantities and the unforeseen negative impact they have on other components of the economy.

The question remains: will there be anything to replace oil? I cannot know, but I truly do not think so. The Bible makes oil the prime interest of world economies. And that importance is going to bring us to a very perilous time; a time when production will fail or at least fall far short of needs, and economies will crash one after another like dominoes. When that happens, even money will lose its importance. The rich will be hurt along with everyone else because their money will be useless if there is nothing to buy.

That will be the time for a new "savior" to step to the plate and offer the world his solution. The "anti-savior" is coming. And that time is on our horizon. In fact, it might already be here. II Thessalonians 2:7 tells us:

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work"

Jesus said that when we shall see the signs of the end, that *man of sin* shall be revealed. The signs are here; wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, failing economies. The time of the Gentiles is drawing to a close and the last king will soon be in power.

Maybe he is alive today, and maybe he is not. The "signs" seem to indicate that he is. If he is not, it is certain he soon will be. This earth has never known a time like ours in its history. Everything is ready for the return of the Lord for his church, which precedes the coming of the wicked one.

Christians often refute any attempt to say the end is near by quoting that well known scripture in II Thessalonians chapter five: "...*the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*". In other words, like a thief who breaks into a house with stealth, so too the coming of the Lord shall occur quietly and without warning or much notice.

Now, while it is true that the return of the Lord and the advent of Anti-Christ and that period of tribulation shall come as a surprise for most of the world, it is not necessarily true of believers. Most Christians fail to read the next verse in that chapter where the Lord carefully explains to believers that "...*that day should not overtake you as a thief*".

In other words, believers will be able to see current events for what they are and how they herald and evidence the coming end times. And when those times are upon us, we should know. Most Christians will tell you that they know that their Lord is coming soon. We know. We have the Spirit of Truth within us and we know and we watch.

Still, it will happen quickly, without warning for most of the earth's inhabitants. And then, that *man of sin* will be revealed and the world will know him, not for who he is, but for who he seems to be. But we believers can know who he is now, or at least we can make a pretty good assumption.

Again, it pains me to believe this individual will come to the world in the capacity of an American President, but the evidence is hard to ignore.

CHAPTER 18

Where in the World is Hell



There are so many religions, pseudo-religions, sects and cults in the world today; more, I suppose, than at any other time in history, though admittedly, I have no statistics to support that supposition. It is just my personal observation as one who has studied the histories of religions and cults. For anyone who keeps up on current events, it just seems that there is a renaissance of religion taking place as more and more people align themselves with some sort of spiritual group or organization.

This is unique to our modern times because not only are there more people than at any other time in history claiming a religious affiliation (as one would expect with increased population), there is also an increased percentage of the population finding spiritual awareness. In other words, there appears to be less atheists and agnostics and more people who express a belief in God.

Don't be fooled by the trend though; it still is politically incorrect to mention, let alone believe in God. Having a spiritual awareness is acceptable, whereas being religious or believing in God is not. This is nothing new, just the manifestation of a historical trend of society moving further and further away from traditional religion, while at the same time appearing to be spiritual.

If you spend any time studying religion in history you will see that the trend has always been that with each new generation more people claim to be spiritual but less people actually believe in a deity. Simultaneously, revolutionary new strains or splinter groups from traditional denominations surface in society with a more watered-down message with each progressive generation. Religion is made softer and gentler and more palatable to those who seek a spiritual experience rather than a Bible-centered belief system.

The lean is away from Godliness and toward humanism. Emphasis is on the whole being and not the soul and God is all but eliminated from this new spiritual experience. It is a regression away from God and being Godly, into deeper ungodliness. But the need for people to feel religious is appeased by their claim of being "spiritual".

The ancient Jewish people (a culture given to strict religious order and a people who enjoyed a close relationship with God), had problems with this. Following their own progressive ideas and devices, they repeatedly strayed from God while continuing to

embrace the idea that they were his people. They would follow after other gods like Baal, but when the occasion called for it, quickly claim the honor of being God's chosen people.

When they strayed (which was quite often) God would chastise them or do some wondrous thing for them to get their attention. They would see their folly, repent and come back to God with a contrite spirit, only to move away from him again in the next generation. In fact, God even documents that such behavior is a generational trend. In the book of Judges, chapter 2, verse 10, it says:

"...there arose another generation after then which knew not the Lord....".

The same thing is happening today in America and other previously "religious" countries. In America, almost every day of the year, a traditional Christian church closes its doors in America, and is replaced by a new age religion or cult movement of some sort. Everywhere you look you find the weird and bizarre, from Charles Manson to the Davidian cult to the people who thought a comet was coming to take them away.

In traditional denominations that most of us grew up knowing, we see sweeping changes too. They have undergone splits in their organizations; and then have split and split again until there are so many splinter groups that one can no longer keep track of who is related to whom or who believes what.

For example, I am a fundamental, independent Baptist. At one time, that was all there was in the Baptist ranks. Of course, they were not always known as Baptists. There were Montatists, Donatists, Paulicians, and Ana-Baptists, to mention a few. The name changed over the centuries, but the Baptist distinctive remained intact.

Today we still have traditional fundamentalists, but we also have a wide variety of Baptists who are nothing like the traditional Baptists of yesteryear. These new or neo evangelists embrace a smorgasbord of beliefs and doctrines that are in stark contrast with fundamentalism, the Bible, and sometimes even each other.

Nowadays the label "Baptist" is confusing to say the least. We have Baptists, American Baptists, Southern Baptists, Northern Baptists, Adventists, Free Will Baptists, Full Gospel Baptists, Missionary Baptists, Reformed Baptists, Reorganized Baptists, Re-reorganized Baptist, First Baptists, Second Baptists, Third Baptists, and I think you get the idea.

Despite all this falling away to new age beliefs, despite all the watered down gospels, despite all the humanism that has filtered into mainstream religion in America, there seems to be one belief that has remained untouched. Whether it is embraced as an idea, a solid article of faith, a simple hope or a happy notion, almost everyone who we mentioned above acknowledge that there is a heaven.

Their ideas of what heaven is and who gets there may vary greatly, but invariably all believe this place exists. They may call it by another name, they may refute the Bible concept of it, but for everyone but definitive atheists, there is a better life waiting for them somewhere, somehow.

Invariably, they will tell you that they are going there when their life on earth is over. And this would be the humorous part if it was not so sad; it doesn't matter what their belief system is (i.e. faith, grace, experience, works, etc.) when it comes to the afterlife, they qualify. No matter what they have done, no matter how they weigh right and wrong, they meet the criteria for the heaven they imagine.

Isn't it odd that even the worst among us see themselves as qualifying for some sort of eternal gift or reward? I think this mindset is typified in the old "Godfather" movie series where murderers and racketeers would do their dastardly deeds, wiping out their competition, silencing witnesses, and then attend church, give a large sum of money and leave with every confidence they were okay with God. It is just human nature to place a set of scales in God's hands and to tip those scales in their own favor.

As tempting as it is for me to address the shortcomings of this way of thinking, I will restrain myself in order to stay on point. Again, almost every "religious" person believes in this place called heaven. The reason is clear and self-serving; this makes for a very positive religious view, and therefore, makes God very palatable and acceptable. It makes religion convenient and non-offensive. It does not interfere with one's life or lifestyle. Heaven is a positive concept and therefore a good thing to believe in. It makes one feel good to think of this place waiting for their deserving soul.

Conversely, one of the most repugnant topics to the same church-going or religious people is the subject of Hell. The idea of hell is harsh and offensive to them. It is extremely negative and therefore, largely unacceptable. In a survey of thousands of church-goers who either called or considered themselves Christian, one of the questions asked was *"Is there a Hell"*?

More than half of those who responded said they did not believe in a place called Hell. They believed the Bible account of Heaven, but rejected the same Bible's account of Hell. The most common reasons for this response were *"Beliefs need to be progressive - Hell is old hat teaching"* and *"How could a loving God send people to Hell"*? There were other reasons, but by a wide margin, those two were the most common responses.

Hell is a place that most people do not want to believe in, and the rest do not want to talk about. The mentality that accepts one report of God's word (Heaven) and rejects the other (Hell) is typical of human reasoning. We are inclined to embrace the things that we like and reject the things that we do not, regardless of fact. We delude ourselves by thinking that if we reject and bury that idea out of our consciousness, it is no longer true.

You may think that my observation is simplistic, but this behavior is seen in many areas of life. Take for instance fires; did you know that many, if not most victims who perish

in a house or apartment fire are found hiding in closets or under beds? Sadly, it is true. People who have fortunately been rescued from closets before they were harmed by the flames, concede that they thought by not facing the problem (the fire), it could not touch them. We can only conclude that those who perished were victims of the same misguided thinking.

As absurd as that may sound, it is the way our reasoning sometimes works. If I do not accept that something is a threat to me, then it is not a threat. It is often referred to as positive thinking, but a better definition might be that it is the "*it can't happen to me*" philosophy. Infomercial gurus cash in selling positive thinking ideas to people because such a philosophy appeals to our psyche. It gives us a false sense of safety and control. Billions of dollars are spent believing that what the guru is selling can work for you. But the reality is that it works only for a very small percentage of those who pay for the product.

We all are subject to this mindset at one time or another. We drive automobiles knowing that nearly 50,000 people die on the roads of our nation each year. If we really thought that we could be one of those who perish, we probably would not drive as much as we do. But we drive without giving it much thought because subconsciously we think "*it can't happen to me*".

We know an airplane can crash, but if we really thought it could happen to us, we probably would not fly. But it can and does happen. Fortunately, the aviation industry has made air travel safer and safer every year. But it still happens despite the fact that almost everyone believes "*it can't happen to me*".

And whether we believe in Hell or not comes from this same mindset. If we really thought it could happen to us, we would take God and the Bible much more seriously. Instead, many simply reject the idea of such a place and refuse to believe it.

Admittedly, it is a hard topic to think about and even harder to give credence to. This writer is no exception. I find it easier to speak of Heaven than I do Hell. But Hell is a Bible teaching; one that carries an urgency for the reader. It is a critical part of the gospel message. Without Hell, the gospel is an empty gesture. If the gospel was just that Jesus died, it would not make sense. But that Jesus died to save us from something makes sense and completes the message God has for us.

And the Bible is clear about what that something is. It is the second death, or Hell. As tough as it is to talk about this place, it cannot be denied that Hell is repeatedly, and perhaps overwhelmingly, taught in the Bible. In the New Testament alone, it is mentioned over 160 times, nearly ten times more than Heaven, and yet some who readily accept the Heaven account, will reject what the Bible says about Hell.

Ignoring the teaching of God does not negate the fact that Hell exists. Hiding in our spiritual closet, as it were, is not going to protect us from the perdition's flames. If

something is true, it is true whether we believe it or not. It is true whether we acknowledge it or not.

Jesus himself mentioned Hell many more times than Heaven. In fact, seemingly, when Jesus taught with the most passion, it was when he spoke of this place of torment. He lamented and even wept when he discussed this awful place, because of his love for us. It is without doubt the reason he took on flesh and suffered his own death; that his beloved creature "man" would have a way to escape this place called Hell. Hebrews 2:9 says:

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God should taste death for every man".

Jesus was made lower than the angels for a short season, willingly tasted death so that he could bring to God those who should believe in him. By this perfect atonement, he is able to bring to God all those who trust in him and as a consequence or benefit, they avoid the second death.

When the angels are tasked with throwing Christ-rejecters into the Lake of Fire, as we are told will happen in Matthew 13:50 and the Revelation, those who trust in the Lord Jesus know the angels will not be coming for them because Jesus paid that price in their stead.

And this brings us to the purpose of this chapter; to discuss this place called Hell. Hell is a literal, actual place. The Bible teaches this. In order for one to reject the reality of Hell, one must reject that the Bible is the actual Word of the Living God.

If God is perfect as he claims (and he is), then all that he does is perfect, including the recording of his perfect thoughts for us to have. If the criticism is that only part of the Word of God can be believed, who is to say which part? I submit that if we cannot believe it all, then we cannot believe it at all. So belief that God means there is a place called Hell and that it is all he says it is, is foundational to believing in God at all. I hope you can see that.

One cannot be a person of faith if that faith is not in the Word of God and ALL that it teaches, for we know not God apart from his word. Romans 10:17 says:

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"

So, what is Hell? Some have and will no doubt continue to argue that the word "Hell" means grave or pit and not a place of fire and brimstone or of punishment and wrath. Truthfully, in some instances in scripture it does mean precisely that; a pit or grave. But this does not negate the use of the word in terms of eternal punishment in many other places.

Let us discuss the uses as they are applied in scripture. There are four words or terms to be considered:

1. **Sheol** (Hebrew) - grave. Also used as pit or depths. Commonly accepted as the abode of the dead in the Old Testament, referring to the grave or death. The word occurs 65 times in the Old Testament to refer to the grave or pit. It is also used to illustrate the temporary holding place of the body in Jonah 2:2 as the belly of the great fish represents a grave-type for Jonah. (For examples of the use of this word, see Psalm 55:14 and Proverbs 15:24).

2. **Hades** (Hebrew) - temporary abode of unbelievers. In truth, Hades at one time contained the place called Paradise. We see this illustrated in Luke Chapter 16 with the story of the rich man and Lazarus. That the two sections or compartments of Hades were separate and distinct is obvious from this passage of scripture. Hades is generally considered the holding place for unbelievers pending the judgment...the unseen dead (See Revelation 1:18, 6:8 and 2:13-14. Christ holds the keys to this intermediate place of punishment and will bring them to the throne of judgment at the appointed time).

The other part of Hades was Paradise, where believers were at rest. The dynamics of Hades, at least the good or Paradise side, has changed, but we will not spend time on that here. Suffice it to say that this is not a place where believers go today. Today the Bible tells us that the believer is "*absent from the body and present with the Lord*"; in Heaven itself.

3. **Tartarus** (Greek) - also called **Gehenna**. The final abode for the wicked dead. This place is commonly considered the "Hell" of eternal punishment.

4. **Lake of Fire** - that place discussed in chapter 14 of the Revelation on to the end of that book where the Devil and his angels and all in Hades and Tartarus shall be cast and kept throughout all eternity.

These definitions were basic, intended to give the reader a simple understanding of the differences in terms and words used in scripture. It is the definition of "Hell" as that place of punishment that we are discussing and we will refrain therefore from referring to either Sheol or Hades for the remainder of this discourse. We are concerned only with that place of punishment mentioned in so many places throughout the Bible.

II Thessalonians 1:8-9 is a good representation of those passages:

"In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power".

This passage should be enough to convince anyone of the fact that Hell is not the grave or a pit. It is that place of torment and punishment, where people who reject God's grace and mercy will be forever incarcerated.

I have to admit to you that I wish there was not a place like Hell and that no one would ever have to go there, not even those who have treated me spitefully in this life. Who among us would wish this punishment on anyone? But it will befall many. The Bible says more will go to Hell than will not.

Please note that those who are confined there are not placed there because of their sin, nor are they put there unjustly, without cause. It says that God exacts his vengeance upon them because they rejected His Son and wanted nothing to do with reconciliation with God through His Son.

It was not God's choice, it was theirs. He has begged mankind through the centuries, first in person and now through his written word, to come to him his way. And yet many refuse. Many mock his loving attempt to reconcile them unto himself. I don't think anyone could argue, at least not honestly, that God has not done everything possible to keep us from Hell, including taking on flesh to die in our stead.

II Peter 3:9 says it best:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance".

Emphasis was added to show that God does not want anyone to perish. This word "*perish*" speaks of spiritual death or the second death that we mentioned earlier. In truth, God did not want anyone to die physically either, but that was a by-product of the fall in the Garden of Eden and cannot be altered. He speaks here of spiritual death and his will is that none should experience it, but that all should repent and come to him.

God did not create Hell for mankind. Matthew 15:41 tells us that it was made for the "...*devil and his angels*" because of their rebellion against God. However, because of our sin, we are ourselves in rebellion against the Spirit of God. We are away from him and need a way to be reconciled to him. And he provides that way.

In Romans 10:13 it says:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved".

One must read the preceding verses to see that to "*call upon the Lord*" means to believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is the Savior and that God raised him from the dead. The "*whosoever*" that does this is born again and will never see this place called Hell. The one who rejects the record of God, that he sent his son and that he is the only means of salvation, is that one who will indeed perish spiritually.

Hebrews 9:27 says:

"And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment".

Is this place called Hell real? God says it is. In my mind, that settles it. We will explore more details about Hell in a moment, but for those who are still straddling the fence as to whether there is a Hell or not, how do you answer these questions:

- If there is no Hell, why did God send a Savior?
- If there is no Hell, what do we need to be saved from?
- If there is no Hell, why did Jesus preach 10 times more on hell than heaven?
- If there is no Hell, why did Jesus have to die?
- If there is no Hell, why does God tell us there is?
- If there is no Hell, why does the Lord warn us about it?
- If there is no Hell, why is there a distinction in the words used for it?
- If there is no Hell, why is there a true story about it in Luke with actual people who died and went there?

The only possible conclusion that an honest person can reach is that there is indeed a place called Hell. It is as real as Heaven. It is as real as earth. It is not a benign place of soul-sleep as some erroneously claim, but rather a place of great torment and everlasting punishment. At this moment, while we live in our reality, people are awake and aware in this awful place called Hell. Just because we cannot dial it up on television or search for a video of it on the internet does not make it any less real. It is a real, actual, current place where those who reject God's love will spend eternity.

But we can temper the negative impact of that truth with two other truths: first, that God does not want anyone to go there; and second, that he has made a very simple way for us to avoid it. The sting and mystery of death and the threat of this place is removed when we trust in God's way of salvation.

Now that we have established that Hell is a real place, we can answer the most commonly asked questions about this place...

WHERE IS HELL

Some believe that Hell is like Heaven in the sense that they are both spiritual places far removed from the reality of this world. In other words, these are not places that you can travel to in a jet or spaceship, because they are not within our physical realm. The understanding we have is that the only sure way of getting to either of these places is for our earthly vessel to expire.

But while they are far removed from our physical reality, these places are very much real in their own right. They are physical realities as well as spiritual places. People are alive

there right now, at this moment. They are conscious of their existence and are going about their business, whatever that may be.

Though I am certain that we cannot travel to Hell, this does not mean that I think Hell is physically located somewhere far out in space. In fact, I think the commonly accepted idea that Hell is located in some far-away, undetermined place is in error. Some have supposed it is on or in our Sun or some other super-heated gaseous giant far out in space. I do not.

I will no doubt shock some and elicit the ridicule of others with my idea of where Hell is located, but that comes along with the territory of expressing one's opinion, and I am prepared. Just remember that this is my personal opinion and I am not dogmatically married to it. I am open to the ideas of others, provided they build a strong case and are not just shooting from the hip with their opinion. I hope you are as open to mine and will weigh the information I offer honestly.

My studies have led me to conclude that Hell is physically located inside of the earth. Yes, good old terra firma beneath our feet. I am not being flippant, nor am I trying to come across as revolutionary in order to find the proverbial fifteen minutes of fame. This is sincerely my opinion, based upon many factors. For me the evidence is very strong and convincing and I will present that evidence in a moment.

I want to re-emphasize one important point before I continue and that is this; that undoubtedly those still in this earthly life cannot access either Heaven or Hell until such time as we pass from this life. We can no more travel to Hell physically by drilling down into the earth (assuming I am right about its location) than we can gain access to Heaven with a rocket ship.

The reason I felt it necessary to re-emphasize this self-evident truth is that I have known people or read several accounts by people who claim to have visited both Heaven and Hell. As strange as that may sound, I assure you that there is no shortage of people in this world who make such assertions.

For example: a dear friend of mine, who is involved in an eastern religion where members claim that soul travel is a common experience, told me that he once visited Hell, that it was all the Bible said it was. He said that it was located inside the core of the earth. Of course, upon close examination of his experience, his description was not in keeping with the Bible account at all, but more along the line of Hollywood's version of what Hell is like.

I wondered how much influence the media had on helping him form his opinion. He is not the type of person to purposely deceive or embellish and so I believed that he had undergone some sort of spiritual experience. With great kindness and graciousness I explained the Biblical position on such experiences and reminded him that a spiritual experience was not always from God.

I gave him the example of when Jesus Christ was on earth; how he too had undergone a similar experience. Satan had taken him to the pinnacle and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth, trying to tempt and deceive him. I concluded with a soft warning for him to be careful of the great deceiver and his methods. Those seeking God through ways outlawed or condemned by the Bible are not going to find God, but they may very well find a clever and convincing imitation.

Another example comes from a story that I read on the internet; the account of scientists accidentally drilling into Hell. There is no shortage of offerings on this story if you feel led to do some research on it, but I can assure you that the claims are false and the story nothing more than urban legend or hoax. Still, to be fair, there are those who claim the story is true and there is much confusion about some of the facts.

I am unsure of the date, but the story or urban legend takes place in Siberia. There, Russian scientists are conducting exploratory drilling in the earth (for reasons unknown). The original story is written in a Norwegian newspaper in the local language, so translation into English might have added to the confusion that exists as to what was actually reported.

It was in essence a very unscientific report by scientists and workers who were performing exploratory drilling deep into the earth, apparently near volcanic activity in Siberia. The scientist quoted in the article stated that he had been a communist and did not believe in God or Heaven or Hell. He made that statement so as to remove any suspicion of bias in what he was about to say.

His story was that as his crew was drilling deep down in the earth, their drill apparatus started to shake wildly and uncontrollably. According to him, when this happens, it indicates that the drill has broken through hard rock into a large empty pocket or cavern. I am no engineer, but that makes sense to me. I can envision the drill swinging wildly in such a situation.

He went on to say that when this occurred, their temperature gauges soared quickly to an unbelievable 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The heat was probably more intense than what was registered, but that was the maximum temperature on their gauge.

It is commonly accepted that earth's core temperatures can reach 12,000 Fahrenheit. It was probably conceivable to the crew that they could have broken through into a cavern filled with lava. At this point it was an unusual occurrence, but nothing shocking.

The story continues that it was believed voices could be heard through the drill shaft. They decided to pull the drill and lower a microphone down into the shaft. Though not a necessary part of their tool inventory, they had on hand a specially designed microphone that was used to detect plate movement.

The scientist said that they lowered the microphone down the shaft and listened intently at the amplified sounds it sent back to them. There was the expected creaking and

thumping and banging noises, but then there was something else; something they were not expecting. They claim that they heard human voices; many, many human voices; perhaps millions. At first they could not distinguish what was being said, but in a few moments they realized that they were hearing people screaming in pain.

He said that the hair on the back of his neck was standing up. It was startling and very eerie. And then the story ends abruptly. No mention is made as to what transpired after this discovery.

Of course the story is not true. But true or not, it shows that people are willing to offer unfounded ideas about what and where Hell is. It is probably nothing more than a hoax. But for the sake of argument, let's say it isn't. Let's say something actually happened down below the earth. If I had to guess, I would be compelled to label this experience as nothing more than sensationalism or suggestive hysteria.

Most people left alone in an old abandoned house will soon arrive at the opinion that they are not alone. The creaks and snapping in the walls and floors will cause the house to take on a personality of its own. If you add a few more people to the situation, replete with imaginations, soon the whole group will get the "willies" and swear they heard voices or saw moving shapes. It is human nature.

Deep in the darkness of the earth near a volcano, under the stress of knowing you could accidentally drill into an active lava tube, has to be unsettling. Listening to the squealing of your drill rig and the myriad natural sounds that might be picked up by a sensitive microphone, you have a situation much more subject to imaginations gone wild than even a rickety old house.

I do not mean to belittle these men for reacting to a scary situation in a normal way. Who among us has not been in a scary situation where our imaginations have played tricks on us? It happens and it is normal. We need to recognize that what these scientists experienced was nothing more than group hysteria dynamics at work, and not assign some supernatural overtone to it.

It is quite preposterous to think that man could ever access those spiritual places (Hell or Heaven) that God has set aside without meeting the pre-qualifying criteria for that access, namely, dying. God has gone on the record that he will not allow it. He has established supernatural borders that cannot be crossed under any circumstances by humans on this side or the other. There is no doubt that other than humans can make contact with this world, but that is another study altogether.

Just for the sake of argument, think of the possibilities and ramifications there would be if mankind were able to access the next life prematurely, a sort of modern day Tower of Babel, if you will. If we can hear them, as this group of scientists claim, then with a little more effort we could see them. If we could see them, we will eventually be able to reach them. If we could reach them, we could rescue them and pull them from that abyss.

In essence, we could circumvent the providence and will of God. We could take the cross symbols off the walls and from around our necks. We would no longer need a savior, because we could save ourselves. We could have special rescue squads ready to go, trained in high temperature evacuation and outfitted with the latest heat resistant gear.

And since, according to scripture, those we rescued had been given superior bodies by God to ensure they would not be consumed in their punishment, we would now have a super race who could not die. With a little cross-breeding and planning, we could have a race that no longer needed or depended upon their creator. That would make God obsolete and the humanists and atheists would have arrived.

Sorry for getting carried away here, but sometimes you have to take something to the extreme in order to see the absurdity to it. I find great calamity in the account of this scientist. First, he is, or at least was an admitted atheist. I know that it is not impossible for a confessed atheist to be enlightened and converted, but when that atheist is also a secular scientist, a communist, and in all probability an evolutionist, the probability is very, very low no matter what the circumstances.

Dealing with a spiritual void in a person is one thing, but overcoming communism, humanism, intellectualism and evolution theory all at the same time is almost an insurmountable task. The Bible says that even God gave these types up to their wicked devices.

Second, while I am not a scientist, I believe common sense tells me that lowering a microphone into temperatures exceeding 2,000 degrees, would surely be the end of that apparatus. With temperatures much less than that, pig iron melts. What magical substance was this microphone encased in that it could withstand temperatures that would melt a battleship?

Finally, there was no documentation or proof given to support this account. There were no sworn affidavits, no log records, and no investigation into the facts. Rather we are given the scientist's personal testimony and expected to accept it at face value. At face value it fails, and is relegated to fodder for an X-Files episode.

What's more, a scientist knows that theory and ideas must be supported by scientific evidence and proof. The man was asking us to merely take him at his word, a complete violation of the rules by which he as a scientist lives by. There were no checks and balances, no tests, no proofs, no collaborating discovery. All we have is his word. For all we know the "spirits" he heard were coming from a bottle of Russian vodka.

Finally, we do not know what ulterior motives might have been in play. If you read some of the accounts on the internet, you will see that it appears there was an agenda we are not privy to.

All that aside, returning to the original, unpopular point that I wanted to make, I believe that Hell is a real place and that the Bible account of it is true. Despite the fact that we

cannot see, hear or smell Hell from our physical plane, and in opposition to all the arguments against God making such a place, I do believe it exists.

And, as I stated earlier, I believe that the spiritual place called Hell is physically contained in the core of earth. I cannot say where it is actually located or how deep beneath the surface it is, but I can offer substantial evidence to convince you that I am right. A disclaimer first; under no circumstances should what I share with you lend any credibility to the story perpetrated by the scientist we spoke of. I completely reject his story, because it cannot be supported or reconciled to what the Bible tells us.

Now then, the evidence that Hell is a real place is not skimpy or inadequate. It is not an imaginary place conjured up by a fire and brimstone preacher to keep his flock in line. The Bible provides overwhelming evidence that is compelling and that leaves us with no other verdict but that Hell is real. In fact, if I were to list all the references to this place in the New Testament, you would tire of rustling through the pages to check them. I think what I have listed and explained below should be sufficient to convince you.

Hell, the place of punishment, is mentioned more in the parables of Jesus and in more of the Epistles and other books than Heaven ever is. The fact that people prefer to believe in the latter and not the former does nothing to diminish the fact that Hell exists. You may never have seen the Rock of Gibraltar or a picture of it, but I can assure you that it does exist. Whether you believe it exists or not does not alter that fact.

I have to be honest here; I cannot actually personally assure you that it exists, because I have never personally seen it. One of the ships I was stationed on in the Navy passed by it perhaps 30 times during my three long cruises to that region, but each time we passed it, it was either nighttime or a heavy fog was present. On those few occasions where we passed by in daylight on a clear day, I was on duty and could not leave my post. Sometimes I wonder if I had actually been adopted and my real parents surname was Murphy.

At any rate, I know the rock exists, even if I never personally saw it. Others have seen it and told me about it. They have shared pictures of it with me. The evidence is overwhelming and I believe.

Whether you or I believe something exists or not only impacts us personally. The fact that it exists is not changed by what you or I think. The things of God will always be a matter of personal faith. God arranged it that way. He would rather we place our faith in him, being convinced by his Word and Spirit, then have us question his authority and ability, asking him to prove himself again and again.

God counts faith as the most crucial element of the spiritual life. Jesus said to his disciples (and I paraphrase it for clarity): *"Ye believe because ye have seen, blessed are they who believe without seeing"*.

When one relies upon their faith, one's belief in that thing is sincere and the knowledge of that thing is important. If one cannot muster faith in a thing, then that person does not believe in it. Faith is a perfect test of the heart of a person, and God displays his infinite wisdom in requiring the individual to display faith. In this matter of Hell, one must truly believe it exists in order to want to avoid going there.

Now let us look at the characteristics and dimensions of Hell. There is a lot of information offered in scripture.

WHAT IS HELL LIKE

Hell is a real place with real dimensions and characteristics. They are briefly discussed below:

Hell is an Everlasting Ending

There is an abundance of scripture to support this. We will excerpt only a few from one book, but there are many, many others.

- Matthew 13:40-42

"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire: so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity: and shall cast them into a furnace of fire...."

- Matthew 25:41

"Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire...."

- Matthew 25:46

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment...."

Hell is Growing

In Isaiah, chapter 5 we are told that Hell is enlarging itself. One might argue that this speaks of the grave, and they would be correct. But they would be only partially correct. The actual indication is that what lies beyond the grave (Hell) is being increased in size by the sheer numbers being added to it via the grave. The actual place is not growing, in and of itself, but the population is growing exponentially, forcing it to expand.

Matthew 7:13 tells us that many are going to enter into Hell because they did not find the right way (see verse 14 also). These trusted something other than the Son of God; perhaps good works or an experience, etc.

But that same Lord who they did not trust gave compassionate warning in that same verse. He said:

**"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way,
that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat".**

You will have to read the entire text to get the gist of what is being said, but it is pretty straight-forward. Simply, the Lord is saying enter in at the straight gate. The straight gate is the way through the shed blood of Jesus the Christ. It is the way that leads to life everlasting, not the other gate that so many others are choosing to follow. That gate leads to destruction.

Now let us camp out on this thought of Hell's volume for a moment. The Bible says Hell is enlarging itself. It is growing bigger. That makes sense since so many are being added to it each day. Approximately 55 million people pass away annually. The Lord Jesus tells us plainly that most of these have chosen the wide gate and broad way that leads to destruction, or Hell.

Register in your mind, if you can, how that after many, many centuries of people consuming natural resources that cannot be replenished (i.e. trillions of barrels of oil, trillions of tons of coal, wood and other combustibles, etc.) that the earth has not gotten smaller? Surely the sheer volume of all these materials, coupled with the rusting away of metals and the consumption of forests and fields by controlled burn, wildfires and volcanoes, represents an enormous, substantial piece of real estate. And yet the earth not only has not shrunk in size, but continues to enlarge itself.

Many things that are consumed recycle back into the environment and are used again and again. Water is one of those things. I have always been amazed by water, how it comes from the ground into my home, is consumed by me and then it passes through me, back into the earth via a sewage treatment plant, evaporates, becomes airborne and travels to another part of the earth to become part of someone else's eco-system.

Water is recyclable. It is perpetual and never seems to be actually consumed. But this is not so with other natural resources. As we said above, coal, wood, oil and other combustible materials have been burned in great volume and are gone forever, save the small amount of ash and pollutants left behind?

The huge furnace beneath our feet is pouring out seemingly inexhaustible amounts of earth's molten core to form new surface earth. Volcanic activity is more prevalent today than at any other time in modern history. In effect, the earth is expanding under great pressure and is expelling materials out to make room for...well that is the question isn't it; to make room for what?

It is a most discomfoting thought, but I believe the earth is enlarging itself to accommodate an ever-growing Hell. That is one of the properties of Hell; that it is enlarging itself. Perhaps, better stated, Hell is filling itself.

If you would humor me with a short trip down a rabbit trail, something has always bothered me about science's view of the internal thermals of the earth. I have always wondered why the earth is so hot. Earth is not a gaseous ball like the sun. It does not have a burning fuel on or beneath the surface. And yet, much of the earth's innards, we are told, are molten; so hot that the very rock core is melted into liquid form.

The question that comes to my mind is "*Why*"? Why is the core of the earth so hot? If I were to accept the big bang theory (which I absolutely do not), then it could be that the great ball called earth was once very hot and is still cooling after millions or even billions of years. The problem is the earth is not cooling. It is an established fact of science that it is getting hotter.

Now, if science is correct about the earth being billions of years old (and again, I disagree with that hypothesis), how can they explain that the earth, void of some sort of internal combustion mechanism, has not cooled after all those years? Things cool when they do not have a heat source. The cement at the Hoover dam took decades to completely cure and cool, but it eventually happened. Each day the mass grew cooler, until finally it was finished cooling.

Shouldn't the earth, regardless of its greater mass, progressively cool? Isn't it logical that the cooling process applies to all matter, irrespective of size? But instead, it grows progressively hotter. And I am not talking about the earth's atmosphere. Rather, I am specifically discussing the earth's core.

I know through my own experiences with heat that anything left without a heat source eventually cools, even something as large as the earth. You can heat the toughest metal to the point where it turns glowing red, but left alone for 30 minutes, it cools back to its normal temperature.

I had a big burn area behind a home I used to own. There I burned the Spring and Fall trimmings and leaves. I had the area surrounded by large rocks in a circular shape. Often, the fire got so hot that the rocks glowed red. Despite this, when the fire burned itself out, it did not take long for the several hundred rocks to cool down. Without the heat source, the rocks simply cooled. Isn't the earth subject to the same laws of physics?

As I contemplated this issue of non-cooling, it occurred to me that one possibility might be that the earth is some sort of heat engine, generating heat from some process taking place way down deep under the surface. This not being my area of expertise, I had to defer this thought to others who should have been able to answer my question.

I sought out friends who were high school science teachers and asked them to explain to me how the earth could be getting hotter instead of cooling. They could not. They went deep into thought and it appeared they were going to give me an answer, but instead, they hemmed and hawed for a few moments and then, in honesty, both respectively said "*I don't know*".

Another friend; in fact, a very close friend, was a Chemistry Professor at the University of Miami. He is a very intelligent and well-read individual. He seemingly knows everything; always willing and able to discuss any topic intelligently. But he too, did not know.

My own son is a Physicist. He is a very intelligent individual as well. He has an amazing thought process and quite a repertoire of knowledge on a variety of topics. He thinks things through and provides lucid and compelling responses to most questions. But he too did not have an answer.

Recently, a group of American scientists tried to float the idea of a giant ball of fissionable material floating around in a hollow void in the center of the earth, but it never really took root. There were so many problems with this theory that no one seemed able to remedy them. One of the biggest problems was that there was absolutely no evidence to support the theory. It was based upon a "*think out of the box*" mentality with absolutely no basis.

The only other possibility, from a scientific standpoint would be that there was some sort of large-scale, constant friction taking place beneath the surface. This seemed a bit more plausible to me since it is common knowledge that earthquakes often come from the scraping of continental shelves and plates moving against each other. So could there be continental or layer collisions going on that we are not yet privy to?

Logic tells us that in order for this phenomenon to occur and produce such heat through friction, the resulting earthquake activity would be unprecedented and almost continuous. The energy that would be required to maintain a constant and growing heat exchange would almost guarantee that there would not be a structure left standing on the planet.

My thoughts and conclusions may not be totally sound. I am first to admit that I am not a scientist and I just do not know the answers to the questions I ask. But I have asked many scientists who should know and they are apparently as much in the dark as you and I. An abundance of research on the internet has not produced answers either. It seems the three theories I mentioned above are brought up time and time again, but supporting proof is never offered.

I can only conclude therefore, that the earth's heat comes from some mysterious or unknown force. I submit that this mysterious force is nothing more than the providence of God. He produces the heat. The heat is likely produced by the flames of Hell.

Now, I know some will laugh or scoff, but in the absence of any other viable explanation, mine is as good as anyone else's. At least with my idea I provide substantial Biblical proof and some logical reasoning.

In I Peter chapter three we are told that while Jesus' body lay motionless in the grave, he went in his spirit to *preach unto the spirits in Hell, which was unmistakably in the earth. In his letter to the Ephesians, chapter four, verse nine, the Apostle Paul confirms the location to where Jesus went. The reference point is Earth. He qualifies that by saying that before he ascended up (from off the earth), he would first have to descend down (into the earth). Specifically, he wrote:

"Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?"

*It is commonly believed that this is where the doctrine of purgatory began as it is imagined that Jesus went to preach repentance to those who were not qualified for Heaven. This is not what this passage says. Faithful translation of this passage shows that Jesus was not "preaching" but "heralding". He was heralding himself as Lord of Lord and King of Kings. We are told in the New Testament "*Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*". Jesus was fulfilling this scripture, ensuring that these knees and these tongues knew who he was.

Many other verses identify the location of this place called Hell as well. Here are only a few samplings:

- Revelation 9:1-2

"And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace...."

The place this angel fell to was Earth. Once there, he proceeded to open the bottomless pit. The bottomless pit is Hell and it unquestionably is in the earth.

This same pit is mentioned over and over again in scripture. There are some small variances in the application, but the location remains the same...in the earth. And so you do not think this is strictly a New Testament occurrence, in Numbers 16:32-33 we see this same location being pinpointed. We are told about the wrath of God being measured out against a man named Korah, who had disobeyed the Lord and grieved him. God consumed his whole family and we are told:

"And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation."

The implication of this account is obvious. They did not immediately die, but went alive into this place of God's wrath, this "pit" called Hell. I am not going to address the reason for God's wrath extending to his entire family, because that would steer this lesson in a direction I do not want it to go.

Suffice it to say, God's judgments are always righteous and right. But rather than discuss them, I just want the reader to see this harsh account of God's wrath so that they realize God is not only a God of love and mercy, but of holiness and judgment. He has made a place called Hell. Irrespective of what you and I may choose to believe, Hell is real. It exists. And it is in the earth.

Other passages you might visit are Isaiah 14: 9-15 and Ezekiel 32:18-21. There are many more, to be sure, but these should give adequate representation of what the Bible teaches on hell and its location.

Hell is a Place in Contrast With the Human Spirit

There are things that each of us dislike, perhaps even hate. They make us ill, scare us or just make us feel plain "icky". One may not like spiders. Another may not like rock music. Some detest tuna fish and so on and so forth. These are everyday things that some people are at variance with. They are not common dislikes, but individual phobias or repulsions. They are not things in contrast with the human spirit that we all share, but rather in contrast with individual preferences and tastes.

While I do not believe that there will be spiders or tuna fish in Hell, there will be aspects of Hell that are in contrast to every human spirit. I do not mean that those confined there will merely dislike these things, but rather that they will find them to be repulsively in contrast to their nature, stirring deep fear and loathing. The contrasts will be profound and will shake sufferers to their core.

I will list these in no particular order and give at least a couple of scripture references for them. Please know that the scripture given is not the sum of evidence available. There are literally hundreds of passages in both the Old and New Testaments to support this snapshot of Hell that I offer.

For lack of a better term, let us call these the dimensions of Hell. They are:

First, Hell is a place of **Fire**.

If Hell is known universally by any characteristic at all, it is known as a place of fire. Invariably, when Hell is referred to in any setting, be it religious or political, in jest or in seriousness, it is the flames or fire that are emphasized. We even incorporate this characteristic of Hell into our communications. You have heard people say jokingly, "*It is as hot as Hell*" or in anger, "*I hope you burn in Hell*". I certainly do not condone such language, but it is part of our culture. We recognize that Hell is a place of fire.

Fire is something that we ordinarily do not fear when it is used for the purpose God gave it. But when it becomes a threat to us, those we love, or our property, it becomes a very frightful thing. Uncontrolled fire is scary. Just ask the people who live in the hills of our western states, where wildfires seem to be an annual occurrence. In just a few moments, fire can rob you of all you own, all that is important to you, and even your life.

During idle moments of chit-chat, when people talk about how they want to die (and you know we have all done this), almost without exception, rather than disclosing how we prefer to die, we default to emphatically stating how we do not want to die. Invariably, people go on record saying *"Well, I don't want to die in a fire"*. The fear of fire is so deeply rooted in our nature that we are involuntarily compelled to utter this disclaimer, as if by saying it, we ensure it will not happen.

Of course most of us prefer to die in our sleep, and even then of some peaceful ailment. We make sure we state that fact and then add a list of alternate choices in cascading order of preference. But I have never met anyone who voluntarily had death by fire on their list. No one ever says *"I guess dying by fire would be exciting"*. Fire just unsettles the human spirit. It frightens us to our core. The thought of our flesh, the flesh we have come to love, boiling off our bodies is just too much to bear even in thought.

That is what makes Hell so objectionable and contrary a place; because it is a place of fire, and burning is one of the few things that is in direct contrast to our soul. Just read these few verses and judge for yourself the impact that this truth has upon you:

- Matthew 13:41-42

"The Son of man shall send for his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire...."

- Matthew 25:41

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire...."

- Luke 16:24

"And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame"

Fire is the most egregious characteristic of Hell. The thought of being thrown into perdition's flames assaults the human imagination and spirit and leaves one shaken. But Hell's despair does end there. There is more.

Next, Hell is a place of **Darkness**.

Hell will not only be a place of fire. It will also be a place of total and complete darkness. The Bible clearly teaches this to be the case.

- Matthew 8:12

"But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness..."

- II Peter 2:4

"For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment...."

- Jude 6 & 13

"And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved to everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day....Raging waves of the sea, foaming out of their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever".

The last portion of this passage is addressing ungodly men, not angels only. It extends the fate of the fallen angels (demons) to include those humans who are considered ungodly. It clearly teaches that those who refuse God's grace and gift of eternal life, who, in so doing reserve for themselves a spot in this place called Hell, will not only be in flames for all eternity, but also in darkness.

One could logically argue that there is an apparent contradiction in these characteristics. How could Hell be both fire and darkness at the same time? Everyone knows that fire gives light. If there is fire, there has to be light and therefore no darkness.

Obviously, for some, this one small disparity completely refutes the whole idea that there is a Hell at all. Some people look for any reason to deny that Hell exists. This then is a loophole they can latch on to. They can now safely reject what the Bible says about Hell because they have identified a contradiction.

Well, just hold your horses there partner. Don't take your victory lap just yet. I have faith that God knows what he is talking about; that what he wrote is right and true. If God says that there is fire and darkness at the same time, then there is fire and darkness. Let me give you a scenario where both can be true. You can have a fire burning brightly, projecting great light in every direction, but a blind person or someone with their eyes sealed shut could not see that light. Am I saying that God is going to blind everyone before putting them in Hell? No, I am not saying that. There is no support for such a

position in scripture. The report we have of the rich man in Hell was that he "...*lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham*".

Admittedly, this was Hades and not the Hell we are speaking of right now, and there are some differences; so we could safely claim the rich man was not a good representation of what will be experienced in Hell. That notwithstanding, I think it is certain that everyone will have sight in Hell. In fact, even those who went through this life blind will have their sight restored. My hypothesis was only meant to show that there is a logical way both fire and darkness could be present; but I absolutely do not subscribe to that theory.

So how then is it possible to have fire and darkness? As the Bible says of things like this, "*With men it is not possible, but with God all things are possible*". In other words, if God wants something to be, it just is that way, by his very will.

However, for the sake of argument, I would like to share some facts with you as presented by Dr. Al Lacey in his sermon "The Horrors of Hell". It is an extraordinary sermon that all should hear. It will give unbelievers a clear picture of what is ahead for them without the Lord in their lives and stir the heart of believers to serve him more perfectly.

Addressing this very contrast between fire and darkness, Dr. Lacey offered that there are many levels or degrees of fire. He delineated them in his sermon, using the flame from a gas stove as an example.

To begin he said, when you turn the burner on, you will notice that there is a blue flame present. The blue flame is that flame that first appears on your gas stove, close to the jets. It is very hot, but it is nevertheless, the coolest flame known to man.

Intermingled among the blue flames, you can see little yellow flames. The yellow flame begins where the blue flame leaves off. It is hotter than the blue flame.

Then on the tips of the yellow flames you will see orange flames. The orange flame is the start of some very serious heat. It is hotter than the yellow flame and hotter than the blue flame.

Then, if you put a pot over the flame on the stove, and let it sit for a few minutes, you will see little red flames intermittently appearing and licking at the bottom of the pot. You have heard the term "*Red hot*". This flame is hotter than orange, hotter than yellow, hotter than blue. It appears when a fire has been burning for awhile and increases its heat output. It is the hottest flame you will find on your gas stove.

But the colors do not stop there. There are flames that register even more heat. If you have ever watched a welder at work, you will have noticed that the flame at the end of his torch is white. You have heard the term "*White hot*". This flame is hotter even than red, hotter than orange, hotter than yellow and hotter than blue.

In fact, it is the hottest flame that man is able to produce. This flame is used to cut through metal. It is a dangerous flame because of its heat output, but it is also dangerous to look at without protective eyewear. It gives off a light that can damage the human eye.

When I was a young man, I was observing a welder using this white flame. Another bystander warned me not to stare at the flame for more than a few seconds or it could hurt my eyes. Of course, youth perceives "*don't*" as a challenge and in keeping with that expectation, I stared at the flame of a welder for about a minute before it actually hurt to do so.

It did not occur to me at the time that the man welding was wearing a very dark shield over his face to protect his eyes. That should have been enough of a warning for me. But it wasn't. No matter, I was young and I knew that I would be okay. And after a few seconds of rubbing my eyes, they were just fine again anyway....until the next morning.

When I awoke the next morning, I was in torment. My eyes felt like they had sand in them. It was not just uncomfortable; it was agonizing pain. I cried out for my mother (in a manly sort of way of course). My mother rushed me to the Naval hospital, where the doctor said that I had scabs on my eyes. And that was exactly what it felt like. It was very, very painful and also very scary.

Fortunately, it turned out that the damage was temporary and I was told the eyes would heal within 24 hours. They did, and was I ever thankful that I had not stared at that flame any longer than I had.

So then, the hottest flame man has been able to reproduce is the white flame, a very dangerous flame. But it doesn't end yet. There is more. In photographing the sun through a series of filters, scientists have discovered one more color of flame that we had not previously known about.

That flame is hotter than blue, hotter than yellow, hotter than orange, hotter than red and hotter even than white. Do you know what color that light is? You guessed it...**Black!** The black flame is the hottest flame known. And of course, the black flame does not produce light. Clearly, Hell can be fire and darkness. God knows what he is talking about.

Some might still argue "*So what if the flame is black and Hell is pitch black; I am not afraid of the dark*"? Well, I don't buy that age-old macho argument. Even the biggest, meanest man is afraid of the dark under the right circumstances. It has been my observation and experience that everyone is afraid of the dark on some level.

I suppose the level of apprehension one has really depends upon what kind of dark you are talking about. Some can walk down a dark alley with little fear, but find it impossible to walk through a cemetery at night because they are superstitious.

Take me for example. I am an Everglades person. I love the Florida Everglades. I do not live in Florida now, but when I did, I hiked in the Everglades several times each week. When I could not get off during the day to do this, I would hike at night. I had no apprehensions. I loved the Everglades and being out in the dark with alligators and snakes was something I enjoyed.

But, put me in an alley in the inner city or in a deserted castle with the pale moonlight filtering in through a window, and I might not be so bold. Someone who lives in the city may have no problem in that alley, but let me take them out in the Everglades one night out of their comfort zone and their stress level will rise.

My point is that everyone is afraid of the dark on some level. You know it is true, so quit trying to convince yourself that it isn't. You may be the bravest person in the world in front of others, but when you are alone in the dark...well, there is just something about the dark that grates against your human nature. We hear things in the dark that aren't there in the daylight. We imagine things that we would not imagine in daylight.

At the risk of boring you by repeating a story that is one of my other books, let me share this with you. It illustrates perfectly what I am trying to convey to you. As a child I had an experience in the dark that underscores my contention that there is just something about the dark.

My best friend was staying over one night, and like all junior boys, we had plans of staying up all night. But long before that happened, we wore out my parent's patience, who in frustration that I only understand now as an adult, finally ordered us to my room.

There we entertained ourselves as quietly as we could for awhile, but there is just so much you can do in a small room without making noise. So noise we made. And once the volume reached critical mass for my parents, they put the skids on our fun and ordered us to sleep. All there was left to do now was to talk and giggle.

That did not last long. Before we knew it, we began drifting off to sleep. Somewhere in that almost asleep/still semi-awake phase, there was a loud crashing noise outside. We jumped up on the bed to look out the window to see what had caused the commotion. It was kind of exciting and kind of scary all at the same time, because we lived in a remote corner of the naval base with the bay and docks right behind my house.

There actually was nothing to fear. All the neighbors were Navy families and the base was inaccessible to the general public. It was a typical military family housing area with zero crime and frequent patrols by the Shore Patrol. But in the dark, all the places where we played with abandon during daylight, took on an air of mystery and danger.

As I looked out the window I was standing at, through the corner of my eye I caught movement in the window directly across the room from me. To my horror, there was a man standing in the other window. I could not make out who it was. It was just too dark

and the man was just a shadowy figure. I froze and did not know what to do. There was a lump in my throat the size of my fist and my heart was pounding wildly.

I was too frightened to know what my friend was thinking, but I was sure he saw the man too, and certain that he saw the terror in my eyes. I was conscious of him next to me, but could not tell you what he was doing. Maybe it was his knees I heard knocking together (but I cannot be sure that it was not my own). But he was not my concern at the moment.

I regained some self-control and started to move toward the edge of the bed to jump and run screaming to my parents for help. To my horror, the man moved too and I felt he was getting ready to spring toward me and grab me. I looked around, and the shadowy man looked around too. I stood up straight and he stood up straight. I lifted my arm and he lifted his arm. I lifted my leg and he lifted his leg. Heeyyyyy!

The horrible, wicked man that I imagined to be a deranged serial killer was nothing more than my own shadow! Frozen by my fear, it had not even occurred to me that there was no other window in the room other than the one I had been looking out of. It was merely a shadow window caused by the moonlight coming through the real window.

There is just something about the dark isn't there? Even the biggest, burliest and bravest men, if they are honest, will admit that there is just something about the dark. It goes against our nature. It instills apprehension and fear that we do not feel in the daylight.

And this earthly darkness is nothing in comparison to the total and complete darkness that prevails in this place called Hell. It is most certainly darkness and fire, two characteristics that cause great anxiety to the human heart.

Next, Hell is a place of **Unquenchable Thirst**.

The account of the rich man in Hell in Luke chapter 16 is one that most people are familiar with. What some may not understand is that it actually happened. It is not a parable; it is a real story with real characters. Even if it were a parable, the truth it teaches is apropos.

There is great suffering in Hell and that suffering, in addition to fire and darkness, includes another one of the most torturous things the human body can endure, thirst. Hell will be, or rather is and will remain a place of unquenchable thirst.

The human body can do without the addictions we have burdened ourselves with; nicotine, alcohol, sugar, etc. It may be tough to withdraw from and do without them if we have allowed ourselves to become dependent upon them, but our bodies can persevere. We do not need them to function.

Our bodies also need nutrients to function and survive, but they can even function without those for an extended period of time. One might grow weak in such a scenario, but people have lasted months without much sustenance.

But without water, you cannot make it very long at all. Depending upon the prevailing environmental conditions, you could expire in less than 48 hours without water. Water takes second seat only to oxygen. It is an important and necessary element.

Thirst is something everyone has endured. I do not have to explain it to you. You have experienced it firsthand at one time or another. However, there is a difference between thirst and extreme thirst. Thirst is uncomfortable. It is undesirable. But usually you know you can quench that thirst by walking to the nearest water fountain or canteen. It is not life-threatening.

Extreme thirst is when you have been thirsty and unable to quench that thirst for a long period of time; you have endured fluid-sapping conditions for a measurable time and your thirst has now become a matter of life and death. You are parched and it feels like you have sand in your throat. This is life-threatening thirst. It is most miserable.

I used to hike in the desert a lot in southwestern Texas. In the summer months it is a like a furnace in that area. I have been miles away from my truck and out of water. In the short time it took me to get back to the truck, the sun had drained me of most of my stored fluid and I was nearing the danger point. All I needed to make me feel worse was to have some yahoo tell me *"But it is a dry heat!"*

To be honest, I really was not in danger. I planned well enough not to be too far away from my truck and had an ample supply of cool, quenching water in the cooler within. Still, I was extremely thirsty. I had not anticipated that the heat would soar to the level it had so quickly. I thought it would take several more hours.

The negative effect on my body was considerable. Getting to my water supply became my number one priority. My entire concentration was on getting water. Nothing else mattered.

I cannot imagine what it was like for this rich man in Hell who asked only for a drop of water...just one small drop! He must have been out of his mind with the torment of the heat and dryness. It must have been at least 100 times worse than any thirst I have endured in the desert and without any possibility of receiving even that one drop he craved. What a terrible place, this place called Hell. It is one of flame, darkness and thirst.

Next is a place of **Unfulfilled Desire**.

The torment and suffering of Hell is not only physical. It is also mental and emotional. There are many indications in scripture that suggest one's lusts will remain with them in Hell. In other words, if you were an alcoholic, you will crave alcohol. If you were addicted to pornography, you will crave pornography. If you were hooked on drugs or nicotine, you will crave those.

The difference is that in Hell there will never be a time when you will be able to satisfy those lusts or desires. And they will never subside. On earth, if you have the will power and can stick with it, the desire for nicotine or alcohol will subside to the point you can handle it and kick the habit. That will not be possible in Hell. There, you are lost in your lusts and desires, but never, never, never being able to satisfy or gratify yourself.

I started smoking at age nine and continued that bad habit for more than 20 years. I loved smoking, but I knew it was a bad thing. It was killing me slowly. I saw the evidence of it in my labored breathing and in the colorful phlegm I coughed up each morning. I knew without anyone telling me, that I had to quit.

Like so many of you, I literally tried to quit more than 100 times and that is no exaggeration. I would make it a day or two and then slip up. This happened nine or ten times a year and went on for many years.

When I finally realized that I was hurting the temple of God and grieving his spirit, I found the resolve to finally quit for good. Surprisingly, it was not difficult at all. There was very little craving and virtually no withdrawal shakes. Within one week what little craving I had was completely gone and my habit of smoking was finally over.

What made the difference was the fact that I wanted to quit. I had it in my mind to stop; that was what I wanted. The battle was over. Now, some 30 years later, I enjoy clean lungs and smooth, clear breathing.

It is important to note however, that at any time, I could have decided that I wanted to go back to smoking. Like the other 100 times where I tried to quit, I could have simply changed my mind and picked up a cigarette. On earth, we can cater to our lusts or we can resist them and eventually be free of them. We have that choice.

But in Hell, we can do neither. Our lusts will be magnified many times what they are here, but we will not be able to gratify ourselves. And no matter our level of resolve, they shall not subside. Lusts, desires, concerns, worries, anxiety...all will be present and unchecked in eternal punishment.

In Luke 16, the rich man had genuine concern for the eternity of his brothers, who were, at that time, still alive on earth. Despite his anguish and pain, he was able to cater to the desires and concerns of his heart. He was able to display emotion. His heart was broken for his brothers. He knew the depths and despair of Hell and that he was forever entombed there. Notice, he did not ask to be let out. He did not ask for a second chance. Those in Hell know that Hell is forever. But he was anxious for those he loved, that they should not come to that place.

There is great sorrow in Hell. Throughout the gospels Jesus said there would be weeping and wailing in Hell. No doubt some of this will be caused by one's personal torment and pain, but there can be no mistaking that emotional duress and stress will be experienced

as well. The body will suffer, but so too will the mind and heart. Revelation 14:11 says of Hell's occupants:

**"And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever:
and they have no rest..."**

"*No rest*" can mean many things, but the list must include mental anguish. The dictionary defines torment as being both physical and mental pain, but it leans more heavily to mental anguish, worry, sorrow, harassment and annoyance. Those things will overwhelm those who find themselves in this awful place.

In Mark 9:44, 46 and 48 it says:

"Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"

So many conjectured ideas have been spawned by these words "*the worm*". I use the word "conjectured" purposely to point out that there is just not enough evidence to prove what is meant by the term. My opinion, which I shall give in a moment, is also conjecture, but I have thought long and hard on all that is said in scripture and feel my understanding is at least as worthy as that of anyone else.

Some have said the worm is the "inner man". Others believe that men and women actually become literal worms. In fact, I read somewhere years ago that there are huge worms found on the ocean floor around cracks created by volcanic activity. They hypothesize that people actually turn into these and other worms, losing their human shape. Some carry their silly ideas to the extreme, imagining that these worms are escapees from Hell, coming through the cracks in the ocean floor. Maybe it is unfair of me to mock them, but a person who entertains such ridiculous ideas should be treated like the fool that he/she is.

I don't buy any of these ideas, especially the worm look-alike idea. The rich man opened up his eyes in Hell and called over to Abraham. We are given the impression that he was still human in appearance as when he was alive on earth. He was not a worm. Indeed, there is no basis for any conjecture that people somehow evolve into worms. It is an theologically immature and unskilled interpretation of the account.

I perceive most of these ideas to be sensationalism. People everywhere want their 15 minutes of fame and so they say and write things that will provoke public interest and response. I understand that. I suppose there was a time when I wanted my 15 minutes as well, but when it comes to the things of God, one must set aside self and serve God's purposes rather than their own. Sensationalism never serves God. It only confuses the simple truth God wants people to understand.

All other published opinions considered, as I assess all that scripture says about this "*worm*", I am convinced that the term is a reference to the consciousness of a person, or if you will, the soul. When the Lord says the worm dieth not, he says there will be

weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. These three reactions are a product of consciousness. For one to interpret these passages then to mean "...where the consciousness dieth not" seems to be an honest representation of the intent in Christ's words.

Because the worm or consciousness does not die, Hell will be a place where the lusts of this flesh continue to thrive unabated. Fire, darkness, thirst and unfulfilled lust and temptation spell a most horrific eternity.

Finally, we have some **Miscellaneous Thoughts on Hell.**

Other characteristics of Hell are important to note too. In addition to there being fire, burning, darkness, unquenchable thirst and unfulfilled desire, it seems that there will be other aspects of Hell that contrast with human nature and prey on our fears. One of them is constant falling. There are several places in scripture that allude to this, but admittedly we are not given great detail.

No matter what it amounts to, falling is something quite upsetting to a frail and fragile human being. Studies have shown that one of the most common features of recurring nightmares is the sensation of falling. The urban legend of dreams tells us that if we fall and die in a dream and do not wake up, we will actually die in our sleep. Of course, this premise is ridiculous, but the false claim serves to evidence that falling is a basic fear of humans.

We can surmise from all the other dimensions that we discussed that it will be a place of great suffering, loneliness and despair. It will be a place of no escape and no end. There will be nothing to look forward to and no one to help share your pain, as the indication is that Hell is a place of solitude for those who enter in.

Though alone, the pain and anguish of others will probably be heard. This can only add to one's despair. There will be no real contact between people in Hell. The proverbial "*I am going to party with all my friends.*" many imagine will never take place and loneliness will prevail.

But undoubtedly, the worst thing about Hell is that it will be a place void of the presence of God. At face value, some might think that is not such a bad thing. But consider this; God has been present everywhere in human history. The earth has not known one day, one hour or one moment without the Spirit of God being present. During the best and worst moments of earth, God's spirit was here. He held evil in check. He comforted the weary of heart. He gave testimony to the existence of God and the authority of God's Word.

It may be hard to accept or understand, but God was here during all the low moments of history, through Pearl Harbor, 9/11, the Spanish Inquisition, the Holocaust, and so on and so forth. He may not have intervened as much as some thought he should have, but he

assures us that without him present the evil one would have done even more evil and damage.

Nothing escaped his omniscient eye. Proverbs 15:3 tells us "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*" Someday, he will balance the books on all the ills and evil of this world and he will exact justice and judgment. So do not concern yourself about that. It is a done deal. But he has kept the lid on this world and kept it from exploding or imploding as the case may be, from the effects of rampant and unchecked sin.

Most of sense will admit that even in our lowest hour we felt God's presence. There was not utter despair. There was always a way out and up. When we called his name out in the middle of the night in our tears, we felt that our words were heard. He may not always answer in the way we want, but inside, we know he is there and it gives us hope. It strengthens our faith.

But there will be no hope or faith in Hell. God will not be present there. Hell will be void of the presence and influence of God. He will not hear those in Hell who cry out to him and they will never gain his audience. Prayers will for the first time in man's history, literally bounce back off the ceiling.

The torment, anguish and pain that is Hell will be endured in loneliness by those who enter in. There will be no neighbors to lean on for support. There will be no contact with others. The inhabitants of Hell will be utterly and totally alone. There will be no access to God, no atonement that can be made, no appeal process, no hope, no purgatorial process, nothing but suffering under the wrath of God's holiness. God's holiness demands that sin pay the penalty of death.

I must say again, speaking from my human and sinful heart, I wish there was not a place called Hell. I am shaken to my core to think so many will allow themselves to go to this God-forsaken place. I am thankful that I was fortunate enough to see God's truth when someone shared it with me, and that I was wise enough to take care of business with God on God's terms before I faced that next world.

God did not make Hell for people. We are told in the Bible that it was made for "...*the devil and his angels.*" God does not want anyone to go to this awful place. He has done everything he can do to prevent it. He sent the prophets, he sent his Son, he wrote the Bible and he beckons to each heart to "come". Jesus said "**Behold I stand at the door (of your heart) and knock...**".

The individual must open their heart's door, believe in him and accept his atonement for their sin. For those who don't, they are rejecting God's gift of eternal life and choosing their own destiny. They are choosing, not God.

And as much as I wish this place were not real, it is as real as Heaven and Earth. It is not some fabled land far away or in another lifetime. It is not a cleverly concocted fairy tale

to keep society in order. Hell is real. It sits below our feet and it is on the horizon of each life. Don't let that be your destiny.

CHAPTER 19

The Unpardonable Sin

GUILTY



Never have spoken words been as important as when they came from the lips of Jesus and never have important words been more negatively scrutinized by men than his. I understand (and believe) that all the words of scripture were transmitted directly from God, and are therefore the words of Jesus, who is himself God. But the words of Jesus that are most often attacked and mocked are the words that he uttered personally while in the flesh upon this earth. Almost everything he said in person has been subjected to the most outrageous bias of unregenerate men and women.

To be fair, his words have sometimes been innocently misinterpreted without ulterior motive, but usually they are purposely misrepresented in order to favor other agendas. They have been changed to fit a particular religious point of view, made to seem harsh to pit those of other beliefs against Christianity, twisted to say something that they do not say, or altogether dropped from passages because there was no way to change or misinterpret them without it being blatantly obvious that one had another agenda.

We won't take time to delve into why men (and women) do such things. I think the motives of such people are very clear. They are self-serving. They want to promote themselves or their agenda. Perhaps they want fame or fortune. Whatever their motive, honesty and integrity are not factors that figure in.

Instead, I would like to look at one portion of scripture uttered personally by Jesus that has been one of the most maligned passages in the Bible and perhaps one of the most difficult to understand. It is found in Matthew chapter 12.

For whatever reasons, there have been more erroneous, off the wall explanations for what has come to be known as "*the unpardonable sin*" than any other doctrine, with perhaps the sole exception of the doctrine of salvation. And coincidentally, both of these topics are intricately tied together in these verses, as we shall see in this chapter.

In Matthew 12:31-32 Jesus said:

"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. 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."

As I said, there are many explanations offered for what this passage of scripture is saying, but as in all things of God, only one can be correct and true. I realize that when I take the position that everything is either black or white with no grey areas, it ruffles feathers. In

this day of political correctness we have raised up a generation whose mantra is *"tolerance for anything, everything and everybody"*. We cannot say that someone is wrong and another right; all hold their own views and should respect one another.

But that is not the way God sees things. He paints things in definite, definitive terms (i.e. *"thou shalt"* and *"thou shalt not"*, etc.). He identifies wrong and right and draws an unwavering border between the two. In order for us to be right, we must conform to his way. There is no compromise with God.

So then, there is only one right interpretation or understanding of this passage. All others are wrong. Some may be less wrong than others, but they are still wrong. As with all scripture, there is no guesswork with God. There is one meaning to what he said; not two, not three, and no grey area. It only remains to discover what this passage is saying.

As I said before, there is no magic ring or secret handshake when it comes to understanding scripture. There is no hidden code that must be deciphered. Discernment requires just one thing; that the reader be regenerated and indwelt with the Holy Spirit, the only one who can reveal the meaning.

This is not some revolutionary concept. Christians have known this since the day Christ breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit. To facilitate our understanding, yea to ensure it, believers are given his Holy Spirit when we trust him as savior. We are told in scripture that the Holy Spirit "explains" everything to us as we travel along on our path of growth. His Word, he tells us, *"...is spiritually discerned"*. The natural or unregenerate man (unbeliever) does not understand the spiritual things of his word. Only one who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit can.

These verses can be properly discerned and understood. Let us then get to the business of explaining the meaning, while also dispelling some of the erroneous assumptions made by some.

Some look at these verses and conclude that the unpardonable sin is committed when one blasphemes God by ascribing credit to Satan for what the Spirit of God has done. Others take a literal approach and think that one cannot say evil or naughty things about the Holy Spirit (i.e. calling him names or mocking him, etc.).

In truth, I can understand and agree with both of these views. Jesus vehemently rebuked those who accused him of being of Satan. He also carefully admonished men to not take the name of God in vain. Both of these infractions would seem to be unpardonable, would they not? But they are indeed pardonable. Even these things can be forgiven and put under the blood if men repent of them. The unpardonable sin is just that, unpardonable. It cannot be forgiven by God.

So these do not constitute *"...blasphemy against the Holy Ghost."* Then what does? The answer is in the doctrine of salvation, which by the way, neither of the two charges mentioned above take into consideration.

Salvation, or the reconciliation of fallen man to Holy God, is why Jesus came to this earth. The salvation of the mankind he loves is why he suffered. That is why he allowed himself to be mocked and beaten. That is why he allowed the Roman soldiers to rip his beard from his face and spit upon him. That is why he hung naked and humiliated before the world. He could have called legions of angels to destroy the world and rescue him, but he hung on that cross willingly to pay for our reconciliation. That is why he died.

And this is the big point now, so do not miss this - this is the primary reason that the Holy Spirit is in the world...to bring mankind to the Christ, to reveal these truths about the Christ of God to sinners, which every last one of us are.

Luke 19:10 says:

"For the Son of Man (Jesus) came to seek and to save that which was lost".

That is the truth that the Holy Spirit is here to drive home to every heart that will hear. That is his purpose to unbelievers, to tap on their heart's door with the gospel of Jesus Christ, to convict them of their sin, to lead them to repentance and to indwell and seal those who believe. That is the Holy Spirit's ministry to the unregenerate world.

Now in our text in Matthew, Jesus was revealing a great truth. What was the meat of that truth? Was it that Satan was receiving credit for what the Spirit was doing? It was not. Certainly Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees for accusing him of doing works in the name of the devil, but this was not the real problem he was addressing. The real problem was their refusal to acknowledge who he was, thereby undermining his authority and his claim that he and the Father are one.

Moreover, "*speaking against*" the Holy Ghost did not mean that someone had gone around smearing the name of God's Spirit by calling him names. There would be grave consequences for anyone doing such a thing. Despite the fact that the Jewish leadership all missed the boat on the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah, they revered Jehovah and would never tolerate blatant blasphemy of his name. So it is quite obvious Jesus was not saying that the unpardonable sin was people denigrating the Holy Spirit.

The only explanation left then, and quite frankly, the only explanation that fits with the rest of scripture, is that Jesus was pointing out how someone could come up short in obtaining salvation. Salvation is the result of forgiveness and these verses were addressing how one could miss that forgiveness. To explain these verses in any other way would be to put the Bible in conflict with itself, and that would be wrongfully dividing the Word of Truth.

Let me bring it all together to make it clear. That the Holy Spirit's primary purpose on earth is to woo men to Christ is very well established in scripture. The Holy Spirit both convinces and convicts men of sin so that they may be brought to God in repentance.

The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God (for instance Roman chapter 3) to show us that we all have sinned and are not worthy of God.

Once he convinces us in our hearts that we are lost in our sins, once we drop all of our pretenses and defenses and understand the true gospel message that we are lost and that is why Jesus had to die in our place, then he (the Holy Spirit) convicts us of that sin, making us feel the need to repent and to come to God on God's terms. Then as the "paraclete" (one called along side) he indwells each new convert and teaches them how to live Godly lives.

The Holy Spirit's mission to those who have not been convinced and convicted of sin is to do exactly that; to bring them to God. How does he do that? The answer is quite simple; he witnesses to that heart that Jesus is the Savior. He exposes us to the truths of salvation in God's Word.

There is no cookie-cutter method for his doing this either. He works differently in all of our lives. For one it might be that he speaks gently to your heart as you read the Bible or hear a sermon. For another it might take a near-death accident or experience. For another it might take seeing another pass away and contemplating whether there is an eternity or not.

But while his methods may vary, the message to our heart is constant and true; it is the gospel message, that Jesus Christ was born in the flesh so that he could become a sacrifice for our sin, a sacrifice that was holy, and also wholly acceptable to God. The message is reverberated throughout scripture over and over and over again that we might get the message right.

The message is to hear, believe, repent, and receive, nothing more and nothing less. Jesus said "*ye must be born again*", "*I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me*", and "*I am the true vine*."

Once an individual has heard this message, the Holy Spirit taps at their heart's door to let them know they have heard the truth. Some people have no trouble accepting the truth and respond immediately in a positive way. Others struggle with it, as I did, and have to defeat their own humanistic thinking in an internal battle. But no matter how it happens, when one comes to grips with the gospel and believes the report of God in his word, then, they must repent of the sin that separated them from God and receive the Lord Jesus as their own savior.

That is all the Bible teaches about salvation. There is no gauntlet of sacraments and experiences one must endure, no mediator between God and man save the Lord Jesus himself, no money that has to be paid, no other consideration.

Baptism is an important step of obedience in your new Christian life, but is not a component or requirement of salvation. The malefactor on the cross next to Jesus had no chance to be baptized. He merely expressed faith in Jesus, accepted who he was and

Jesus told him that he would be in paradise with him that day. There is nothing that one must do, or for that matter can do to obtain God's favor, except to believe in faith and accept the Lord Jesus as savior. It is a matter of accepting an already finished act of God's love for us.

Now, I said all that so that we could tie that salvation message in with the unpardonable sin and answer confidently what this sin is. If the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to deliver the message of salvation to each person, then for that person to speak against that message, or simply to reject it as false, is blasphemy. It is not so much blasphemy against God the Father or God the Son, but more against God the Holy Spirit, whose whole purpose toward sinners is to proclaim the reconciliatory love of God through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To reject this truth is to say you do not believe it as the truth and it is a blasphemous sin against the Holy Spirit of God. When these stuff-shirted religionists accused Jesus of having an evil spirit, it was not what they said that mattered, but their unbelief behind it. They were rejecting him as the Messiah and committing the unpardonable sin of rejecting the only means of salvation, which is faith in Christ Jesus.

And make no mistake, in God's eyes, rejection of his son by the scowling, hypocritical mob of Pharisees is no different than Jesus being rejected by a sweet, elderly lady who always did nice things in her life. To you and I it may seem different because we like to factor in the goodness of people. But God does not recognize our good as anything worthy of reconciliation.

He says "*All your righteousness is as filthy rags*". He does not recognize any self-merit or self-righteousness, but measures us by one standard and one standard only, rejection or acceptance of his son, whom he sacrificed for us. In fact, in Ephesians 2:8-9 he says:

"For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast".

It could not be any clearer than that. If there was another way of getting to heaven, it would say so here, but it does not. It denounces works and anything else we ourselves could do, because then we could stand before God and boast of our own goodness and demand that he recognize our good. Instead, it says we are saved (reconciled and preserved forever) by grace, through God's undeserved favor, through faith, by merely believing.

This is the message of the Holy Spirit to the unregenerate heart. This is what Jesus was talking about when he said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, or against the ministry and witness of the Holy Spirit, would not be forgiven. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is rejecting what he says about Jesus the Christ. Or better stated; blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is rejecting Jesus Christ and refusing to believe in him.

This is in complete alignment with the rest of what scripture has to say about salvation. There is only one thing that will keep you out of heaven and condemn you to hell, your failure to embrace Jesus as your savior. Not one of your sins, not the multitude of them, will condemn you. If you have rejected Jesus as savior, and live your life on earth without him, you will have committed the unpardonable sin and are condemned already.

I John 5:10-13 says:

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life..."

This is what the Lord was saying to the Pharisees; that if they rejected the witness of the Holy Spirit and did not believe who he (Jesus) was, they could not be forgiven and they would ever be in their sins. He was telling them that there was no other way to rid themselves of their sins and that rejecting that truth and only means of salvation, was blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Hebrews 10:29 & 31 echoes Jesus warning:

"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace....It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God".

If you are reading this and find yourself in the same place as the Pharisees, unregenerate and away from God, you now have the same choice they were faced with, whether to accept the Lord or not. They committed the unpardonable sin. Will you?

CHAPTER 20

Dinosaurs

I could easily give in to the temptation of developing a case of Creationism against Evolution here, but since I go into great detail on this topic in another of my titles, *“Cold Noses at the Pearly Gates”*, I see no reason to do so here. We may touch briefly on these issues in order to establish historical facts, but our goal here is to discuss dinosaurs. Did they exist? If so, what happened to them? And how do we fit dinosaurs into the Bible or creation account?



Many Christians seem to think that if they acknowledge that dinosaurs existed that somehow they will be in theological default, and thereby give credibility to the theory of evolution. This simply is not so. Dinosaurs existed; of this there can be no doubt. Acknowledging this fact does not mean we accept evolution theory.

Just because evolutionists hang their entire theoretical beliefs on dinosaurs does not mean they have exclusive rights to use them to prove their case. By concession, Christians allow evolutionists to manipulate the public with the very evidence that can disprove evolution theory.

Creationists accept creation by faith. We accept the Bible account of God creating everything. If physical evidence shows that dinosaurs existed (and it does) then we acknowledge by faith that God created them along with all the other creatures that he created. That is neither a wild or irresponsible assumption. It makes complete sense.

Creationism is an all or nothing proposition. Either God made it all or he did not make it at all. We do not need to exclude dinosaurs from the creative act in order to maintain a Bible position for creation and against evolution. It is true that dinosaurs are not mentioned specifically in the Genesis account of creation, but then neither are rabbits; yet no one can deny that we have an abundance of them.

The fact that dinosaurs are not specifically mentioned does not mean we can ignore the evidence of their existence. The earth bears overwhelming evidence that they once were here and roamed freely. Indeed, some may still roam the earth and sea (more on that later).

On the other hand, we cannot blindly accept all that science claims concerning the dinosaur either. If we did, we would then have to accept the whole of the theory of evolution, propagated by those who have a bias to prove. This is something creationists just cannot do.

Evolutionists have a choice. They can accept the theory of evolution or they can reject it. Christian creationists are without alternative. It is not within our authority to choose what we will believe. We have accepted the Lord Jesus in faith and he has indwelt us

with his Spirit. The Spirit dictates to our heart and mind what we will believe and what we will not believe based on what God revealed in the Bible. So, we cannot accept the anti-scriptural teachings of evolution without rejecting the Spirit's witness to us.

Those of the secular world who have not committed to which camp they will affiliate with, creationism or evolution, have a choice as well. They can believe what they will. Unfortunately, they do not make that choice from a level playing field. They do not have a choice of what will be taught to them in secular schools. In fact, in most public school system, the word indoctrination is a more appropriate label than education.

The teaching of creationism is forbidden while evolution theory is welcomed and embraced. The government has even launched an assault on private and Christian schools, demanding that they teach evolution theory, or at least hire teachers who are sympathetic to it. Thus far these attempts have failed, but who knows what the future holds.

We have Charles Darwin and others like him to thank for this theory of evolution. Strange but appropriate that it was introduced as "theory" for truly the evidence, when stripped of bias, is weak. Many of the bones and imagined prehistoric missing links have ultimately proven to be false and untrustworthy.

The Piltdown Man hoax is a good example of this. Charles Darwin himself was taken in by the deliberate mixing of human and ape bones. For more than forty years evolutionists embraced this precious and important link in human evolution. They swore by it and made it one of the pivotal links of man's progression. Strange that when it was exposed for the hoax it was, the link no longer was important.

Darwin himself doubted his many of his own conclusions as evidenced in his introductory work "*The Origin of the Species*". Here, over 1500 times he used unsteady and non-persuasive terms (i.e. "maybe", "I think" "perhaps", "it could be", etc.) to present his conclusions. Since that time we have seen science falter many times in attempting to further this theory.

Science, working in tandem with a media full of college graduates who had been indoctrinated with evolution theory, simply ignored these snafus and continued teaching their theory as if it had experienced no loss of integrity. Science blatantly ignored the facts to preserve their hold on public education.

But the damage had been done. Fueled with new enthusiasm that the Scopes Trial outcome could be undone, those of the Christian, Jewish and other faiths took up again the fight against this Godless religion of evolution. It has come to the point where entire school systems (i.e. Kansas, Texas, etc.) have taken up once again the fight against evolution being taught in public schools. School voucher systems are often premised on parents being able to choose a curriculum void of evolution theory.

Voucher systems are in effect in several states and being considered by still others. The federal government is doing its best to quell the rising tide for a nationwide voucher system, but the war rages on. It may not be that people are against the teaching of evolution as much as they are against being forced to learn it. Americans are about choice and when the government chooses for them, they usually find ways around it.

So goes the battle started by Charles Darwin and his theory. But I would like to say something more this man Darwin, to be fair to him. I know I am a bit off topic already, but please humor me for just a few more moments. I think what I have to say deserves saying for this matter to be complete and for you to properly perceive the bias that exists with evolution theory.

Science is quick to embrace the teachings of Darwin on evolution, because what he taught lines up with what they personally think. This is true bias; acceptance without proof because you like what is being said; and rejecting all other ideas without exploring them.

But science is not consistent. Darwin also offered another, more negative slant on his theory that you never hear science echo. More than likely it is because in this second view of Darwin, he also builds up Christianity and science cannot condone this, for this is tantamount to building up creationism.

While Charles Darwin certainly deserves the discredit for the introduction of evolution theory, he does not wholly deserve the blame for the damage it has caused society in terms of young minds being swayed from faith in God. I doubt he could have foreseen that his theory would itself have "evolved" into the pseudo religion that it has become; masked under the banner of science.

Indeed, by some of the things he himself uttered, it is clear that Darwin would be ashamed of how others have advanced his assumptions without proof. It would bother him too to see how Christianity has been attacked by evolutionists. If one believes the aim of Darwin was to destroy belief in God and the Bible, they have not made an honest attempt to discern the man and what he believed.

Whether Darwin was a man of personal faith or not cannot be determined by the record we have, and is not for me or anyone else to decide. But on that topic of faith he made some noteworthy comments that will shock both evolutionist and creationists alike. I will share those with you in a moment.

There have been many scholarly and unimpeachable arguments written in opposition to the relatively new theory of evolution. Still, science and religion are like politics; people will believe what they will. Unfortunately, as I alluded to earlier, there is a generation who has not been allowed the opportunity to believe what they will.

Evolution theory has been involuntarily pounded into the heads of American school children for many decades without their being given an opportunity to hear the account of

creation. The net result is that we have a generation of adults in every walk of life who have been indoctrinated to believe evolution as the new gospel.

The theory is promoted in almost every major regimen of higher learning (i.e. mathematics, science, social studies, history, psychology, etc.). To be fair, at this level, religious studies are also offered, but are so inundated by secular understandings and compromises that they really are not an alternative offering, but rather effect an unacceptable blending of science and religion.

Despite the successful infiltration of evolution beliefs into the fabric of American society, we are no better off for it. As a result of science and academe embracing this theory, no drunkard has been made sober; no harlot has left her profession; no thief has returned his booty, and no child molester has changed his wicked behavior. Bad people have not turned good. Society has not realized a moral renaissance. The need for law enforcement has not decreased. Generally speaking, evolution has made nothing better and the world continues to progress toward more open wickedness than righteousness.

Conversely, the world-old belief of creationism, God and the Bible has had not only a positive impact on society, but truly an overwhelming positive impact. The gospel of Jesus Christ has set at liberty and quickened the souls of innumerable multitudes. When one meets the creator on his terms, the creation account is the only plausible explanation for who we are and why we are here; and has an immediate life-altering effect. It gives the recipient purpose and an awareness of a great universal plan for mankind.

It is the power and authority of the Bible and the Lord and Savior it reveals to us that has changed the lives of many, encouraging them to be better, to achieve more, to contribute more. Christianity, no evolution, has profoundly and positively impacted the people of this world.

As I alluded to earlier, I recently came across comments made by Charles Darwin that undoubtedly will surprise evolutionists and creationists alike. What he said may not cause ardent evolutionists to rapidly abandon their erroneous beliefs, but it certainly will give them pause. If that pause leads to reflection on the truth to Darwin's words, perhaps that will lead to something more positive for them.

Darwin, moved from within, wrote to a minister in the town where he lived and offered these words...*"Your services have done more for our village in a few months than all our (speaking of himself and scientists involved in evolutionary research with him) effort for many years. We have never been able to reclaim a single drunkard, but through your services I do not know that there is a drunkard left in the village."* The positive impact of the gospel on that village was substantial enough for all to see.

Later, while visiting Tierra del Fuego, an island off the coast of South America, Darwin noted that the people were given to savagery and conduct not fit to be written about here. He said it was a *"horrifying"* place and he departed from that island in complete disgust.

But, upon his return to this island after a missionary had worked with the people for many months, he was amazed at the cultural change that had taken place.

He openly acknowledged that the gospel and personal faith in Jesus Christ had changed the lives of this previously savage people. In fact, he was so moved by the work of the mission there that he personally and regularly contributed money to the work until the time of his death.

Clearly, while perhaps not a believer himself, he was an honest man and could see the evidence of the power of God in the lives of others. From other things he wrote, it would seem he struggled with the apparent conflict his theory created with those who embraced faith in God.

Perhaps this would explain why in his book on origins, he was not as emphatic as some would lead you to believe these days. When he used words like "*maybe*", "*could be*", "*possibly*" and "*I think*", perhaps he was subconsciously expressing his own doubts.

In any event, he undoubtedly had concerns and misgivings about the usefulness of his theoretical beliefs for society. In light of his own admission, it is likely that the father of evolution theory would be saddened to know that it was his ideas and conclusions that took the place of prayer and Bible study in our public schools and began the undermining of a religion-based society.

If evolutionists won't believe the evidence of the Bible, perhaps the words of the one they hold in highest esteem will resonate with them. Papa Darwin said that evolutionary theory brings no benefit to mankind; only the gospel does. Faith in Jesus Christ, not scientific theory, regenerates the soul and contributes to the good of society.

In light of all I have said above, without giving any credence to evolution, let me state clearly again that in one thing what evolutions say is true; the earth bears evidence that dinosaurs once existed. I personally believe it. I cannot ignore the evidence. But here is the difference between me and an ardent evolutionist. They believe the evidence based upon the evidence. I believe the evidence based upon scripture.

Dinosaurs are mentioned at least a half dozen times in the Bible. Does that surprise you? It surprises most people. No real details are provided to end the century old argument of evolution vs. creation, but it does prove their existence. The Bible does not speak to the issue enough to give us a clear picture of their earthly tenure, so unlike evolutionists, I will not try to speculate on that. I will however, offer speculation as to why they are no longer with us, at least not in great numbers.

I said it that way, because there is evidence that some so-called prehistoric creatures still exist (i.e. Nessy, Champy, etc.). At this writing, my best friend, who is a Herpetologist/Biologist, is in the Congo looking for evidence of a prehistoric creature known as Mokélé-mbèmbé.

Most of science rejects that possibility, because the evidence gathered is largely circumstantial. Direct evidence like photographs, videos and footprints is somehow viewed with skepticism rather than anticipation of discovering something new. Oddly, the evidence is at least equal to that which forms the basis of several of their key hypothesis about evolution, but no one in science sees that as being a double standard.

That notwithstanding, from a Biblical standpoint, dinosaurs did exist. Several times, the Bible makes mention of huge creatures. Whether you believe the Bible is the supernatural word of God or whether you believe in God at all is not important here. The very fact that mention is made in the book is evidence that what science calls prehistoric are not prehistoric at all, but current.

Now then, let us look at the two creatures mentioned in scripture. The first is:

LEVIATHAN

In Job 41:1-10 we are given first mention of a great and fierce beast that inhabited the ocean in Bible times. The name given to this beast is Leviathan. You will need to turn to the referenced verses to acquaint yourself with what it says for it is much too long to record here.

Some have supposed that this creature was a whale or crocodile. While both of these creatures are aquatic, neither seems to be a good fit. The whale, for one, can be eliminated. Leviathan is a fierce creature (vs. 10). Whales are not exactly fierce creatures. They are awesome and large, but you could not consider them fierce.

There are occasions when whales will fight back against their tormentors, such as the couple in the 1980s who accidentally cruised over a whale in their boat somewhere in Central American waters, and the whale, apparently in anger, turned on them and sunk their boat. This is the exception rather than the norm. Whales are usually very docile creatures, until they are run over or harpooned.

The story "Moby Dick" evidences that human experience has been that whales can and will defend themselves. Nevertheless, they are not normally aggressive or fierce. There are a hundred stories of gentleness to every report of negative behavior. Just recently, in 2011, a family rescued a whale from a fishing net and the whale was so thankful that it hung around for over an hour and made friendly gestures to the family.

When fishing off Pearl Harbor in my boat years ago, I often encountered whales. The most aggression I ever witnessed was the occasional nudge of my boat, seemingly to scratch their backs. While that in itself was a bit unsettling, it seemed to me that they were aware of my presence and my frailty and did nothing to endanger me. From personal experience then, and from documented behavior, we can safely eliminate the whale from being Leviathan.

I doubt that Leviathan was crocodilian either, at least not a modern day crocodilian. As big as salt water crocodiles can grow, there are none that are so fierce that a man, or a group of men, could not dispatch it if so motivated. I have personally tagged alligators for the state of Florida and know full well the strength of a large alligator.

Admittedly, crocodiles are more aggressive than alligators and grow significantly larger. I have fed and handled crocodiles too. It is not hard for me to imagine the power of a 20 foot crocodile. I have had the opportunity to feed several dozen crocodiles at one time (two of which were 17 foot goliaths) at a tourist attraction near Palmdale, Florida.

A friend of mine (now deceased) owned and operated the establishment. He and another friend of mine (the one I mentioned above who is currently in the Congo) thought it would be humorous to see me feed the animals from a little island platform in the middle of their pond.

I will not go into the gory details of that feeding experience. I just want to attest to the power of these beasts. As I said, I was on this platform above the pond. The crocodiles apparently knew when someone was on this platform that it was feeding time as they quickly headed toward me from all over the approximately two-acre pond.

The platform was a square deck measuring perhaps six foot by six foot and sat approximately two feet above water level. There were wooden walls that rose four foot above that on each side. If it sounds sturdy, think again. It was one of those floating contraptions that did little to instill a feeling of security to anyone who stood upon it.

As soon as I dangled the first piece of meat over the wall, the crocodiles exploded into action. One 10-footer rose out of the water nearly high enough to grab the meat from my hand (and I quickly figured out that it was high enough to grab my hand as well). Before I could react and back up, another crocodile about the same size jumped on top of the first one, and then another and another. It was reminiscent of a cheerleader squad building a human pyramid; they just stacked up one on top of the other as if they had practiced the move.

In an instant I was staring almost eye level with a huge crocodile. I had no time to react other than to toss the meat and withdraw my hand. The crocodile snatched the meat out of mid-air and as quickly as it had developed, the pyramid fell apart and they were gone.

If I was thinking of giving a sigh of relief, it was quickly choked off by the gasp I uttered when the biggest crocodile I had ever seen slammed into the deck. Slammed is probably too mellow a word. The brute torpedoed the deck and it shook violently. I have never felt so vulnerable. This critter was the big 17 ½ footer that was king of the 6 acre pond.

I wanted to run to safety down the pier that led to the platform, but my male ego would not let me. I knew the guys were watching and just waiting for me to run. I was not going to give them the satisfaction. So I mustered the courage needed and finished feeding those brutes. Rather than piece feeding them, however, I just started jettisoning

chunks of meat in every direction, every direction except near the pier that led back to land. I didn't want any crocodiles near my exit route. Then, sure that the crocodiles were all busy fighting over the meat, I hurried down that pier to safety.

So, I am familiar with the extraordinary power and aggression of crocodiles and in that regard, they certainly satisfy the fierceness of Leviathan. But if you read the rest of this chapter in Job and other Bible books that describe him in more detail, I think you will see that scripture gives Leviathan a whole level of fierceness above even that great beast.

In fact, so great and fierce is this beast, that the Bible tells us in Psalm 74:14 that it took God himself to break the beast in pieces. That does not mean that this was a difficult task for God; it merely means that the feat was above the ability of men, so God had to intervene. I am certain that he who created Leviathan would have no trouble dispatching him if he so willed.

That Leviathan existed during more modern times is well documented by the fact that his presence is documented in scripture, which itself was written in modern times, relatively speaking. Any doubts you may still have about this can be put to rest by simply reading Psalms 104:25-26. Here God tells us that Leviathan was playing in the ocean at a time when great ships traveled the seas.

Most of us are familiar with the legends and folklore of dragons and great sea serpents. The old axiom that there is always some truth embodied in the stuff of legends would seem to be not as far-fetched here as with other topics. The myriad stories of such creatures from both sea-faring and wilderness-faring men cannot be summarily dismissed as mere campfire stories.

Many eye-witnesses were men and women of social status, even royalty. They would not chance public ridicule to foster some fairy tale. Indeed, often bounties were placed on these creatures by kings and noblemen, hardly something that would be done if there was any doubt that the legends were real.

Given this account we have of Leviathan, is it so hard to believe that legends of great monsters stem from actual encounters and that they are not just the imaginations of homesick, drunken sailors or knights looking to make a name for themselves?

In Isaiah 27:1 we are told:

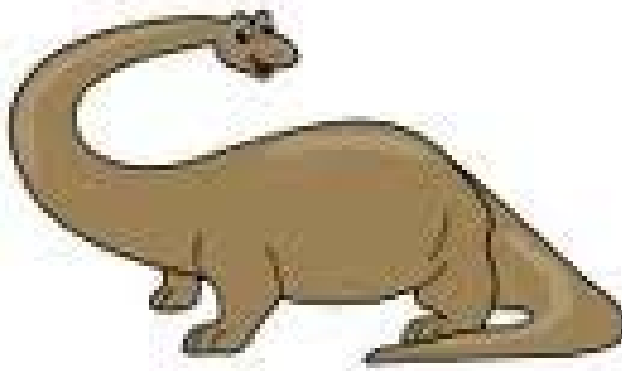
"In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing (coiled) serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea"

Might I say "*Wow*"! God is telling us that there were serpents and dragons in the seas in Bible times. He even mentions them as being "*crooked*". With that description, I am immediately brought back to the artist's conceptions of sea monsters in textbooks; they were all bending or crooked.

That would surely fit with the legends and tales told by ancient sailors. And I might add that the stories continue even to this day. People are still seeing things in the ocean and in lakes and waterways that have access to the ocean. Stories come from Canada, America, the United Kingdom and even Russia.

Is it so hard to believe that these creatures are not millions of years old as science supposes, but actually existed during historic times, and that they may still exist today? More about this in a moment; for now we need to add yet another creature mentioned in the Bible into the mix. That would be...

BEHEMOTH



In Job 40:15-24 we are told:

"Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an Ox. Lo now, his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly. He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his bones are wrapped together. His bones are as strong pieces of brass...like bars of iron....Behold, he drinketh up a river and hasteth not: he trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth...."

This has to be a very surprising thing to find in the Bible for someone who believes dinosaurs were prehistoric. But wait, it is going to get a whole lot more surprising in the next paragraph. I have to point out something that should absolutely shock just about everyone.

The first thing I want you to see in this passage is something that even most creationists miss. In verse 15 God says "*which I made with thee*". Clearly God claims he created these great creatures at the same time he made man. No other rendering can be applied. He made this dinosaur during his well-known six days of creation. There is no reason to believe he did not make all of them at that time.

This would explain why the footprints of men and dinosaurs are found in the same level of strata. Evolutionists claim that they are found together because the earth moved and

folded over and therefore the dinosaur's footprints which were deeper in the historical earth appear to be at the same level as modern man. That is a ridiculous claim, but in keeping with their propensity for cunning situational explanations to shore up the weakness of their theory. Had footprints of either man or beast been "folded over", would they then not appear upside down?

But let us return to this great Behemoth. It is no secret that many Bible scholars contend Behemoth was an elephant or a hippopotamus. Some say it might have been a rhinoceros or bull. They offer no proof, only contention. While I concede that these are all enormously strong creatures, I cannot agree that any fit the bill as Behemoth.

First of all, we are told in verse 17 that his tail is like a cedar. God uses the cedar tree in illustration throughout scripture, and always it is used to demonstrate great strength, even uncommon strength. It is not a stretch of one's imagination then to accept that Behemoth was a creature with an immense and powerful tail, like unto a cedar.

The creatures mentioned above all have short, relatively insignificant tails. One might even say that their tails are disproportionate to their enormous size and strength. Their tails are so insignificant that they are used only to swat insects or, in the elephant's case, as a trunk-hold for other elephants.

Behemoth had a significant tail, one that he moved like a cedar. A typical cedar is huge, but even if we allowed that it was an average sized cedar, the tail of Behemoth had to be 15 foot long. Certainly a creature that had such a large tail had to be tremendously larger than any elephant or hippo.

Second, as Behemoth drinks water it says "*and hasteth not*". This creature was not afraid of anything. It did not hasten its drinking for fear it might be discovered or caught. It was not prey. Even elephants approach waterholes warily. They are occasionally targeted by prides of lions.

Behemoth possessed a confidence that it was top dog and apprehension was not in its vocabulary. Elephants or rhinos are immensely strong creatures which have been known to stand their ground and defend themselves and their own kind. But even the biggest and strongest of them fear man and will usually take flight if that possibility presents itself. Not so Behemoth. Behemoth hasteth not. It feared nothing.

That dinosaurs existed is a fact that cannot be denied. That they existed in modern times is also a fact, a Bible fact, which in my opinion is about as solid as a fact can be. But this is not the full story.

The next question we must address then is "*What happened to the dinosaurs*"? Before we answer that, I think we need to understand that some dinosaur species still exist. There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that they are still with us.

I do not think it possible that all the sightings and reports of dinosaur-type creatures can be hoaxes. To be sure, many are. Some people try to win the spotlight by prefabricating stories of sightings. But there are many honest and upstanding citizens who report sightings too, who want no media attention at all. Often they do not want to report the sightings because they risk ridicule and loss of reputation by doing so. Their very reluctance lends great credence to their reports.

These reports come from trustworthy individuals. Couple their reports with the knowledge that science is regularly discovering new life forms in the ocean and on land, is it that hard to believe that unknown creatures are able to exist without many seeing them. Take for example the large goat/deer-like Saola discovered in Viet Nam, long after millions of people had fought a 30 year war in those jungles without ever reporting a sighting. And yet, this pony-sized creature exists in substantial numbers.

Another example and one that is even more compelling than the previous one. In 2006-2007, researchers discovered more than 100,000 lowland gorillas living in the northern Congo, Africa. This discovery was completely unexpected. That a population of huge primates could live undetected for so long in these modern times was incomprehensible. And yet, there they were; more than half of the world's gorilla population.

My final example should help complete the case I am making, to wit: that animals can and do live among us in almost complete anonymity. There is this little canal at the edge of the Everglades outside of Miami, Florida, near to the Miami Zoo, where people dump trash and practice shooting their guns. It is an awful place. There are so many discarded washers, dryers and other appliances that it looks like an appliance store once stood on the spot, but exploded and machines were thrown in every direction.

There are burned-out, abandoned automobiles that have been so riddled by bullets from target practice that you almost feel you are in the final scene of "Bonnie and Clyde". The place looks like something out of the Mad Max movie.

As you look around at all the spent shells and rusting metal, observe the tires, trash and grease slicks in the small, 3 foot canal, you think to yourself, "*Nothing could live here*". There are no birds, no lizards, nothing alive that you can see...I suspect because target shooters probably dispatched them on sight. It is just a barren piece of property about 100 foot wide and a mile long, with a sliver of water running through it. To the naked eye it is nothing more than a dead zone.

However, if you come back to that place a few hours after dark, you would be surprised at the number of alligators and other creatures that inhabit that small canal. They are there all the time, but hidden from view during daylight hours, coming out only when people are not around. That is the way of animals, be they small or large. They have a natural fear of man and they avoid us.

Given these examples of eyewitness accounts and instances where large animals have gone undiscovered while surrounded by millions of people, it is not a stretch of the

imagination at all to believe that enormous dinosaur-like creatures can and do still exist. But whether they continue to exist or not is not the question of the moment.

Even if we concede that some do, obviously the small number of them shows that dinosaurs have virtually gone extinct. So the question of the moment then is what happened to them?

Science has another cunning situational explanation. We are told that a giant asteroid hit the planet and caused the sun to be blocked out for two years. We are not told how they know this, we are provided with any proof or evidence to support their claim, other than the roundish shape of the Gulf of Mexico, but like most scientific evidence, we are expected to simply accept the conclusions of these learned men and women.

We are also not told how they know that this cloud of dust particles remained airborne for precisely two years other than strata measurements of dust taken in localized areas. I submit local strata levels could just as easily be affected by local events. Stretching a local event to world-wide proportions is irresponsible and self-serving.

Bottom line, I just do not buy it. There are just too many unanswered questions. If such a cataclysmic event occurred on earth, an event that was severe enough to kill off all the dinosaurs, why would anything else have survived? If the earth was darkened for the two years following the asteroid's impact, how did plant life survive without sunlight?

How did the oxygen levels remain unchanged and unaffected without plant life? How did the animals we have today survive? How could the writers of the Bible have witnessed firsthand Leviathan and Behemoth if they had disappeared allegedly millions of years earlier? How indeed? Using science's own standards, life would have stopped altogether.

It is unfair for me to refute the ideas of evolutionists about what caused the dinosaurs to disappear without offering my own up for scrutiny. This might confuse you a bit, but I believe the reason for the dinosaurs' demise was actually natural selection. But I do not mean that in the same sense that ardent evolutions mean it. Rather, I mean it in the truest sense. These creatures were problematic for society and society naturally selected them for destruction.

The Tasmanian Tiger became extinct because people tired of dealing with its predatory nature. A bounty was placed on them and opportunists eliminated them. The grizzly bear is no longer found in great numbers as it once was 100 years ago in the lower 48 states, because it posed a danger to people and their livestock. And so, it was slaughtered until its numbers were cut back to an acceptable level to humans. These were trouble-maker species to man and he eliminated the threat.

Then there are those that posed no problem or threat to us at all, but which were hunted to near extinction as a food source. The buffalo is one for example. But scores of other

species have suffered similar fates for similar reasons. Humans ended, or nearly ended their existence out of simple gluttonous and irresponsible behavior.

I am not trying to indict anyone. I understand the concerns people held. I would not want my children going out in the backyard to play with the possibility of them encountering a 1200 pound grizzly bear. And if given the choice of letting my children starve or potentially wiping out a species, well I don't think there is a choice, to be honest.

The point is that modern life forms that threatened either our safety or our comfort suffered at our hands. Their numbers dwindled or they disappeared as a direct result of human intervention.

I think it is reasonable to assume then, especially given the Bible evidence that these creatures lived among men, that the dinosaurs suffered a similar fate. I think Behemoth probably trampled too many gardens or broke down too many homes and finally Behemoth had to go. And once men learned that Behemoth could be killed and that he tasted good that was about the end of the road for him. And Leviathan and all the other whose bones have been uncovered suffered similar fates at the hands of people.

One might argue that there is not much to document this theory of mine and I would have to agree. But ten or twelve thousand years ago, they didn't keep very good records on anything other than politics and religion, and even those were shabby. Nevertheless, my hypothesis has at least as much plausibility as that of evolutionists.

There is not an overwhelming amount of documentation about grizzly bears and their demise in the continental United States, but we know it happened. We learned about it from tale passed down from generation to generation. We also know what happened to the buffalo, but we learned about it from books written a century after it happened. Yet both accounts are accepted as fact.

Does it really require a lot to believe that the demise of so-called prehistoric creatures came as the result of increased human populations? We have solid, irrefutable evidence in the Bible that they lived less than 5,000 years ago in considerable numbers. We have evidence that some have managed to live even unto this day and age. We have evidence of their footprints at the same level of strata as mans'.

Their dwindling numbers suggest a progressive extinction rather than a cataclysmic one. The evidence for this theory is strong, but science rejects it. They default to their own ideas because after all, they are the product of higher and enlightened education.

And besides, to conceded a progressive rather than cataclysmic extinction would not only prove them wrong about the dinosaurs and evolution, but it would unseat their presumption regarding fossil fuels.

Science claims that the oil deposits are the result of the decomposing meltdown of dead or dying dinosaurs. As I consider how much oil this country alone uses each day, literally millions of barrels, there is no conceivable way that enough dinosaurs lived to give us that much oil. And that is considering only America's use.

Hundreds of millions of barrels of oil are used each day world-wide. Even if science was right about the earth being billions of years old, simple math proves that there could never have been enough dinosaurs to live to have accounted for the amount of oil in the earth.

The western world has been using oil on an increasing basis for hundreds of years; America in particular. At the end of the 19th century, the combustible engine came on the scene and the use of oil skyrocketed. Today we have several hundred vehicles that require oil and petroleum on a daily basis. And that does not take into consideration all of the rest of the world's needs.

Even if we were to concede that there had been enough dinosaurs to go down to the amount of oil we require, would not the earth then yield up more than just the relatively few skeletons that we have managed to come up with? Bones have a longer shelf life than the variety of fluids that leak from a decomposing animal carcass; and yet we are asked by science to believe that the seemingly trillions of barrels of body fluids outlasted millions of tons of bones.

Since we have these huge underground lakes of crude, shouldn't we have heaps and heaps of skeletal remains, especially in the general vicinity where the pool of oil is found? And yet, we do not. Some might contend "*But they are buried*", but my response would be "*Well, so is the oil, but we managed to find it.*"

And I am not done yet. If there were enough dinosaurs to create these enormous pools of oil, how is it that they all managed to die in just a few locations? If they covered the earth as science supposes, how did their melted down ooze manage to wind up in the mid-east, Gulf of Mexico and a handful of other sites? And often where we do find bigger quantities of dinosaur remains, we find no oil? The whole supposition is kind of perplexing to me; how about you?

And there are myriad other questions that require answers before someone should blindly accept the hypothesis presented for public consumption by science. I believe it takes less faith to believe God than it does to believe Darwinists and all their suppositions. Well, in any event, no matter what you believe, I would be careful about swimming in Loch Ness if the opportunity ever presents itself.

CHAPTER 21

UFOs



In the previous chapter, I conceded credibility to the sightings of modern-day dinosaurs or dinosaur-like creatures. I premised this concession upon reports from thousands of responsible, believable witnesses. Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) sightings are significantly different in that the thousands of witnesses are not usually from individual sightings on different days, but mass witnesses who observed the same phenomenon at generally the same time.

Nevertheless, I feel compelled to offer the same concession for the sightings of UFOs and things that go bump in the night sky, because many of the witnesses also are reputable, believable individuals. We have had members of Congress, Air Force pilots, ministers, celebrities and a host of professional people give reports of seeing unexplainable things in the sky.

There simply has to be something to their reports; something going on. While I am a Christian and cannot accept that these might be beings from another world (more on that to follow below), I am an honest person and cannot deny that people are seeing unexplainable things.

Without doubt, there are hoaxes when it comes to UFO sightings, just as there are hoaxes about dinosaur sightings. Some people want their 15 minutes of fame no matter how they come by it. Falsely claiming to have seen an UFO is one of many ways people aspire to be in the national spotlight. It would seem however, that the percentage of hoaxes is a considerably small percentage of the many unexplained sightings.

There are also mistakes made; things deemed unexplainable that are proven to indeed be explainable later on. Weather balloons, satellites, flocks of birds, military activity (i.e. flares, maneuvers, test flights, etc.) and such are often mistaken for unexplainable phenomenon or objects.

But there are a lot of credible sightings of unexplainable things as well. And, as mentioned earlier, they are often reported by people we would consider beyond reproach, who have no desire to be in the limelight. These people have no hidden or ulterior motive. They were minding their own business, not looking to be eyewitnesses to a UFO. They just were in the wrong place at the right time.

If this were just a modern-day phenomenon, one might suspect that people had been influenced, perhaps even motivated by the twentieth century sci-fi genre of books and movies. But this is not the case. UFO sightings are not new. There are ancient records,

meager as they might be (i.e. cave paintings, desert carvings, personal writings, etc.) that seem to indicate people many centuries ago also saw unexplainable "things" in the night skies.

And centuries ago there were a whole lot less reasons for things to be in the sky. There were no military, civilian or even model airplanes. There were no satellites orbiting the earth. There were no weather balloons, hang gliders or parachutists. There were no electrical or battery-powered lights. And yet, people reported seeing strange things in the sky by day and strange lights at night.

So what is this centuries old phenomenon all about? From a Biblical perspective, can there be life on another planet? Could there be another race of beings visiting us, watching us and waiting to make contact? Are we in danger of some sort?

Before we consider what the thing from a logical standpoint. or universe who have been perhaps millennia, why have us? Wouldn't it make more communicated with us?



Bible has to say, let us consider this If there are beings from another planet visiting our planet for centuries, they traveled all this way just to watch sense that they would have

What could they possibly have learned from us, say in the second century, given that they had the knowledge and technology to travel through space? We earthlings were marveling over the invention of the wheelbarrow at the time, and no threat to a race so vastly superior.

In fact, almost everything connected with this belief in UFOs seems to defy logic. When my wife and I lived in Houston years ago, we used to drive from Houston to Kansas to visit family on a fairly regular basis. We would leave at midnight in order to avoid both the Houston and Dallas traffic. As stupid as that may seem to some, we shaved about 3 hours off our trips by doing this and spared ourselves the stress of bumper to bumper traffic at 70 mph. It was a good trade-off for a little loss of sleep.

Quick story...my wife and I usually talk during long trips and that helps the time pass. At night however, it seems that the start of the engine triggers a sleep response in the woman and I am left alone for all practical purposes. To entertain myself, I switch on the radio to catch whatever talk show I can find.

I learned quickly that there was one talk show program on late night that was carried widely across the nation by hundreds of stations. This meant I did not have to worry about missing too much of the program when I drove out of broadcast range of the station I was currently listening to. I could usually quickly search for and switch to another station without missing too much of what the host or guest was talking about.

The host covered a variety of topics, but more often than not, the topic was UFOs and extra-terrestrials. The host believed in the whole spectrum of UFO-ology, from Roswell

to the X-files. I was never swayed by anything said on the program, but it was entertaining and kept me awake and alert.

I was very tired while driving one morning; it was about 3:00 a.m. I was struggling to stay alert so I may not relay what I am about to share with you exactly how it was broadcast, but I think I am pretty close. The host shared a personal story about a very peculiar man he had seen.

He said that approximately eight years earlier he had been looking at this man somewhere in San Francisco, when suddenly he just disappeared. He didn't get lost in the crowd. He didn't dart behind something. The man had been standing in plain view with no obstructions in the host's line of sight. But all of a sudden "poof", he disappeared.

The host said that he knew then that this man was an alien, because he had witnessed this activity before. Then he told the audience the reason he was telling us this old story was because he had seen this very same man again at a Chicago airport.

I am sorry friends, but considering all this from a logical standpoint, it makes no sense to me. Why would anyone so obviously superior to us waste their time on a trip to observe us? If there were such a race of beings from far off in another galaxy, what possible benefit could they get from observing an inferior race of beings? It would be tantamount to my sitting and watching a colony of ants. It may be entertaining to me, but it would not hold my interest for several hundred years. And quite frankly, I would not be very concerned about them seeing me.

If our astronauts were to encounter another civilization on the moon, regardless if they were inferior or superior to us, would they not try to communicate with them? Of course they would. And if we encountered a culture much more inferior to our own, would we not attempt to help them? Of course we would. We do that on Earth now. We locate a backward tribe in the Amazon and before you know it they are getting vaccinated and wearing brand name T-shirts. I am not sure that this is a good thing, but it is human nature.

So, for me personally, I just cannot buy the whole UFO/alien thing from a logical standpoint. I am not being stubborn or close-minded on this. I am not ignoring the reports of reputable people. But I think there is another explanation. In fact, I know there is.

And of course, as I mentioned previously, I always lean toward a Bible perspective, particularly with things of such importance. I can tell you this unequivocally, that the Bible says absolutely nothing about UFOs or other planets being inhabited, or even being habitable for that matter.

Some counter me on this by saying that the Bible does indeed talk about UFOs. They pull one of a few obscure verses from the Old Testament that make mention of heaven or

space and claim that the Bible is talking about UFOs. For example, in Judges 5:20 it says *“They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera”*.

They use verses like this to support their bias, while having no foundational understanding of what the passage is referring to. It is not only biased, it is irresponsible. This verse, and others with similar language, are taken out of context and have absolutely nothing to do with UFOs, as I will show later. It requires almost no effort at all to discover what these verses are talking about, unless of course, you allow your bias to get in the way.

Others get even a bit more irresponsible, twisting or adding to scripture things that are not there. For instance, consider the Star of Bethlehem and the presumptions that have been added to this Biblical account. Science has not been able to pinpoint what star this star might have been. They dug out all their charts and data and just could not identify it. There was no known star or planet of the Bible description that passed over Bethlehem at this time in history.

This paved the way for bias to rear its ugly head again. Science concluded that this was no star or planet; this was a UFO. It is the only acceptable explanation for the reported independent movement of this object.

Never mind that the Bible identifies this flying object. Never mind that God tells us it was a special star that he made for the great event of the birth of his only begotten Son. Oh no, let's reject the part that does not support our bias and go with what we like.

I know a failing of mine that I probably need to work on, but I have little patience for people who try to force the Bible to say what they want it to say to support some agenda they have. Anyone who tries to find some "hidden meaning" on this or any other topic, when it isn't there, is plainly a fool, complete with court jester hat and big clown feet.

God does not play games with his word and he does not have a secret agenda. When God wants to say something, he says it. There is never ambiguity, never wiggle room. God says it straight out. The Ten Commandments is a good example of this. God says *“Thou shalt”* and *“Thou shalt not”*. Never does he say *“You figure out if you should or shouldn't”*.

I think that this subject of alien races would be of sufficient importance that God would have given us a head's up on it in the Bible. He told us about Heaven and Hell. He told us about the angels and the demons. He told us about the creatures and animals in heaven. Why would he leave something so important out, particularly if he as the omniscient God that he is, knew one day they would visit us on Earth?

The complete absence of anything in the Bible on this topic is enough for me to know that there just are no other planets with beings on them. There just is no other planet like Earth. God tells us that he made all of the planets and stars. He made them from nothing and hung them on nothing. He knows where they are and what they are made of, because

he created them. If there was life on any one of them, I am certain he would have told us about it.

And there is much more to consider from a Biblical standpoint. What of God's immutability and his reconciliatory interests toward mankind? What of salvation and the sacrifice of his own son on the cross for our sins? What of God's own claim that he is not a respecter of persons? He claims that when it comes to salvation, he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

If all the claims and promises of God are so, and I am absolutely sure that they are, and there are other inhabited worlds, how can they ever have a relationship with God as we have? He said that all that are created in his image (let's say humanoid for the sake of argument) are sinners and are away from him.

So how can they have a relationship with God? Simply, they cannot. They are lost, without hope. If God created them, and he would have had to, they have no way of reconciliation with God. Why? Because of God's own doctrine. Take John 3:16 for instance:

"For God so loved the world (this world), that he gave his ONLY begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life"

Then, John closes the chapter by writing in verse 36:

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him"

If we believe the Bible, if we believe God means what he wrote, then any people not from earth have a major dilemma. The reason they have a dilemma is because certain axioms of the Bible apply. The Bible tells us that Jesus died for sin, but specifically and exclusively for the sins of the people of this world.

The Bible further informs us that Jesus is the only "*begotten*" son of God. That means there are no others who can be sacrificed for the sins of some other people somewhere else in the universe (and again, God says "...*for all have sinned*"). And since Jesus cannot be crucified again, that spells disaster for anyone not from earth; he cannot be sacrificed for them.

So, if there are people elsewhere, and of course we assume they are similar to us in appearance, nature and person (humanoid, sinful and self-centered as the word of God says all are in Romans chapter three), then those people have absolutely no hope. No one can die for their sin and God cannot forgive them.

This very fact then undermines the Word of God, which claims that God cannot be a respecter of persons when it comes to salvation. The Bible tells us that God desires for *"all men everywhere to repent"* and that *"God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"*. If there are people on other planets, then these things in the Bible simply are not true. The Bible is false, our faith is in vain and God is unfair.

And these things can never be. God is more than fair when it comes to our salvation. And the Bible says *"Let God be true and every man a liar"*. Not only does God not lie, but he cannot lie. It is impossible for him to do so, because it is completely against his holy nature.

Therefore, his word is pure and perfect and not in error. We can accept that what it says is true. In the final analysis, we must conclude that human life cannot exist on other planets, based upon definitive and definite principles in God's word. Additionally, we can assume no "other" type of life exists, for it is not only not mentioned by God in his word, but that life would serve no purpose for God. And life exists for one reason – to the glory of God.

There is much more we could consider in the case of UFOs and the alleged aliens who pilot them. We could discuss actual cases, where eyewitnesses give intricate details. But I think what we have discussed sufficiently shows that from a Bible perspective, life on another planet, and therefore life from another planet is an impossibility.

The only life on other planets would have to be life that we have sent in our rockets and satellites. I remember one occasion back in the 1960s when we sent a rocket into space with wasps and other insects onboard. Presumably the purpose was to discover how those life forms reacted to space travel. The rocket never returned to earth and the creatures onboard were lost. I used to wonder why Hollywood had not capitalized on that happenstance by making some sci-fi movie about the creatures surviving, mutating and coming back to earth.

My wife used to work at NASA in Houston. It was a cool job. She got to meet all the astronauts of that time and was one of the employees who had their family's names put on a micro chip and plaque on the space station.

NASA has shown us that there are mysteries and great spectacles in the outlying universe. They have super powerful telescopes like Hubble that have looked deep into space and provided us with a wealth of information. But in all their exploring, they have not found life.

Our rovers on Mars have sent back information and photographs of the topography of this planet, and some are hyping it up saying that it appears there once was water on this planet. If there was water, where did it go? Water may evaporate from one area, but it is redistributed to another. I am no scientist, but I know water just doesn't disappear on earth. We have the same amount today as we have ever had.

Our conditions may not be as harsh as those on Mars, but if you believe science tells us about our environmental history, it has been in the past. In the past they say, we have had super volcanoes explode, giant earthquakes, asteroids and all sorts of other disasters that killed off life on our planet. And yet, our planet remains solvent and well. Why would Mars be different?

NASA is like any other government agency, self-serving and self-preserving, to ensure continued funding. A little hype goes a long way. I am not saying they are deceitful. There are a lot of great people who work in this agency. I am only suggesting that the facts might have been stretched to ensure continued interest in their program.

All of that aside, there are "things" being seen in our skies by a lot of people. Even Bible believing Christians, who deny that there is life on other planets, have reported seeing UFOs. What are they seeing? What is going on? In addition to the small percentage of hoaxes and intentionally fallacious reports, we have to concede that a significant percentage of sightings are explainable; not UFOs, but IFOs (Identified Flying Objects). Often sightings prove to be military aircraft, flares, weather balloons, hot air balloons, and so on.

But even with this concession, we cannot deny that there are truly many unidentified flying objects that should not be in the sky. What are they? What is the answer? Well, you will probably think I am off my rocker, but I am going to give you my opinion. And I am not going to pussy-foot around; I will get right to the point.

My guess is that people are seeing things supernatural. Now don't immediately balk at this suggestion. Hear me out. Is this any harder for you to believe than accepting that some superior beings from across the galaxy are visiting us?

It is quite possible, even probable that dark forces are at work. Ephesians chapter six tells us that Satan is a very, very powerful adversary. We learn in other epistles that he will deceive us, tempt us, and lie to us and that he seeks to devour us and neutralize our ability to know and serve the Lord.

People think Satan has a motive and goal in all of the evil he does. They think that Satan might have devised this UFO phenomenon in order to plant the thought in people's minds that there is more to our universe than we are aware of, that there are probably higher life forms. And they, not God, will be our saviors. They will fix all the wrongs of mankind.

The idea is that Satan has developed this "pie in the sky" placebo to keep our attention away from God. His ultimate goal, they say, is to have such a great number of people lost and away from God that the Lord will have to repent of his judgment of Satan. He couldn't possibly condemn so many multitudes.

That is possible I suppose, but I don't think that it is so. Satan has no plan in the evil he does. It is his nature to be wicked. He cannot keep himself from being wicked; not that

he would try. You see, he doesn't want to be right with God; rather he wants to be God. He has always wanted that. He is jealous of God and wants what he has.

I do think he is behind the UFO thing and that he and his demons do things that can be interpreted as extraterrestrial, but I doubt that he has a plan behind it. I believe Satan does what he does because it is his nature and he simply cannot help himself. He wants to deceive. He loves being evil. As God's nature is to be holy and true, Satan's is to be unholy and untrue. He loves what God hates and he hates what God loves. God loves people and if Satan can hurt people, he has appeased his own nature and feels great satisfaction in himself.

That Satan has considerable power and control of our world is Biblical. He is a powerful being. God temporarily allows him this power. With that power, he took Jesus up into a high place and showed him the kingdoms of the world. He offered them to Jesus if he would but worship him.

Of course Jesus has power over Satan; that was not the issue or lesson here. The lesson was to show that on this earth, Satan has power and authority. He has control of governments. If he did not, he would not have been able to legitimately offer them to Jesus.

He has control of government agencies, of educational systems, and even religious denominations. He has used his power over these institutions to remove God from schools, to advance the false teachings of evolution and to evangelize America with the false gospels of many different cults. His mission is to deceive and he has been very good at it throughout man's history. It would appear then, that deceiving people about UFOs would be an easy thing to accomplish.

We are warned to resist him because he is like a ravenous wolf and roaring lion (a lion roars when it is hungry and wants to devour something). He is the prince of the power of the air according to scripture, but he is a dark prince. All the elements are there for him to seize control of this UFO phenomenon and use it to deceive people away from God.

Believe me, I know how weird it must sound to readers to lay the blame on Satan, but I have little doubt but that he is the power behind the deceit of UFOs. At his disposal are the legions of fallen angels (demons) who followed him in his rebellion against God. They number in the millions, perhaps a billion. They too have power, though much more limited than Satan's. They are able to create havoc in our world and they are very good at doing bad.

Satan and his horde have established many, many false religions, instituted humanism, invaded governments and judiciaries, and flooded the world with immorality and greed. They will take every opportunity they can to be evil and to flaunt their evil in the face of God. If that evil includes diverting the attention of people away from God and holiness to any other thing they can...pornography, work, infidelity, astrology, cults, the occult,

and even UFOs, they will do it. They are tireless workers of evil. They need no rest. They need no incentive other than to gratify their own thirst for doing evil.

As spiritual creatures with great power, how difficult would it be for them to fool those who are anxiously gazing into the night sky to see something, with a little light and mirror show? Does it not say of him in scripture that he is the great deceiver and liar? Does it not say of Satan's disciples that "*...even his ministers can appear as angels of light*"?

I submit to you that the UFO phenomenon is nothing more than another attempt of Satan to cast doubt upon God. The thought he wants to get across to people, the thought that would pull them away from God is that maybe there is a superior race somewhere in the universe, so superior that they started this world and they are just checking in on us from time to time. Thus the sightings of UFOs, don't you see?

Such a story would take away the need for one to believe and trust in God, would it not? A perfect *modus operandi* of Satan; I see his fingerprints all over this. Don't you?

CHAPTER 22

Heaven It May Be a Surprise for You



Admittedly, this chapter is primarily for those who are assured in their heart and mind that heaven is in their future. I know that everyone feels that ultimately they will be going to this glorious future. Curiously, almost without exception, everyone feels they are worthy of this rest that God has to offer.

We buy into that age-old devil's lie that God has some huge set of scales in his hand where he weighs our good and bad. How amazing is it that almost without exception we all feel our good outweighs our bad?

Well, the truth is God that God does not have a set of scales. But he does measure our good and bad. And his assessment is that our good "...is as filthy rags" and we have no righteousness in and of ourselves. We need to trust his Son, who alone is righteous. In other words, it is not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ that God heaps forgiveness upon us. We accept Jesus and trust that he secured our eternity and that seals it. Nothing else works. Nothing.

So I am writing to those who trust him as savior. But rest assured, if you are not, you can be. Anyone can be. Romans 10:13 says "*For whosoever (put our name in there) shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*".

Now back to the lesson on heaven. You are a born again believer. You have placed your faith in Christ and know your eternity is secure. One day you are assured of heaven. You enjoy this life, but inside, like most believers, you yearn for that moment when your soul will take flight for that heavenly shore. Most of us do not want our earthly life to hurry by, yet our souls thirst for the time when we shall bid the cares of this woeful world and our toils goodbye.

You have heard so much about heaven from preachers and your Sunday School Teacher. It is a grand place where all the cares and problems of this life will be left far behind, where your dreams and hopes will be fulfilled. Many promises are made in scripture concerning this wonderful place and every one of them is positive and uplifting.

But what if heaven isn't what you expect? What if when you get there, you find that everything you imagined is not so? The truth is, most Christians are in for a very big surprise, perhaps even a shock. Heaven will not be at all what they expect.

If you ask the average person what heaven will be like, invariably they will respond with something like "*It is a place of happiness*", or words to that effect. And indeed, they are correct, according to scripture. It will be a place of happiness.

But if queried further, they will elaborate on what they think it will take to make heaven a happy place for them. One will imagine that they will be playing marathon golf, sporting an unearthly handicap. Another envisions endless championship fishing tournaments with them as the star. Still others imagine unlimited charge accounts at enormous malls that never run out of stock and never close.

It is human nature to imagine heaven to be one's own personal utopia. It is how we visualize and categorize our hopes. But human nature is exactly that part of us that God does not want in his heaven. Human nature is in contrast with God. It is referred to in scripture by many names and all are seated in negative context. It is referred to as *self*, the *flesh*, the *old man*, and the *old nature* just to name a few.

Our old nature is our sinful part, the selfish, self-centered and self-serving part. It is the cause of our sin and problems. The sum of it is told to us in Romans where it is called "*enmity (or hatred) against God*". In other words, the only thing our flesh is capable of is hatred toward God.

It is this human or earthly nature that imagines a customized heaven. It is our self-centeredness that dictates what it would take for heaven to be our personal utopia. Our flesh knows what it needs to make it happy and by golly it had better be there!

Here then is the surprise for many believers; that heaven will not be at all what their self-centered flesh is expecting; but will be rather what God wants it to be. So then, what is heaven like? What does God have planned? The short and simple answer is "*I don't know*". No one knows. Oh lots of folks write about it and detail it, but they do not know.

We are not given much detail on God's plans for eternity, except that we will spend much time around his throne in fellowship and worship. Indeed, if we could quantify the heavenly experience in terms of time, most of our time will be spent worshipping and praising the Lord.

Now, at the risk of shocking you further, let me say that I find the prospect of constant worship quite boring. I do not mean to be irreverent to the Lord, for certainly he is deserving of my eternal praise and worship, but somehow golf and fishing seem to resonate with my excitement sensor more than a perpetual church service.

If worshipping 24/7 was something that thrilled me so, why would I have so much trouble being faithful in church attendance on Sundays when I get the sniffles? And that is the best my old nature is capable of; going to church only some of the time because I find it boring. And how much harder would it be to attend a church service all the time!!!!

But that is just "me" talking, or my old nature. The best my old man can imagine for heaven is to concede to God cursory time of praise and worship. The rest of the time, my old nature wants to have fun. The same slight sniffle that wouldn't stop me from fishing on Saturday, becomes a deadly disease on Sunday morning.

In my present condition, though regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, my old flesh still has a modicum of control and influence in my thinking. Consequently, I often think in terms of what "I" want and what will make "me" happy.

Fortunately, that is not how I will enter heaven. In I Corinthians 15:53 we are told "*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*". Right now, I am corruptible, because of my flesh. I am self-centered, thinking in terms of what I want.

But when this mortal shall put on immortality, I will also put on incorruption. In reality, incorruption is not so much put on as corruption is put off. Either way, I will be without my old sinful, self-centered nature. My self-centered core will be supernaturally extracted by God and sent packing.

When we accept the Lord, essentially our salvation comes in three phases. First, immediately upon confessing Christ, we are saved from the **penalty of sin**. Our sins are forgiven forever. There is no longer a penalty. The wages of sin were paid by the Lord Jesus and our account is paid in full.

Then, as we live our Christian experience on earth, we are saved from the **power of sin**. We are told that sin no longer has dominion (or control) over us. This is a quantitative term that means influence still is present, but not control. We have the Holy Spirit within us teaching, convicting and reproducing his holy attributes within us. It is a constant struggle to be sure. Even the Apostle Paul wrote of his battle in Romans chapter seven. But the ultimate victory is sure – it comes in the next phase.

Finally, when we pass or when the rapture occurs, we are saved from the **presence of sin**. This is huge. Sin is then no longer a part of us. The old man, the flesh, the old nature is removed by God and put off. No longer is self important. No longer do we think in terms of "me" and "I".

In this new state where self is no longer the center of our world, where sin has no presence, then our new man will soar and excel. Then worshipping God and praising his mighty works will be thrilling and exciting.

It isn't now, I know. That is the effect of the old nature in us. But when that old nature is gone, we will hardly be able to contain the praise that pours from our lips as our new nature takes completely over and we fellowship with the one with whom we have to do.

Golf and fishing will not even register on our "to do" list as all we will want to do is sit in the presence of our Lord, overwhelmed with his majesty and wonder. Then will the will of God for mankind come full circle. We will once again be in the Eden scenario. All of our needs will be provided for. God shall fellowship with us on a regular, if not continuing basis. But this time there will be no sin of disobedience.

Yes, heaven will be a surprise for many. It won't be what some will be expecting. It will be better. It will be a pleasant surprise when we arrive there without our old nature. It will be a time unparalleled in our previous existence, where we no longer are influenced by the selfish flesh that housed our soul for so long.

Can you imagine what it would be like to not sin? What would it feel like to never be tempted by evil? How glorious to not have that flesh/spirit battle raging inside of us, to know those days are forever gone. This will be the wonderful surprise of heaven.

CHAPTER 23

Setting the Record Straight on Eve

There is nothing more egregious to the human spirit than injustice. We can usually tolerate hardships or suffering, especially when we feel that we are not alone; that others are enduring similar experiences in their lives. It may just be the old axiom "*misery loves company*" at play, but more likely it is the feeling that even if life is difficult, it is at least equally difficult for all.

Somehow we derive a bizarre sense of fairness from this. For example, when we arrive at the Doctor's office and see that others are also suffering from the flu, we suddenly feel a little better. Subconsciously, we accept that we are not alone, that we have not been singled out by fate. And this makes our situation a little more tolerable.

When it comes to injustices, however, we are presented with a much different situation, a most intolerable challenge. When one is wronged, it is not perceived on a universal level, but rather on a very individual and personal one. In essence, our perception is that we have been wronged to the exclusion of everyone else; that life has somehow placed the fickle finger of fate upon us.

Our self-esteem compels us to fight back against the injustice. Indeed, being treated unfairly and not attempting to right the wrong is almost beyond our ability. Even the seasoned Christian, armed with the direction of our Lord to "*turn the other cheek*" and to be longsuffering in such matters, is tested to their limit when it comes to unfairness.

To a lesser degree, when an injustice is perpetrated on others, especially when they cannot defend themselves, some of us feel as passionate about fixing that wrong as we do when we ourselves are the victim. Call us champions of a cause, do-gooders or plain old busy bodies; it matters not. What matters is that the injustice be remedied.

Case in point, through recorded time, Eve, the Biblical matriarch of the human race, has repeatedly been assigned the blame for causing the fall of mankind and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Even though this injustice was imposed upon her posthumously and, in all probability she is not even aware of her infamous legacy, public opinion remains in error and the record needs to be corrected. It bothers me to no end to hear the blame for the condition of our present world placed upon her. It is an injustice that needs remedy.

Let us consider the things we know from scripture to see if we can accomplish this task. To begin, I think we all know the story. God told Adam that he and Eve were not to eat of a certain tree in the garden. Adam knew which tree was taboo. Eve knew also. Yet, they both willfully and purposely ate of that tree, thereby disobeying God.

It is true that Eve took and ate of this tree first. But God did not expel Eve from the garden after she sinned. He could have, but he did not. She remained at Adam's side. It

was not until Adam sinned that they were told to leave the garden and both man and wife were ushered out.

It seems natural to blame the woman. She was the first to eat of the fruit and she also caused her husband to eat of it. But everything is not always as it seems. While it is true that Eve disobeyed first, God placed the blame on Adam. In Romans 5:12, we are told "*Wherefore as by one man, sin entered into the world...*". The latter part of this verse goes on to explain that because of Adam's sin, death has passed upon all of us. No mention is made of Eve. The blame was placed upon the man.

The net result of Adam's sin is commonly referred to as "the curse" in Christendom. Simply stated, all who are born into this life are cursed to die both a physical and a spiritual death. Tradition points the finger of blame for this at Eve. However, God lays the blame for the curse and fall upon Adam and not Eve.

Effectually, Eve's sin was almost inconsequential in terms of impact on mankind as a whole. I am not trying to lessen the sinfulness of her act, for scripture tells us that "*the woman being deceived was in the transgression*". No doubt about it; she sinned.

And I am not trying to give her a free pass. Rather, I am attempting to show that because her sin was the result of being beguiled or tricked, the consequence of it was primarily confined to Eve herself and it was not the catalyst for expulsion from Eden. God did not condemn Adam or declare the curse to be in effect because of Eve's sin. He did not immediately expel them from the utopia he had created for them. It was only after Adam sinned that this penalty was imposed. It was only then that the ramifications of sin began to take its toll on this world.

Why was this so? Why was Adam's sin more consequential and grave than Eve's? We might assume it was because God held Adam responsible for Eve's behavior, as the man was scripturally assigned as head of the family; and we would be correct in that assumption. However, this is too simplistic an explanation.

Clearly Adam's sin somehow weighed heavier than Eve's; and Adam's sin, not Eve's, was the catalyst for the fall of mankind. The reason for this is clearly spelled out; Adam sinned on purpose. Eve did not. She was deceived. Certainly the lust of the flesh and pride of life were contributing factors to her decision-making process. She lusted after something forbidden and the benefit the serpent falsely told her she would derive from it. But the fact remains; she was deceived and did not conceive the sin in her heart.

We cannot say the same thing for Adam. Adam conceived his sin in his heart. Proof of this is found in I Timothy 2:14 (kju), where we are told: "*And Adam was not deceived...*". Adam consciously and purposely chose to sin. He was fully aware of God's expressed taboo. He knew what ramifications would follow his act of disobedience for God had taken care to spell them out for him. Yet, after lengthy consideration, he purposely and willfully sinned anyway.

Why would he do this? Why would he choose to separate himself from God and the good life he had in the garden? Why would he subject himself to physical suffering and death? What would compel a man to give up perfection for decay, peace for turmoil, and leisure for hard work and toil?

The answer is actually quite simple. He did it for Eve. Adam knew that Eve had violated God's command and that there was no reversing or erasing the ramifications of that sin. He knew that what God had said would come to pass. Eve was going to perish. Her body was going to die.

Try to imagine Adam's situation. The Garden of Eden was his home. It was a place of great beauty and tranquility. The land and environment were perfect. The animals were tame. There were no predators or prey. Each day was perfect in every way. There was no illness or death. There was no aging. There was no crime, no chaos, no turmoil whatsoever. Locks and alarms did not exist.

There was no need for concern in any matter. God provided for everything. Adam had been a content and happy man. There was nothing threatening or negative in Adam's world. In fact, there had been only one semi-negative experience in the habitat God had made for Adam, a brief period of time when Adam felt lonely. And God took care of that problem quickly by creating Eve. After he had awakened from the sleep God had induced, Adam awoke to see the first woman.

She was the most exquisite creature he had ever seen, more beautiful than any of the other creatures in the garden. She looked like him, and yet she was not like him. There was something different about her, something very special. She not only complimented his life, she completed it. She met his needs emotionally and physically and almost immediately he loved her. They were a perfect match in a perfect place and joy filled every corner of their world.

With Eve's arrival, Adam experienced what was perhaps the first epiphany. Suddenly he was aware of the beauty of Eden. He hadn't noticed it quite the same way before, at least not to this degree. The birds' songs seemed sweeter, the flowers more fragrant, the garden more alive. Now, with Eve, there was purpose to living and this place he was in made sense to him. He was no longer lonely. His life had meaning.

With that in mind, try to put yourself in Adam's place. All of a sudden, without warning everything had changed. His perfect world was shattered. He sensed the change and for the first time he feared. Adam did not have to ask Eve what she had done. He could see it. Not only had the garden started to change, but Eve too was different. Her countenance had gone from one of innocence to one of sensuality. Her face reflected concern and despair. She seemed unhappy and frightened. Her flesh was already showing signs of aging.

Adam knew that she had disobeyed God. He knew immediately that the consequences of God's warning were starting to take effect. His Eve was going to die. Already she was

changing. Already she was moving away from him in shame. He was losing her. No doubt God would ask her to leave the Garden. What would he do without her?

Unhappiness flooded into his heart. Adam knew that he had a choice to make. Was he to be faithful to God and give up the love of his life and perhaps his very reason for living? Was he to watch helplessly as Eve wasted away? No, he could not do that. There was an alternative. There was a way to keep his Eve, to be with her. All he had to do was disobey God like Eve had.

The choice may have been painful, but it was not a hard one for Adam to make. He did not want to disobey God. He did not want to be away from God. But he loved Eve more than God and he really had no choice. He chose to sin and die with her rather than to live forever without her. Adam was not deceived. Adam was not tricked. He purposely sinned in order to be with the woman God had given to him.

Eve has taken the brunt of blame for the fall throughout history. We can suppose that Adam would not have sinned if Eve hadn't, and therefore she is ultimately to blame. But we cannot know that for sure. All we can know for sure is that Adam sinned willingly and knowingly and that God held him responsible for the fall, not Eve.

Today we are armed with the knowledge of human history and the written Word of God. That old serpent is revealed to us and we are told how to resist him and make him flee. Eve had neither an account of human history nor the written word of God to rely on for wisdom. She was not "street smart" if you will in regard to the deceptive ways of Satan. Consequently, she was an easy mark for that old serpent.

Again, Eve does not deserve a free pass. She was the first sinner. But neither does she deserve the burden of blame for the fall of mankind. It is time to set the record straight.

CHAPTER 24

How Much Do You Really Know About Christmas

(An Eye-opening Quiz)

Probably one of the most celebrated days of the year in America, and in many other countries around the world is Christmas. Even cultures that are not Christian in origin or persuasion, such as Japan and China, celebrate this great day, December 25th. They even refer to it as "Christmas".



I might as well state straight out that it is very doubtful that Jesus was born on December 25th. The month of December is at best cool in Israel and often cold. It is not likely that shepherds would be sitting out in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. It is more likely that Jesus was born in March or April, when one would expect the shepherds to be in the field.

That is not the only misconception about Christmas and the birth of Christ, however. There are many others. I will go over them after the quiz below, because much of what I say provides answers to the quiz questions and we can't have you read the answers before you take the quiz, now can we?

So how much do you really know about Christmas? How much of what you think about Christmas is Biblical and how much is just bunk? Could you pass the following quiz on this topic? Test your knowledge. There are no trick questions, but you might be surprised by some of the answers. Score 5 points for each correct answer. I will leave it up to you to decide whether you passed or not. The answers are at the end of the quiz.

The Quiz

1. Christmas (the day Jesus was born) probably actually occurred on:
 - a. December 25th
 - b. March 29th
 - c. April 1st
 - d. We do not know

2. How many angels spoke to the shepherds?
 - a. 2
 - b. a multitude
 - c. 1
 - d. it cannot be determined

3. A manger is:
 - a. a feeding trough
 - b. a barn
 - c. a stable
 - d. a room behind an Inn

4. Where was Joseph's family from?
 - a. Bethlehem
 - b. Nazareth
 - c. Jerusalem
 - d. Galilee

5. How were the shepherds to find and recognize the Lord?
 - a. by following a star
 - b. by asking at the Inn
 - c. by looking for a babe in a manger
 - d. by looking for the Magi

6. How many wise men came to see Jesus?
 - a. two
 - b. the Bible doesn't say

- c. three
 - d. none
7. How did Joseph and Mary get to Bethlehem?
- a. walked
 - b. by cart
 - c. Joseph walked/Mary rode a donkey
 - d. The Bible doesn't say
8. When Mary was found to be with child, she and Joseph were:
- a. married
 - b. companions
 - c. engaged
 - d. The Bible does not say
9. Who told Joseph what to name the baby?
- a. Mary
 - b. An angel
 - c. God
 - d. Jewish elders
10. Where did the wise men find Jesus?
- a. In the manger
 - b. On a donkey with Mary
 - c. In the field
 - d. In a house

11. Who saw the star over Bethlehem?

- a. Joseph and Mary
- b. The shepherds
- c. The three kings
- d. Everyone
- e. None of the above

12. The Innkeeper told Joseph:

- a. There is no room
- b. We don't allow children
- c. You can use the stable out back
- d. None of the above

13. Who told Joseph to go to Bethlehem?

- a. an angel
- b. Herod
- c. The tax collector
- d. Caesar

14. What is meant by "heavenly host"?

- a. an arch angel
- b. greeting angels
- c. an army of angels
- d. an angelic choir or herald

15. What song did the heavenly host sing?

- a. "Away in a Manger"

- b. "Joy to the World"
 - c. "Glory to God in the Highest"
 - d. They did not sing
16. What animals were present at the birth of Jesus?
- a. cows and sheep
 - b. cows, sheep and donkeys
 - c. cows, sheep and camels
 - d. unknown
17. What is the most accurate definition for "Magi"?
- a. Magicians
 - b. Wise men
 - c. Astrologers
 - d. Eastern kings
18. Why did Herod want to know when Jesus was found?
- a. So he could worship him
 - b. So he could tell others
 - c. So he could kill him
 - d. None of the above
19. How long was the trip for the wise men to Bethlehem?
- a. Two years
 - b. Less than 1 day
 - c. A little less than two years
 - d. None of the above

20. How many shepherds were there in the field?

- a. 3
- b. 4
- c. 6
- d. We are not told

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 6. d |
| 2. c | 7. d |
| 3. a | 8. c |
| 4. b | 9. b |
| 5. c | 10. d |
11. e (3 kings are not mentioned - all the wise men saw the star)
12. d (no mention of the Inn Keeper is made)
13. d (see Luke 2:1-3)
14. c
15. d (we are told "a heavenly host *saying*")
16. d (the Bible does not say what animals were present)
17. c
18. c
19. c (Herod had all the male children under 2 put to death)
20. d

I know some of the answers may have surprised you, but I assure you they are accurate. Check out what I wrote below. Most people score 10 correct answers. How many did you get?

THE NATIVITY

Irrespective of the battle going on all over our land about the display of the manger scene in public places, the nativity scene that we customarily see in store windows and in front of private residences do not accurately reflect the facts.

The manger scene is a depiction of the moment Christ was born. Traditionally, it reflects the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, the star overhead, some livestock and a half dozen or more people. The scene pictures the very moment that the gift of God (His Son) arrived on Earth.

At the moment Jesus was born, we only have evidence of two people being in attendance. These same two people had traveled together, arrived at Bethlehem together, and it is reasonable to believe that they stopped and rested together. These two people were of course, Mary and Joseph. Mary had to be in attendance at the birth of Jesus for obvious reasons. Joseph, as her husband, also needed to be there to attend to Mary.

The traditional manger scene accurately includes Mary and Joseph. But it also includes the shepherds and the wise men. The shepherds were not there. We know this because in Luke, chapter 2, the angels are seen speaking to the shepherds and telling them of the event that has already taken place.

After being told that a savior had been born, the shepherds announced that they were going to Bethlehem to see "*this thing which has come to pass*". Since we assume that the nativity represents the actual moments immediately following the birth of Jesus, we can say that they were not there. They may have well been there a few short hours later, but they were not there at the actual birth.

As for the wise men or kings from the east, they could neither have been there at the birth, nor a few short hours or even days or weeks later. In fact, it was very much closer to two years later when they beheld the Son of God. Let's prove this.

In Matthew chapter 2 we are given the account of the visit of the Magi. After an apparent long and arduous journey, these wise men arrived at Jerusalem, where they made inquiry about this "*King of the Jews*". Herod the Roman Governor, motivated by jealousy and perhaps fear of someone who could govern and lead the Jews against Rome, commissioned the wise men to not only seek this child out, but to report back to him when they found him. He lied to them, telling them that he wanted to also go and worship him; but we know by the subsequent slaying of innocent male children in Bethlehem, that his real motive was to eliminate the Lord.

That the journey took a long time is evidenced both by the distance that they had to travel (remember they had no other means but camel, donkey and walking) and what the scripture offers of their visit. Specifically, in Matthew 2:11 it tells us:

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him..."

Too often we rush through this verse without realizing that it does not say "*and when they were come into the manger*". It says "house". Mary and Joseph had long since moved out of the stable and found more suitable accommodations for living. They were in a house.

Then, we also miss that this verse says "*young child*". It does not say baby or infant, or even pre-toddler. It says "*young child*". Jesus had grown. He was no longer an infant, but rather about 2 years old. The Magi or wise men came to Bethlehem long after Joseph and Mary had left the stable. They came into their home and saw Jesus as a young child.

This is further substantiated by verse 16 where we are told that Herod sent soldiers to slay all the two year old and younger males in Bethlehem. It specifically says:

"...from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men".

He had inquired of the wise men in Jerusalem and sent them on their way to Bethlehem, which was less than a day's journey. Herod told them to send him news of the "*child*", because he knew that the Christ child was already 2 years old. Consequently, we can conclude that these wise men had been traveling for almost two years before they arrived in Jerusalem, which was the stop prior to their going to Bethlehem. They could not have been present at the manger.

THE WISE MEN

There is also a false assumption about the wise men. They are always depicted as being three in number. Moreover, in the nativity scene there are never any attendants accompanying them (i.e. servants, military escort, etc.). Of course, at this late date we cannot be sure how many wise men there were, but we do know there were at least two, because they were referred to as wise men in the plural. However, there is no indication that there were three.

No doubt, this assumption that there were three comes from the fact that three gifts are mentioned (gold, frankincense and myrrh). One automatically concludes that the wise men then brought one gift each. That may well be, but it is doubtful.

Those times were much different than today. We complain about the crime rate and not enough police protection, but in those days you were basically on your own. There were no state troopers that patrolled the highways, no call boxes on the side of the road, no cell phones. And there were many criminal elements who would take advantage of small groups traveling unprotected.

These regal types would not be travelling alone or in small numbers. It is more likely that there were a great number of magi and their attendants. Some claim that it was customary for as many as 40 wise men to travel together with their respective entourages. Realistically, a dozen would not be out of the question, and very probable.

Those who accompanied these VIPs would probably have numbered in the hundreds. There would be armed guards, special assistants, cooks, handmaids, mechanic/carpenters and a host of others in support of the undertaking. Again, we will never know, but it is likely that the number was not three.

CHAPTER 25

Summary

In the introduction to this book, I opened with the following questions/comments: *“Why should believers look at difficult passages of the Bible? What purpose does it serve for us to understand them? It would be very easy to simply ignore them. Who would know? Who would care?”*

I hope that you have come to recognize the importance of knowing the answers to the difficult questions people often ask. Christians are in this world for one reason, to communicate to the world the love of God through his son the Lord Jesus Christ. We live our lives, work, raise families and preoccupy ourselves with our special interests and hobbies, but the fact remains, our primary purpose for being here is to be witnesses and ambassadors for God.

Men and women are lost and without hope. They need the Lord. Most do not even know that they do. But we Christians know. We know what awaits the soul that dies without the forgiveness of God through Christ. And that same Christ told us *“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.”*

When we do, people are going to ask us what makes us right over all the other religions of the world. The only evidence we can give them is the Bible. It is the supernatural, living word of the only true and living God. It has authority and power unmatched by the sum of all other religious writings.

When a Christian holds the Bible up as evidence of the power of God, they are subjecting themselves to immediate scrutiny. People are going to ask questions, and often they will be the tough questions that we posed in this book. If you are not prepared, if you cannot answer, people will reject your credibility. At the same time, they will reject the gospel.

It behooves each Christian to know as much about their Father’s word as they possibly can. I Peter 3:15 admonishes us *“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.”*

They will ask and you should have an answer.

