

The Q&A Book

Questions & Answers, Book II

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
CATEGORIES:	
1. Questions from Genesis	3
2. God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit	10
3. Salvation—Death, Heaven, and Hell	22
4. Sabbath and Holy Days	35
5. Law of God	51
6. The Church	63
7. Prophecy	69
8. The Bible	77
9. Alleged Contradictions	81
10. Cults and False Doctrines	84
11. Family and Personal Issues	92
12. Miscellaneous	105

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, we have received literally thousands of questions on various biblical topics from our readers and viewers. In the past, we have addressed many of these questions in our various periodicals. Unfortunately, those new to our program and literature usually do not have access to the many questions and answers we have published in past years.

We have observed that new readers and viewers, once they have had time to compare our beliefs with the teachings of their own Bibles, often ask the same questions—or variations of the same questions—that many before them have asked.

For this reason, we have compiled, edited, and revised a fair number of these questions and answers and published them in *The Q&A Book—Questions and Answers, Volume One*. *Volume Two* builds upon the first volume, presenting even more Q's and A's. It is our hope that this book will help new students of the Bible find answers to their questions more quickly.

The questions have been organized under twelve categories. Unavoidably, some of these categories tend to overlap with others.

The questions are representative of the many inquiries we receive by way of the regular mail, e-mail, and telephone calls. Most of them have been reworded and condensed for the sake of clarity.

For your convenience, this edition of *The Question and Answer Book* includes suggestions for further reading or listening after each Q&A. Please order by the accompanying code letters or CD numbers in brackets []. Please limit your order to four items per request and one request per week.

Thank you for the opportunity of serving you! We hope you will find this volume helpful as you continue your study of God's Word.

1 Questions From Genesis

Q How should a Christian approach the Genesis stories—fact, fiction, or allegory?

A The apostle Paul declared, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16).” The Greek word is *theopneustos*, and means, literally, *God-breathed*—given by inspiration of God.

The apostle Peter verified, “Knowing this first, that *no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation*. 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” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

Inspiration is defined by Webster as “the supernatural influence of the Spirit of God on the human mind, by which the prophets and apostles and sacred writers were qualified to set forth divine truth without any mixture of error.”

It is evident that Jesus, the founder of Christianity, believed in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures when He said, “The Scripture *cannot be broken*” (John 10:35). He went on to add, “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall *in no wise* pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). A true Christian should take Jesus at His word. “But he [Jesus] answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Of course, all the Scripture they had was the *Old Testament*, because the New Testament had not yet been written.

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days *scoffers*, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3–4).

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, skeptics claimed that Moses could not have written the Torah [the first five books of the Bible] because writing had not yet been invented. Many archaeological finds later in the 20th century proved these claims to be false. Writing was well known in the time of Moses. Further, Moses was a prince in Egypt before his exile, and so would have been highly educated. Still further, note some of the many places in your own Bible where it records that “Moses wrote”: Exodus 24:4; Numbers 32:2; Deuteronomy 31:9; 31:22; Joshua 8:32; Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28; and John 5:26.

Thus, while supposedly “learned” men were loudly proclaiming there was no such thing as WRITING until long after Moses, God, in His providence, used the spade of the archaeologist to bring to light *hundreds of thousands* of books that were written *long before* the days of Moses. These confirm biblical records. (See pages 830–831 of *Halley’s Bible Handbook, Revised Edition*, by Henry H. Halley, available in many libraries and most Christian bookstores.)

In short, a Christian should take the stories in the book of Genesis as *literal, factual, and historical*. Problems with this understanding exist only in the minds of skeptics and gainsayers. “Take heed that *no man deceive you*” (Matthew 24:4).

Suggested reading:

- *The Q&A Book—Questions and Answers, Volume 1* [QUE]
- *Evolution— Fact Or Fallacy?* [EFF]
- *The Days of Creation* [CD# C533]
- *The Rising War Against Christians* [CD# C625]

- Also, be sure to visit us at www.cgi.org.

Q How does Adam and Eve, cavemen, and the Ice Age all fit together?

A This is a common question. The short answer is, *they don't!* Many have wondered about these things. Whole books have been written addressing each of these subjects from different points of view. Many are confused. We will, of course, answer from the *biblical*—not the flawed *evolutionary*—point of view.

When God created Adam and Eve, they were fully developed human beings, capable of communication, society, and development. (See Genesis 2:19–25; 3:1–20; and 4:1–2 in your own Bible.)

It is almost entertaining to consider the lengths evolutionary scientists go to in order to prove the existence of “prehistoric” cavemen. One evolutionist found a misshapen tooth in a cave and from that created a misshapen human being who lived in a cave, hunched over like an ape. It was later determined to be the tooth of a wild pig! There is *no way* that science can prove the existence of cavemen from a fossil. Evolutionary scientists simply have a theory and then they force the evidence to fit the theory. Adam and Eve were the first human beings ever created and were fully formed, intelligent, and upright as only God could make them.

The Bible doesn't use the terms “cavemen” or “Neanderthals,” and according to the Bible, there is no such thing as “prehistoric” man. The term “prehistoric” means “belonging to the era before recorded history” (www.dictionary.com). It *presupposes* that the biblical account is merely a fabrication, because the book of Genesis records events that precede the creation of man. The Bible is clear that Adam and Eve were *perfect* humans from the time of their creation and did not “evolve” in any sense from lower life forms.

With that said, the Bible *does* describe a period of traumatic upheaval upon the earth (commonly called the Noachian Flood, found in Genesis chapters 6–9), during which time civilization was utterly destroyed—except for eight people—and men were forced to start over. It is in this historical context that some scholars believe men lived in caves and made use of stone tools. These men were not primitive; they were simply destitute. And they certainly were not half ape. The fossil evidence is quite clear: “cavemen”—men who lived in caves—were human. There are still “cavemen”—people living in caves and in the wilderness—alive today! There are some fossilized ape remains which Darwinian paleo-anthropologists interpret as being some sort of transition between ape and man. Due to artistic renderings in school textbooks and media hype, most people are conditioned to picture these interpretations when they imagine cavemen. They picture furry half-men-half-ape creatures crouched in a cave next to a fire, drawing on the walls with their newly developed stone tools. This is a common misconception. And as far as Darwinian paleo-anthropology goes, please keep in mind that these interpretations reflect a peculiar worldview, and are *not* the result of evidence. In fact, not only is there major opposition to these interpretations within the academic community, the Darwinists themselves do not agree with one another on the details. Unfortunately, this popular mainstream view has spawned the belief that man and ape both “evolved” from the same ancestor. Speculation and guesswork to make the theory fit the facts runs rampant. The evidence in favor of this particular interpretation is wholly lacking.

And finally, what does the Bible say about the Ice Age? The Bible does not mention an Ice Age. First, it was not something that had an impact upon the writers of the Bible, as they all lived in the

Middle East, a region far south of the continental glaciations. Further, it is *not* a salvation issue.

Creationists are typically amused by “evidence” for an Ice Age. They contend that secular dating assumptions are mistaken, and cite the Ice Age as an effect of the true biblical Flood, not an ice age.

Secular scientists, on the other hand, have difficulty explaining how the Ice Age could have begun. Many and varied theories (guesses) have been proposed, such as a near collision with another heavenly body, shifting of the magnetic poles, fluctuations of the temperature of the sun, massive sunspots, and re-tilting of the earth. As stated, the scientists cannot even agree among themselves—but the one thing most will agree upon is that it *couldn't* be the result of a worldwide flood! Among the many things that confound the scientists are fossil remains on mountaintops and the inversion of strata—supposed “older” layers of strata resting on top of “newer” strata. The only event that answers *all* the facts is the great Flood mentioned in your Bible!

On topics such as this, we are happy to refer people to resources that are more advanced and more in-depth than we can provide. Dr. Walt Brown explains how the Ice Age serves as evidence *for* the Flood. One recommended book—although we cannot agree on every point—is *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* by Dr. John Whitcomb and Dr. Henry M. Morris. It is available at www.amazon.com at a reduced cost.

Be sure to request our free booklet, *Evolution—Fact or Fallacy?* It begins by asking, *No one can deny that our complex universe is an astounding, majestic marvel. But how did it get here? Where did we come from? Does it really matter? Can it be, as so many contend, that this all just “happened” by some fortuitous cosmic accident? Or did it come about as the result of the careful design of an infinite God? Here are the facts you need to know!*

Suggested reading:

- *Evolution—Fact or Fallacy?* [EFF]
- *The Bible and Archaeology* [CD# C 733]

Q According to the Bible, clearly and without any doubt, every living substance on earth was destroyed, including whales, bacteria, viruses, and seeds. These 20 million odd species were all allegedly husbanded on the tiny ark. Can this be possible? If every living substance was killed, how were the whales, fish, and other sea creatures harbored on the ark? If every substance was killed, how do we find the dove plucking an olive leaf (Genesis 8:11)?

A These kinds of questions have been presented by skeptics and gainsayers for years. They have been asked and answered countless times for those with ears to hear. Even though these objections have been asked and satisfactorily answered countless times, each new generation comes along and asks them again as though they had just discovered something “new” that has never been answered. Atheists, agnostics, unbelievers, and liberal scholars have all scoffed at the biblical account of Noah’s ark and the flood. But their criticisms rest upon several mistaken assumptions. Many skeptics like to maximize the number of animals on the ark while minimizing the size of the ark.

Even a cursory reading of the sixth chapter of Genesis will reveal some often overlooked, but very important details. The Bible *nowhere* states that Noah had to take on board the ark representatives of *every* living creature. There were three requirements for the animals to be loaded into the ark. They had to be 1) air-breathing, 2) terrestrial (land-dwelling), and 3) of the same biblical representative *kind*. You may verify this in Genesis 6:17–20.

The ark did not need to carry every species (possibly numbering in the millions) of animal. Many use the English word *species* and the biblical Hebrew word, *miyn*, translated *kind*, interchangeably. But this is incorrect, since they are *not* synonymous terms. The word *species* is much narrower. Many species can be included in *one* single biblical “kind.” The Genesis use of the word *kind* denotes an organism that reproduces others like itself. For example, only *one pair* of the dog kind would have been required, which would later breed into today’s many species.

Many creatures did not need to be taken aboard the ark because they were water dwellers (whales, dolphins, fish, etc.). It is estimated that the *average* size mammal and bird is about the size of a *cat*, not gargantuan like a camel, elephant, or giraffe. The ark was designed to carry only every biblical *kind* (numbering in the few thousands) of terrestrial, air-breathing animals, not the millions of species we see today.

Another major misconception concerns the size of the ark. Many people today are under the false assumption (usually conveyed by other skeptics) that Noah’s ark could not have possibly carried all its intended cargo.

In reality, the ark was a *gigantic* ship! Assuming an 18-inch cubit (many scholars believe it was an even larger 21-inch cubit), Noah’s ark would have had a total cubic volume of 1,518,000 cubic feet—that would be equal to the capacity of 569 modern railroad stock cars! It took Noah, his family, and an inestimable number of workers 120 years to build it!

It is estimated that such a vessel would have a displacement nearly equal to that of the massive *Titanic* of the 20th century. No cargo vessel of ancient times even slightly resembled the ark in its colossal size. The ark could *easily* accommodate the number of animals required!

If you would like a scientifically detailed study of the subject, Dr. John Whitcomb and Dr. Henry Morris, in their book *The Genesis Flood*, did an exceptionally thorough job of analyzing the pertinent data relating to the physical dimensions and carrying capacity of the ark. Among many other things, they point out that many of the animals on the ark may have been put into a state of hibernation, and could well have been literal “genetic banks” that through the years of proliferation developed the many varieties of animals we see today.

You also asked, “If every substance was killed, how do we find the dove plucking an olive leaf?”

This is another common misconception. As stated, *not* every living substance was killed; only terrestrial air-breathing creatures were drowned. Notice that nothing is said about taking plant life or seeds aboard the ark. The dove, bringing back a green olive leaf, was an indication that the waters were much diminished from the earth.

We should also note that later worshipers of God accepted the flood as *genuine history*; they did not regard it as a myth. Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, and Peter were among those who referred to it as something that really happened. (See Isaiah 54:9; Matthew 24:37–39; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20,21; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:5–7.)

In conclusion, in spite of what skeptics and agnostics would have us believe, it is evident when all the facts are examined that there is no scientific evidence that the biblical account of Noah’s ark is a myth or fable.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Q&A Book—Questions and Answers, Volume 1* [QUE]
- *Evolution—Fact or Fallacy?* [EFF]
- *UFO’s Exist—But What Are They?* [UFO]
- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *The Rising War Against Christians* [CD# C625]

- *Filling Our God-Shaped Hole* [CD# C667]

Q Some people who came to my door told me that Adam and Eve would not be resurrected because they were created perfect and willfully sinned against God. Is this true?

A In similar situations, I have a two-word answer for such opinions. Simply ask them, “Scripture, please?” There is *no* scripture showing that Adam and Eve will not be resurrected because they willfully sinned against God. We have *all* sinned willfully and knowingly at one time or another (Romans 3:23).

If God is not specific on a matter, it is presumptuous of us to speculate how God will judge others. We are not to judge anyone’s relationship with God (Matthew 7:1). Who and when persons are resurrected is *God’s* call, not ours.

On the contrary, God’s Word tells us, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but *after* this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Further, 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “We must ALL [including Adam and Eve] appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that *every one* [including Adam and Eve] may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

Like everyone else, Adam and Eve will be resurrected and judged according to what they did with what they knew. The book of Genesis is very brief, hitting only the highlights. There are many things we do not know. We cannot rule out God’s grace upon a repentant sinner.

We do not believe there is any validity or authority to the statement that Adam and Eve will not be resurrected. The answer is that God knows, and He has not chosen to reveal the answer at this time.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *What Does the Bible Say About Predestination and Election?* [BPE]
- *Statement of Beliefs* [SBF]
- *Doctrine or Theory?* [CD# C759]

Q Who was Melchisedec?

A This question has long puzzled many Bible students. Many have wondered just *who* the Melchizedec of the Bible is. Melchizedek is actually a TITLE or designation of honor. It is a position or office that has to be filled by a worthy candidate. The term is a transliteration of two Hebrew words, *melek* and *tsedeq*. The Hebrew *melek* means “king,” and *tsedeq* means “righteousness.” Therefore, the name “Melchizedek” means literally, “king of righteousness.”

Hebrews 7:2 labels Melchisedec the “King of righteousness” and “King of peace.” Think of it! Jesus Himself said: “There is *none* good but one, that is, *God*” (Matthew 19:17). None can be righteous but *God*—Christ in person! Note, too, that this man was King of *peace*. “Salem”—from which Jeru-*salem* was named—means “peace.” And remember, Jesus is called the Prince of *peace* (Isaiah 9:6)! No human being could be King of peace.

The first six verses of Hebrews 7 begin the process of comparing the two priesthoods—the Levitical and the Melchizedec, making it plain that Melchizedec could be none other than Christ Himself.

Observe *further* in Hebrews 7:3: Melchizedec was “without mother, without father, without

descent,” or as the Phillips translation renders it, “He had no father or mother and no family tree.” He was not born as human beings are. He was without human father and mother. This does *NOT* mean that Melchizedec’s “record of birth” was simply lost or misplaced. Without such records, human priests *COULD NOT SERVE* (Ezra 2:62)!

Melchizedec had no such genealogy because He was not an ordinary mortal. He had *no* descent or pedigree from another, but was *self-existent*. Notice Paul’s own inspired interpretation of this fact: “Having *neither beginning of days, nor end of life*” (Hebrews 7:3). Therefore, He has always existed from eternity! He was not even created, like angels. He is eternally self-existing. And that is true only of GOD, not humanity! God *only* has immortality (1 Timothy 6:14–16).

Hebrews 5:5 removes any doubt: “So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an High Priest; but He [God the Father] that said unto Him, You are My Son, today have I begotten You. As He says also in another place, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec” (verses 5–6). The Moffatt translation renders it, “with the *rank* of Melchizedec.” Christ held the *rank* of Melchizedec even back when He received tithes from Abraham during the times of the patriarchs. This priesthood was superior to the priesthood of the Levites because it was Jesus Christ Himself. Christ is the mediator of a *better* covenant based upon *better* promises (Hebrews 8:6).

Some people have stumbled on the statement that Melchizedec has *no* “end of life.” They contend that since Christ died, He had an end of life! *If* that be true, then Christ is still dead! But Christ is *not* dead. He is alive today! It was not possible for Christ to be held by death (Acts 2:24). Christ would never have fulfilled His office of High Priest if He had not died for the sins of the people and risen again. It is the function of the High Priest to lead the way to salvation.

Notice, too, in Hebrews 7:3, this Melchisedec “...abides a priest continually.” This scripture reveals Melchizedec abides—that is, still abides, remains permanently, continually, a priest. God the Father is not the Priest of God, but Christ the Son *is*! The apostle Paul, writing shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven as our High Priest, stated that *even then* Melchizedec “abideth [meaning *does now abide*] a priest continually.” The Moffatt translation says that Melchizedec, “...resembling God’s Son continues to be priest permanently.”

Upon close examination of Scripture, it becomes abundantly clear that Melchizedec and Christ are one and the same Person! Considering all these things, how could anyone possibly think He could have been anyone else?

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Who, What, Is God* [WWG]
- *Is Jesus Really God?* [JRG]
- *Is Jesus God?* [CD# CJG1]

Q I have read some reports on DNA tests for various nationalities. According to the report, the Jews are closely related to Middle Eastern people like the Arabs. Caucasians, whose ancestors came from Northwestern Europe, were not closely related to Jews, but rather to people in Central Asia. Does this not mean we are not of the lost ten tribes, and some of the prophecies for the latter days would not apply to the U.S.?

A A question of this complexity and magnitude is difficult to answer in a mere Q & A format. But let us begin with what we know.

As you know, the *Church of God International* has always maintained that ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were exiled and *lost their identity* (to man, not to God) and that their descendants

are now to be found amongst Western peoples. This is derived from the Bible, Talmud, and rabbinical sources, as well as from secular studies in ancient history, archaeology, linguistics, and, yes, even mythology, along with related fields. The prophets spoke often of Israel “in the last days.” Peoples who emerged from the British Isles (including North America) represent Joseph. The Jews of the State of Israel and the Diaspora are Judah, only a tiny *part* of Israel.

The fact many overlook is that while all Jews are Israelites, not all Israelites are Jews—just as all Texans are Americans, but not all Americans are Texans. The Jewish people are only one-twelfth of the twelve tribes of Israel. This oversight causes much confusion even among scientists—who are not necessarily historians.

Actually, the “jury” is still out in regards to using DNA as a valid tracing method to determine the Israelite connections for the Semitic caucasian societies of the West. There is much we are still learning in this field of science. Attempting to prove Israelite connections *solely* through the scientific evidence of DNA, at this point, is still highly suspect, to say the least.

God ordained that the birthrighted nations *would* lose their identity, *and they did!* God intended that the identities of these cultures are perceived *only* by those who have had their eyes opened to the facts of what His Word describes as the “signs” He gave when profiling them for the last days (Genesis 49). Be assured, there is much to be gained in believing God’s Word over contemporary science.

As you undoubtedly know, DNA studies divide mankind into different groups according to haplogroups or “tracers.” There are YDNA haplogroups that trace DNA only through *male* ancestry. Nevertheless, it now appears that certain *environmental* influences at some stage in the past influence or determine YDNA haplogroups. Male YDNA haplogroups are based on “junk” DNA, which was supposed at first to have no function, and therefore not liable to be influenced by environment. It is now agreed that “junk” DNA is constantly active and functional.

There are also mtDNA haplogroups that trace DNA only through *female* ancestry, at least in theory. It is now agreed that mtDNA may *also* be influenced by environmental factors. It is also agreed that occasionally the mtDNA is influenced by the *male* side, and not *only* the female side.

There is also a related science called “Epigenetics.” Epigenetics studies show how DNA sequences vary in their applications (switch on and off) according to environment, but the underlying pattern remains the same. To complicate matters even further, there is also the matter of “synthetic tracers.”

It must be concluded that it is specious *for the present* to view “DNA tracers” (haplogroups) as a legitimate means of proving genealogy in this *SPECIFIC application*, when considering centuries of inter-racial mixing and the fact that the DNA pools of Israel *are not pure*. They were inter-racially mixed early on, beginning with Manasseh/Ephraim, who were also children of an inter-racial marriage. The Bible records several incidents such as that of Moses and the Ethiopian woman, Ruth and Boaz, etc. Consider, too, that when Israel came out of Egypt after 430 years of captivity, they came out with a great “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38). The Jewish DNA chromosomes do not define *all* Israelites, only those of the tribe of *Judah*. Even though the twelve tribes all had the same *father*, present DNA studies illustrate that using the male DNA *only* to prove this connection remains highly doubtful due to environmental and inter-racial intermingling through the centuries. The book of Judges reports many wars and captivities where, undoubtedly, there was even further mixing and migrations of Israel. Consider, too, that God said, “For, lo, I will command, and I will *SIFT the house of Israel among all nations*, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth” (Amos 9:9). God would not have to “sift” them from amongst all nations if they were not mixed in the first place. The Bible is first and foremost a history book of what God *has* done, *is* doing, and *will* do.

In summary, we would be far better off looking to the prophecies of what *God* said would become of Israel in the last days (Genesis 49:22–26; Deuteronomy 33:16–17).

There is much information on this subject, and this is only the *tiny tip* of the iceberg. Upon request, we would be happy to send you our eight-CD series entitled *The Biblical Origins of the United States and British Commonwealth*, along with an illustrated booklet of maps and further information.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Evolution: Fact...or Fiction?* [EFF]
- *The Biblical Origins of The United States and British Commonwealth* (8 CDs, with accompanying booklet) [CD# CUS]
- *Prophecy: The Convincing Factor* [CD# C513]
- *America's Disturbing Future* [CD# C867]

2 God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit

Q If Jesus was God, then why did He have to pray?

A Good question! Really, the answer is quite simple. Many cannot answer this question because they are locked into a false idea of *who* and *what* God *is*. Armed with the understanding of the nature of Jesus and the Father, the answer becomes quite evident.

Most people have been taught from childhood that God is some kind of a “trinity”—an incomprehensible three-persons-in-one, and one-person-in-three conglomeration—and so it is *no wonder* they do not understand God the Father and Jesus Christ are *TWO DISTINCT SPIRITUAL BEINGS*.

The pagan “trinity” idea was canonized in the fourth and fifth centuries after meetings in which religious leaders worked out an agreement, changing the minds of a few who disagreed and excommunicating those who refused to accept it. It was not taught in the Bible at all. Rather, it was an idea forced *upon* the Bible, rather than a concept taken *from* it. Even among those who believe in it, there are vast differences of opinion as to what it means.

The English word “God” is first mentioned in Genesis 1:1, and is translated from the Hebrew word *elohim*. *Elohim* is a uni-plural word such as “family,” “team,” or “club,” meaning, it is *one* family, *one* team, or *one* club, but consists of *more than one* person. The Godhead is presently a family consisting of the Father and the Son. Christ is the God of the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 10:4) and Christ came to reveal the Father (Luke 10:22). At the resurrection, we, too, will be metabolically changed—born again—and become literal sons of God as well (John 1:12; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23, 49–53).

One scripture sometimes used by people who accept the trinity is John 14:7: “If ye had known Me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him.” Some feel this verse proves God and Jesus were the same person. However, a text without a context is often a pretext. Reading the verse in context demonstrates this is not at all what the Savior was saying.

In verse 10, Jesus goes on to say, “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He

doeth the works.” Here, Jesus Christ clearly says He isn’t speaking for Himself, but for God, and it is God the Father doing the works, not Him. This makes it very clear they are separate beings. Going on, in verse 20, we learn exactly what Jesus means when He talks about being in the Father: “At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.” If the phrase “I am in my Father” meant they were the same person, then the next phrase, “And ye in Me, and I in you” would mean the apostles were also the same person as Jesus, making it far larger than any trinity. Jesus uses similar phrasing often, instructing the apostles to be “one” with each other as He is one with His heavenly Father. His meaning was obviously that they were to be completely unified in love, doctrine, and purpose, just as Jesus and the Father are.

The testimony of Stephen is even more clear about the separateness of Jesus and God: “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55–56).

In the same vein, the following verses should demonstrate the utter absurdity of saying that God the Father and God the Son (Christ) are “the same,” “one being” or “one entity”:

- Christ said that NO man would know the day or the hour of His return (Mark 13:32), not the angels, *neither the Son*, but the Father *only*. Are we to believe Jesus had a “split-personality” where *part* of Him knew what *another* part of Him did not?
- We read in Matthew 1:18,20 and Hebrews 1:5 that Jesus was begotten *by His Father*. Are we to believe He begat *Himself*?
- When Jesus said His Father was GREATER than He was (John 14:28), did He mean He was greater than *Himself*?
- When Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46), did He forsake *Himself*?
- When Christ ascended to His Father in heaven (John 20:17), did He ascend to *Himself*?
- When, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies Thy footstool” (Psalms 110:1, Matthew 22:44), did this mean that Jesus was about to sit at His *own* right hand?”
- And when Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven (Matthew 6:9; John 17:1–26), did He pray to *Himself*?

The answer to all the above is obviously NO, of course not. He prayed to His Father in Heaven, just as we do, and as He taught us to do.

If He is God—and He *is!*—*why* did Jesus pray? Let the Scripture answer! “[Jesus] Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him [God the Father] that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared” (Hebrews 5:7). *There it is!* He was not praying to Himself, but to God His Father in heaven. Jesus drew strength and comfort from His heavenly Father, just as *we* must do! Prayer was a very important part of Jesus’ life and He spent much time in it. He prayed, “... Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be *Thy* name” (Matthew 6:9). Many times in the Gospels, we read that Jesus prayed or went alone to pray apart from the disciples (Matthew 6:6).

Why did Jesus pray? Jesus prayed because of His relationship with the Father. In John chapter 17, we find Jesus’ high priestly prayer. This prayer is Jesus’ *intercession* for the disciples and all who would believe in Him because of their testimony (John 17:20). In this prayer, we see Jesus’ relationship with the Father and the confidence that He has in His Father’s perfect provision and

plan. Jesus' relationship with the Father was the power that brought salvation to man. Jesus laid aside His glory and took on the mantle of flesh (Philippians 2:5–8), and while He wore that mantle, He was obedient to the Father.

Why did Jesus pray? Jesus prayed because of His *dependence* upon and His *obedience* to the Father. Jesus said, "I CAN OF MINE OWN SELF DO NOTHING: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me" (John 5:30). Therefore, Jesus was in complete submission to the Father. He never sinned. Yes, Jesus prayed often and consistently.

Why did Jesus pray? For strength and protection, as well as heartfelt love for His Father. In order to maintain our relationship with the Father, fervent prayer is essential as well. It is the one piece of the armor God provides us (Ephesians 6:11–18) that energizes each of the other pieces.

Why did Jesus pray? He prayed to teach us that as children of God, our obedient submission to the will of the Father will bring us spiritual blessing.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Who, What Is God?* [WWG]
- *Born From Above or Born Again?* [BFA]
- *How to Be More Effective in Your Prayer Life* [YPL]
- *Is Jesus Christ God?* (Set of 3 CDs) [CD# CJC1]
- *The International News* (Quarterly subscription) [INT]

Q Do I understand correctly that Jesus Christ ascended to His Father after being resurrected, then returned to earth and then ascended to heaven again?

A Yes, you are correct. In John 20:17, Christ said to Mary, "... 'Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father'" (John 20:17). Then we see, a scant two verses later, verse 19, that Jesus appeared that same day at evening in a locked room where the disciples were assembled, and showed them His pierced hands and side. Thus between the time Christ appeared to Mary and the time later that same evening, Christ had ascended up to His heavenly Father and returned. Eight days later He appeared to the disciples again in a locked room with Thomas being present (verse 26) and had Thomas thrust his finger into His wounded hands and his hand into His side. Jesus was with them for only 40 more days, and then He ascended again to the Father (Acts 1:3–11), where He awaits His second coming in the days just ahead.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Christ in the Old Testament* [TES]
- *Is Jesus Really God?* [JRG]
- *Why Christ Must Return* [CMR]
- *Christ Our Passover* [CPO]
- *Do You Understand God's Passover?* [CD# CC820]
- *Do You Really Know Jesus Christ?* [CD# C586]
- *Jesus Is Lord* [CD# CC619]

Q My cousin belongs to an organization that does not believe Jesus is God, but was a created Being. Is Jesus God?

A The Scriptures plainly prove that He is God and not a created Being! The organization you mentioned believes that Christ was a created being, not the Creator. Further, they teach that Jesus Christ is, in fact, none other than the archangel Michael. Some have even suggested that He may have been the twin brother of the great archangel Lucifer—the very Lucifer who later became Satan the devil. Those who hold this view believe that God the Father stands alone as the One Being who has eternally existed.

If Jesus was created, then how could He have been an adequate sacrifice to atone for sins committed against an infinite God? Think for a moment! Jesus—not an angel—*must* have been God to adequately atone for our sins.

But does it really matter whether or not we believe that Jesus is God? *Indeed, it does!* If one places faith in a false Christ or another gospel, one that is not described in Scripture, can this false Christ save them (Galatians 1:6–8)? Truly, the identity of Christ is of utmost importance. And yet, many are leading people astray by teaching that Jesus was a created being.

But what does your Bible teach? *Was* Jesus a created being? Let us search the Scriptures (John 5:39; Acts 17:11).

John 1:1,3 contains two direct statements that tell us it was the preexistent Jesus who created all things. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was God*... *All* things were made by Him; and without Him *was not anything made* that was made.”

Paul backed up exactly what John wrote: “For by Him were *all* things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for Him: And He is before *all* things, and by Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16–17). Notice all the “alls!”

Since Jesus created all things, He could not have been one of the “created things.” Paul adds, “And He is before *all* things, and by Him *all* things consist” (Colossians 1:17).

Christ is the one in the Godhead who did the creating. He is the Word—the Spokesman—who said, “Let there be light” and there was light, “Let there be firmament,” “Let there be waters, seas, grass, herbs, fruit trees,” and then created man himself (Genesis 1:3,6,10,11,26). And it was so.

The scholar, Dr. Norman Geisler, comments on Colossians 1:17: “The context of this passage makes it clear that there are no exceptions; Christ is the Creator of all things including angels and everything visible or invisible. Nowhere is this made more clear that Christ is not a creature—angelic or otherwise—than in the relation of angels to Him. Since Christ could not be both the Creator of everything and at the same time a creature Himself, it is necessary to conclude that He is Himself the uncreated Creator of all creation” (*Christian Apologetics*, 1988, p. 338).

He adds a footnote: “In view of the clear teaching that Christ is Creator and not a creature, the Arian misinterpretations of phrases like Christ is ‘firstborn’ (Colossians 1:15) or ‘beginning of creation’ (Revelation 3:14) are wrong. Christ is ‘firstborn’ in the sense of being the unique (not created) Son of God. Christ is first over creation, not first in it” (ibid.). At Christ’s second coming, Christians will also be metabolically changed (1 Corinthians 15:51–54)—literally born into the God family as His begotten children, but Christ is the first!

Hebrews 1:1–2 speaks of the Son as the Being through whom God created the worlds. Also see Colossians 1:16–17; Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 40:25–26,28. Jesus was not created. He existed from eternity along with God the Father!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Is Jesus Really God?* [JRG]
- *Who, What Is God?* [WWG]
- *The Q&A Book—Questions And Answers—Volume 1* [QUE]
- *Evolution—Fact or Fallacy?* [EFF]
- *The Days of Creation* [CD# C533]

Q Do you believe that Michael the Archangel is Jesus?

A There is a demonic agenda to downgrade Jesus to mere angelic status—a being whose sacrifice could not cover the sins of mankind! People of this point of view put forth certain unclear scriptures in order to persuade others that Jesus is the archangel Michael.

First, never attempt to establish doctrine by unclear scriptures—put plain, easy-to-understand scriptures first. No single scripture can be used to establish doctrine. There is great value in gathering *all* the scriptures on a single subject, as we are instructed to do in Isaiah 28:10–13. Many “hunt and peck” for scriptures to give supposed credibility to their preconceived ideas.

No, Jesus was *NOT* the Archangel Michael *NOR* was He a “created being” as some of the Arian persuasion allege. Christ is the *Creator*, not the created. Unfortunately, these deceivers would have you believe that Jesus is just a created being, and that He is the first one to *be* created. They teach that Jesus was formerly an angel who was elevated to the position of possibly a lesser god. Your Bible teaches no such thing! There are even some who have their own translation that wrests some texts to “prove” their predisposed argument.

We need to understand what the Bible *plainly* says before we delve into speculations. Jesus is God just as the Father is God—a like, but separate Being in the God Family. Jesus is, in fact, the God of the Old Testament—the One who said the words, “Let there be light,” etc. in Genesis 1. (See John 1:1,3, 10; Colossians 1:15–16; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:2; and Revelation 4:11.) God the Father used Christ, the Word, to create *all things* (John. 1:1–3), including Lucifer, Michael, and Gabriel. An angel cannot create himself.

Additionally, Jesus *said* He was God several times and accepted worship (John 17:5, 24; 20:28; 8:58; 4:25–26; Mark 14:61–61, etc.). The Jews understood His claims clearly, called them blasphemy, and picked up stones to kill Him!

The word “archangel” appears only *twice* in the entire Bible: in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Jude 1:9. It is said that Lucifer, Michael, and Gabriel are all called “archangels” because they are the only three angels mentioned in Scripture *by name*. It is true that *only* Michael is *specifically called* an archangel in Scripture (Jude 1:9).

Secondly, Michael is not Christ. An incident between Satan the Devil and Michael demonstrates this *so easily a child can understand*.

Notice: “Likewise also these filthy dreamers [wicked men] defile the flesh, despise dominion [authority], and speak evil of dignities [rulers in authority]. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil...about the body of Moses, DARED NOT BRING AGAINST HIM A RAILING ACCUSATION, but said, THE LORD [Christ—who is Michael’s *superior*] REBUKE YOU” (Jude 8–9). Michael the archangel could *not* have been referring to *himself* in this way!

Michael is called a “great prince” who serves Israel (Daniel 10:21; 12:1). He has tremendous authority as an archangel, but his position is *not* one of higher rank than that of Satan. Michael, Gabriel, and Lucifer (who later rebelled, and became Satan the Devil) were each given authority

over *one third* of the angels (inferred by Revelation 12:4). Thus the term “archangel” became associated with *all three* angels! Michael showed respect for Satan’s position as the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4) by *not* rebuking Satan himself.

But Christ *CAN* and *DID* rebuke Satan with a sharp command because He created him as Lucifer (Ezekiel 28:15).

Notice Matthew 4:10. Christ said to Lucifer, a created being (Isaiah 14:12), “Get you hence, Satan.” A creation cannot be greater than its Creator. Because Christ has authority over Satan—He has a *higher rank*—the devil *had* to obey Christ!

The Scripture asks, “For unto which of the *angels* said He at *any* time, ‘Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?’” (Hebrews 1:5,13). The obvious answer is, *none*—only Jesus Christ is the Son of God, not Michael!

Obviously, Michael and Christ are *NOT* the same. Let no man deceive you. Michael is an *archangel*, a created spirit being. Michael and all other created spirit beings are subject to Christ’s authority.

Christ is the Supreme Ruler under God the Father. He is “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life” (Hebrews 7:3). No one created Him.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Is Jesus Really God?* [JRG]
- *Who, What Is God?* [WWG]
- *What Is the Real “Gospel Truth?”* [RGT]
- *Who Is Jesus Christ?* [CD# C810]
- *The Real Nature of Jesus Christ* [CD# C559]
- *Doctrine or Theory?* [CD# C579]

Q What is the Holy Spirit, a person, force, or part of a Trinity?

A Many are confused on this issue due to erroneous traditional teaching. Traditionally, belief in a trinitarian three-in-one being has been the central doctrine of the churches for centuries. Historically, many have maintained that those who do not affirm belief in the trinity are heretics. Various trinitarian concepts exist, but generally the trinity teaching is that there are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; yet, together they are but one God. The doctrine says that the three are coequal, almighty, and uncreated, having existed eternally in the Godhead. Supporters of the trinity say that it is founded not only on religious tradition but also on the Bible. But is this true?

Strangely, the word “trinity” is not once mentioned in the Bible. Upon thorough investigation, we find the trinity is a doctrine that is read *into* the Bible rather than one derived *from* it. Surely, if belief in the trinity were essential to one’s salvation, God would have made it very clear. We need to prove all things by God’s Word and hold fast to that which is good or true (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Some are confused by such scriptures as John 14:16–17,26; 16:7–8,13. They ask why does the Bible use the pronoun “he” to describe the Holy Spirit if it is not a person? In the above passages, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the “Comforter.” “Comforter” is masculine in the Greek language.

According to Greek rules of grammar, you *must* use a masculine pronoun to refer to a masculine noun. Since “comforter” is masculine in Greek, a masculine pronoun is used. That is

why “he” is used in many cases where it refers to the antecedent “comforter.”

In some cases, “he” is used in the *King James Version* where the original Greek uses “it.” The reason is that the translators believed in the trinity themselves, and interpreted rather than translated. John 14:17 is a good example. The pronouns “he” and “him” should have been rendered “it” as they are in the Greek. They refer to the word “spirit,” which is neuter in the Greek. Therefore, the pronouns that refer to them must also be neuter. Notice Romans 8:16: “The Spirit itself beareth witness...” Here the King James translators have correctly translated the Greek pronoun in the neuter gender.

Another scripture that is often misunderstood is Matthew 28:19. Notice that the disciples are to be baptized “into”—the inspired original Greek *eis* means, here, “into,” rather than “in”—“into the NAME of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

This verse does not say that all three are persons. People give names to many things that are not persons. Everything, whether person, place, or thing, has a name. *Personification does not prove personality either in Greek or in English.* When we say, “Stop in the name of the law,” we are not referring to a person. We mean that which the law stands for, its authority.

What is the name into which converts are to be baptized in order to receive the Holy Spirit? The name is “GOD.” We are called the “sons of God” or “God’s sons”—just as human beings bear the names Johnson, Robertson, and Jackson, meaning originally the sons of John, Robert and Jack. God is the family name of the divine Kingdom. It is the Father from “whom the whole family in heaven and [on] earth is NAMED” (Ephesians 3:15). The Father’s name is GOD in English.

Notice: “I have manifested Thy name unto the men...” said Jesus to the disciples. “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me ...” (John 17:6, 11). What is that NAME by which the church is kept?—“the Church of God” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Acts 20:28 and many other places).

For further evidence proving that the Holy Spirit is not a person, turn to Matthew 1:20. Here we read that Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Yet Christ calls God His Father, not the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). *If* the Holy Spirit were a person, *it* would be Christ’s Father. Proof positive that the Holy Spirit is not a person but the power, or means, God the Father uses—much as a man uses electricity for energy, light, or heat.

All that is shown by the mentioning of the Holy Spirit in this verse is that the Holy Spirit belongs to the family of God. It is the essence or power of God.

Consider further: *if* the Holy Spirit were a person, Jesus Christ prayed to the wrong individual! Throughout the four Gospels, we find Christ speaking to God—not the Holy Spirit—as His Father.

Some may be confused by the words found in 1 John 5:7–8. “For there are three that bear record [in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.]”

Notice words in brackets []. They were not written by the Apostle John, but were added later. They are not found in any of the old manuscripts of the inspired *Koine* Greek, and were not found in the manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate until the eighth century after Christ. In view of this, these words give no credence or authority for belief in a trinity.

The *Ryrie Study Bible* says, “Verse 7 should end with the word *record*. The rest of verse 7 and all of verse 8 are not in any ancient Greek text.”

The *Scofield Reference Bible* says, “It is generally agreed that v. 7 has no real authority, and has been inserted.”

A.T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures* commentary adds, “Some Latin scribe caught up Cyprian’s

exegesis and wrote it on the margin of his text, and so it got into the Vulgate and finally into the *Textus Receptus* by the stupidity of Erasmus.”

The *Critical and Experimental Commentary* says of this section that the verse was not found in the Latin Vulgate until the eighth century. The *New Interpreter's Bible* states, “This verse in the KJV is to be rejected... It appears in no ancient Greek MS [manuscript].”

The Pulpit Commentary states, “[These] words which are not contained in a single Greek uncial manuscript, nor in a single Greek cursive earlier than the fourteenth century (the two which contain the passage being evidently translated from the Vulgate), nor are quoted by a single Greek Father during the whole of the Trinitarian controversy, nor are found in *any* authority until late in the fifth century, cannot be genuine.”

The Abingdon Bible Commentary concludes, “When Erasmus published his first Manuscript edition, he was chided by Stunica for having omitted the passage about the trinity in 1 John 7:7–7. In a rash moment Erasmus said that if the passage could be found in a single Greek Manuscript, he would insert it. The passage was translated from the Latin Vulgate and forged into the Greek miniscule 61 of the 16th century (now in Dublin). Erasmus suspected the truth, but stood to his promise to put it in. When the Revised Version properly left it out a cry was made that it was done in the interest of Unitarianism. It should never have been put in the Greek at all!” (*The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 861)

Consider that even *if* these italicized verses were inspired by God, not only the spirit but also “the water and the blood” are said to be “witnesses.” But water and blood are obviously not persons, and neither is the Holy Spirit.

Neither the Jews nor the early Christians viewed the Holy Spirit as part of any “trinity.” That teaching came centuries later. As *A Catholic Dictionary* notes: “The third Person was asserted at a Council of Alexandria in 362... and finally by the Council of Constantinople of 381”—some three and a half centuries after the Holy Spirit filled the disciples at Pentecost in Acts 2!

No, the Holy Spirit is not a person, and it is not part of a trinity. The Holy Spirit is God’s active energy or force that He uses to accomplish His will. It is not equal to God but is always at His disposition and subordinate to Him.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Who, What, Is God?* [WWG]
- *Is Jesus Really God?* [JRG]
- *The Holy Spirit* [CD# C534]
- *One God, One Lord* [CD# C546]

Q Is JESUS the correct translation from the original Hebrew language? Is the name Jesus pagan?

A As you may know, there has been much confusion and debate about the exact pronunciation of the name of Jesus. Most disagree among themselves. Some religious movements have argued that we worship the wrong Savior if we do not call Him by His Hebrew name, *Yeshua* (or a derivative of it depending upon where one places the accent marks). *The Bible says no such thing!*

What is Jesus’ original name? The historically correct answer can only be that it is the name He was given by the archangel Gabriel in Matthew 1:21 before His birth and confirmed at His “naming ceremony” (Luke 2:21). The original text of the gospel of Luke is in the *Greek* language.

Note that the angel did *not* speak Greek to Mary. The original gospel is a Greek translation of what was really spoken in Hebrew or Aramaic.

Matthew 1:21 emphatically states, “...*call His name Jesus.*” The name *Jesus* is derived from the verb signifying *to save*. Our Savior was given that name because HE SHALL SAVE HIS PEOPLE, not temporarily, as Joshua did the Israelites from their enemies, but spiritually and eternally FROM THEIR SINS. As an aside, in verse 23 we read, “...and they shall call *His name* Emmanuel [Greek Εμμανουηλ.:]”—yet few “holy names” people insist that we call Jesus “Emmanuel.”

The Bible doesn’t give preeminence to one language (or translation) over another. We are *not* commanded to call upon the name of the Lord in the Hebrew language only. Acts 2:21 says, “But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” God *knows* who calls upon His name, whether they do so in English, Portuguese, Spanish, or Hebrew. Are we to believe the God who made and later confounded the languages does not understand all languages? He is still the same Lord and Savior and knows who calls upon Him. God is no respecter of persons *or languages!*

If, for example, your name was William Gates, it would be written William Gates in Hebrew today, but since you do not speak those Semitic languages, you answer when someone calls you “William Gates” in the language you *do* speak, namely English.

The apostle Paul said, “Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they *strive not about words* to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers” (2 Timothy 2:14).

Those who argue and insist we call Jesus by His correct name, *Yeshua*, are concerning themselves with minor, nit-picky matters. English speakers call Him Jesus, with a “J” that sounds like “gee.” Portuguese speakers call Him Jesus but with a “J” that sounds like “sjeh,” and Spanish speakers call Him Jesus with a “J” that sounds like “hey.” Which one of these pronunciations is the correct one? All of them, of course, in their own language.

Basically, what all this means is, Joshua and Jesus are one and the *same* name, but in a different language. One is translated from Hebrew into English, the other from Greek into English. The *meaning* of the name is the same: it means “Savior” and “the salvation of the Lord.”

Putting all arguments aside, it is *not* wrong or pagan to call our Lord and Savior “Jesus” in the English language. It does *not* make anyone any more (or less) “holy” by uttering a name in a foreign (to us) language than it is to say it in our own language. Further, speaking of the Millennium, the Scriptures tell us, “For then [in the Kingdom of God] will I turn to the people *a pure language*, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zephaniah 3:9). May God haste that day!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Assurance of Salvation* [SAL]
- *Is Jesus Really God?* [JRG]
- *Who, What, is God?* [WWG]
- *What the Bible Says About Tongues* [CD# C721]
- *The Real Nature of Jesus Christ* [CD# C559]

Q When was Jesus buried and resurrected? I have heard He may have been crucified on a Wednesday and resurrected on Saturday. How can this be?

A This question has troubled many because of the proclivity to blend human traditions and philosophical thinking with the Bible’s own clear statements. Most often, they just don’t fit.

The whole question can be resolved by asking ourselves, *Whom do we choose to believe—the inspired words of Jesus Christ Himself—or the traditions of men?*

Rather than just making a brief statement, allow us go into some detail, line upon line (Isaiah 28:9), and ponder some scriptures most traditional Christians fail to consider.

Turn first to Matthew 12:38. Here we find some of the scribes and Pharisees asking Jesus for a *SIGN* to *prove* He was the Messiah. But Jesus told them that the *ONLY* sign He would give was that of the prophet Jonah: “For *as* Jonah was *three days AND three nights* in the belly of the great fish, *so* will the Son of Man be *three days and three nights* in the heart of the earth” (verse 40). In order to *shoehorn* their Good Friday/Easter Sunday tradition into the Scriptures, traditional Christianity must do violence to the Scriptures by cutting the amount of time Christ was in the tomb *in half*, allowing His entombment to be only *a day and a half*.

Many *deny* the only sign Christ gave by teaching that Christ’s “three days and three nights” statement does *not* require a literal span of 72 hours, reasoning that only a *part* of a day can be reckoned as a whole day, passing it off as a “Greek idiom.” But the book of Jonah, upon which Christ based His claim as Messiah, was written in Hebrew, not Greek! Still, to perpetuate their Good Friday/ Easter Sunday tradition, proponents claim that since Jesus died in the afternoon, they assume the remainder of Friday constituted the “first” day, Saturday the “second day,” and part of Sunday the “third.” However, this reasoning fails to take into consideration that only *two* nights—Friday night and Saturday night—are accounted for in this explanation. Something is obviously very *wrong* with the traditional reckoning!

Jonah 1:17, to which Christ referred, states explicitly, “Jonah was in the belly of the fish *THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS*.” We have *no* biblical basis whatsoever for thinking that Jesus meant only two nights and one day, plus parts of two days. *If* Jesus were in the tomb only from late Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning, then the *SIGN* He gave that He was the prophesied Messiah *was not fulfilled!*

We must harmonize *all* the scriptures together regarding how long Christ was in the tomb. Let’s carefully examine the details from the Gospels. When we do, we will discover Jesus’ words were *fulfilled precisely*, proving Him to be the Messiah.

Notice the events outlined in Luke 23. Jesus’ moment of death, as well as His hasty burial because of the oncoming Sabbath that began *at sundown*, is narrated in verses 46–53. Verse 54 then states, “That day was *THE PREPARATION*, and the Sabbath drew near.” But *which* Sabbath?

Many have *assumed* that it is the *weekly* Sabbath mentioned here, and that Jesus was therefore crucified on a Friday. But John 19:31 shows that this approaching Sabbath “was *a high day*”—not the *weekly* Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset), but the first Day of Unleavened Bread, which is one of God’s *annual*, or high Sabbath days (Exodus 12:16–17; Leviticus 23:6–7). These *annual* holy days could—and usually did—fall on *any* day of the week other than the regular weekly Sabbath day.

This high-day Sabbath was Wednesday sunset through Thursday sunset, since Luke 23:56 shows that the women, after seeing Christ’s body being laid in the tomb just before sunset, “returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils” for the final preparation of the body.

Such work would not have been done on a Sabbath day, since it would have been considered a violation of the Sabbath. This is verified by Mark’s account, which states, “Now *when the Sabbath was PAST*, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices [which they would not have purchased on the high-day Sabbath], that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1).

The women had to wait *until this annual “high day” Sabbath was over* before they could

buy and prepare the spices to be used for anointing Jesus' body. Then, after purchasing and preparing the spices and oils on Friday, "they rested on the Sabbath *according to the commandment*" (Luke 23:56). This *second* Sabbath mentioned in the Gospel accounts is the regular weekly Sabbath, observed from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

By comparing details in both Gospels—where Mark tells us the women bought spices *after* the Sabbath and Luke relates that they prepared the spices *before* resting on the Sabbath—we can clearly see that *two different Sabbaths* are mentioned. The first, as John 19:31 tells us, was a "high day"—the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—which, in A.D. 31, fell on a Thursday. The second was the weekly seventh-day Sabbath.

After the women rested on Saturday, the regular weekly Sabbath, they went to Jesus' tomb *early* on the first day of the week (Sunday), "while it was *still dark*" (John 20:1), and found that Christ's body was already gone. He had *already* been resurrected (Matthew 28:1–6; Mark 16:2–6; Luke 24:1–3).

When we consider the details in all four Gospel accounts, the picture is clear. Jesus was crucified and entombed late on Wednesday afternoon, just before a Sabbath began at sunset. However, this was a HIGH-day Sabbath, lasting from Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset that week, rather than the regular weekly Sabbath, lasting from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. How plain!

He remained in the tomb from Wednesday at sunset until Saturday at sunset—exactly 72 hours—when He rose from the dead. While no one witnessed His resurrection (which took place inside a sealed tomb), it had to have happened NEAR SUNSET ON SATURDAY, three days *and* three nights after His body was entombed. It could *not* have happened on Sunday morning, because when Mary Magdalene came to the tomb that morning before sunrise, "while it was STILL DARK," she found the stone rolled away and the tomb *empty*. When the women came to the tomb, the angel said, "HE IS NOT HERE: for He *is* [already] *risen*, AS HE SAID. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6). This was *no* "Easter sunrise" event!

Thus, we can be assured that the length of His entombment that Jesus gave as proof He was the Messiah was *exactly* as long as He foretold. Jesus rose *precisely three days and three nights*—72 full hours—after He was placed in the tomb. Do the math—it cannot be worked out any other way.

This understanding completely destroys the Good Friday/Easter Sunday myth, along with the Protestant excuse of keeping Sunday as "the Lord's Day." Because most people do not understand the biblical high days Jesus Christ and His followers kept, they fail to understand the chronological details so accurately preserved for us in the Gospels.

For further details, be sure to request the items listed below.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Three Days and Three Nights—Was Jesus Crucified on Friday and Resurrected Sunday?*
- *God's Seasonal Plan* [GSP]
- *How Was Passover Replaced by Easter?* [WCP]
- *Easter: Truth or Tradition?* [CD# C725]
- *So, What About Easter?* [CD# C523]

Q I thought I read in the Bible that Jesus was born six months after John the Baptist. But the Christians are saying Jesus was born at Christmas. Is that true or false?

A You are correct that Christ was born six months after John the Baptist. Yours is a short question that requires a rather long answer. Here is how we arrive at this conclusion.

To begin with, let it plainly be stated that *the Scriptures do not give the precise date of Christ's birth*. If this were important—if we were expected to celebrate the birth of Christ—God would have surely inspired the date to have been recorded! By close examination of several passages in the Bible, we are able to conclude that Christ was most definitely *not* born on the 25th of December, but at some time in the *autumn* of the year.

Please turn in your own Bible and *read all of* Luke 1:5–9, 26–37. Notice that the angel Gabriel (v. 19) visited Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, *during the course of Abia* (v. 5). What, some wonder, was “*the course of Abia*” (also called “Abijah” in Hebrew)? We learn from 1 Chronicles 24:7–10, that the “course of Abia” was the eighth of 24 courses, or revolving patterns of turns, during a 12-month year. Each group of priests (all except the most senior, who were on duty more often) officiated in the temple for *two weeks* every year. *Zacharias*' turn of duty came when the eighth group (*Abijah's*) was serving, which was during the 15th and 16th weeks after the beginning of the year.

A year in God's sacred calendar begins with the new moon nearest the spring equinox. Consequently, the biblical new year begins in the month of Abib or Nisan, corresponding to our March or very early April (compare Exodus 12:2). For our purposes here, we will use the equinox date of March 20. Fifteen weeks (105 days) after the 20th of March bring us to *early July*. In other words, in *early July* the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his aged wife, Elisabeth, would conceive and bear a son, whose name was to be John. Six months into Elisabeth's pregnancy, that is, in *early January*, Gabriel informed the virgin Mary that she also was to conceive and bring forth a son, Jesus Christ—the Messiah! When Mary said that this was not possible as she had never had relations with a man, Gabriel told her that the aged Elisabeth, who had been barren for many, many years, was *already* six months pregnant—another apparent impossibility with man, but not with God. *For with God nothing shall be impossible!*

In summary, from closely reading the above passages (Luke 1:5–9, 26–37) we learn, among other things, these significant details:

- Elisabeth conceived in *early July*.
- Mary conceived some *6 months after* Elisabeth, in *early January*.
- Therefore *Jesus* was born just over *9 months later*, which brings us to an autumn date in *late September or early October*.
- From the above scriptural evidence, it is certain that Jesus Christ was *not* born on December 25, but in the *autumn of the year*. This is very enlightening, because late September or early October coincides with *the Feast of Trumpets* and *the Feast of Tabernacles*, the most sacred time of the sacred calendar (Leviticus 23:23–44). This time frame is very significant because the Feast of Trumpets pictures the *Second Coming* of Jesus Christ in power and glory, and the Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennium when Christ will tabernacle—or dwell with—mankind upon the earth for a thousand years (compare Isaiah 2:2–4; Daniel 7:14,18,22,27; Zechariah 14:9–21; Revelation 20:4–6).

These facts may be verified in E.W. Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, Appendix 179, available through most Christian Bible bookstores and other places.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Facts You Should Know About Christmas* [XMS]
- *Is Christmas Christian?* [ICC]

- *The Ghost of Christmas Past* [CD# C875]
- *The Genealogy of Jesus—Is the Record Reliable?* [CD# C583]

3

Salvation—Death, Heaven, and Hell

Q I need help in understanding Luke 16:19–31, the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. Some denominations claim this is absolute proof that Lazarus is in heaven and the rich man is in hell. What is your opinion?

A We cannot answer in behalf of other organizations. We can only point you to the Scriptures and encourage you to believe what is *in your own Bible*. The whole issue of Lazarus and the rich man hinges upon whether the story is literal or a parable. If it were a literal, historical event, the teachers you refer to would appear to have a good case. If it is *not* a literal, historical event, the story is a parable, and the teachers are reaching for scriptures out of context to give credibility to their preconceived ideas. The good news is, there is *no* need to guess. The Bible makes it *very plain!*

Go get your Bible. First notice, contextually, *TO WHOM* was Jesus Christ speaking when He related this account of Lazarus and the rich man. If you have a red-letter Bible that displays the first-person sayings of Jesus in red, you will see that this account is one of a series of many parables given *in a single hearing*. Tracing it back to chapter fifteen, verse one, we read, “Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.” Notice, *all the publicans and sinners were there!* Now moving on to Luke 16:1, we read, “And He said also unto His disciples...” The disciples were there *also* among the others. Let us move on to verse 14: “And *the Pharisees also*, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.”

So we see that in Christ’s hearing were all the publicans, sinners, Pharisees, and His disciples, all together in a sizable group. Now turn quickly to Matthew 13:34: “All these things spake *Jesus unto the multitude IN PARABLES; and WITHOUT A PARABLE SPAKE HE NOT UNTO THEM!*”

Did you catch that? Christ did *not* speak to the public *except* in parables! This was done so that the sense and the very words of Psalm 78:2–3 might be fulfilled concerning Christ. See Christ’s own answer as to why He spoke in parables in Matthew 13:10–15. Beginning in verse 13, Christ said to His inner circle of disciples, “*Therefore* speak I to them *in parables*: because they seeing see *not*; and hearing they hear *not*, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, by hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.” Why? “For this people’s *heart* is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes *they* have closed; *lest* at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:14–15). Christ was not trying to “save” everyone there and then!

Here is another biblical statement that is diametrically *opposite* of what most people have been taught! In other words, Christ deliberately *clouded* the meanings of the parables He gave to the public. *And these same parables are still clouded to most professing Bible teachers today!* The carnal-minded Pharisees, publicans, and sinners in His audience were *not* privileged to understand. *Only* His chosen, personal disciples received the later, fuller explanations of His parables (Matthew 13:16). And yet many have been told that He spoke in parables to make the meaning clearer to all!

So we have established BY YOUR VERY OWN BIBLE that the account of Lazarus and the rich man is and *must* be a parable!

What *is* a parable? A parable is an allegory, a short narrative making a moral or religious point by comparing it with natural things or a situation at hand. A parable is a story that illustrates a lesson. It is made to make one understand one thing by comparing it with another of the same nature. Simply put, it is a story with a moral pointing to a truth. It is a rule of Bible study that one should take the Bible literally where it is at all possible. If symbolic, figurative, or typical language is used—as in the case of parables—then look for the literal truth it intends to convey.

The context and the wording of this illustration by Jesus Christ show very clearly that it is a *parable* and not an actual historical event. Poverty is not being praised; nor are riches being condemned. Rather, mercy, commiseration, and benevolence are being extolled. The principle is this: “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink” (Proverbs 25:21; Romans 12:20). The parable illustrates that the scribes and Pharisees in the audience had corrupted the law, not only in the commandment of loving our enemies, but even that of loving our brethren. This was not a new, but an old commandment. The lesson is, when you are in your comfort zone, take heed. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12). The parable illustrates the warning given earlier: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Luke 13:28). The timing of this parable is the second resurrection when the righteous are accepted into the Kingdom of God while the unrighteous are cast into a lake of fire and BURNED UP, leaving them neither root nor branch (Malachi 4:1). The example here teaches the value of good works, final rewards, and a reversal in the spiritual status, or condition, of those who fall into the categories represented by Lazarus and the rich man.

There is much, *much* more to be gleaned from this parable—far too much to go into in a mere Q & A format. The booklet, *Lazarus And The Rich Man—Where Are They?* starts out like this:

“Millions of people turn to Luke 16, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, to substantiate their belief that we have an immortal soul and that Lazarus is in heaven right now waiting for our arrival... unless, of course, you go to “the other place” where the rich man is.

Is this true? Can you prove it from your own Bible? We should have a Bible reason for everything we believe, and take no man’s word for it, nor any church organization’s word for it—no matter how sincere and trusted they may be—until we have proven it for ourselves out of our own Bibles. Just because a man or an organization is considered “holy” and sincere, does that make them right? Friends, you need to blow the dust off your Bible and check these things out for yourself. If you are correct, you have nothing to fear—but what if you are mistaken?”

The booklet ends with an extended study of synonymous words for “hell,” etc.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *Lazarus and the Rich Man—Where Are They?* [LRM]
- *Is Elijah In Heaven?* [ELH]
- *Parables* [CD# C 815]
- *Providence of the Dead* [CD]
- *What Happens When You Die?* [CD# C465]
- *Soul—Mortal or Immortal?* [CD# C334]

Q Is Paradise where we go when we die? Does our soul or spirit go to paradise?

A Many are surprised to learn that the word “paradise” is mentioned in the Bible *only three times*: Luke 23:43; 1 Corinthians 12:4; and Revelation 2:7. “Paradise” is translated from the Greek word *paradeisos*. This is a word of Persian origin, and means a garden, particularly a garden of pleasure, filled with trees, shrubs, fountains, and flowers. In hot climates, such gardens were peculiarly pleasant, and hence they were attached to the mansions of the rich and the palaces of princes. The word came thus to denote any place of happiness, and was used particularly to denote the abodes of the blessed in the Kingdom of God. Jesus used this word to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) as a *type* of the Kingdom of God where the earth will be like a beautiful garden, lush, green, and at peace. Compare Isaiah 11:6–9; 65:25.

When God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). But man also was given a spirit that made him far superior to the animal world, which operates solely on instinct and conditioned response.

The human mind, coupled with the human spirit, gives man intelligence far above the animal kingdom. When a human is converted and is given the Holy Spirit from God, that Spirit combines with the human spirit to begin the formation of a new spiritual creature. Then, when a person dies, his spirit returns to God until the resurrection. In analogy, the human spirit may be compared to a master recording device that records all of a man’s characteristics, intelligence, and experiences.

If God so chooses, He can rebuild that man either from new physical material or from spirit (depending on which resurrection he may be in) from all the information contained in the human spirit. Scripture clearly speaks of two types of spirit a man can have: The spirit of man, “which is in him,” and the Spirit of God, which is given to him during the conversion process. Some scriptural references in this regard can be found in your own Bible: Genesis 2:7; Job 32:8; Ecclesiastes 3:21; 12:7; Daniel 45:28–37; Zechariah 12:1; Romans 8:16; and 1 Corinthians 2:11–15.

Contrary to what many religious organizations teach about heaven, YOUR BIBLE says “NO man hath ascended up to heaven, but He [Christ] that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). Revelation 5:10 says, “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign ON THE EARTH.” Yes, Jesus is coming a second time TO THIS EARTH and will set up His Kingdom ON EARTH! The Kingdom of God is the *family* of God ruling as the government of God (Ephesians 3:14–15). It is a future world-ruling government to be set up ON EARTH by Christ at His return, with Jesus as King and the resurrected spirit-composed saints in positions of co-rulership with Him. The Kingdom of God—sometimes referred to as a “mystery” in the New Testament because so few really understood it—was first preached and explained by Christ, then by His church. It shall be established ON EARTH for a thousand years following Christ’s return, and shall be completely fulfilled when New Jerusalem and God the Father come down out of heaven to dwell on the New Earth. (Please read all of Mark 4:11; Revelation 5:10; 20:4; and 21:1–3,7,10.)

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Assurance of Salvation* [SAL]
- *The Second Coming... and Beyond* [SCB]
- *Do You Have an Immortal Soul?* [IMS]
- *Immortality* [CD# C757]
- *Soul: Mortal or Immortal?* [CD# C334]

Q I have several questions about an *Armor of God* program that addressed the issues of death and heaven. I have always thought my dear mother was in heaven, yet you seem to say she is not. I am confused. What does the Bible really teach about death? Are our loved ones in heaven, hell, purgatory, or are they just unconscious?

A From childhood, many people have preconceived ideas about what the Bible teaches, and then hunt and peck for Bible verses—often *out of context*—that seem to verify what *they* want it to say. Several denominations have a “pathway” of scriptures they want to concentrate on, while ignoring many others on the same subject. This is called “text proofing.” To be honest with the Word of God, we must find ALL the Scriptures on a matter and piece them together—somewhat like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle—then the picture finally becomes abundantly clear. The Bible seldom has *all* truth on a matter in any one place (Isaiah 28:9–10). That is why we are to *search the Scriptures daily* (Acts 17:11), *prove all things* (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and *rightly divide* the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Here are a few key scriptures many avoid regarding the state of the dead:

- “His [man’s] breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; IN THAT VERY DAY *HIS THOUGHTS PERISH*” (Psalms 146:4). Psalms 6:5 goes on to say, “For *in death THERE IS NO REMEMBRANCE* of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?” “THE DEAD PRAISE NOT THE LORD, neither *any* that go down into silence” (Psalms 115:17).
- “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: *as* the one dieth, *so* dieth the other; yea, they have *all* one breath; so that A MAN HATH NO PREMINENCE ABOVE A BEAST: for all is vanity. ALL GO UNTO ONE PLACE; ALL ARE OF THE DUST, AND ALL TURN TO DUST AGAIN” (Ecclesiastes 3:19–20).
- “For the living know that they shall die: BUT THE DEAD KNOW NOT ANY THING, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).
- “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; FOR THERE IS NO WORK, NOR DEVICE, NOR KNOWLEDGE, NOR WISDOM, IN THE GRAVE, WHITHER THOU GOEST” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).
- “So man lieth down, and riseth not: *till* the heavens be no more, THEY SHALL NOT AWAKE, NOR BE RAISED OUT OF THEIR SLEEP” (Job 14:12).
- “If a man die, *shall* he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, TILL MY CHANGE COME. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hand” (Job 14:14–15).
- Jesus plainly said, “AND *NO* MAN HATH ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN” (John 3:13), but He Himself, who just came *down* from heaven.
- “These *all* died in faith, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES, but having seen them *afar off*...” (Hebrews 11:13,19). All go to their graves with *no* conscious thought *until the* RESURRECTION of the dead!
- These verses are backed up and verified by Philippians 3:21, 1 Thessalonians 4:1–17, 1 Corinthians 15:51–54, and many other places.

And remember, Jesus said, “*The scripture cannot be broken*” (John 10:35)! You cannot use one scripture against another—all must blend in harmoniously. The Apostle Paul verified that “ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16)!

We must ask ourselves *how* these vividly clear, plain, impossible-to-be-misunderstood scriptures about the state of the dead compare with our preconceived ideas of death, heaven, hell,

immortality of the soul, etc. *Could* some of our preconceptions have gotten into our minds through other *men* and religious *organizations* (Matthew 24:4–5; Isaiah 8:20)? We challenge you—send for the materials listed below, then *look up* each verse quoted *in your own Bible*—and then BELIEVE YOUR OWN BIBLE!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Do You Have an Immortal Soul?* [IMS]
- *Immortality—God’s Gift to the Saints* [GGI]
- *Is Elijah in Heaven?* [ELH]
- *Lazarus and the Rich Man—Where Are They?*
- *What Happens When You Die?* [CD# C455]
- *Soul: Mortal or Immortal?* [CD# C334]

Q What does it mean to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)?

A Many people wonder about this saying in Philippians 2:12, but it is easy to understand.

While Christ is our Savior, the author of our salvation, and certainly paid the penalty of our sins for us—He died *for* us, in our *stead*—we must ACCEPT what He has done, BELIEVE Him, and work together WITH Him. God does not do it all *for* us. Our humble cooperation is a requirement. “Work out your *own* salvation” simply means *WE ARE INVOLVED* in our own salvation process, implying that it should be every Christian’s duty to abide by, submit, and be humbly obedient to God and His commandments. “With fear and trembling,” lest we should live in sin (1 John 3:4) and ultimately miss out on eternal life. This does not “save” us or “earn” salvation—that is entirely a gift by the *grace* of God!—but is nonetheless a requirement. If there were nothing to do, why the necessity of repenting and overcoming?

By analogy, if I were to hold out a thousand dollar bill to you and say, “Dear Sir or Madame, this is a *free GIFT*. It is entirely yours. All I *REQUIRE* is that you get up out of your chair, walk across the room and take it from my hand,” your complying does not “earn” it—it is still a *free gift*. Likewise, our obedience to God does not “earn” salvation,” but is simply a character-developing requirement.

In 1 John 2:4 we learn, “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth *not* His commandments, is a *liar*, and the truth is not in him.”

1 Peter 1:4–10 shows *the necessity of effort*: “Whereby are given unto us exceeding *great and precious promises*: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving *all diligence*, ADD to your faith VIRTUE; and to virtue KNOWLEDGE; and to knowledge TEMPERANCE; and to temperance PATIENCE; and to patience GODLINESS; and to godliness BROTHERLY KINDNESS; and to brotherly kindness CHARITY. For if these things be *in* you, and *abound*, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that *lacketh* these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, GIVE DILIGENCE to make your calling and election sure: for if ye *do* these things, ye shall never fall.”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Understanding the Commandments* [UTN]
- *How to Be A Real Christian*

- *In Spirit and in Truth* [CD# C548]
- *How to Increase Your Faith* [CD# C557]
- *Do You Really Know Jesus Christ?* [CD# C586]

Q If someone is cremated, will they be resurrected after death?

A The answer is definitely *Yes!* Some people are concerned that this practice is somehow against God’s will. We do not believe that, nor is there any scriptural evidence to support such a view. Cremation is much more affordable than a traditional burial, and there is nothing whatsoever to indicate that God is displeased by it.

Others are concerned about the resurrection. Will God be able to resurrect someone who has been cremated? God’s Word assures us that He can! With God *all* things are possible. When the apostle Paul was confronted with people who were trying to analyze the “mechanics” of the resurrection, he basically told them, “Don’t worry about it” (1 Corinthians 15). We recommend you read that entire chapter in your Bible. It is quite profound, enlightening, and encouraging. In it, Paul explains that, at Christ’s return, the “dead in Christ” will be resurrected and receive spiritual bodies. One thousand years later, the general (or second) resurrection will occur. This is when “the rest of the dead” will be raised back to physical life and have their opportunity for salvation (Revelation 20:1–5). God does not need your dust, bone, or ashes to resurrect you!

Resurrection from the dead is indeed the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Paul said because of the *resurrection* he was called in question (Acts 23:6; 24:21). We must have faith that God is able to bring about those things that He has *promised*. Jesus Christ said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Afraid to Die?* [ATD]
- *Do You Have an Immoral Soul?* [IMS]
- *What Happens When You Die?* [CD# C455]
- *Does God Love the World Enough to Save It?* [GLW]

Q After a lifetime of troubles, despair, disappointment, and hard knocks, I’ve decided it is high time I get serious about my spiritual life. Please give me a summary of the basic steps I must take to become a Christian. Thank you.

A First of all, we wish to congratulate you and encourage you as you begin your life as a Christian. It is the *most important* and *exciting* decision you will ever make!

You asked for a summary of the basic steps to take regarding the Christian walk. In the book of Matthew, chapter 19, verses 16–17, we read that a similar question was proposed to Jesus Christ: “And, behold, one came and said unto Him, ‘Good Master, what good thing shall I *do*, that I may have eternal life?’ And He [Christ] said unto him, ‘... *if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*’” This is a plain and simple answer from Jesus Christ Himself.

Again, we read in 1 John 5:2, “By *this* we know that we love the children of God, when we *love God, and keep His commandments.*”

Similarly, 1 John 5:3 says, “For *this is* the love of God, that we *keep His commandments*: and his commandments are *not* grievous.”

There are many who will tell you that all you have to do is confess Jesus and accept Him into your heart and you will be saved. But is that *all* the Bible says?

We see from these verses mentioned above that commandment keeping (all ten!) *is very important*. In Matthew 22:36–40, a lawyer came to Christ, tempting Him, and asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Christ broke the commandments into two broad categories: the first four of the Ten Commandments show *how to love God*; the last six show *how to love your fellow man*. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang *all* the law and the prophets.’”

Of course, as a disciple or learner of Christ, you must become intensely involved with God’s Word, the Holy Bible. It goes without saying that you must *read* it, *study* it, *pray* to draw closer to God, and even *fast* occasionally. *Repentance* of our sins is a prerequisite (Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3,5; 1 John 3:4) followed by *baptism* (Acts 2:38). Following baptism and the *laying on of hands* (1 Timothy 4:14; Hebrews 6:2), you will receive God’s Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you through the rest of your life as you follow Christ. For further details, be sure to send for the suggested items below.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *How To Study Your Bible* STB]
- *How To Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *Things to Do While Waiting For Jesus to Return* [WFJ]
- *Ten Simple Rules* [CD# C861]
- *Discipleship* [CD# C846]

Q How do you know when you are called to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior?”

A Jesus said, “No one *can* come to me except the Father who has sent me *draw* him, and I will raise him up in the last day” (John 6:44,65). This is repeated in verse 65. Your calling—the opening of your mind—is a miracle, an act of God. It means God the Father has directly singled *you* out and is beginning to open your mind to His Word, the Bible. As you repent and diligently seek Him, more and more truths will open up to you, leading you into the light. God calls—draws you by His Spirit—but *you* must respond! Romans 8:9 tells us, “...Now if any man have not the *Spirit* of Christ, he is none of his,” that is, not a Christian. To whom does He give His Spirit? Acts 5:32 answers, “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given *to them that obey him*.” Acts 2:38 goes on, “...*Repent*, and *be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *What Does the Bible Say About Predestinating and Election?* [BPE]
- *Ten Facts You Should Know About Repentance* [TFR]
- *How To Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *Games Sinners Play* [CD# C709]
- *First Calling* [CD# C754]
- *The Baptismal Candidate* [CD# C563]

Q I recently gave my heart to the Lord at a church meeting and was told I am now saved. But what about baptism? Do I need to be baptized as well? What is the proper mode of baptism? Please help.

A The method of baptism is a much-debated issue among many, but it should not be confusing if one looks to the *Bible* for the answer. Some even go so far as to claim that water baptism is not necessary. Some radio and TV evangelists suggest, “If you want to be saved, all you have to do is accept Jesus in your heart. As you sit in your car or home—wherever you are—just say the words, ‘I accept you, Jesus’ and you will be *instantly saved*. You don’t even need to be baptized!” This false doctrine has given many a sinner a false sense of security! We need to be aware that there are false gospels, false ministers, and even false baptisms.

Notice what the inspired apostle Peter *did* say on the Day of Pentecost: Peter had just given an inspiring sermon that convicted his hearers of their sins, and showed that they had collectively killed the Messiah. His hearers were “pricked in their hearts” and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we *DO*?” “Then Peter said unto them, ‘REPENT, and BE BAPTIZED every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!’” (Acts 2:37–38). Notice, we must do *two* things, then God promises to perform the *third*! Peter never once said, “Just sit there and whisper to yourself, *Jesus, I accept you into my heart*.” No! Peter taught that receiving salvation required *action* on the part of those wanting it. How could it be plainer? Repentance and baptism are essential *requirements* for salvation.

Christ said in Mark 16:16, “He that BELIEVETH *and* is BAPTIZED shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Christ’s final commission to His followers was, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, BAPTIZING them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Christian baptism, then, is a command, not an option!

Our Statement of Beliefs correctly states:

BAPTISM: *The ceremony of water baptism is performed by immersion, for the forgiveness of sins, upon true repentance and acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice. After this ceremony, and as a result, one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Baptism symbolizes the renunciation of the past sinful way of life, the burial of the old man in a watery grave, and the emergence of a new, Spirit-led man living with Christ’s mind and following in His footsteps (Matthew 3:13–16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1–8; Colossians 2:1,2).*

The physical act of baptism—that of immersing the repentant sinner in water—is not what saves, but it is a *requirement* to receiving the Holy Spirit, which **DOES** save!

The true *Bible* definition of a Christian (not the dictionary definition) is found in Romans 8:9, “...Now if any man have not the *Spirit* of Christ, he is none of His,” that is, he or she is not a true Christian. Again, *how* does one *receive* this necessary Spirit? “REPENT, and BE BAPTIZED!”

Note that the Holy Spirit is a *free gift*, granted upon faith, repentance and baptism; we cannot “earn it.” Now, to *whom* does God give this free gift? “...to them that OBEY Him” (Acts 5:32). Obedience is a requirement!

By analogy, if I were to call you on the phone and announce, “I have a free \$1,000 gift for you! All I *REQUIRE* of you is that you come to my house today and pick it up.” Coming to my house does not “earn” you the \$1,000—it is *still* a free gift. But you must meet the **CONDITIONS** for receiving it! If you *refuse* to take those steps, you will receive *nothing*.

The same is true of receiving God’s Holy Spirit. There are certain requirements that must be

met. The first condition is “repent.” To repent means “to change the mind”—to come to a realization that you have sinned and are sorrowful to the point of turning around and determining to go the other way and follow Christ. What is SIN? “... sin is the transgression [breaking] of the law” (1 John 3:4).

Jesus died for our sins—died in our place, *in our stead*—so we would not have to pay the eternal death penalty ourselves (Romans 6:23), so that we may have ETERNAL LIFE (John 3:16). If we are to receive salvation, it is *vital* that we understand what is *required* in order to receive this great gift. We dare not take the word of any *man* or church denomination, but must look to *the Word of God* itself for our answers.

In short, baptism is a required outward expression, or symbolic act, of our inward faith!

Baptism has a deep threefold meaning for us. It encapsulates God’s plan of salvation for us. It pictures the washing of our sins, our burial, *and* our resurrection in Jesus Christ.

1. We are cleansed of our sins. “There is now *no* condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). At that time we stand innocent before God. *Both* the blood of Christ and the waters of baptism are required to wash away our sins (read both Acts 22:16 and Revelation 1:5).
2. Baptism symbolizes the death of our old, sinful selves. To be baptized is to “bury” one’s sinful, carnal self in a watery grave (Colossians 2:12).
3. Baptism and the laying on of hands imparts “new life”—the begetting of God’s Spirit—and corresponds to the resurrection that we are promised *if* we obey God and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior.

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ *were baptized into His death?* Therefore we are *buried* with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For *if* we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, *we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Romans 6:3–5).

What could be more picturesque? Baptism pictures our being buried with Christ by being covered, or immersed, with water, and being resurrected with Him by being raised out of that watery grave!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Once Saved—Always Saved?* [OSA]
- *Ten Facts You Should Know About Repentance* [TFR]
- *Is Water Baptism Required For Salvation* [WBR]
- *Statement of Beliefs* [SBF]
- *How to Be A Real Christian?* [REL]
- Visit our Website: www.cgi.org

Q In your Home Bible Study Course, Lesson 5, question 20 asks, “Our new birth will take place at the resurrection.” True or false? You said the answer is True. I thought that we were born again when we accept Jesus as our Savior. Please discuss this with me.”

A Certainly! We would be glad to.

Most professing Christians innocently assume the Bible says what they have been *told* it says. Millions of Protestants and tens of millions of Evangelicals think that when one becomes a believer or has a “religious experience,” or “accepts Christ into their hearts,” they are automatically “saved”

and have been “born again.” They have been taught that being “born again” occurs in *this* life, upon “receiving Jesus.” But this is *not* what the Bible teaches. We need to “prove all things and hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) *by our own Bibles*, not by the precepts of men.

“Born again” has *nothing whatsoever to do* with “professing Jesus”—or “just believing in your heart”—or “giving your heart to the Lord”—or any so-called religious experience. This does not happen at conversion—but rather, the Bible teaches that rebirth comes *long after* this initial step in a new Christian’s life. The popular concept of being “born again” is based largely on ignorance of God’s Word, coupled with outright faulty reasoning.

The proper explanation of John 3 where “born again” is first mentioned, will show that indeed when one is truly *born* of the Spirit, he will BE a spirit being. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Nicodemus was incredulous. “Nicodemus saith unto him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?’” (John 3:4)? In verse 6, Christ continues, “That which is **BORN** of the flesh *IS* flesh; and that which is **BORN** of the Spirit *IS* SPIRIT.” We were born of the flesh and *are* therefore flesh. When truly born again, we will be spirit beings.

To be “born of the spirit” (verse 5) refers to the resurrection from the dead to eternal life as a glorified spirit being, not an emotional “conversion experience.”

Jesus went on to explain, “**THE WIND** bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: *SO IS* every one that is **BORN** of the Spirit” (John 3:8). When we are truly born again—born of the spirit—we will be *like* the wind: able to invisibly come and go as a spirit being.

Simply put, the plain meaning of this verse is that one must *become spirit* to even *see* the kingdom of God. We are *not yet* spirit beings when we “make our decision” for Christ. As one man put it, “If you believe you are born again, just take the hat pin test. If you bleed, you know you are flesh and blood, not spirit—not yet born again.”

Going on, Paul taught, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). The next two verses explain that the resurrection will occur at the seventh (last) trumpet, when “the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*.” Verses 51–54 describe more about when and what this “change” is. This will be a metabolic change from mortality to immortality. See also Job 14:12,14.

Christ returns when the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 blows. This is *when* the resurrection of the dead will occur. Do not misunderstand the importance of this climactic event! People who were once fleshly human beings will be changed into spirit—will be then *born again*—and enter into the Kingdom of God. No physical people can enter this Kingdom.

John 4:24 tells us, “God is a *Spirit*.” Under the Father, Christ leads His kingdom, which is composed of spirit beings. At His return, Christ, as a member of the God Family, will have many younger “brothers and sisters,” who will have qualified to rule with Him (Revelation 5:10).

As you suggested, we recommend that you begin doing the Home Bible Study Course beginning with Lesson 1, since each lesson lays a foundation and builds upon the next.

I hope this helps. There is *much more* to this subject than can be explained in this format. Please request the following. All our materials are absolutely FREE, of course, as per Mathew 10:8.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Born From Above or Born Again?* [BFA]
- *Man’s Awesome Destiny* [MAN]
- *How to Be A Real Christian* [REL]

- *Nick at Night* [CD# C 703]
- *The Hope of the Resurrection* [CD# C624]

Q My dear mother has died, leaving her physical pain and emotional torment to join her Savior, Jesus. I cannot agree with some things you teach, especially about death—that there is nothing left after the body dies. I’ve heard too much of what different people have experienced and I believe something—the spirit—is left when the soul returns to the dirt.

I followed the teaching of a woman’s ministry in the mid 80s. Jesus took her spirit from her body and took her into hell to show her that place. She could walk, talk, feel, and smell, even though in her spirit she had seen her body lying on the bed beside her husband. Therefore, I truly believe that my dear mother got the surprise of her life when she passed, left her body, and rejoined Jesus with His Father, God in heaven! My mother had even told me about having an out-of-body experience in her lifetime. She was standing at the foot of her bed looking down on her body. But regretfully, I must leave off giving to your ministry at this time, and I will be putting Daddy’s tithe into good works, helping others.

A Thank you for writing. Let us take this opportunity to express our gratefulness in being able to help you in any way we can.

We are very sorry to hear about the passing of your mother. These are indeed emotionally devastating times! Please be assured that you have our deepest sympathies and condolences as well as our prayers.

We live in a darkened and superstitious age. God gave us His Word to deliver us from the power of darkness and deception (Colossians 1:13). Like a laser beam, the Bible cuts through the traditions and false concepts of men. God’s Word reveals the full scope of the Lord’s creative and redemptive plan for His people. Only in its pages can we gain a true perspective of our past, present, and future.

We are cautioned in 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, believe *not* every spirit, but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

We are further warned that Satan has, and is, deceiving the whole world (Revelation 12:9), and that fact cautions us to *prove all things* by God’s Word and hold fast that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We are told further that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1).

The truth of the matter is that if we want God’s truth, we must turn to His Word, the Bible, *not* to the experiences, visions, dreams, and interpretations of people. In most cases, those who reject the reliability of the Bible do so because of false impressions they have gained from sources other than the Bible. Most people’s knowledge about the Bible is derived almost entirely from second, third, and fourth-hand sources. It is not surprising then, that so many people rely upon the experiences, feelings, emotions, perceptions, and dreams of others instead of God’s Word.

What does *the Bible* tell us about the state of the dead and the spirit in man?

God’s Word, the Bible, tells us very specifically that there *is* a spirit in man (Job 32:8). The spirit is not the man—it is something **IN** the man.

Regarding what happens to the spirit of man at death, you could compare human spirit in man with a CD or magnetic tape recording. A tape or CD cannot record or play back sound without a recorder, because it only records and stores information. Likewise, the human spirit cannot function without a body. Once separated from a body, it only stores a record of man’s character and

personality until a resurrection. Human spirit is the means by which God preserves the character developed in this life. A resurrection occurs when God places that same character—from the record of the spirit—in a new body. That is why it is so vital that people develop true godly character now. That character will last forever. Man’s spirit, similar to a grain of wheat, contains the pattern of the character and being of the man or woman who had it (see 1 Corinthians 15:34–38).

At death, the spirit is committed to God’s keeping—then it, this record of the man, returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7)—until a resurrection. Where the spirit actually is, is not of major importance (Deuteronomy 29:29). In this connection, in Ecclesiastes 3:19–21 we read, “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: AS THE ONE DIETH, SO DIETH THE OTHER; yea, THEY HAVE ALL ONE BREATH; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. ALL GO UNTO ONE PLACE; ALL ARE OF THE DUST, AND ALL TURN TO DUST AGAIN. Who *knoweth* the spirit [*ruach*] of man that goeth upward, and the spirit [or breath] of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” It’s a rhetorical question! The answer is, nobody knows!

Concerning the state of the dead, the Bible often compares death to deep, dreamless *sleep*—a state of total unconsciousness.

We are shown plainly in Ecclesiastes 9:5, “For the living know that they shall die: BUT THE DEAD KNOW NOT ANY THING.” Further, we are told, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is NO work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (verse 10).

Psalm 146:4 adds, “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; IN THAT VERY DAY HIS THOUGHTS PERISH.” A few other verses in the Bible relating to the state of the dead include Psalm 6:4; 115:17.

For example, Daniel, speaking of the time of the resurrection, said, “And many of them that *sleep* in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

Job asked, “If a man die, *shall he live again?* All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till MY CHANGE come” (Job 14:14).

This *same* change is mentioned again in 1 Corinthians 15:52, “...for the trumpet [at the second coming of Christ] shall sound, and *the dead* [those in their graves] *shall be raised* [resurrected] incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*.”

While these Bible truths may seem shocking to those who grew up believing in the “immortal soul”, the words “immortal soul” are nowhere found in your Bible. We are told that God *only* has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). Please read this in your own Bible.

The Bible is truly *good news* for everyone. It reveals God is the Savior of all mankind (1 Timothy 4:10), Jesus is Savior of the entire world (John 4:42, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:14), Jesus died for all (2 Corinthians 5:15), Jesus will draw all men to Himself (John 12:32), every knee will bow in worship before Jesus (Philippians 3:21), there will be a restitution of all things (Acts 3:21), and a reconciliation of all things (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10).

Be assured that God has a plan to save everybody. Jesus came to save everyone. Those who aren’t drawn to Him in this life (John 6:44,65) will be drawn to Him in another resurrected age, because the promises are sure (John 12:32; 1 Corinthians 15:22). Only the incorrigibly wicked who utterly refuse to submit to God and His ways will in the end be cast into a lake of fire and burned up for all eternity. They shall be ashes under the feet of the righteous (Malachi 4:1–3). Please feel free to request the items suggested below.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Man’s Awesome Destiny* [MAN]

- *Lazarus and the Rich Man—Where Are They?* [LRM]
- *Is Elijah in Heaven?* [ELH]
- *Soul: Mortal or Immortal?* [CD# C334]
- *Last Great Day Message* [CD# 580]

Q I went to a Bible study and the minister said Hebrews 12:1 means that our loved ones are watching over us from heaven. True or false?

A False. Hebrews 12:1–2 reads, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

These verses say absolutely nothing about our loved ones watching over us from heaven. The minister you are referring to is reading his preconceived theology *into* the Scriptures.

The Bible says that in death, one’s very thoughts perish (see Psalm 6:5; 115:17; 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5,10, etc.) Hebrews 12:1 is not speaking of living witnesses “in the clouds” that are watching over us. The cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1 is referring to the record of the heroes of faith mentioned in chapter 11 and others. Men added the chapter breaks, not God. “Every weight” refers to encumbrances and obstructions to Christian progress. “The sin that so easily besets us” in this context, focuses on the particular sin of unbelief—the opposite of “by faith” (see Hebrews 11:3,4,5,7,9, etc.).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Do You Have an Immortal Soul?* [IMS]
- *Assurance of Salvation* [SAL]
- *Why Christ Must Return!* [CMR]
- *Soul: Mortal or Immortal?* [C334]
- *Is This the End?* [C929]

Q Since God is all knowing, does that mean that our lives are already programmed? Because God knows our heart, does He know what we will or are going to do before we do it? Are we predestined to do whatever we do? Can I believe that what I do, I was going to do anyway? Doesn’t God know what I will do in my whole life from start to finish before I do it?”

A The four times the words “predestined” and “predestinated” are used in the Bible all refer to the fact that everyone will be given the opportunity for salvation and to become sons of God, whether in this life or in a later resurrection (Revelation 20:5–6). This is something God has foreordained as to the *time* of our calling (John 6:44, 65), and has nothing to do with our making right or wrong choices in life.

Nowhere does it mean we are predestined or predetermined to make individual decisions. On the contrary, we are admonished to make right decisions: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore CHOOSE LIFE,

that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Also look up Deuteronomy 11:26–28, and 30:15. Obviously, we could not make choices if everything is foreordained. In the first Psalm, we are admonished in poetic form to walk in God’s way, as opposed to walking in sinners’ ways. Adam and Eve had a CHOICE, and unfortunately made the wrong decision (Genesis 2:6–7; 3:6). When Abraham was about to slay his beloved son, Isaac, God stopped him and said, “NOW I KNOW” (Genesis 22:12), indicating He did not know for sure what Abraham’s CHOICE would be until he was put to the test.

God has given man *free will*. We are all individuals with different heredity, likes, dislikes, beliefs, and opportunities. We are not robots or automatons. We all have CHOICES to make. God does not make our choices *for us*. “Let *no* man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man” (James 1:13). Based upon our mindset, attitude, and past behavior, God can pretty accurately foretell what choices we may make in any given situation, but it is still *our* choice. Will we follow God and keep His commandments no matter what trial or circumstance we may find ourselves in—or will we follow our own ways or the ways of sin? The choice is ours, and God is “keeping score.” In the end, He will be able to say of each of us, “*Now I know!*”

Similar to the pagan philosophy of Epicureanism—a life devoted to the indulgence of self-gratifying habits and lusts—it is believed by many that we might as well do whatever we feel like, no matter what the circumstances, because it is all foreordained and we don’t have a choice. Do not be deceived by this false doctrine! This deceptive belief removes all responsibility of the individual. This idea destroys godly character—the ability to know right from wrong and *choose* to go the right way.

The Bible truth is, “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Jesus said, “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). The apostle Paul, under divine inspiration, spoke of the day “...when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to My gospel.” We are told in 2 Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him...”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *What Does the Bible Say About Predestination and Election?* [BPE]
- *Foreknowledge and Free Will* [CD# CC568]
- *Knowledge of Good and Evil* [CD# C786]
- *God’s Providential Plan* [CD# C790]

4

Sabbath and Holy Days

Q I would like to know more about God’s holy days. Can you tell me more about them?

A God’s holy days are built around the spring and fall harvest seasons in Israel and are a *type* of God’s plan of salvation for all mankind. All seven are mentioned in Leviticus 23. They were kept *in*

the past (Leviticus 23:4), will be kept *in the future* (Zechariah 14:16,19), and should be observed by Christians *today* (Matthew 5:4). Because mankind has, as a whole, neglected these holy days, it has *lost* the knowledge of what God has in store for mankind.

Rather than try to explain the deep meanings of these days in a mere question and answer format, we suggest you request the free items listed below and “prove all things” (2 Thessalonians 5:21) by looking up each reference given in your own Bible.

Suggested reading:

- *Home Bible Study Course* [CO1]
- *God’s Seasonal Plan* [GSP]
- *Fall Festivals* [TFF]
- *Holy Day Calendar* [HDC]
- *Come to the Feast!* [CTF]
- *Renewing the Holy Days* [CD# C736]

Q Which day do you observe for God’s Sabbath—Saturday or Sunday?

A We teach that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is God’s Sabbath. We teach the seventh-day Sabbath is to be taught and kept holy in accordance with the biblical instruction. Instituted at creation, reaffirmed to Israel as a part of the covenant at Sinai, and taught by Jesus Christ, the Messenger of the New Covenant, the observance of the Sabbath is basic to a Christian’s relationship with God. See the confirming scriptures at: Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 16; 20:8–11; 31:12–17; Mark 2:27–28; Luke 4:16, and Acts 18:4,21.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Sunday, Saturday—What Difference Does It Make?* [SAT]
- *Sabbath—A Memorial Connection* [CD# C732]
- *A Sabbath Forever* [CD #C660]
- *Who Changed Saturday to Sunday?* [CD #C659]

Q I have heard many pros and cons about whether we should keep the Sabbath today. Frankly, I am confused. Can you please explain to me in simple layman’s terms whether or not the Sabbath should be kept today?

A Certainly. All one needs to do is *read* the Bible and *believe* what it *says*. Christ said, “And why *call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not* the things which I say” (Luke 6:46)? He added, “Howbeit *in vain* do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of *men*” (Mark 7:7). “Full well,” He added, “ye reject the commandment of *God*, that ye may keep *your own tradition*” (Mark 7:9). So, what saith the Scriptures?

- First, God *commanded* all men to remember the Sabbath forever as one of the cardinal points of His Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8–11). A “thus saith the Lord” carries a *lot* of weight!
- The Sabbath was made in the beginning, before He even made mankind—some 3,000 years *before* the Ten Commandments were given to Israel. Note that God blessed the *seventh* day, not the first (Genesis 2:1–3, emphasis added throughout).

- The Sabbath was made specifically *for man*—all mankind, not just for the Jews. It was set apart as holy time for all mankind forever. Note that Christ is the *Lord of the Sabbath*, not some other day. “...The Sabbath was made for *man*, and not man for the Sabbath:” (Mark 2:27).
- “Therefore the Son of man is Lord also *of the Sabbath* [not Sunday]” (Mark 2:28).
- Israel had lost the knowledge of the Sabbath while in Egyptian slavery and God showed them which day it was by means of the special “manna miracles,” and reemphasized the importance of keeping it holy (Exodus 16:1–30).
- Jesus Christ, our example, kept the Sabbath day (Luke 4:16).
- Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, also kept the Sabbath (Acts 17:2).
- Paul taught the Gentiles on the Sabbath (Acts 13:42,44).
- Speaking of the seventh day, the book of Hebrews says, “There remaineth therefore a rest [Greek, *sabbatismos*] to the people of God” (Hebrews 4:4,9).
- In the future, when God’s Kingdom will be ruling on the earth, the Sabbath will be kept by all flesh (Isaiah 66:23).

From this quick summary, we see that God commands keeping the Sabbath holy, that it is one of the cardinal Ten Commandments, that the Sabbath was made for man at the time man was made, that it was given over 3,000 years *before* Israel was given the Ten Commandments, Jesus kept it, Paul kept it, and it will be *kept in the Millennium* when God’s Kingdom will rule. Putting these points together, we can plainly see that we ought to be keeping the Sabbath holy *now*.

Our *Statement of Beliefs* says: *SABBATH: The seventh-day Sabbath is to be taught and kept holy in accordance with the biblical instruction. Instituted at creation, reaffirmed to Israel as a part of the covenant at Sinai, and taught by Jesus Christ, who is the Messenger of the New Covenant, the observance of the Sabbath is basic to a Christian’s relationship with God. (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 16; 20:8–11; 31:12–17; Ezekiel 20:12,20; Mark 2:27–28; Luke 4:16.)*

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Sunday, Saturday—What Difference Does It Make?* [SAT]
- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *Statement Of Beliefs* [SBF]
- *Is the Law Only for the Jews?* [CD# C915]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]
- *The Book of Hebrews* [set of 4 CDs, CD# SCSHA, with coupon for next set]

Q Can you explain why the holy days are still in effect and should be kept today?

A Once again, all one needs to do is read God’s Word, the Bible, and *do* what it says.

- God pronounces *blessings* for those who keep His Sabbaths, but *curses* for those who will not hearken to Him. Read all of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 5, the “blessings and cursings” chapters.
- The holy days are feasts of *God*, not the Jews (Leviticus 23:2,4). They are commanded to be observed forever (Leviticus 23:31,41). Note how many times God says, “These are My feasts” or “The feasts of the *Lord*” (Leviticus 23:2,4,37,44).
- They are to be kept forever (Exodus 12:24; 13:10; Leviticus 16:29,34; 23:31,41).
- These days were ordained during the year *before* the sacrifices were given to Israel (Exodus

12 and 13).

- God’s Sabbaths, including the high or annual Sabbaths, are part of the *identifying sign* between God and His people (Exodus 13:9; 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12,20).
- Jeremiah 7:21–23 points out that God instructed Israel about the holy days at the time He brought them out of Egypt. He did not institute burnt offerings or sacrifices until later. Therefore, the holy days do not stand or fall with the sacrifices, but are truly commanded forever.
- Jesus observed the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (Luke 2:41,42), the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Last Great Day (John 7:1–2,14,37).
- The New Testament Church and the apostles kept the holy days: Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:3; 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:6–8); Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8); the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9); and the Feast of Tabernacles (Acts 18:21). Paul told the Colossians not to let anyone condemn or intimidate them for observing the days God made holy (Colossians 2:16–17).
- The Feast of Tabernacles will be observed during the Millennium by everyone—both Jew and Gentile (Zechariah 14:16). So all who would be in God’s Kingdom had better learn to observe them now!

Our *Statement of Beliefs* reads: *ANNUAL HOLY DAYS: The annual holy days were ordained by God, kept by the ancient Israelites, and continued by the early New Testament Christians. These seven annual “appointed feasts” picture God’s plan of salvation for man. (Leviticus 23; Zechariah 14:16; John 7:8–10; Acts 2:1; 12:3; 20:6, 16; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 16:8.)*

Suggested reading and listening:

- *God’s Seasonal Plan* [GSP]
- *Come to the Feast!* [CTF]
- *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God’s Law?* [COV]
- *The Second Coming And Beyond* [SCB]
- *Renewing the Holy Days* [CD# C736]
- *God’s Holy Days Are Unique!* [CD# C 738]

Q My pastor says **Colossians 2:14–17 proves the Sabbath, holy days and the Ten Commandments are done away in Jesus Christ. How would you answer?**

A This is an often-asked “difficult scripture,” but is easily explained if we just take the Scriptures for what they *say* and not read something into the Scriptures that isn’t there.

Colossians 2:16–17 is frequently cited out of context by those who reject God’s Sabbath and holy days in an effort to support their belief that they are “done away” or “nailed to the cross.” Regrettably, such reasoning is based on poor scholarship and misleading translations from the original wording of Paul’s instructions.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Colosse to counter a local Gnostic heresy (Colossians 2:8). These Colossian heretics introduced various man-made prohibitions—such as “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” this or that (verse 21)—against the enjoyment of physical things. These outsiders were not keeping God’s commanded holy days and judged and ridiculed those who did! They especially objected to the pleasurable aspects of God’s festivals—the eating and drinking aspects—that are commanded in the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 12:17–18). These false ascetic teachers—those who taught that all worldly pleasures were evil—had influenced the congregation

in Colosse, attempting to persuade them to direct their worship toward angels (Colossians 2:18), and neglect their own bodies (verse 23). No such distorted ideas are taught anywhere in the Scriptures! Paul was actually validating the importance of God's holy days to Christians. He explains these things were still, at that time—after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ—foreshadows of “things to come” (verse 17).

Colossians 2:16–17 [KJV] reads, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: Which are a shadow [or foretype] of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.” This passage is often misinterpreted. What does it really say?

Notice that the word “is” in verse 17 is in *italics*, meaning it was not in the original Greek, but *added* later by the translators. (This is not discernable in the paraphrased NIV.) Without this added word, the verse reads correctly, “. . .but the body of Christ.” In other words, don't let any *man* judge or condemn you, but let *the body of Christ*—the church—determine it. These verses are not “doing away” with anything; THEY ARE CLEARLY SAYING THAT WE SHOULD NOT LET ANY MAN JUDGE US FOR *KEEPING* GOD'S SABBATHS AND HOLY DAYS!

Putting plain impossible-to-be-misunderstood scriptures first, Christ plainly said, “Think *not* [do not even *entertain the thought!*] that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am *not* come to destroy, but to fulfil [fill to the full]. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in *no* wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17–18).

Quick! Look out your window! Have heaven and earth passed away? No? Then neither has God's laws or holy days! That should settle the matter. In this vein, get your Bible and also look up Matthew 19:17; 24:35; Luke 16:17; 21:33; and Revelation 22:14; along with Romans 7:1,7,12,14,16,22,25.

With this in mind, Colossians 2:14 plainly states exactly *what* was “nailed to the cross.”

“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it [the handwriting of ordinances] out of the way, nailing *it* to his cross.” The handwriting of ordinances simply refers to the debt, or record of our sins, each of us have incurred. Clearly, the context of Colossians 2 is referring to this *record of our sins*, not to the Ten Commandments.

Our individual, personal sins have separated us from God and demand the death penalty (compare Isaiah 59:2 with 1 John 3:4 and Romans 6:23). This certificate, or debt of sin, is what Paul said was “against us” and “contrary to us” (Colossians 2:14), because it—this debt of sin—would prevent us from being in God's Kingdom. Compare Galatians 5:19–21 with Revelation 21:8.

Anciently, a criminal's list of crimes—or, in our case, the citation of our sins—was often nailed to the stake with the criminal to cite the violations he was being punished for (as was the sign placed over the head of Jesus when He was falsely accused of saying He was a king in place of Caesar—Matthew 27:37). Thus, all the believers' sins were put to Christ's account. He, being innocent of all sin, paid our debt *for* us—in our stead. Only two things were nailed to the cross: 1) the body of Christ, and 2) the record of our sins. No laws of any kind were nailed to the stake!

Paul's whole point in Colossians 2 is that Christ's sacrifice alone is all that is necessary. Nothing else—no work of man, no ritual, no angel, no pagan gods, no traditions, no principality—can save us. Christ is our Savior, and Christ in us through His Holy Spirit is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Only Christ, with His sacrifice, is able to nail every person's spiritual debts, or sins, to the stake.

Rather than “doing away” with God's laws or holy days, Paul's comments in this passage confirm the Colossian Christians were indeed **OBSERVING** the weekly Sabbath and holy days of God more than 30 years *after* Jesus Christ's death and resurrection!

Had they not been observing these days, the heretics would have had no basis for their objections to the eating and drinking aspects—the *feasting* portion—of the Sabbath and the holy days.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God’s Law?* (COV)
- *The Ten Commandments* (TNC).
- *How To Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *Understanding Jewish Arguments* [CD# C511]
- *Renewing the Holy Days* [CD# 736]
- *Keeping the Festivals* [CD# C922]
- *Paul Reconsidered* [CD# C940]
- *Do James and Paul Agree?* [CD# C631]

Q I work for an organization that sometimes requires that I work on Saturday, and wondered if God will forgive you for this.

A Certainly, God can and will forgive any sin REPENTED of.

However, God’s Word plainly tells us, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. SIX days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But THE SEVENTH DAY IS THE SABBATH of the LORD thy God: *in it thou shalt not do any work*, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates” (Exodus 20:8–10).

At first, this requirement of God may appear “difficult” in a non-Sabbath-keeping society, but we are not able to compromise with God’s Word. God holds us accountable for what we know and blesses our obedience to Him. We must often step forward boldly IN FAITH (Hebrews 10:38). Christ said in Luke 6:46, “And why *call* ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do* not the things which I SAY?”

It seems that the majority of those who are following Jesus Christ have to cross “the Sabbath bridge” at one time or another. This is why the Sabbath is sometimes referred to as the “test” commandment. In most cases, the administration is able to work around your religious beliefs if they are properly informed. You need to earnestly PRAY about your situation and go to the top administrator and humbly explain your situation. Many take the stand that if they cannot obey God’s commandment, it is a sign that perhaps they should not be working at that establishment. In today’s liberal society, most religious beliefs are tolerated, and accommodations can be made. You will need to ask God for wisdom and favor in this case.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *What Is the Unpardonable Sin?* [UPD]
- *Laodiceans Beware* [CD# C 708]
- *Hearers or Doers?* [CD# C737]
- *Why Do Christians Have Problems?* [CD# C682]
- *The Challenge of Discouragement* [CD# C653]
- *What About Love?* [CD# C751]

Q A Sabbath keeper told me it is a sin to eat out at restaurants on the Sabbath or holy

days. Is this true, or is that only a Pharisaical opinion?

A The church has long taught that, depending upon one's circumstances and preferences, it is not wrong to eat in restaurants on the Sabbath or holy days. The issue of eating out on the Sabbath revolves around the concepts of *commerce* (doing one's regular business on the Sabbath) and causing others to work. There are the two primary references used by well meaning but misinformed people who believe eating out on the Sabbath is a sin: Nehemiah 10:31 and 13:15.

It is well to remember the biblical principle that a *text* without a *context* is very often a *pretext*. We must be careful when extracting principles that we do not jump to conclusions in comparing a theocratic society to modern-day life where civil laws are *not* in the hands of Sabbath keepers. One cannot transfer the events of that day to our day. Nehemiah 13 is *not* about eating in a restaurant! This was not the problem. The Jews had turned the Sabbath into a market day and were selling all kinds of wares. This was not just a food market. The Sabbath had become the primary business and shopping day of the week in Jerusalem. Shopping in those days was generally an all-day activity. This was contrary to the spirit of the Sabbath commandment.

It would be well to note that the book of Nehemiah is a *historical* record—noting what Nehemiah *did*—not a doctrinal treatise. There was *no* “thus saith the Lord” as to what Nehemiah did. Additionally, it should be noted that these restrictions were only *in Jerusalem*. There is no mention in Scripture of the other cities in Judea during the time of Nehemiah. What about inns where people lodged and ate while traveling?

Amos 8:5 references a similar type situation to that of Nehemiah 13. In this case, the Israelites had become corrupt in their business dealings and wanted to continue their businesses on the Sabbath. In fact, the whole society had become corrupt. Here again, this is not applicable to eating out in a restaurant today.

We must take care not to *misapply* God's Word to a situation where it does not fit. We are cautioned in Ecclesiastes 7:16, “Be not righteous over much.” People sometimes leap to wrong conclusions by attempting to make “connections” when there are none, then search for scriptures to back up their preconceived notions. This is called “proof-texting” in an attempt to back one's predetermined ideas with Scripture. This is what the Pharisees did in making the Sabbath a burden by making up hundreds of “do's and don'ts.”

The question often proposed in regard to eating in a restaurant on the Sabbath is, “Isn't it wrong to have someone serve you in a restaurant? Aren't they working for you?”

The answer to both questions is an emphatic “No!” These waiters, waitresses, chefs, etc. are *not* your “servants” in the way described in the Fourth Commandment. (If you think they are, just try asking one of them to wash your feet!) They do not live in your household. They are the employees of the owner of the restaurant. They would be working regardless of whether or not you were there. Of course, if you are the *owner* of a business, you should close it down on the Sabbath day. Even so, the people who work for you *still* do not keep the Sabbath. They may well choose to work a second job or do other activities that would not be in keeping with the Sabbath. If you do not go a restaurant, the employees will *still* be working there. Quite simply, *they are not Sabbath keepers*. God does not hold us responsible for their working on the Sabbath just because we use their services. (One cannot help but wonder, if there had been a Burger King on the hot, dusty road to Damascus, would Paul have stopped in for a “Whopper” and a Coke on the Sabbath?)

Further, eating out occasionally on the Sabbath can be restful, enhancing our spiritual fellowship with brethren, and allowing family members more time to be with one another. “Breaking bread” together is always depicted in the Bible as a time of joy and fellowship.

A second objection sometimes raised by the “non-eaters” is, “Aren't you participating in a

business transaction when you eat out on the Sabbath?”

There are no free meals. You are naturally expected to pay for your meal. Some prefer to put their tab on their credit card so they will not have to exchange actual “cash” at that time; although, from the restaurant’s point of view, they have paid their bill then and there. Further, it is actually *less* work for many (especially the ladies!) to eat in a restaurant than it is to have guests in their homes for a Sabbath meal. Certainly the preparation day for the Sabbath (Friday) should be taken advantage of, but this does not rule out eating a pleasant meal in a restaurant the next day!

There are other areas that would be affected if one takes the position that eating in a restaurant on the Sabbath is sin. For example, when one goes to the Feast of Tabernacles, would we expect him to check out of his hotel room on Friday evening and not return until Saturday evening in order to keep from violating the Sabbath? Where would he go for a night and a day? This would involve more hardship. By staying in a hotel room on the Sabbath, you are being *served* and you are being *charged* for that service. An entire staff of people is on duty 24 hours a day to serve your needs.

Another area of concern would be in a nursing home or a hospital setting. A fee is charged for the meals in both locations, and someone has to serve those meals. Are members of the church who live in nursing homes or find themselves in a hospital over the Sabbath violating the Sabbath by eating their meals? We think not. By extension, if one concludes that a waitress is working “just for you,” the same logic could be applied to those who work in water or power plants, producing water and electricity for the community. To be consistent according to this logic, Sabbath observers should not turn on their water or electricity. What if you need the assistance of the police, fire department, or rescue squad, who are also on duty 24/7? Some cities collect your trash on the Sabbath. What if you need to take public transportation—a bus, taxi, or subway—to attend Sabbath services? Many Sabbath congregations rent a hall or room on the Sabbath, often requiring having a janitor on the premises. Many people rent a home or apartment. The rent does not cease on the Sabbath. These examples and questions support our position that eating out in a restaurant does not violate the Sabbath.

These are many other things that could be said about this issue, but the conclusion of the church is that eating out on the Sabbath does not violate the Sabbath command. Whether one eats out on the Sabbath or does not eat out is a personal choice (See Romans 14:22–23). But it *must not* become a point of *division* within the church! Sowing division among the brethren is one of the seven things God says He *hates* (see Proverbs 6:16,19). To attempt to persuade others that it is wrong would be divisive (1 Corinthians 14:26). All things should be used for the purpose of edifying or building up, not tearing down.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *God’s Seasonal Plan* [GSP]
- *Seven Reasons Why We Keep the Sabbath* [CD# C407]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]

Q I have a question about the Sabbath. It is my understanding that we are to worship, pray, meditate, and rest on Saturday, the Sabbath. Can a person do all of these things on the Sabbath, and still go to church on Sunday? They have many things going on in churches during the week. Can you attend a Sunday-keeping church and not be in violation of observing the Sabbath?

A There is a popular phrase going around that merits much consideration. It is W.W.J.D., short

for “What Would *Jesus Do*”? The Scriptures show that Christ and the Apostles kept the seventh-day Sabbath and taught others to keep it—and they are *our examples* (See John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:10). Christ commanded, “Teaching them to observe *all things* whatsoever *I* have commanded *YOU*” (Matthew 28:20). Since the seventh-day Sabbath was observed long *before* the Ten Commandments were given (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 16:23,26,29–30), was incorporated into the *heart* of the Ten Commandments themselves (Exodus 20:8–11), was kept by Christ (Luke 4:16), was taught to the *Gentiles* by Paul after the resurrection, (Acts 17:2, 18:4), and will be kept in the *future* (Isaiah 66:23), it is a sure indication that God, *who does not change* (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), commands His true followers to keep the same seventh-day Sabbath today. Beware of those who wrest the Scriptures to say otherwise.

Granted, many churches have large congregations, beautiful music, wonderful, friendly people, youth activities, and so forth, but this is *not* the criterion for truth. What *is* truth? “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17)! 2 John 1:10 warns us, “If there come *any* unto you, and bring not THIS DOCTRINE [that is, the doctrine revealed in the Bible, not “tradition”] receive him NOT into your house [your mind], neither bid him God speed!” Are Sunday keepers keeping God’s Sabbath—or the pagan day of the Sun, which the Scriptures forbid? Are they observing God’s holy days as outlined in Leviticus 23 and countless other places—or are they observing the pagan holidays of Sunday, Easter, Christmas, Halloween, Valentine’s Day, and so on? You be the judge. The answer should be plain. The question one must ask oneself is *why* would I *want* to join myself to error [Sunday keeping] when I can be fellowshiping with God’s people on His holy Sabbath day? “Can two walk together,” the inspired prophet Amos asked, “except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3)?

2 Corinthians 6:14 plainly tells us, “Be ye *not* unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (Also compare Ephesians 5:11 and 1 John 1:6.) The apostle James, the Lord’s half-brother, said, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in *one point*, he is guilty of *all*” (James 2:10).

You will need to ask God’s guidance and direction in attending both God’s seventh-day Sabbath and Sunday. The Bible plainly teaches that we are to *obey* God—to obey His Commandments (Matthew 19:16–18; 1 John 3:4). Not only are we to obey the commandments, but Christ said we are to live by EVERY WORD that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Sunday, Saturday—What Difference Does It Make?* [SAT]
- *God’s Season Plan* [GSP]
- *Sabbath: A Memorial of Creation* [CD# C732]
- *Who Changed Saturday to Sunday?* [CD# C659]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]
- *A Sabbath Forever* [CD# C660]

Q Matthew 18:20 says, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Doesn’t this mean I can assemble with one or two friends who believe the same as I do—even if we are wrong—and this is the same as a church service in God’s sight?

A Many people single out this scripture for biblical support to justify “doing their own thing,” or “striking out on their own” no matter what they believe, as long as a few others are in agreement

and allege to come “in Jesus’ name.”

However, as we have emphasized many times, a *text* without a *context* is only a *pretext*. We must compare scripture with scripture. DOES God approve of all who allege to “come in His name”? Let Christ Himself—our ultimate authority—answer: “For *many* shall come IN MY NAME, *saying*, ‘I am Christ’ [that is, they will be saying Jesus IS the Christ]; “and [by this means—by affirming that, “Jesus is the Christ” while branching out into doctrinal error] shall *deceive* many!” (Matthew 24:5). We are warned in 2 John 10, “If there come ANY unto you, and bring not THIS [true] DOCTRINE, receive him NOT into your house, neither bid him God speed,” no matter *whose* name they profess to come in. Acts 5:32 says, “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also *the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given* TO THEM THAT OBEY HIM.” Jesus would *never* attend a “church” that teaches false doctrine or who would not OBEY Him, even if they profess, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied IN THY NAME? AND IN THY NAME have cast out devils? And IN THY NAME done many wonderful works?” “And then will I profess unto them,” Jesus says, “‘I NEVER KNEW YOU: depart from me, ye that work iniquity [lawlessness, or sin]’” (Matthew 7:22–23)!

The apostle Paul warned, “For I know this, that after my departing shall *grievous wolves enter in among you*, not sparing the flock. Also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after *them*” (Acts 20:29–30).

Clearly, Matthew 18:20 is a clear reference to Christ’s omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. He is aware of His followers’ situations and will be with them, no matter where they are or how they may be scattered. This verse reflects proof of His divine oversight and deity. This is not a blanket approval for those who want to strike out on their own and “do their own thing” as long as they say the “magic” words, “in Jesus’ name.”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God’s Law?* [COV]
- *Do You Really Know Jesus Christ?* [CD# C586]
- *Would Jesus Attend Your Church?* [CD# C565]
- *Is Your Church Doing What Jesus Did?* [CD# C668]

Q Concerning the Sabbath, please read Acts 20:7. The first day of the week was Sunday. The people gathered to worship on this day for the same reason we do today, to celebrate the day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Jewish believers continued to worship on the Sabbath, which, admittedly, is Saturday. The Book of Hebrews tells us that Christ and His finished work is our Sabbath and our rest (see Heb 4:8-10). The primary purpose of the gathering was the Lord’s Supper. Amen?

A No Amen on that! Acts 20:7 says, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

We must always be careful we do not read preconceived ideas *into* the Bible that are not there. Let’s notice what the Bible actually *says*. First of all, notice this scripture does *not* say Paul observed Sunday as a day of worship. *If* this were an example for us today, we would be starting our services on Saturday evening—not on Sunday morning. God reckons days from SUNDOWN TO SUNDOWN (Genesis 1:5,8,12,19,23,21; 2:2.), not by a manmade watch. Verse 7 of Acts 20 shows Paul preaching to the brethren at Troas UNTIL MIDNIGHT. Also, services would have to continue until dawn, or the break of day (see verse 11).

Next we need to realize that the “breaking of bread” in verse 7 was NOT a “religious service,” but was common usage meaning THE EATING OF A MEAL. (Allowing the Bible to *interpret* itself, Matthew 14:19, Luke 24:30, Acts 2:42, 20:11, and 27:35 proves this.)

Once again, Acts 20:7 does *not* describe a normal Sabbath service. Again, notice the *context*. Paul was en route from Greece to Jerusalem (Acts 20:2–3,16). Since he did not know when he would ever see the brethren again, he wanted to teach them as much as possible in the time allotted. The people were *more* than willing to listen! So, after the Sabbath, Paul remained behind teaching the brethren, while his ship left and sailed around the peninsula (verse 13). He remained talking with them till MIDNIGHT and continued after a short meal and talked some more until DAYBREAK Sunday morning (verse 11). Then, after Paul had stayed as long as he could, he left them to walk across the peninsula to meet his ship (verses 13–14). Notice, he WORKED on that Sunday by taking this *long* walk from Troas to Assos—a distance of some 19 miles!

There is *nothing* in the above scripture to indicate it was Paul’s custom to observe Sunday—the pagan day of the sun. In fact, all through the book of Acts, we see it was Paul’s CUSTOM to observe *the Sabbath* (Acts 17:2; 13:14–15, 42–44). NOWHERE do we see transference of God’s holy Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8–11) to the first day of the week. *It just is not there.*

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Church of God in Prophecy* [CGP]
- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [C532]
- *The Sabbath: A Memorial Connection* [CD3 C732]
- *Understanding Christian Responsibility* [CD# C664]

Q My church is now teaching that Christ and His finished work is our Sabbath rest and that Christ kept it *for* us, so Christians are no longer under obligation to keep it. Is this true?

A No, it is not true. This is a common misconception. *Christ* is not our Sabbath; *THE SEVENTH DAY OF THE WEEK* (Saturday) *IS THE SABBATH* (Exodus 20:10; 23:21; Hebrews 4:4)! The Lamsa translation translates Hebrews 4:9, “It is therefore the *duty* of the people of God to *keep the Sabbath.*” “REST” in the Authorized Version is σαββατισμος or *sabbatismos* (pronounced, sab-ba-tis'-mos) in the Koine Greek, and literally means, as most margins show, “a KEEPING of the Sabbath.” Thus, the fourth commandment is clearly shown here to be commanded in the *New* Testament as well as the Old! God’s weekly Sabbath is a TYPE of the ultimate MILLENNIAL Sabbath yet to come! Nothing here has anything to do with doing away with the Sabbath or changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Home Study Bible Course* [C01]
- *Holy Sabbath* [CD# C612]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]
- *A Sabbath Forever* [CD # C660]

Q You seem to stress that God’s Sabbath and holy days are very important. Why is this so?

A God’s holy days are of concern to many. Let us embark on a “mini-Bible study” to

demonstrate—from *your own Bible*—that God’s holy days are in effect and should be kept today.

The revelation of God’s holy days are nearly as old as the Bible itself, and were known and practiced by the early Christian church for many years *after* the Savior’s ascension. But over the centuries, these truths were somehow lost to millions. The ideas and customs of *men* mean *nothing* in God’s sight; we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of *God* (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4), that is, the Bible.

The annual holy days were ordained by God, kept by the ancient Israelites, and continued by the early New Testament Christians. THESE SEVEN ANNUAL “APPOINTED FEASTS” PICTURE GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION FOR MAN. Again, take the time to look us these scriptures in your own Bible: Leviticus 23; Zechariah 14:16; John 7:8–10; Acts 2:1; 12:3; 20:6,16; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 16:8.

- Please note first that many who would oppose the keeping of God’s holy days mockingly label them as “Jewish,” but God’s Word correctly informs us that these are the Feasts of GOD, not the “Jews.” (See Leviticus 23:2–5,44.) They were commanded by God to be observed FOREVER (Leviticus 23:31,41).
- Notice, the holy days were ordained during the year BEFORE the sacrifices were given to Israel (Exodus 12 and 13). As an aside, the Days of Unleavened Bread and His Sabbaths were given as part of the identifying SIGN between God and His people (Exodus 13:9; Ezekiel 20:12,20).
- Jeremiah 17:21–23 shows that when God instituted the holy days—AT THE TIME HE BROUGHT ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT—He did NOT institute burnt offerings or sacrifices. So the holy days were NOT tied together with the sacrifices until one year AFTER coming out of Egypt. At that time, there was NO temple built, no place to sacrifice in. Remember, what did not *begin* with the sacrifices *did not end* when the sacrifices came to an end. Therefore, God’s holy days do NOT stand or fall with the sacrifices, but are commanded to be kept FOREVER. The animal sacrifices and oblations, by contrast, were to last *only* until the ULTIMATE sacrifice of Jesus Christ at Calvary, since they all pointed to Him in some way, shape, or form.
- Observe carefully that Jesus KEPT the Days of Unleavened Bread (Luke 2:41–42); the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1–2,14,37); the Last Great Day, etc. Christ is our EXAMPLE in *all* things (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6).
- The New Testament Church and the Apostles KEPT the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 12:3; 20:6; 1 Corinthians 16:8); the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9); the Feast of Tabernacles (Acts 18:21). Paul told the Colossians not to let ANYONE condemn them for observing the days that *God* made holy (Colossians 2:16–17).
- The Sabbath and Feast of Tabernacles were observed IN THE PAST and will be observed IN THE FUTURE during the Millennium by EVERYONE—both Jew and Gentile (Isaiah 66:23; Zechariah 14:1). Again, we emphasize, please look up all these verses *in your own Bible!* Prove all things; hold fast that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Timothy 2:15).
- God warns mankind specifically and repeatedly to “Learn NOT the way of the heathen” (Jeremiah 10:2). Christ warned, “But IN VAIN they do WORSHIP me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7), and, “why *call* ye me, Lord, Lord,” He asks, “and DO not the things which I SAY” (Luke 6:46)?
- Putting all these things together, we see that ALL who would be in the first resurrection had better learn to observe God’s Sabbath and holy days NOW, because they are ordained of GOD and are to be kept FOREVER (Leviticus 23:21,31,41; Exodus 12:14–15; 31:16–17).

For further details, consider requesting some of the materials below.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Sunday—Saturday, What Difference Does It Make?* [SAT]
- *Holy Day Calendar* [HDC]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]
- *A Sabbath Forever* [CD# C660]
- *Preparing for the Holy Days* [CD# C767]
- *Preparing for the Feast* [CD# C654]

Q I notice that some years the calendars published by the sacred name groups and yours are identical, but some years they are not. Why is this?

A You are correct. The reason for this is that we use the Hebrew Calendar, but the names groups use a different calendar. Their calendar differs from the Hebrew Calendar on several points, including the following: 1) They believe that the new moon, which marks the first day of each month, cannot be during the conjunction, but must always be the first appearance of the crescent. 2) They check the barley crops in Jerusalem in determining which new moon begins the first month of the year. 3) They ignore postponements, intercalary years, and certain other features of the Hebrew Calendar. Consequently, some years their calendar and the Hebrew Calendar are in agreement; other years they differ.

Since the Bible does not provide the rules of the calendar, we believe the best we can do is use the calendar system handed down to us by the same people who preserved the Hebrew Scriptures (Romans 3:9–10). The fact that some of the components of the Hebrew Calendar are not mentioned in Scripture does not mean they were unknown in the time of Moses. The “sacred names” groups construct their own calendar from the little information Scripture supplies on this subject and from their own assumptions.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Holy Day Calendar* [HDC]
- *The Calendar Controversy* [4–CD set]

Q Why do you use the Jews’ calendar with its many postponements?

A We might ask you in turn, *why not?* It should be noted that many who *claim* to be the “final authority” in such matters often vehemently disagree among themselves. Of course, the Bible says nothing about postponements. But then, *it doesn’t say much at all about the rules of the calendar.*

Whether or not Scripture contains a reference to the vernal equinox is disputed; the precise definition of a “new moon” is *not* there; and *nothing* is said of intercalary years. Some (the Karaites and various Sacred Names groups) say the first day of the first month can be determined by the time the barley in Israel is “in the Abib,” which is a certain stage of ripeness.

The problem with this is, *someone* has to decide *which* crop is to be used for this purpose, as the barley crops ripen at different times in different parts of the land. Further, *where is the rule* telling us we here in the western hemisphere have to go by “Jerusalem time”? We could ask, tongue-in-cheek, “Why not pick a barley crop in the good ol’ USA and get somebody to determine when it’s ‘in the Abib’?” Or, “Why not have small groups in each area go by their *own* barley crops and observable new moons?” Are we to suppose God is pleased when each individual takes these

responsibilities to himself and *rejects* the notion that some decisions regarding practice are reserved for an authoritative body (Romans 1:16; 2:10)? Our God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

It certainly appears that *the best we can do at this time* is go by the Hebrew calendar that's been handed down to us *for millennia*. The fact is, while we are unable to prove that postponements were in use during the Old Testament period or in the time of Christ, nobody else has proven that postponements were *not* in use.

A detailed examination of the Hebrew calendar is far beyond the scope of this simple question-and-answer format. Much preliminary knowledge must be understood before more advanced questions can be satisfied. The book, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, by Arthur Spier, lists all the holy days of the Jewish calendar from 1899 to 2100 A.D., and thoroughly explains all the rules the Church has consistently used for these many years. For details, you can obtain a copy of Arthur Spier's book at <http://www.amazon.com/Comprehensive-Hebrew-Calendar-Arthur-Spier/dp/0873063988>.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Holy Day Calendar* [HDC]
- *The Reliability of the New Testament* [4-CD set, SCPNT]
- *The Calendar Controversy* [4-CD set]

Q Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong went into great detail to show that Pentecost always falls on a Monday. I would like to know your reasoning that Pentecost was on Sunday. You can't both be right.

A That's a fair question. If one is searching for a group that mirrors the days of the *Radio Church of God*, I don't believe you'll find it. I do not see God working with *any* one group in the same manner that many witnessed in the earlier years of the *Radio Church of God* and subsequent *Worldwide Church of God*. Since then, the WCG has changed so much that it scarcely resembles the same church.

Many papers have been written concerning the Sunday/Monday Pentecost controversy. Some are so "locked in" to what they have been told and think they have proved, they refuse to even consider any new truth. The point is, what if they were wrong the *first time*? For decades, Mr. Armstrong was such a person, but finally, considering *all the facts* brought to his attention *he admitted he had made a mistake!* How *humbling* to admit he was mistaken for 40 years! Still today, others equally locked in to their paradigms, insist, "No, he was right the first time!" Which is right? As you pointed out, both views can't be correct if they are different. How can we be certain? We must go *to the Bible itself*, not to any "inspired revelations," "apostolic errors," or "locked-in paradigms" of *any* man or organization of men.

The instruction for counting Pentecost is found in Leviticus 23:15–16. They are pretty straightforward. We are instructed to count 50 days *from* the day after the Sabbath (Sunday) that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The confusion was over the word "from"—should it be used inclusively or exclusively?

Herbert W. Armstrong originally thought the word "from" should be *exclusive*—*counting out away from* Sunday—and thus miscounted the 50-day count to Pentecost and assumed that it fell on a Monday. Herman L. Hoeh further accommodated Mr. Armstrong, believing that an "apostle's" error *must* be inspired truth. In order to justify this erroneous count, in Leviticus 23, he deliberately misinterpreted the term "the Sabbath," Hebrew, *ha shabbat*, to read "week," Hebrew, *shavua*,

thereby making it possible to have partial, or imperfect weeks, for the counting of the seven weeks and Sabbaths to Pentecost. Thus, making “the morrow after the seventh *Sabbath*” to read as, “the morrow after the seventh *week*”—a Monday. This erroneous count then incorrectly made Pentecost “on the morrow after the seventh first day of the week.” Various ministers, linguistic experts, and translators were consulted for their insight. It was found that for 40 years the WCG kept Pentecost on the wrong day. In 1974, a special ministerial conference was held to correct this mistake. At that time, Mr. Hoeh *admitted* that he had done this because he believed that Mr. Armstrong’s error was “inspired truth,” which it was not. The WCG then changed to the correct day, and began to follow the *scriptural* instructions to begin the count of the 50 days on [beginning with] the first day of the week—then seven complete weeks were to be counted, each week ending in a weekly Sabbath, or 49 days. However, the total count was to be 50 days; and the 50th day was “the morrow *after* the seventh *Sabbath*”—*not* the seventh week. Several old-time ministers in the organization bolted because they would not admit error and change—the very attitudes Mr. Armstrong so often preached against. The correct count *always* makes Pentecost fall on the *first* day of the week after the seventh Sabbath. It is the only first day of the week that the church is to keep—a special holy day. Sunday could also be counted as an “eighth day”—meaning “a new beginning”—and so it was for the Church of God, for it was on that day the Church received the begetting day of the Holy Spirit.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Did Peter Have the Primacy?* [PHP].
- *The Miracle of Pentecost* [MPT]
- *Should We Observe Pentecost on Sivan 6?* [PNT]
- *Pentecost* [CD# C834]
- *Church History 103* [CD# C508]
- *Foreknowledge and Free Will* [CD# C568]

Q I know that Saturday is God’s Sabbath day, but I am having an especially difficult Sabbath-keeping problem! Can you offer any encouragement?

A Since you did not mention the details of your problem, it is difficult to advise specifically. Indeed, it sometimes seems that God’s people have *cycles* of good and bad times. Sometimes there is genuinely an “ox in the ditch” emergency situation; sometimes we just think there is; and sometimes we push our own ox into the ditch!

Down through the annals of time, God’s Sabbath has always been the “test” commandment—sometimes seeming to be the most difficult to obey, depending on one’s circumstances.

The fourth commandment simply says:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8–11).

We are not at liberty to alter what God says, and hope you can appreciate that we cannot compromise with the Word of God. However, it is realistically evident that no one can instantaneously “snap to” and obey all God’s commandments perfectly or develop godly character

in one fell swoop. Our God is a kind, patient, merciful, and understanding God who works with us—sometimes even altering circumstances for us—as we seek to obey Him with all our heart (Deuteronomy 10:12–13; Micah 6:8). He gives us time and opportunity to grow, change, and overcome. Sometimes we need some time to work things out. That’s what character development is all about: *knowing* right from wrong and setting our hearts to *obey* God, no matter what.

If you have some unusually difficult circumstance in your life that you need counseling with, please call us at **(903) 939–2929**. One of our ministers would be more than happy to talk with you. In the meantime, you have our earnest prayers on your behalf.

You may also wish to inquire if there is a *Church of God International* congregation near you. The CGI, as we sometimes refer to ourselves, has many congregations, and we welcome visitors and newcomers. We have an “open door” policy, so there are no “screening” requirements to see if you are “good enough” to attend with us. We invite you to join us for Sabbath services if at all possible, where you will be spiritually fed, nourished, and encouraged. Additionally, we offer an “extended church” program consisting of weekly CDs of live sermons given in various locations for those who may be too distant to attend.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Share the Vision* DVD
- *The International News*, our quarterly newspaper [INT]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]
- *How to Become a True Christian* [REL]

Q How can I celebrate the Lord’s Supper?

A What people commonly refer to today as the sacrament of the “Lord’s Supper” is actually the New Testament rite of Passover. Should Christians celebrate the feast (day) of Passover?

Absolutely! The Apostle Paul clearly answers the question for us: “...*Christ our Passover* is sacrificed for us: Therefore LET US KEEP THE FEAST” (1 Corinthians 5:7,8). Christ commands, “This DO in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24–25). This is not an option or a suggestion. It is a New Testament command! It is a “Thus saith the Lord!”

The Passover is God’s appointed memorial day set aside to remember His sacrifice for us and to celebrate His ongoing work of deliverance (2 Corinthians 1:9–10). Just as it keeps the weekly Sabbath, the *Church of God International* also observes the annual holy days and the Passover, also called Lord’s Supper, in 1 Corinthians 11:20. The Passover represents the sacrifice of Christ, which pays for the sins of all who repent and accept it in faith. It also represents partaking of eternal life through Jesus Christ, which is symbolized by the bread and wine that picture His body and blood. Just as Moses delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, so also does Christ deliver humanity from the bondage of all sin and its associated physical and spiritual consequences.

All God’s holy days, beginning with the Passover, serve as an outline or depiction of God’s plan of salvation for both the individual and for mankind in general. Thus, the Passover represents Christ’s sacrifice for all—for both the individual and the world—and pictures the initial step in salvation. Only through acceptance of His sacrifice can one repent and be forgiven. Repentance is the first stage in individual conversion.

The Passover is observed in the evening at the beginning of Nisan 14 of the Hebrew calendar in a very solemn ceremony, the most structured of any of the annual assemblies. The order is first the foot washing service, then the taking of the bread, and finally the drinking of the wine. Before each

part of the ceremony, appropriate scriptures are read. A reading of selections from John, chapters 13–17, and the singing of a hymn conclude the service. The next night, the evening at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th, is the beginning of the Days of Unleavened Bread. The entire seven-day period is a time of eating only unleavened food products. All leaven is removed from the homes before sunset at the end of the 14th.

This understanding is based on a multitude of scriptures and is ultimately derived from the examples of Jesus and the New Testament writers. For a much deeper understanding of this subject, please request the free booklets and CDs suggested below.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *God's Seasonal Plan* [GSP].
- *Who Changed Passover to Easter?* [WPC]
- *Should Christians Observe Easter?* [EST]
- *Ten Facts You Should Know About Repentance* [TFR]
- *Passover Themes* (CD# C211).
- *Do You Understand God's Passover?* [CD# C820]
- *So, What About Easter?* [CD# C523]
- *Easter: Truth or Tradition?* [CD# C725]
- *The Enormous Scope of Christ's Death* [CD# C528]
- *Understanding Jewish Arguments* [CD# C511]
- *God's Holy Days Are Unique* [CD# C738]
- *Passover Criminals* [CD# C722]

5 Law of God

Q If we are to obey God's commandments and holy days, then why are we not obeying the clothing law about wearing tassels in Deuteronomy 22:12?

A This is a rather commonly asked question. Granted, it is not always easy to discern the purpose of some of the laws of Moses, because we live in a different time and culture. The “clothing law” you mentioned is found in only two places: Numbers 15:38 and Deuteronomy 22:12.

Many professing Christians have questions about which Old Testament rules and laws we should observe today. For example, many claim they keep the Ten Commandments, but ignore one of them—the seventh-day Sabbath. In effect, *their* ten means only *nine!* Some may reason, “Oh, that’s an *Old Testament law*”—but *so* are the other *nine!*

Many do not understand that the laws of God are divided into three general categories: CEREMONIAL, CIVIL, and MORAL. Not discerning the difference, they tend to lump them all together as though they were all one and the same, and applicable or not applicable to everyone in every circumstance. Nothing could be further from the truth.

- THE CEREMONIAL LAWS were in some way, shape, or form, typical of the *ultimate* sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We do not perform animal sacrifices today because they are fulfilled in our Passover, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7).

- THE CIVIL LAWS were “the laws of the land,” much as we have many civic, municipal, and community laws today. Many civil laws defined how Israel should deal with specific situations in their culture and in their time. Many of these are not strictly applicable today. Some examples are laws regarding birds (Deuteronomy 22:6–7), animals (Deuteronomy 25:4), and the building of a parapet around your roof for safety (Deuteronomy 22:8), although these are still good principles for us today, as much as we can apply them.
- THE MORAL LAW was summarized in the Ten Commandments. These laws are eternal. They have always been in effect and always will be (Psalm 119:44,160; Matthew 5:17–18). “And *this is love*, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard *from the beginning*, ye should walk in it” (2 John 6).

God’s command to the children of Israel regarding fringes or tassels in Numbers 15:38 was a “mnemonic,” or *memory* device, to impress upon them that they were to separate themselves from surrounding nations: “Speak unto the children *of Israel*, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue” (Numbers 15:38). The effect of this can be likened to tying a string around your finger as a reminder. The fringes (tassels) and ribband (cord) of blue on the edges of their garments were to *remind* Israel to obey all God’s commandments (verse 40).

The *context* following Numbers 15:38 explains *the reason* for the tassels: “And it shall be unto you for a fringe [tassel], that ye may *look* upon it, *and remember* all the commandments of the LORD, and *do* them; and that ye seek *not* after your *own* heart and your *own* eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may *remember*, and *do* all my commandments, and *be holy* unto your God” (Numbers 15:39–40). This was not to impress God about how “holy” they were. Wearing tassels was a part of their *ceremonial* dress to *remind* them to keep the *moral* law—the Ten Commandments, along with the judgments and statutes that elaborate on them!

Note that God did *not* give Israel many elaborate laws about dress. Evidently men and women used similar mantles, or outer garments, though a woman’s might be embroidered or more colorful. What laws about clothing did God give? Neither men nor women were to wear clothes identified with the opposite sex, evidently with a transvestite intent (Deuteronomy 22:5). (This does *not* refer to a woman’s wearing pants *designed* for women.) Israelites were to put a fringed edge on their garments with a blue string above the fringe, possibly with tassels on the corners of the mantles (Numbers 15:38–41). That is basically *all* the direction the law gave about clothing styles.

In reality, God’s guidelines with regard to clothing and dress are very general. God expects Christian women to dress in “modest apparel” (1 Timothy 2:9)—that is, in clothes that are not unusual, flamboyant, or garish. A Christian woman should not be an “exhibitionist” in attracting undue attention to herself by wearing clothing which is provocative or outrageous. In our culture today, wearing religious tassels or phylacteries to show others how “righteous” you are would certainly fall within this category. See 1 Peter 3:4.

Jesus Himself addressed the self-righteous religious leaders of His time who wanted to *set themselves apart* from others by means of *unusual dress*. “But all their works they do for *TO BE SEEN OF MEN*: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments” (Matthew 23:5). The hypocritical Pharisees made these “phylacteries” very large, to impress the people with their “great sanctity.” Some religious leaders teach that we should still wear “tassels” today. However, today we are not constrained to external service, but obedience *from the heart*, out of regard for God. To illustrate this principle, even when we give alms, pray, and fast today, we are not to appear “righteous” or to call attention to men that we are giving, praying, or fasting, but to do these things to God in secret (Matthew 6:1–5,16–18).

Remember, the nation of Israel did *not*, as a whole, have access to God’s Holy Spirit. Today, we

do. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he [it] shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your *remembrance*, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *The Ten Commandments* (4-CD set) [SCSCA]
- *Are the Commandments Abolished?* [CD# C540]

Q I take exception with a sentence in your booklet *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God’s Law?* which reads, “As you search through these Old Testament laws, you are hard put to find a single one of them which would not be good for society today!” [page 6]. What of stoning of adulterers, and gays, selling your daughter into slavery, etc. Please tell me you do *not* think these would be “good for society today!”

A If the inspired writings of the Bible were only the thoughts of *men*, I might be inclined to agree with you in this “politically correct” society. But they are *not*! 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us, “*ALL* scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” And, of course, when the Apostle Paul wrote this, all that was in existence was what we today call “the Old Testament.” In Deuteronomy 5:29 God says, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear Me, and *keep* all My commandments *always*, that it might be well with them, and with their children *for ever!*” OUR OUTLOOK ON WHETHER GOD’S LAWS OUGHT BE KEPT TODAY LARGELY DEPENDS UPON WHETHER WE ARE *CULTURALLY CONDITIONED*, OR *BIBLICALLY TAUGHT!*

David said, “O how *love* I thy law” (Psalm 119:97,113,163), and David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22)! God does *not* change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). Christ said we should live by “every word” of God (Matthew 4:4), and remember, only the *Old* Testament was in existence at that time. He said in Matthew 5:17–18, “Think NOT that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am *not* come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in NO wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled!” *Have* heaven and earth passed away? No. Then *neither* has God’s law!

We must realize that in a *theocracy*, the parents were to teach their children God’s law *from infancy* (Deuteronomy 6–7). Once these laws were ingrained into the *societal conscience*, they were to be perpetuated *forever*. When an occasional lawbreaker was put to death, he was an *EXAMPLE* to all! It did not happen very often. For example, when the man was stoned for gathering sticks on the Sabbath day—not innocently, but presumptuously, in open defiance of God and His laws—it took only ONCE to put the *fear* of the Lord into the people (Numbers 15:30–31)! You NEVER read of that happening again!

The very next sentence in our *New Covenant* booklet after the one that you question reads, “Certainly, the laws involving criminal justice, if obeyed today, would rid our peoples of the terrible curse of *crime*” [page 7]! How true! Ecclesiastes 8:11 tells us, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed *speedily*, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” How much better if our judicial system were to put to death a known rapist, murderer, or child molester *quickly*—not after years and years of appeals, costs, and loophole acquittals—to put the fear of the Lord into the populace! After Christ’s return, His righteous laws *WILL* be reinstated and enforced.

Regarding your comment about slavery: Most people in our society blindly *assume* that the biblical laws of slavery were similar to the abuses that transpired in the United States in the South many years ago. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Some people reason: The Old Testament law sanctions slavery (Leviticus 25:39–46), even permitting a man to sell his own daughter (Exodus 21:7). Doesn't this show that the Old Testament law is inadmissible as a guide for today?

Let us examine the Old Testament slavery laws more closely. The law of Moses reveals the will of God and, *at the same time*, reflects the cultural norms of the day. Slavery was less than ideal, but it was woven into the economic fabric of the ancient world, and both slaves and slave owners benefited from the arrangement.

When we think of slavery, we think of human beings being hunted down like animals, chained and shackled, torn from their families, and hauled off to another country, where they are further dehumanized through forced labor and severe disciplinary measures.

But the slavery laws of the Bible put dramatic restraints on these dehumanizing elements.

An Israelite could “sell himself” to another Israelite, but he was an indentured servant, not a slave, and his obligation ended in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:39–43). A person usually sold himself as a servant to pay off a debt (cf. Leviticus 25:29; Amos 2:6), but he was to be treated as a hired laborer (Leviticus 25:43) and offered his release after six years. The Israelites were permitted to buy slaves from other nations, and they could buy the children and families of foreigners dwelling among them. These were permanent slaves (verses 44–46).

While the law of Moses does not forbid slavery, it does secure certain rights for slaves. Runaway slaves were not to be captured and returned to their masters, but were permitted to dwell wherever they chose among the Israelites, who were not to oppress them (Deuteronomy 23:15–16).

No doubt, many of the “strangers” who dwelt among the Israelites were runaway slaves from other nations. The Israelites were expressly forbidden to mistreat them (Leviticus 19:33). “The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (verse 34).

The law of Exodus 21:1–11 concerns Hebrew servants. The next section (verses 7–11) concerns a young lady whose father sells her for marriage. She is a servant, not a slave, and expected to be married to her master or his son, else be purchased by her relatives. If the master was displeased with her, he must allow her to be redeemed. He is not to sell her to a foreign nation. This law protects the rights of the young lady.

In summary, the Old Testament law permits slavery, but this permission pertains only to a world that has slavery built into its economic structure. The same law sets forth regulations designed to protect the rights of slaves and servants.

The law does not *require* slavery; it simply recognizes it *as an existing institution* and regulates it according to universal principles of fair treatment and protection of rights, including giving asylum to runaway slaves. Any attempt by moderns to reinstate slavery under the banner of “getting back to biblical law” would actually be a violation of these underlying universal principles!

So, yes, the Old Testament law may still be used for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It's a matter of being able to distinguish the cultural norms reflected in and acknowledged by the law from the universal standards of justice and righteousness contained in the law.

I, for one, my friend, will take God's Word over “cultural conditioning” every time!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God's Law?* [COV]

- *Was Moses the Lawgiver* [MTL]
- *America's Greatest Sin* [AMS]
- *What Does the Bible Say About Same Sex Unions?* [BSU]
- *Is the Law Only for the Jews?* [CD# C915]
- *Questions About the Millennium* [CD# C956]

Q Thanks for the booklet, *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God's Law? I am still confused. You say the Law continues. Does this mean you advocate stoning to death gays, adulterers, etc., and slavery, the temple with the sacrifices, etc.? Please explain.*

A This is a fair question. No, we do *not* advocate stoning to death gays, adulterers, etc., and slavery, the temple with the sacrifices, etc. The booklet you referred to is addressing the New Covenant God will establish at Christ's return with the houses of Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8:8,10; 10:16), which *includes* the Ten Commandments [see page 18 of the booklet]—*not the national and sacrificial laws ancient Israel kept UNDER A THEOCRACY*. We do not live under a theocracy today. Many things that were applicable in their society are not applicable today. Still, as the phrase goes, "some people want to throw the baby out with the bath water" by eliminating *all* laws. Please reread the booklet and LOOK UP EACH AND EVERY SCRIPTURE. "Prove all things" *from your own Bible* (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

"The law is done away" is a common mantra among dispensationalists and antinomians, or "no-law" advocates. This popular "no law" concept is *so* ingrained in the minds of many that it is difficult for them to accept the plain statements of Jesus Christ on this topic. OUR OUTLOOK ON WHETHER GOD'S LAWS OUGHT BE KEPT TODAY LARGELY DEPENDS UPON WHETHER WE ARE *CULTURALLY CONDITIONED*, OR *BIBLICALLY TAUGHT!*

Before we continue, may we assume that you place the pure, unadulterated Word of *God* before the doctrines and concepts of *men*? If so, we have common ground.

Jesus warned repeatedly, "*Take heed* that no man *deceive* you" (Matthew 24:4,11,24). He went on to say, "But *in vain* they do worship Me [yes, it *is* possible to worship God *in vain!*], teaching for doctrines the commandments of *men*" (Matthew 15:9).

"If there come *any* unto you, and bring not *this doctrine*," we are warned, "receive him NOT into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2 John 1:10).

Most people are confused by those ministers who *claim* to expound the words of God, but read their denominational beliefs *into* the Bible rather than take the Bible at face value. You often see one preacher quote one set of scriptures regarding the law, and another group quoting verses mentioning grace. The common *assumption* is that one set of scriptures "contradicts" another. What folly! Christ said the Scripture *cannot* be broken (John 10:35). *All* Scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16). We must *rightly* divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Most dispensationalists attempt to hold up law and grace as conflicting "opposites," but nothing can be further from the truth. Actually, they go *together* like hand in glove. Grace does not "do away" with God's law, but is God's *unmerited pardon* for our sins, making it possible for us to keep the law through the Holy Spirit that is given to those who *obey* Him (Acts 5:32).

The Ten Commandments spell out in plain language how we humans should live and behave. They define right and wrong—or in Bible terms, righteousness and sin (compare Psalm 119:172 and 1 John 3:4). Again, *which* laws are we addressing here? The Ten Commandments!

Far from being "done away," JESUS CATEGORICALLY STATED THAT THE LAW OF GOD WILL

OUTLAST THIS PRESENT UNIVERSE! In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Christ said emphatically, “Think NOT that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am NOT come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, TILL HEAVEN AND EARTH PASS, ONE JOT OR ONE TITTLE SHALL IN NO WISE PASS FROM THE LAW, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these *least* commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17–19). The spiritual principles expressed are as eternal and unchanging as the Almighty Himself (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). Let no one deceive you, the Ten Commandments are to be kept *forever*. No one should presume to teach otherwise.

Psalm 111:7–8 states, “The works of His hands are verity and judgment; *all* His commandments are sure. *They stand fast for ever and ever*, and are done in truth and uprightness.”

“And why *call* ye me, Lord, Lord,” Jesus asks, “and *do* not the things which I *say*” (Luke 6:46)?

We are sometimes asked, “How can the Ten Commandments be a law of LOVE?”

We’re glad you asked! Here is a way of explaining what love means—an explanation which many professing Christians have probably never heard. When the Eternal RULER of the universe first placed man on this planet earth, all was *perfect* harmony and beauty (Genesis 1:21). There was PEACE. There was PLENTY. There was BEAUTY. There was every provision and facility for HAPPINESS. In order to make it POSSIBLE for man to live a continuously peaceful, happy, prosperous, and joyful existence, the Eternal God designed that *all* things operate according to fixed, inexorable LAWS.

For example, we have the laws of physics, laws of chemistry, laws of mathematics, and laws of health. The entire universe operates on a system of law—without them, the universe would be in chaos. Man is no exception. God is the Great Lawgiver (Isaiah 33:22; James 4:12) and the Bible is His “owner’s manual” on how man ought to live.

Of necessity, there is also a great, fundamental, invisible *spiritual law* that regulates man’s relationship with his CREATOR [the first four commandments] and man’s relationship with his fellow MAN [the last six commandments]. See Exodus 20:1–17. The purpose of this inexorable SPIRITUAL law, like all of God’s laws, is to make possible man’s HAPPINESS—to bring man PEACE and JOY—to make life really worth living—with no “kickbacks!” Think. What is WRONG with placing God *first* in your life, or with not lying, stealing, or killing? God’s laws were His love gift to mankind to help him live a happy, peaceful, harmonious life!

When this spiritual law is broken (sin), varying kinds of unhappiness, fear and worry, strife and war, come in varying degrees AS THE PENALTY of broken law. “The wages of sin,” we are told in Romans 6:23, “is death; but the gift of God [through grace and forgiveness] is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Ignorance of the law is no excuse.

That great overall SPIRITUAL law can best be defined as LOVE in continual action. It is love manifested and expressed through caring (Luke 6:31). It is love, first, to God the CREATOR in reverence, adoration, gratitude, and OBEDIENCE (because He is the *supreme Creator-Ruler* who alone KNOWS what is right and best for us and has power to give it); and it is love, secondly, to FELLOW man, expressed in peaceableness, cooperation, and service. If you truly LOVE your fellow man, you will not steal from him, commit adultery with his wife, or kill him. God’s way travels the very OPPOSITE DIRECTION of greed, vanity, hate, strife, or war.

This great SPIRITUAL LAW is a PRINCIPLE—A WAY OF LIFE. It is an ATTITUDE OF

MIND AND HEART. It is the correct way to *think* and to LIVE. It is not merely a “moral principle”—it is a divinely set in motion spiritual LAW—and it operates automatically and inexorably! Paul said, “Wherefore the law is *holy*, and the commandment *holy*, and *just*, and *good*” (Romans 7: 12).

But since the carnal mind is naturally opposed to God’s law and demand for a righteous life, God defined this principle of LOVE by TEN DISTINCT POINTS—the TEN COMMANDMENTS. The Apostle John explained it this way: “For this *is* the LOVE OF GOD [here is the *Bible* definition], that we *keep* His commandments: and *His commandments are NOT grievous*” (1 John 5:3). “LOVE,” wrote Paul, “is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). Since no one can fulfill the law when he is breaking it, then love must be the *keeping* of the ten points of the law! He who breaks any one point is guilty of all (James 2:10), and is, therefore, *not* loving his neighbor.

The Creator made man a FREE MORAL AGENT—and for a grand purpose! He made man free to decide which way of life he would follow! Throughout history, man has chosen to *reject* the rule and law of God, and has instead tried to govern himself and his fellows as *he* saw fit. Ever since Adam in the Garden of Eden, man has believed that the law of God is somehow “wrong” because it is contrary to his carnal nature, and that man is sufficient unto himself. Man has followed the ways of vanity, jealousy, lust, and GREED ever since. This is the root cause of all our human woes. What man needs is to return to obedience to the law of God, which alone can restore order out of chaos! Christ is coming soon to *enforce* His divine law (Revelation 19:15).

To explain all the nuances and intricacies of the law is far beyond the scope of this format, but we suggest you send immediately for the materials below.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Paul and the Law—Understanding the Hard Sayings* [PTL]
- *Was MOSES the Lawgiver?* [MTL]
- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *Biblical Covenants* [CD# C536]
- *What’s New About the New Covenant?* [CD# C590]
- *Questions and Replies* [CD# C524]
- *Reliability of the New Testament* (3 CD SET) [CD# SCP00]

Q The Old Testament says, “an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24), while the New Testament, says, “vengeance is mine” (Romans 12:14). How do you explain this contradiction?

A This is easily explained. There is no contradiction. The “eye for an eye” principle is repeated in Matthew 5:38, Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. In context, these statutes were given to rule and regulate THE DECISIONS OF JUDGES. Jesus does *not* condemn the law, but prescribes *another* rule for INDIVIDUAL action in the *private* relations of their lives. The “eye for eye, and tooth for tooth, burning for a burning” ruling was the principle of JUST RECOMPENSE. As a judicial rule, it is *not* unjust. We use this same just recompense principle in our judicial system today! If you do evil and the governmental officials do their duty, they will punish you for breaking the law (Romans 13:3). Christ finds *no fault* with the decree as applied to MAGISTRATES, and note that He does *not* take it upon Himself to repeal it! In context, refer back to Matthew 5:18, where He says, “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall IN NO WISE

pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” The Jews, however, instead of confining the rule to magistrates or judges, had extended it to *private* conduct, *and made it the rule by which to extract REVENGE*. They considered *themselves* justified, by this decree, to inflict the same injury on others that they had received. Against *this* our Savior protests. He declares that *the law had no reference to private revenge* and reprisal, but was given only to regulate the magistrates; and that their *private* conduct was to be regulated by *different* principles.

The “vengeance is mine” quote in its ENTIRETY reads, “Dearly beloved, *avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord*” (Romans 12:19).

The main thought here is, “Beloved, *avenge not yourselves.*” In other words, we are *not* to resort to PERSONAL REVENGE. If we are injured, we are to leave the matter in the hands of God and give place unto His wrath in the way and the time *He* sees fit. God sees and resents the injuries *of His children to His children* just as we hate to see our own children fighting.

“For it is written”: The Lord claims it as *His* prerogative to avenge what needs to be avenged. When we do it, we trample on His Divine rights. See Deuteronomy 32:35.

By analogy, when one of our children misbehaves, it is *not* up to our *other children* to punish him, but that is *the job of the parents!* There is no contradiction here! In fact, these scriptures harmoniously *complement* one another. I hope this helps answer your question.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Real Reasons Why Christ Came to This Earth* [CCE]
- *God’s Seasonal Plan* [GSP]
- *Trying to Get It Right This Time* [CD# C550]
- *Glass Houses* [CD# C547]

Q What is the truth about blood transfusions? Some religionists came knocking on my door and insisted that blood transfusions are a sin. What does the Bible say?

A Alongside the advancement of science and medical technology, there are often questions about ethics and biblical principles. The Bible clearly prohibited the eating of blood (see Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:11; 3:17; 7:26–27; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16,23; 15:23; 1 Samuel 14:33; Ezekiel 33:25–26; 44:7; Acts 15:20,29.)

God Himself said He would set His face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among His people (Leviticus 17:10–14).

Three primary reasons are given in the Scriptures for not eating blood: 1) the life of the body is derived from the blood (Leviticus 17:14). 2) The blood is emblematic of Christ’s atonement for our sins. 3) It was often a pagan ritual to drink blood as part of an idolatrous rite. Jeremiah 10:2 commands, “*Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.*” “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (1 Corinthians 10:20–21).

Instruction was given to “pour out the blood” of animals before they were eaten (Leviticus 17:13). Some maintain that abstinence from blood was simply and only an ordinance that was part of the abrogated law of Moses (Colossians 2:14). However, blood abstinence actually pre-dates the law of Moses (Genesis 9:4). When we come to the New Testament, we still find the avoidance of

blood being taught (Acts 15:29).

Plainly, the Scriptures forbid eating and drinking blood. But what about *blood transfusions*? Drinking the blood of animals (or people!) is not in the same category as the intravenous giving of blood to save a human life. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Some forbid blood transfusions because of the potential contamination, infection, H.I.V., etc., and germ transference; and indeed, such cases have occurred. However, thousands of lives have been *saved* through transfusions. Although the Bible does not forbid modern blood transfusions, wise counsel and precaution should be taken to avoid unnecessary risks and exposures.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Afraid to Die?* [ATD]
- *The Miracle of Healing* [HLG]
- *Understanding the Commandments* [UTN]
- *Are the Commandments Abolished?* [CD# C540]

Q When Jesus said we are to “turn the other cheek,” did He set aside the “eye for an eye” law?

A As you read the entire passage of Matthew 5:39 in *context*, it becomes clear that Jesus was not in any way setting aside or abolishing the Law. See verses 17–19, “Think *not* that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” Christ restored the law to its original intent. He *fulfilled* it (meaning “to fill” or “make full”) by stripping it of the *erroneous interpretations* that had been *added* to it by men, and by restoring its original meaning and purpose. The remainder of the chapter provides several examples of just how Jesus did that.

During Jesus’ time, and indeed to this day, people misinterpret and misapply the “eye for an eye” law, thinking that it allows for vigilante justice and personal vengeance. It does not! This law was part of Israel’s criminal justice system, and was to be administered by the judges (Exodus 21:22–25).

It’s important to understand that Jesus’ comments were made in the context of personal relationships. He was explaining how we are to treat each other. Did He mean that we cannot protect and defend ourselves or our families when under attack? Absolutely not! He meant that we should not take judicial matters into our own hands, that we should distance ourselves from personal vengeance, not self-defense. There’s a big difference!

When Jesus said to “turn the other cheek,” He was using hyperbole—exaggeration as a form of emphasis. It was something He often did to make a point (see verses 29 and 30).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *What Is Sin?* [SIN]
- *Can a Christian Be Unconverted?* [CCU]
- *What Is the Unpardonable Sin?* [UPD]
- *How You Can Be an Overcomer* [HBO]
- *How to Be Used of God* [UOG]
- *Resolving Marital Conflicts* [CD# C522]

Q Can you explain why there is animal sacrificing taking place in Ezekiel, chapters 40–48?

Were not the ceremonial laws ended?

A The last nine chapters of Ezekiel have posed numerous problems for many expositors, but God’s Word is clear. The time setting is Millennial—that is, it takes place during the 1,000-year reign of Christ upon the earth after His Second Coming.

The painstaking detail in Ezekiel 40–48 is similar to the instruction given to Moses for the building of the tabernacle and then to others for building the Solomonic temple. Such detail is meaningless unless taken literally as for the tabernacle and first two temples. *If* the detail was intended to be symbolic, the symbols are never explained, as is usually the case with genuine biblical symbolism, so there is no textual basis for a non-literal interpretation. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. It is plain that animal sacrifices will be reinstated during the Millennium (Ezekiel 40:39; 42:13; 43:18–27).

Comparing scripture with scripture, we find that Millennial sacrifices are mentioned as a “matter of fact” by other major prophets of the Old Testament as future occurrences. When understood in context, at least four other prophets join Ezekiel in affirming a sacrificial system in a millennial Temple (Isaiah 56:7; 66:20–23; Jeremiah 33:18; Zechariah 14:16–21; Malachi 3:3–4). This further supports the *literal* interpretation of Ezekiel. Why would five of Israel’s prophets mention these sacrifice if they will not take place? The literal interpretation of the Bible and Bible prophecy stands, especially when one considers the fact that critics cannot tell us, based upon a textual interpretation, what Ezekiel does mean if not taken literally.

The Bible does not always tell us *why* God does what He does—just that He does it.

The renowned *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* observes, “The sacrifices here are not mere *commemorative*, but *propitiatory* ones. The expressions, “blood” (Ezekiel 43:18), and “for a sin offering” (Ezekiel 43:19,21–22), prove this. In the literal sense they can only apply to the *second* temple. Under the Christian dispensation, they would directly oppose the doctrine taught in Heb. 10:1–18, namely, that Christ has by one offering forever atoned for sin. However, it is possible that they might exist with a *retrospective* reference to Christ’s sufferings, as the Levitical sacrifices had a *prospective* reference to them; *not propitiatory* in themselves, but *memorials* to keep up the *remembrance* of His *propitiatory* sufferings, which form the foundation of His kingdom, lest they should be lost sight of in the glory of that kingdom [De burgh]. The particularity of the directions make it unlikely that they are to be understood in a merely vague spiritual sense. Ezekiel 43:18–27.” (Emphasis mine.)

In other words, the temporary Millennial sacrifices will at that time point *back* to Christ’s ultimate sacrifice, just as those in the Old Testament had sacrifices pointing *forward* to Him.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Ezekiel’s Timeless Message* [ETM]
- *The Second Coming and Beyond* [SCB]
- *Christ in the Old Testament* [TES]
- *What Does the Bible Really Say About the Millennium?* [MLN]
- *Preterism* [CD# C741]

Q Is it OK to eat monkey meat?

A No. See Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

Suggested reading:

- *Have the Old Testament Dietary Laws Been Abolished?* [DLA]

Q *Help! I am constantly being approached as to why I do not eat pork. I understand that Peter’s vision in Acts 10 does not make all meats kosher. Still, I would like to be able to give an answer as to why I believe as I do without offending people. Do you have any advice?*

A Thank you for writing. Your interest in the truth of God is inspiring to all of us in God’s Work. We are pleased to hear that you observe God’s food laws. To the degree you obey God, you will surely be blessed. Here are a few pointers that may be of assistance to you.

The shortest, simplest answer as to why you do not eat pork is that, “It is not good for me.” Period. If pressed, tell them your Great Physician [God] tells you so.

Secondly, *God says* you should not eat anything He labels as “unclean.” That should settle the matter once and for all. *Swine* are expressly *forbidden* by God Almighty to be eaten (Leviticus 11:7). In God’s eyes, unclean food is not really food at all! The Bible plainly teaches that we are to OBEY God—to obey His commandments (Matthew 19:16–18; 1 John 3:4). Not only are we to obey the commandments, but Christ also said that we are to live by EVERY WORD that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

Thirdly, the laws given in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 regarding what foods are good for us have *in no way* been changed or abolished. Malachi 3:6 reminds us, “For I am the LORD, *I change not.*” “Jesus Christ is the *same* yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Neither has the nature or composition of the animals mentioned as clean and unclean been changed “since the cross.” Going back, the laws of clean and unclean meats were known and observed even *before* the Noachian flood (Genesis 7:28), long before the Ten Commandments were codified in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

Of course, most of mankind today is not aware of these facts (or choose to ignore them). But *we are!* We are held accountable for obeying what we know (Matthew 7:24–25; John 13:17), no matter how many scoff, ridicule, or try to talk us out of it. Just as ancient Israel was to be a good example of clean living to the Gentile nations, so should God’s spiritual Israel today—God’s church—be an example to the unconverted.

Fourthly, Jesus Christ is certainly a shining example of how we ought to live. He lived a *perfect* life! Christ did not do one thing that was wrong. Yet, Christ permitted demons to enter a herd of swine, causing them to run violently down a steep place into a lake were they were drowned (Luke 8:32–34). Notice, Christ had a *reason* for this action.

The swine were, and still are, *UNCLEAN* animals. Christ permitted *unclean* spirits (demons) to enter *unclean* animals. Christ did not permit unclean spirits to enter and defile clean animals. Christ *permitted* the demons to enter the swine because the swine were *UNFIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION* and ought not to have been sold as “good food” in the marketplace. Jesus was indirectly solving the marketing problem of those Gadarene farmers!

And finally, you have indicated that you understand the meaning of Peter’s *vision* in Acts 10, so I will not go into that in depth here other than to point that THE BIBLE’S *OWN* INTERPRETATION of this vision in Acts 10:28 and 34 is that “God hath shown me that I should not call any *man* common or unclean,” and that “God is no respecter of *persons*” as far as salvation is concerned.

As an aside, there is also a *prophecy for the future* concerning clean and unclean meats: They “...eating swine’s flesh and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be *CONSUMED TOGETHER*, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 66:17). This verse displays a vivid picture of conditions just before the

return of Jesus Christ .

In our *Statement of Beliefs*, under Article 27, *BIBLICAL DIETARY LAWS*, we state:

Biblical dietary laws, including the prohibitions of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, are among the many health laws God gave to Israel. Jesus, the apostles, and the early New Testament church observed them, and they remain in effect today. Scripture indicates that laws pertaining to “clean” and “unclean” animals were recognized and observed from earliest times. (Genesis 7:2–3; 8:20; Leviticus 3:17; 11; Deuteronomy 14:3–21; Matthew 5:17–19; Acts 10:9–15, 28.)

The teaching of God’s Word is clear. Unclean animals were created for a purpose—but *not for food!* Swine, like most unclean creatures, are scavengers—God’s “clean-up crew.” God is saying, in effect, “Please don’t eat My garbage collectors; they are not good for you!”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Have the Old Testament Dietary Laws Been Abolished?* [DLA]
- *Was Moses the Lawgiver?* [MTL]
- *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God’s Law?* [COV]
- *Has Love Been Done Away?* [CD# C765]
- *What Does God Require?* [CD# C850]

Q Should we still keep Jewish laws (days which had sacrifices)? Hebrews 8:9,10. Also, are we obliged to do things that are “Jewish” after having accepted Christ as our Savior?

A Hebrews 8:9–10 reads, “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because *they continued not* in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For *this* is the covenant that I *will* make with the house of Israel *after* those days, saith the Lord; I will put *My laws* into their *mind*, and write them in their *hearts*: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” These verses are SO IMPORTANT to God that He repeated them *three times!* They are also found in Jeremiah 31:31–33 and Hebrews 10:16.

Many people—including whole church organizations—become confused when reading these verses because they do not understand what a “covenant” is. According to the dictionary, the word “covenant” is derived from Latin, and is a noun meaning to come; a coming together; a meeting or agreement of minds. A covenant is *a contract* of mutual consent, or agreement, of two or more persons, to do or perform a certain thing. It is important to fix in mind that A COVENANT IS AN AGREEMENT between parties, NOT A LAW! God’s Word plainly reveals that every one of the Ten Commandments was in force *long before* the time of Moses. In fact, the commandments predated the flood of Noah’s time by *centuries*. And this can be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt! Please request our free article reprint, *Was Moses The Lawgiver?* for a full Scriptural explanation.

Hebrews 8 is *summing up* the terms of agreement between God and ancient Israel (verse 1) and is *contrasting* the *Old Covenant*—the agreement between God and Israel—and the *New Covenant* between God and spiritual Israel, the church. Note that the Old Covenant *included* the Ten Commandments, but the commandments were *not* the covenant itself! The writer of Hebrews plainly points out that the fault with the Old Covenant, or agreement, was not with God, or even with the contract or covenant itself, but “WITH THEM,” with *the people* (verse 8). Israel did not keep *their* part of the agreement—a promise to turn to God and away from sin and idols.

The covenant Christ mediates is a better covenant, since it is enacted on better promises—

eternal life—which was *not* promised to ancient Israel as a whole. In verses 6–13, the New Covenant is *contrasted* with that first covenant (verse 7). God goes on to describe the covenant He WILL MAKE with the houses of Israel and Judah “after those days,” that is, after Christ’s imminent return, the establishing of His Kingdom upon the earth.

Then, at that time, God says, “I will put MY LAWS into their *mind*, and write them in their *hearts*: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.” Then, at *that* time, the people who failed to live up to their part of the agreement, or covenant, will have a NEW heart and mind; they will become truly CONVERTED from the inside out and will willingly OBEY God—including the keeping of His Ten Commandments!

The animal sacrifices you mentioned that were ADDED (Galatians 3:19) because of the transgressions, or breaking, of the covenant Israel made with God (Exodus 24:7) were only temporary “reminders”—a schoolteacher of sorts—in place UNTIL Christ came. All the sacrifices, offerings, and oblations were a picture or TYPE of Christ and pointed to *Him* in some way, shape, or form. We do not observe such *ritualistic* rites today because they pointed forward to Christ. The Ten Commandments, however, a different set of laws in force *long before* Mt. Sinai, will be kept in the *future*, and are *not* “done away” (Psalm 119:44,160; 1 John 5:3). Christ pointedly stated, “THINK *NOT* that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am *NOT* come to destroy, but to fulfil [that is, to complete its purpose]” (Matthew 5:17–18).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Have the Old Testament Dietary Laws Been Abolished?* [DLA]
- *Was Moses the Lawgiver?* [MTL]
- *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God’s Law?* [COV]
- *Are Christians Under the Law?* [UNL]
- *What’s New About the New Covenant?* [CD# C590]
- *Are the Commandments Abolished?* [CD# C450]
- *Is the Law Only For the Jews?* [CD# C915]

6

Church

Q Please explain your *Church of God International* logo.

A Gladly. Our *Armor of God* logo is taken from Ephesians 6:13–18, where the apostle Paul, having described the believer’s enemies, admonishes, “Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day,” cautioning that an evil day is before us, and that without the help of Divine armor, we cannot stand in that day. He then goes on to list several pieces of the Christian armor including truth, righteousness, the true gospel, faith, the knowledge of salvation, the Word of God (the Bible), along with prayer, supplication, and persistent watching. Please turn to Ephesians 6:13–18 and read the entire context from your own Bible.

We believe our *Armor of God* logo fitly describes what we do and teach and as well as what each and every Christian is called to do.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Welcome to the Church of God International!* [WEL]
- *How to Be A Real Christian* [REL]

- *In Whom Do We Trust?* [CD# C0157]

Q Hello. I am inquiring if there is a local congregation in my area. I'm listening online weekly and am interested in attending the *Church of God International*. Is anyone welcome to attend your Sabbath services, or do we have to be screened? I'm not a member of any Church of God. What do you recommend for beginners seeking the church? Thanks.

A *The Church of God International* has an "open door" policy. The concept of "open door" Christian fellowship appears throughout the New Testament. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). Anyone is welcome to attend our Sabbath services. Just bring your Bible and a smile. You asked what we recommend for a beginner seeking the church. Over the years, we have produced countless booklets, articles, and CDs. Over the course of time, most are mentioned for our readers and listeners. For visitors and people new to the faith, we recommend the following for starters:

- *Welcome to the Church Of God International* [WEL]
- *Statement of Beliefs* [SBF]
- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *The Q&A Book—Questions And Answers, Volume One* [QUE]

We also recommend the following CDs:

- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]
- *The Real Nature of Jesus Christ* [CD# C559]
- *When Jesus Steps Into Your Story* [CD# C952]
- *Where Are We Headed Prophetically?* [CD# C916]

Additionally, we would also like to recommend the *International News* [INT], our quarterly flagship publication, which contains informative articles, church news, pictures, and miscellaneous information serving as a window into the activities of local congregations.

For the sake of convenience, you can request materials by title or by code number, or both, and we'll know what you mean. All our materials are absolutely FREE of course, as per Matthew 10:8.

Christian fellowship is a necessity and requirement of the believer and develops friendship, helping, serving, sharing in common, and especially the joy of being "at-one-ment" with brethren of like mind; or, as the book of Proverbs says it, "Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Proverbs 27:17). Hebrews 10:25 reminds us, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Be sure to call or write to see if there is a congregation near you.

Q Does Matthew 16:18 prove that Christ built the church on the apostle Peter?

A No, it does not. There are two valid explanations to this inquiry.

First, contextually, Christ has just asked His disciples, "Whom do *men* say that I the Son of man am" (verse 13)? Some, they said, speculated that He was John the Baptist. Others thought He was Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other prophet. "But whom do *you* say I am?" Jesus pursued (verse 15). "And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Matthew 16:16). "And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for

flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [Greek, *αδης* hades, meaning death or the grave] shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus was saying that UPON THIS TRUTH—this revelation from God the Father that He, Jesus, was indeed, the Messiah, the Son of the living God—He would build His church.

Read verse 18 again carefully. This scripture does *not* say that Christ made Peter the head of His church. The verse reads, “And I [Christ] say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

The key to understanding this scripture lies in the correct translation of the Greek words here rendered “Peter” and “rock.”

The Greek word translated “Peter” is *petros* [Greek, *πετρος*, *petros*], meaning a pebble, or a piece of a larger stone. The Greek word translated “rock” upon which Christ would build His church is *petra* [Greek, *πετρα*, *petra*] meaning a massive rock or huge boulder.

Christ said plainly that He would build His church on a Rock (Himself), not on a pebble (Peter). Christ Himself is the Rock. Compare 1 Corinthians 10:4: “And [their forefathers] did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock [*πετρα*, *petra*] that followed them: AND THAT ROCK [*πετρα*, *petra*] WAS CHRIST.”

He is also the *chief cornerstone* upon which the Church is built: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE” (Ephesians 2:20).

Peter was not infallible. For example, in Matthew 16:21–23, Jesus had to severely rebuke Peter for a wrong attitude immediately after His statement about the “Rock.” Later, Christ rebuked him for hastily cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant, Malchus (John 18:10). Years later, the Apostle Paul reported, “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because *he was to be blamed*” (Galatians 2:11).

In the Psalms, David repeatedly called God his *Rock*: Psalm 62:2,6,7; 71:3; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1, etc.

Five times in Deuteronomy 32, God who is the Creator (who became Jesus Christ—Hebrews 1, John 1) is described as “the Rock,” not any man or organization of men.

Through the centuries, *men* have tried to *usurp* the office of Jesus Christ! Some, in attempting to prove one-man RULE over God’s church, cite the passage in Matthew 16: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Note, however, that Jesus was speaking to *all* the disciples at this moment (read the entire chapter in context), and only two chapters later once again tells *all* the disciples, “Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

The apostle Paul said a great deal about “those that have the rule over you,” and spoke of settling church difficulties with “a rod.”

By the simple process of continual preaching, teaching, and repetitive emphasis on “authority”—by emphasizing the *inspiration of the Holy Spirit* in preaching, teaching, and Bible study—a powerful, charismatic, persuasive religious leader is able to convince his followers that, when he *stands in the pulpit*, he is speaking “under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,” and is therefore BEYOND QUESTION! Gradually, his followers begin to believe they are hearing virtually firsthand, *directly from GOD*.

But Jesus said, “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. BUT IT SHALL *NOT* BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:25–27).

Today *millions* of humans, in *many* different nations, and in *many* different religions, in effect, virtually worship *men*.

Carried to its ultimate extreme, this concept has led to the declaration of *papal infallibility* for the popes in Rome! The Catholic Church teaches that, when a pope speaks from the “Holy See,” in the Vatican, he is *infallible!* The Catholic Church places at least *two* sources of supposed “authority” on an *equal* or *higher level* than the Bible!

The first is the pope himself, when making official pronouncements from the “Holy See.” Such pronouncements carry the weight of *Scripture* with Catholics, are said to be absolutely inspired, and are considered utterly *infallible!*

Also, the *traditions* of the church—those procedures, doctrinal tenets, teachings and administrative and organizational systems which have been gradually established over centuries and centuries of historical development—are considered to be *inviolable*, “written in stone,” and on an equal par with Scripture *or higher!* If any should point out that their traditions and the Bible do not agree, tradition takes precedence!

The Protestant Reformation was as much a protest against hierarchical *abuses of power* as it was a protest against *doctrine* such as the selling of indulgences. Strangely, as the centuries have passed, many organizations which sprang up *following* the Protestant Reformation have themselves drifted into a similar type of hierarchical structure as the organization they left, in protest.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Did Peter Have the Primacy?* [PHP]
- *The Church of God in Prophecy* [CGP]
- *Christ in the Old Testament* [TES]
- *Is Your Church Doing What Jesus Did?* [CD# C668]
- *Can a Christian Be Unconverted?* [CD#C647]

Q 2 John 10 sounds as though Christians are not supposed to associate with non-Christians. Is that what it means? Should we shun non-Christians?

A 2 John 1:10 reads, “If there come *any* unto you, and bring not *this doctrine* [the true doctrine of Christ], receive him *not* into your house, *neither* bid him God speed” [*Emphasis added.*]

There are several other verses in the Bible that support this verse. Among them are: Proverbs 19:27; Romans 16:17–18; 16:22; Galatians 1:8–9; 2 Timothy 3:5–6, and Titus 3:10.

However, many use these verses *out of context* to justify “shunning” someone who is not of their particular understanding or faith, especially those someone had justly or unjustly “marked.” CONTEXT is the key word here.

2 John 10 is clearly referring to *entertaining any supposed teacher or preacher of false religion or doctrine*. Christ warned, “For many shall come *in my name*, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive *many*” (Matthew 24:5).

“Receive him not into your house” cannot mean that no acts of kindness or charity under any circumstances is to be shown to non-believers; but that nothing should be done which could be construed as encouraging or supporting *false religious proponents*.

To invite a teacher of counterfeit doctrine into your house with a friendly greeting, open arms (and in all probability an open pocketbook) can be understood as welcoming and espousing *their false doctrine*. The command not to “receive such an one into your house,” should be taken literally. By extension, inviting false teachers “into your house” would apply to inviting them *into your mind* (where you “live”). We can do this today by entertaining or inviting false religious ministers “into our house” by way of TV or radio in order to *learn* from them. Again, Matthew 24:4–5 applies.

However, keeping in agreement with the other scriptures, we read in Hebrews 13:2, “Be *not* forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” The Bible does not contradict itself. There can be no doubt that entertaining strangers was a custom in the culture to which John was writing. We should likewise be a light and a witness to those around us today (Matthew 5:13–16; Romans 12:9–13).

The apostle Paul gave the *balance* when he said, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not entirely with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; *for then must you needs go out of the world*. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called *a brother* [a “Christian”] be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat (1 Corinthians 5:9–11). In other words, if we were to avoid all kinds of sinners, we would need to step off the planet, because we are *all* sinners (1 John 1:8)!

Thus, 1 John 10 is plainly speaking about not giving *false teachers hospitality*. A more modern term might be that to do so is “aiding and abetting the enemy.” To do so would be to encourage him in his false ministry. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them,” we are told in Ephesians 5:11.

2 John 11 goes on to say, “For he that biddeth him [those espousing false doctrine] God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” This means that to give him such greetings as “God speed,” or “God be with you,” is to wish for his success.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Can a Christian Be Unconverted?* [CCU]
- *Things to Do While Waiting For Jesus to Return* [WFJ]
- *Home Bible Study Course* [CO1]
- *How Much Time in Life?* [CD# C701]

Q I am confused because there are so many churches with different opinions of the truth. These churches and most all religious people I have talked to seem to be so sure that what *they* believe is the truth and all the rest are wrong. If I question that “truth” even with Scripture to back me up, then I become to them “the Devil.” One church I contacted convinced me to send them several hundred dollars for books and CDs, but now I see *the Scriptures* say, “...freely you have received, *freely give*” (Matthew 10:8), and “...It is more blessed to *give* than to receive” (Acts 20:35). I am confused. Please help.

A It is unfortunate that many organizations claim exclusiveness and browbeat those who question their “authority.” This technique is often used as a means of controlling its members with “fear religion.” Once any man or organization convinces its followers that *it* is the “one and only true church,” they gain near absolute control of that person. As a result, it should be of no surprise that so many are disillusioned and confused. 2 Peter 2:3: “And through covetousness shall they

with feigned words MAKE MERCHANDISE of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.”

Christ warned, “Take heed that *you* be not deceived: for *many* [not a few] shall come *in My name* [that is, they are coming “in the name of” Christ] *saying*, I am Christ [that is, they are admitting Jesus *is* the Christ, and by this method, by saying Jesus is the Christ, and that they are coming “in his name,” they will deceive many—in fact, *most*]; and the time draws near: *go not therefore after them*” (Luke 21:8).

Of course, *no one* ever says, “I am a false prophet,” or “this is not the true church,” or “I am in the religion business for the power, the prestige, and the money.” No, never! No one would follow or contribute to them if they admitted this!

The question arises, “How can I tell the truth from error?” That is a fair question. Let the Scriptures answer: “To the law and to the testimony: IF THEY SPEAK NOT ACCORDING TO *THIS WORD*, it is because there is *no* light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Again, we are warned in 2 John 1:10, “If there come *any* unto you, and bring not *THIS DOCTRINE*, receive him *not* into your house [that is, into your mind, whether in person, in print, or any other media], neither bid him God speed [we do not even need to wish them well!]”

You also mentioned, “One church I contacted convinced me to send them several hundred dollars for of books and CDs, but now I see *the Scriptures* say, ‘...freely you have received, *freely give*’ (Matthew 10:8), and ‘...It is more blessed to *give* than to receive’ (Acts 20:35). Addressing a similar issue, the apostle Peter wrote, “But there were *false prophets* also among the people, even as there shall be *false teachers* among you, who privily shall bring in *damnable heresies*, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom *the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*. And through covetousness shall *THEY WITH FEIGNED WORDS MAKE MERCHANDISE OF YOU*: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Peter 2:1–3).

You should be very careful about sending your hard-earned money to those who claim to come “in Jesus’ name,” yet *disobey* what the Scriptures plainly *say* (Luke 6:46).

But take heart! Be confident you *can* know the Truth. It is found in God’s Word, the Bible (John 17:17), not in the books and sayings of men or women. We are admonished to “*Prove* all things; *hold fast* that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Christ warned repeatedly that there would be many false teachers (Matthew 24:4,11,24). Believe *no* man or organization—believe *your own Bible!* By way of the process of elimination, if we find that what others teach is *not* in harmony with GOD’S WORD, we should *not* hold on to it. For example, if some claim, “The Ten Commandments are done away” (a common claim), it is incumbent upon *you* to PROVE BY YOUR OWN BIBLE whether or not this is true.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Home Study Bible Correspondence Course* [CO1]
- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *The New Covenant—Does It Do Away With God’s Law?* [COV]
- *Saturday, Sunday—What Difference Does it Make?* [SAT]

Q Is it okay for a Sabbath keeper to listen to a Sunday minister? Not in a church setting or even on Sunday, but just to get a message.

A Let God’s Word answer: “If there come any unto you, and bring not *this doctrine* [including

the Sabbath], receive him *not* into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 1:10). Also see Galatians 1:8–9; 2 Timothy 3:5–6; and Titus 3:10.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Sunday, Saturday—What Difference Does It Make?* [SAT]
- *Who Changed Saturday to Sunday?* [CD# C659]
- *Holy Sabbath* [CD# C612]
- *The Importance of the Sabbath* [CD# C532]
- *Questions and Replies* [CD# C524]
- *Tithing—Is It For Christians?* [TIC]
- *Is the Law Only for the Jews?* [CD# C915]

7 Prophecy

Q Speaking of Gog and Magog, what is your understanding of Ezekiel 38–39?

A The latter-day identity of Gog and Magog has generated much controversy over the years, and there is no general agreement among scholars. Thus, much speculation abounds. Gog and Magog are mentioned *together* only twice in the Bible: in Ezekiel 38:2 and Revelation 20:8–9.

We cannot answer dogmatically where the Bible is silent. No man’s interpretation is of any value if not backed up by God’s Word, the Bible.

A positive identity of Gog and Magog is difficult, because we do not know the king nor the people intended by it. However, it is evident they were well known by these names in the time the prophet wrote. “Gog” is first found in 1 Chronicles 5:4. Magog was the grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:2). It should be noted in passing that, while such identity issues are often interesting, they are *not* salvation issues.

That the primary reference is to the northern European powers, the majority agrees. The passages should be read in conjunction with Zechariah 12:1–4; 14:1–9; Matthew 24:14–30; Revelation 14:14–20; and 19:17–21. It appears “Gog” is the prince, and “Magog” his land. Most scholars feel the reference to Meshech and Tubal is a probable mark of identification for Moscow and Tobolsk. The northern powers have long been persecutors of dispersed Israel, and it is congruous with both divine justice and with the understanding that destruction will fall at the climax of the last frantic attempt to exterminate the remnant of the Jewish nation of Israel in Jerusalem. The two mentions of Gog and Magog may well be a type and antitype belonging to the yet future “day of the LORD” (Isaiah 2:10–22; Revelation 19:11–21) and to the battle of Armageddon, since it also includes the final revolt of the nations at the close of the Kingdom age. In Revelation 20:7–9, Gog and Magog appear to be the *worldwide* enemies of Christ, and does not refer to the same battle as described in Ezekiel 38:39. The large number of rebels at that time will come from the many people born during the Millennium who, though giving outward obedience to the King, never accept Him. Notice, the Bible simply says, “And shall go out to deceive the nations *which are in the four quarters of the earth*, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:8).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Can You Understand Bible Prophecy?* [CBP]

- *Needed: A Rational Approach to Bible Prophecy* [RAB]
- *Evidence of the End Times* [EET]
- *End-time Warning to the Church* [CD# C076]

Q Where is the Babylon of Revelation 18:10–17? Is it the U.S.A.? Where is the location and when will this happen?

A We cannot be dogmatic because the *Bible* does not say for certain. Revelation is largely written in *symbolism* and is of no private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). The Bible interprets its own symbols.

There are many beliefs and opinions as to what end-time Babylon comprises among those who study and examine end-time prophecy. Some believe that Babylon represents Rome and the religious system it represents, while others interpret it as being some other city. Opinions range from believing that ancient Babylon will be rebuilt, or resurrected in Iraq, or even that Babylon the Great is the United States of America.

Here is what *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says under the article, “Babylon in the New Testament”:

“Babylon, *Babulon*, is used in New Testament in at least two different senses:

1. *Mesopotamian Babylon:*

In Mt 1:11–12,17; Ac 7:43 the old Mesopotamian city is plainly meant. These all refer to the captivity in Babylon and do not demand any further discussion.

2. *Symbolic Sense:*

All the references to Babylon in Revelation are evidently *symbolic*. Some of the most important passages are Re 1:1; 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21. In Re 1:1; 17:5 Babylon is designated as *mesterion* [a mystery]. This undoubtedly indicates that the name is to be understood *figuratively*. A few interpreters have believed that Jerusalem was the city that was designated as Babylon, but most scholars hold that Rome was the city that was meant. That interpretation goes back at least to the time of Tertullian (Adv. Marc., iii. 13). This interpretation was adopted by Jerome and Augustine and has been commonly accepted by the church. There are some striking facts that point to *Rome* as the city that is designated as Babylon.

- (1) The characteristics ascribed to this Babylon apply to Rome rather than to any other city of that age: (a) as ruling over the kings of the earth (Re 17:18); (b) as sitting on seven mountains (Re 17:9); (c) as the center of the world's merchandise (Re 18:3,11–13); (d) as the corrupter of the nations (Re 17:2; 18:3; 19:2); (e) as the persecutor of the saints (Re 17:6).
- (2) Rome is designated as Babylon in the Sibylline Oracles (5 143), and this is perhaps an early Jewish portion of the book. The comparison of Rome to Babylon is common in Jewish apocalyptic literature (see 2 Esdras and the Apocrypha Baruch).
- (3) Rome was regarded by both Jews and Christians as being antagonistic to the kingdom of God, and its downfall was confidently expected. This conception is in accord with the predicted downfall of Babylon (Re 14:8; 18:2, 10–11). As Babylon had been the oppressor of Israel, it was natural that this new power, which was oppressing the people of God, should be designated as Babylon.”

The notes in the majority of “study Bibles” concur with the above.

Determining who and what Babylon the Great is can be very confusing at times (hence the name, Babylon—meaning “confusion”). Unfortunately, it seems few have studied it from the perspective that it may symbolically encompass *more* than one thing, as opposed to exclusively this or exclusively that, as many religious hobbyists are prone to do. Thus, there will continue to be a wide variety of interpretations concerning end-time Babylon. But we *do* know by the context that the biblical Babylon will ultimately be a worldwide antichrist system composed of political, economic, and religious aspects.

The reason that we do not believe the United States is Babylon the Great of Revelation 18 is fourfold: (1) Babylon is described in these passages as being *A CITY* (Revelation 18:10), not a nation or a country; (2) many proponents of this speculation have based much of their belief on extra-biblical dreams and visions which are dubious at best; (3) the city of Babylon, located in modern day Iraq, was well known in the apostle John’s day; and (4) we read that the Babylon spoken of in Revelation 18:10,17,19 will be destroyed *IN ONE HOUR*—a very short time! One must not forget that the tribulation period is three and one-half years in duration, not one hour! The supposition that the United States is Babylon and will be destroyed in one hour, as opposed to the *city* described in Revelation 18, is highly questionable.

Nonetheless, in the end, Babylon—whatever and wherever it is—will be defeated. The antichrist, the beast, and the Devil himself will ultimately suffer their fate in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). The Lord will judge Babylon, and vindicate His servants who were persecuted and hindered from His work. The Babylonian anti-God system will soon be no more, and Christ Himself will reign from Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4,9), not Babylon! The return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His eternal reign on earth—and His saints *with* Him (Daniel 7:18,27)—is something each of us should pray for and endeavor to enter into (Revelation 5:10).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Biblical Origins of the United States and British Commonwealth* (an 8-CD series) [#CUS]

Q What do you think of the writings of Nostradamus? Was he a legitimate seer?

A Michel de Nostredame (December 14 or 21, 1503 to July 2, 1566), usually Latinized to “Nostradamus,” was a prominent figure of the French Renaissance. Nostradamus was a French apothecary and reputed seer who published collections of prophecies that have since become famous worldwide. He is best known for his book, *Les Propheties* (The Prophecies), the first edition of which appeared in 1555. Since the publication of this book, which has rarely been out of print since his death, Nostradamus has attracted an enthusiastic following which, along with the popular press, credits him with predicting many major world events. However, scholarly research has since discredited most of his so-called prophecies.

Most academic sources maintain that the associations made between world events and Nostradamus’s quatrains (stanzas within a poem that consist of four lines) are largely the result of misinterpretations or mistranslations (sometimes deliberate), or are so tenuous as to render them useless as evidence of any genuine predictive power. Nostradamus adherents tend to read later events INTO his vague quatrains. For example, it is true that in several quatrains he mentions the name *Hister* (somewhat resembling *Hitler*), but this is merely the classical name for the Lower Danube, as he himself explains in his *Presage* for 1554.

There have also been several well known Internet hoaxes, where quatrains in the style of Nostradamus have been circulated by e-mail as the real thing. The best known example pertains to the collapse of the World Trade Center in the attacks of September 11, 2001. This led to several hoaxes and *re*-interpretations by Nostradamus enthusiasts of several quatrains as supposed prophecies.

It would be remiss of us if we did not point out what the Bible says about seers, soothsayers, mediums, so-called prophets, witches, fortune tellers, clairvoyants, crystal gazers, supposed miracle workers, and the like. The quatrains of Nostradamus would fall into this category.

We can *know* whether anyone who claims to have “supernatural” powers really is a prophet, a messenger, or servant of God. In the Bible we find these instructions: “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder *come to pass*, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 13:1–3).

God further warns, “Beloved, believe NOT every spirit, but TRY [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because *many* false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Here is HOW we should try the spirits: “And when they shall say unto you, ‘Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter’: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to *THIS WORD* [the Bible], it is because there is *no* light in them” (Isaiah 8:19–20).

The true servant of God will teach people to *believe* and to *obey* exactly what the Word of God says (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4). The foretelling of the future or the working of miracles—whether imagined or real—is NOT, and never has been, the proof of a true servant of God.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Needed: A Rational Approach to Bible Prophecy* [RAB]
- *Can You Understand Bible Prophecy?* [CBP]
- *Evidence of the End Times* [EET]
- *What You Should Know About Demon Possession* [DEM]
- *Prophecy: the Convincing Factor* [CD# C513]
- *Prophetic Hysteria* [CD# C606]
- *End Time Warning to the Church* [CD# C076]

Q What is your opinion about the rapture?

A Our opinions do not count—what the Bible says *does!* The popular *Left Behind* series has planted the secret rapture theory into millions of minds. Most dispensational, pre-tribulation rapturists believe in a two-part coming of Christ: once *for* His saints and once again *with* His saints. Others read other variations of the theory *into* the Scriptures. Some claim, for example, that Matthew 24:40–41 is “proof” of a rapture. This is because they confuse the resurrection with a

rapture. Previously, verse 31 describes the time of Christ's return: "And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Therefore, those mentioned as being in the field or grinding at the mill must be some of those who are "alive and remain" at the time of His Second Coming (1 Corinthians 15:51–54; 1 Thessalonians 5:15–17). There is no scriptural basis for reading the rapture into Matthew 24.

Our booklet, *Should You Expect A Secret Rapture?* compares the Bible with the arguments for pre-tribulationism, and demonstrates that the so-called "secret rapture" has no solid biblical support.

Perhaps a short history of the development of the "secret rapture" doctrine will help.

The earliest generally recognized adoption of the doctrine of a superhuman antichrist preceded by a "secret rapture" occurred around 1825 A.D. when a young Scottish lass by the name of Margaret McDonald received "visions" of a second coming in two stages via a secret rapture before the tribulation. The girl made notes of her vision that fell into the hands of Edward Irving, a then-famous preacher in England at that time. Mr. Irving excitedly began spreading this new idea of a two-part coming of the Lord's return far and wide. Presently, Samuel R. Maitland, librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury, accepted the theory. Around 1830, J.N. Darby, founder of the Plymouth Brethren, visited London and brought the idea back to the U.S., where Dr. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield picked it up and built into the notes of his famous "Scofield Reference Bible" and from there it spread throughout most of fundamental Protestantism. Today, most fundamentalists accept the theory without question. The Jesuits propounded a similar theory as early as the 16th century. Joseph Ribera, Cardinal Bellarmine and Alcasar were among the first to expound this theory.

(Editor's note: This information may be verified in the *Cyclopedia of Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* by McClintock and Strong, and in many other reference works.)

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Should You Expect a Secret Rapture?* [ESR]
- *Rapture of the Saints* [CD# C646]
- *Fate of the Wicked* [CD# C552]
- *Last Great Day Message* [CD# C580]

Q I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and have been since my youth. I recently watched your *Armor of God* program and it truly discouraged me. The commentator was debunking the blessed occurrence of the rapture of the church. Since the church is the bride of Christ, the Groom would never allow His bride to suffer persecution by the Antichrist! Surely, He will rapture away His saints!

Your commentator is sadly mistaken and does not fully understand the scriptures or the dispensation of times, or seasons. May the Lord of the harvest correct him in his teaching or he will suffer loss in the judgment of the saints.

A Thank you for your concern. You mentioned that you were discouraged by hearing one of our presenters debunk "the secret rapture" theory. We understand your consternation. In fact, this is the very reason the issue was addressed. Many are confused about this issue. The belief in a "secret rapture" has become quite widespread in today's evangelical movement and is taken for granted by many without question. Many in modern day Christendom accept the doctrine of a rapture without question simply because they read it in a book, their church organization teaches it, or they have

been influenced by the media and movies such as the *Left Behind* series.

As you mentioned, one of the images Scripture uses of the relationship between Christ and the church is that of a groom and his bride. But this doesn't mean that Christ won't allow His people to suffer in this present life. The argument that the Groom would never allow His bride to suffer persecution certainly tugs at the heart strings, but it flies not only in the face of Scripture, but also the experience of countless Christians.

Consider the *thousands upon thousands* of Christians who've been persecuted throughout church history. Are we better than they?

If you've never read the book *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, we encourage you to do so. Read it online at <http://www.ccel.org/f/foxe/martyrs/home.html>. First published in 1563, it contains numerous accounts of persecuted Christians—from the first martyr, Stephen, all the way through the Protestant Reformation. Admittedly, the descriptions of torture and killings are difficult to read. But it is also inspiring to read the last words of real Christians who paid the ultimate price for faithfulness to their Lord. Accounts like these will become all the more important to strengthening our own faith as we approach the last-days Tribulation.

The author, John Fox, an English scholar, compiled the book at great risk to his own life so we could have the testimony of these saints preserved. Many of the martyrs featured in the book were his contemporaries. Martyrdom wasn't an abstract concept to him, but a present reality—just as it is for many Christians in our own day.

One only needs to read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews to see that God's servants have been persecuted and martyred throughout history.

The "secret rapture" theory is certainly one that most people would *like* to believe, but that does not make it true. There are going to be a lot of Protestants who believe they're going to be miraculously whisked off in a rapture, only to find they are still on the earth when the Tribulation begins. Many are going to be horribly disillusioned, and will likely blame God for their error.

It is vital that we, in these last days, have a sound *Bible reason* for everything we believe!

The reason we believe that Christians will be persecuted by the Antichrist is because the Bible *SAYS* so (see, for example, Daniel 7:25; Revelation 6:9–11; Revelation 13:15; 16:16; and Matthew 24:20–22). Christ's love for His people is not in any way negated by this. We know that all the temporary suffering God allows us to have will work out for our eternal good (Romans 8:28). There will also be many who are protected by God (Psalm 71:1–5; 119:146; Matthew 24:20, and others).

Most dispensational pre-tribulation rapturists believe in a "two-part" coming of Christ: once *for* His saints, and again a second time *with* His saints. The Bible says no such thing! He is not coming again twice, once in a "near miss," and again three and one-half or seven years later, as some believe. Others read still other interpretations into the Scriptures. Many confuse rapture with the resurrection. A few even think they are the same thing. Ironically, there is much confusion and heated debate among rapture proponents themselves.

In short, the rapture theory is a concept that has been foisted *upon* the Bible, rather than an exegesis taken *from* it. Because a *text* without a *context* is often a *pretext*, it is important to consider *all* the scriptures concerning the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and not isolate vague scriptures that *seem* to lend credence to one's own premise when taken out of context.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Should You Expect a Secret Rapture?* [ESR]
- *Rapture of the Saints* [CD# C646]

- *Faith Sown in Trials and Tribulation* [CD# C602]
- *How to Increase Your Faith* [CD# C557]
- *As It Was in the Days of Noah* [CD# C519]
- *God's Permissive Will* [CD# C674]
- *From Suffering to Glory* [CD# C510]

Q I have heard that you believe the United States and Britain are descended from the House of Israel. What evidence do you have to substantiate this?

A The primary source of evidence used for identifying the descendants of the house of Israel and the throne of David is the Bible itself. God's Word, despite the ideas of its critics, is as much a form of evidence as any secular historical record.

The Bible is, of course, largely the story of one man's family. God's unconditional promises to Abraham, the father of the faithful, were magnified and passed on to his sons, Isaac and Jacob, and later confirmed by Jesus Christ.

The promises made to Abraham and his progeny were of *material* blessings and national greatness, mostly unfulfilled until the last couple hundred years, as well as *spiritual salvation*. Jacob, later named Israel, and his twelve sons (tribes), were prophesied to grow into a great nation and a company (group) of nations in these latter days. *Who*, among all the nations of the earth, fulfills these promises today?

God later promised David that his throne would always exist, and that Christ would occupy that throne when He returns. Since *God's promises cannot be broken*, David's throne must exist perpetually on the earth. The only throne extant historically and prophetically matching God's promise among all the modern nations, resides in Great Britain. The twelve families of ancient Israel are today scattered in northwestern Europe, the state of Israel (Judah), and the English speaking nations of America, the British Commonwealth, Canada, and Australia.

Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) and Judah have historically been the dominant tribes in these last days. Though knowledge of Israel's identity is *not* essential for salvation, it nonetheless provides a much clearer understanding of biblical prophecy. It *IN NO WAY* implies racial superiority, but on the contrary, imposes greater responsibility and confirms the validity of the Word of God. We believe the United States to be descended from the ancient tribe of Manasseh, and the British Commonwealth to be descended from the ancient tribe of Ephraim.

While the knowledge of the identity of the house of Israel is a major key to understanding biblical prophecy, it was God's intention to seal many prophecies from the world and reveal them only in these latter days. Much of this sealing was accomplished by hiding the identity of the House of Israel. Therefore, we should not expect to find recognized historical records giving clear evidence of the migrations of the ten tribes of Israel.

We might, however, expect locally preserved individual accounts to include information about these people. And indeed they do. In Ireland, for instance, tradition marks the arrival in the first half of the sixth century B.C. of a small group of people led by a white-haired prophet known as Ollamh Fodhla. Local unwritten tradition further has it that this man was really the prophet Jeremiah.

It is significant that most kings of Scotland and England have been Masons, and that one of their traditional beliefs is that the House of David was transferred to northwest Europe from

Palestine. This information can be found in Algernon Herbert's *Britannica After the Romans*. The old book entitled *Irish Prince and Hebrew Prophet*, Masonic Publishing Company, Bleecker Street, New York City, also makes reference to a Hebrew prophet (Jeremiah), especially in chapters 5, 11, and 12.

Other books of interest are *Our British Ancestors*, by Samuel Lysons, London, 1865; *Irish Pedigrees*, by O'Hart, James Duffy and Company, Ltd., Dublin; *Ogygia, or A Chronological Account of Irish Events*, by Roderic O'Flaherty, Dublin, 1793; *Judah's Scepter and Joseph's Birthright*, by J.H. Allen; *History of Ireland*, by Thomas Moore; *History of Ireland*, by Abbe MacGeoghegan; and *Towers and Temples of Ireland*, by Keane.

These authors perhaps did not fully understand God's truth or His purpose regarding Israel. Nevertheless, helpful information can be gleaned from their writings by anyone who does understand God's purpose and uses the Bible as the primary source.

Critics may say that local traditions are no proof. But, together with the biblical record, there is no other evidence that God allowed to be preserved. Those who believe the Bible will understand the identity of the ten tribes of Israel. Those who do not will come to understand this wonderful truth once God's plan is fulfilled.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Biblical Origins of the United States and British Commonwealth* (8 CDs, with accompanying booklet) [CD# CUS]

Q Could you please explain the vision of Ezekiel 40–48? Visions are usually about future events, yet in Ezekiel 43:18 and elsewhere, sacrifices and burnt offerings are commanded by God. Weren't all sacrifices ended at the death of Jesus Christ? Please help.

A Many have wondered about Ezekiel's vision in chapters 40–48. There are many "private interpretations" of its meaning, but it is best to take the Bible literally for what it actually *says*. The rule of thumb is: Take the Bible *literally* where it is at all possible; if symbolic, figurative, or typical language is used, then look for the *literal truth* it intends to convey.

The first thing to understand is the TIME SETTING. Ezekiel 40–48 concerns restored Israel in the MILLENNIAL Kingdom—the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ upon the earth—immediately following the regathering of Israel (chapter 37), and the battle of Armageddon (chapters 38–39).

The chapters in Ezekiel 40–48 are a complement to the earlier predictions of judgment announced by Ezekiel. He now foresees the return of Israel to the "new" holy land, the rebuilding of the temple (chapter 41), with its courts and gates (chapter 40), the enforcement of God's Sabbath and holy days (44:24), the new distribution of the land (chapter 48), the establishment of a right relationship between God and Israel, and the reorganization of her national life. Detailed instructions are recorded for the building of this future temple and for the service attached to it.

What is shocking and confusing to some is the reinstatement of offerings and animal sacrifices during the Millennium. "Did not all the sacrifices end at the death of Christ?" it is asked. Just AS the sacrifices in the Old Testament LOOKED FORWARD to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, SO the Israelites in the Millennium will perform certain sacrifices LOOKING BACK upon His sacrifice. Again, we must look to what the Bible actually SAYS, not what is commonly believed. Be sure to read these things *in your own Bible* and then believe your Bible!

A great sacrificial altar, corresponding with the brazen altar of the tabernacle, will be placed in the very center of the whole sanctuary when it is built *in the future*. Sacrifices will then be offered

on it as a MEMORIAL of what was typified before the first coming of Christ. Such sacrifices were NEVER to take away sins, and they will NEVER do so in the future; but it is interesting to note that such a program *will* be carried on in the presence of Christ to all coming generations to demonstrate to them what Christ had to go through for *them* (verses 18–27; 45:13–15; 46:11–15, etc.).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Q & A Book—Questions And Answers, Volume 1* [QUE]
- *What Does the Bible Really Say About the Millennium?* [MLN]
- *The Second Coming and Beyond* [SCB]

8 Bible

Q Which Bible do you recommend that we study? I am confused by the variety of Bible translations on the market today. There seems to be a “specialty Bible” for nearly every segment of society. What about the Catholic Bible?

A Many today are confused by the glut of “translation over choice” and tend to skip from translation to translation as they find difficulty with each one, and many eventually “burn out” in sheer frustration. While we have no “official” translation, some of our speakers and writers sometimes use more modern translations such as the *New International Version* and the *New King James Version* for variety or clarity in certain passages. However, most rely on the 1611 *King James Version* (KJV).

Perhaps a little background will be helpful. Translations generally fall into two broad categories: *dynamic equivalence*, or thought-for-thought, and *formal equivalence*, or word-for-word, translations. Dynamic equivalence is the effort of the translator(s) to use their *own* words to interpret what *they* think the original writers probably had in mind. These are usually “easier” to read, but run the danger that the translators’ own or denominational interpretations may creep into the text. Formal, word-for-word translations attempt to hold as closely to the original Hebrew and Greek text as possible. A third category is the *paraphrased* versions that substitute thought-for-thought renderings, making no pretense of adhering to the original writing. *The New Living Bible* is one such paraphrase. While advertised as being “as easy to read as today’s newspapers,” such paraphrases should be studied with much caution.

An even deeper consideration is the *texts* various Bibles are translated from. The King James is translated from the Authorized or Majority text, sometimes also called the Masoretic or *Textus Receptus* (Received -Text), and is based upon the officially kept Scriptures of both the Jews and Greeks (Romans 3:1–2). These amount to over 95 percent of all New Testament manuscripts. Most modern English versions adopt the readings of the Egyptian *Alexandrinus*, *Vaticanus*, and *Sinaiticus* manuscripts that were popularized in the last century by Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort. Putting them all together, they came up with a brand new Greek text that never existed before. However, even an “accurate” translation from the wrong text does not accurately reflect the Word of God. Upon investigation, one must make his or her own choice.

You also asked about the Catholic Bible. The Catholic versions are mostly based, as the name implies, upon the *Vaticanus* manuscript, which was found in the basement of the Vatican Library.

These contain the Apocrypha. The word *Apocrypha* means “hidden.” The Apocrypha refers to the fourteen books written between the years 300 B.C. and 100 B.C. (except Esdras, which was written about A.D. 100). Eleven of these fourteen books are considered Holy Scriptures by the Roman Catholic Church. When added to the Old Testament, they constitute only seven extra books, because the others are integrated *into* existing books themselves. Space here forbids going into much detail, but suffice it to say that the Apocrypha should *not* be considered canonical, because the books do not demonstrate themselves to be on the same level as other Scripture. Jesus did not consider them part of His Old Testament, and we are told not to add or subtract anything from God’s Word (see Deuteronomy 4:3; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; and Revelation 22:18).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *The DaVinci Delusion* [CD# C637]
- *Decoding the DaVinci code* [CD# C635]
- *Preterism* [CD# C741]
- *The Bible and Archaeology* [CD# C 733]
- *The Church of Rome* [CD# C608]

]

Q Our local Christian bookstore has a dizzying array of helps, books, and study aids. Many seem radical and “new age.” Which ones do you recommend?

A You are correct—the over choice can be quite overwhelming and confusing to say the least.

Our primary study book is, of course, the Bible itself, since the Bible is its own best self-interpreter. A literal word-for-word translation such as the *King James Version* or the *New King James Version* is preferred for accuracy over the many thought-for-thought paraphrases available today.

The type of expository books about the Bible depends upon one’s personal needs and preferences.

Perhaps the best overall book we can recommend is *Halley’s Bible Handbook*. This classic book presents an overview of each book of the Bible, along with sections on church history, how we got the Bible, and a summary of archaeological discoveries.

We also recommend *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, and the *New Bible Dictionary, Revised*, for background material of names, people, and places mentioned in the Bible.

The *Atlas of the Bible Lands* is helpful to visualize the cities and boundaries of the Bible lands.

Although we know of no commentary that elaborates on the Bible perfectly, among the best are the *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown One-Volume Bible Commentary*, *The New Bible Commentary, Revised*, and *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (a multi-volume set).

Among Bible concordances, we recommend *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, *Young’s Analytical Concordance*, and the more compact *Cruden’s Handy Concordance to the Bible*.

Although we do not sell the above items, we do offer a *free Home Bible Study Course* that leads you step by step through the main Bible doctrines. Your only “workbook” is the Bible itself.

You are also invited to visit us on the Internet at www.cgi.org, and hope you will come back often. Feel free to read, download, or send for the many booklets, articles, and sermon CDs you see listed.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]

- *Home Bible Study Course* [CO1]
- *Confusion and the Church* [CD# C783]
- Visit our website at: www.cgi.org.

Q Which is the best method of reading and studying the Bible? Should I read it through from front to back and then go back and study, or should I read a section, study it, and then go back and choose a different section and continue until I have read the entire Bible? Please advise.

A There are no set “rules” for reading and studying your Bible. Different people’s minds work differently than others. Generally speaking, your first inclination is correct. It has been correctly stated that Bible reading and Bible study can be likened to a right and a left leg: you need both in your Christian walk. First read the Bible through for context and overview, then study the sections individually. Our recommended booklet, *How to Study Your Bible*, contains several helpful suggestions along with a handy Daily Bible Reading Guide with “check-off boxes” which will take you through the entire Bible in a year. Feel free to read ahead if you desire; you will simply finish reading the Bible before the year is up.

When you finish reading the Bible from cover to cover, be joyful! You will have achieved a task that most people on this planet have never accomplished. Revelation 1:3 tells us, “*Blessed* is he that *readeth*, and they that *hear* the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” You will receive a *blessing* from reading God’s Word! Be thankful that you have been privileged to be able to read every last bit of the written Word of God that has been preserved down through the ages for you!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *You Can understand Bible Prophecy* [CBP]
- *Paul and the Law—Understanding the Hard Sayings* [PTL]
- *The Great Day of the Lord* [GDL]

Q Some in my family say they believe in a God, but not in the Bible because too many people translated it. They are quick to point out that errors in the Bible prove it is only myths and tales of a bunch of old Jews.

A First, unless we are fluent in the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages, we should *thank God* that He saw fit to have the Scriptures translated! How else could we understand them? Secondly, how can one believe in the God *of* the Bible while not believing the Bible itself? This is a contradiction of terms! A generalized, or abstract, belief in a nebulous “higher power” or “a strong hand from somewhere” is *not* the God of your Bible! Speaking of itself, the Bible declares, “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

You also mentioned that some in your family are sure there are “errors” in the Bible. If so, *where are they?* It is truly amazing how often people parrot this charge. When called upon to back up their claim, they draw attention to seemingly “contradictory statements” in the Scriptures as though that is proof—and hope you do not know the answers.

Christians should be prepared for accusations that the Bible has contradictions. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Rebuttals to common “discrepancies” often involve explaining idioms, copyist errors, methods of calculating time and dates, ethical considerations, and cultural considerations.

One of my favorite sayings is, “A TEXT without a CONTEXT is only a *PRETEXT!*” Most perceived “errors” are the result of not reading the verses (and sometimes whole chapters) immediately before and after the verse in question. Truth has nothing to fear from honest investigation. Certain passages at first glance may *appear* to be contradictory, but further investigation will show this is not the case. “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Christ Himself said, “The Scripture *cannot* be broken” (John 10:35). He ought to know; He inspired it. God is an all-knowing, all-powerful Being who does not contradict Himself, and so His Word, *when properly understood*, will not contradict itself.

It is interesting to note that nearly every Bible “contradiction” has been answered time and time again down through the centuries, but each new generation picks up the same old objections as though they never heard the answers before. The apostle Peter predicted under inspiration, “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days *scoffers*, walking after their own lusts” (2 Peter 3:3).

For hundreds of examples of alleged contradictions, we recommend a book by John W. Haley entitled, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1992, ISBN 0-88368-157-9). While we do not agree with everything in the book, it resolves many of the alleged Bible “contradictions” in the Bible which critics bring up time after time.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Who, What Is God?* [WWG]
- *Born From Above, or Born Again?* [BFA]
- *Questions and Replies* [CD# C524]

Q Each time I’ve read the Bible, I seem to understand it a little bit differently. Is it my age, or do we really understand the Bible more as we read it more?

A Congratulations! You have come to the realization that the more you saturate you mind with the Word of God, the more you understand it! “For if these things be in you [God’s Words and the resulting life changes] and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the *knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). Furthermore, the more we *obey* God, the deeper our understanding. Christ asked, “And why *call* ye me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I *say*” (Luke 6:46)? Understanding comes proportionately with obedience to God’s Word. Keep reading and follow God’s Word with all your mind, heart, and soul (Matthew 22:37).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Home Study Bible Course* [CO1]
- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *How You Can Be an Overcomer* [HBO]
- *How to Be Used of God* [UOG]
- *How to Be More Effective in Your Prayer Life* [YPL]

- *In Enemy Territory* [CD# C661]
- *When Jesus Steps Into Your Story* [CD# C952]
- *How Much Time in Life?* [CD# 701]

9 Alleged Contradictions

Q Why does 2 Samuel 14:27 say that Absalom had three sons, and then in 2 Samuel 18:18 that he had no son? Isn't this a contradiction?

A Very observant! This shows you are reading your Bible and “proving all things” (2 Thessalonians 5:21). There is no contradiction here. God’s Word does not contradict itself (John 10:35).

According to 2 Samuel 14:27, Absalom had three sons, unnamed in the text, all of whom died before him. Thus, he had no [living] sons, as per 2 Samuel 18:18.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *The Bible and Archaeology* [CD# C733]

Q In view of James 1:17 and John 10:10, I cannot believe God puts sickness and affliction, diseases, or hardships on people. Doesn't this contradict Deuteronomy 28:15–68? Please explain.

A James 1:17 reads, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” This is true. The point is that all *good* things come from above. God is the source of all light—physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual—and He does not change (Malachi 3:6).

Christ said in John 10:10, “... I am come that they might have *life*, and that they might have it more abundantly,” implying *eternal* life, as well as blessings in this life.

God tries, or tests the heart, but does not tempt man. If He did, who could resist? Scripture says, “I the LORD *search* the heart, I *try* the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doing” (Jeremiah 17:10). We read in James, “Let *no* man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, *neither tempteth he any man*” (James 1:13). God has an active and a passive will. God does not directly tempt any man with evil, but He *allows* us to be tempted. Consider, God did not tempt Job or place any curses on him, but He *allowed* Satan to chasten him (Job 1:12; 2:6). After all Job’s troubles, he didn’t sin (Job 1:22; 2:10). Job’s character was tested, and he was ultimately rewarded double (Job 42:20).

In Deuteronomy 28:15–68, God once again sets up *choices*, or options. The age-old question is, *will* we obey God or not? He says in Deuteronomy 11:26, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse.”

From the beginning, God has ordained that man has *free will* and must make *choices*. In the Garden of Eden for example, Adam and Eve were given the *choice* to eat of the forbidden tree or

not to eat from it (Genesis 2:16–17). They made the wrong choice. We have *all* made wrong choices by sinning. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for *sin is* [Bible definition] the transgression of *the law*” (1 John 3:4). “For *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). See also Romans 5:12.

God has set up and set into motion many laws, both physical and spiritual. When we break these laws, they *automatically* exact a penalty, or curse. God does not even have to intervene to *do* anything—these laws are inexorable; they just work. God said, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore *choose life*, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

In Deuteronomy 28 and its sister chapter in Leviticus 26, God once again set before the carnal nation of Israel the *choice* to either obey and be blessed, or to disobey and reap cursing. These chapters go on to list the blessings and cursings that result from obeying or disobeying God’s commands. Read them in your own Bible.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Does God Love the World Enough to Save It?* [GLW]
- *The Assurance of Salvation* [SAL]
- *As It Was in the Days of Noah* [CD# C519]
- *I Saw a Sermon the Other Day* [CD# C763]

Q Proverbs 26:4 says, “Answer not a fool according to his folly,” while Proverbs 26:5 says to “answer a fool according to his folly.” Isn’t this a clear contradiction in the Bible? If not, how can these two verses be reconciled?

A These two principles are often cited by gainsayers to “prove” the Bible contradicts itself. Just the opposite is true. These verses are complementary, not contradictory. It is absurd to assume the writer contradicted himself in the very next verse.

First of all, we need to realize the Bible does not contradict itself. God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18), and the Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35).

The answer lies in completing the sentences beginning with the word “lest.” The last part of each proverb is the *qualifier* as to *how* to answer a fool.

Proverbs 26:4 says, “Answer not a fool according to his folly, *lest* thou also be like unto him.” Proverbs 26:5 says, “Answer a fool according to his folly, *lest* he be wise in his own conceit.”

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, declared, “...the scripture *cannot* be broken” (John 10:35). That is, it cannot be pronounced wrong, dissolved, or rendered of none effect. It does not contradict itself. The Scripture is our ultimate and final authority. How comforting! A basic rule of Bible study is that when one does not understand something in the Bible, the problem is *not* in the Scripture, but in our understanding or lack of understanding.

Verse 4 tells us *not* to answer a fool according to his folly *lest* we be like him.

In one situation, to answer the fool’s specific statement or question, you would be descending to his level and end up in a pointless argument.

An example of this is given in Luke 20:1–8, where the Pharisees asked Christ by whose authority He did certain things. The Pharisees were not there seeking to learn anything. To avoid being like the fools they were, Christ did not answer their question. Rather, He asked them a question they could not answer without condemning themselves. Since the Pharisees could not answer His question, the discussion was dropped.

Verse 5 tells us that under another set of circumstances, we should answer a fool according to his folly—by a foolish answer, which exposes how ridiculous his statement, claim or question is—or he will be wise in his own conceit.

This case is well illustrated by Paul’s example in 2 Corinthians 11:23.

Certain men were at Corinth who claimed to be true apostles of Christ, but they were false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13). For Paul to have remained silent at the time would have given tacit approval of these men who were leading the church astray. They would have appeared wise in their own conceit.

Therefore in Verse 23, Paul said, “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool.) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often.” These men had been boasting of their qualifications, and in this epistle, Paul was exposing these men for what they were. Paul answered these false apostles’ claims so they would not appear wise.

Proverbs has much to say about fools. They despise wisdom (Proverbs 1:7,22; 10:21; 23:9); they are right in their own eyes (Proverbs 12:15); they are deceitful (Proverbs 14:8); and scornful (Proverbs 10:23; 14:9). The wise are also given instruction on how to deal with fools in Proverbs. Instructing a fool is pointless, because his speech is full of foolishness (Proverbs 15:2,14) and he does not want wisdom and understanding (Proverbs 18:2).

Again, these scriptures do not contradict, but when taken together, explain two different methods of handling the questions and statements of fools. You need wisdom to know just when and how to apply these principles. And wisdom comes from God.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Questions & Answers Book, Volume 1* [QUE]
- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *The Old Testament Revealed* [CD# C403]

Q How do we square these scriptures (Philippians 1:23–24, and 2 Corinthians 5:8) with the fact that the dead know nothing, are asleep, etc.

A We must endeavor to understand what Scripture means from what it states—that’s interpretation. To try and force our cherished, preconceived ideas into Scriptures that simply aren’t there is called *interpolation*. The idea of “going to heaven” is the result of interpolation. Using only interpretation, not interpolation, let us seek biblical understanding.

Both Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8 are addressing *the same issue*. Paul was weighed down by many trials and persecutions. He said in Philippians 1:23, “For I am in a straight betwixt two [in other words, there are two things, each of which I desire. I earnestly long to be with Christ, and I desire to remain to be useful to the brethren (see verse 24)].” Note that the text does NOT say WHEN or WHERE—it does NOT say he would IMMEDIATELY be with Christ! The sense is, that Paul, due to hardships, at times felt he would have preferred to be dead and buried—totally unconscious—and await his resurrection at Christ’s return, rather than to remain in a world of pain, weariness, sin, and trial.

The apostle Paul uses the term “tabernacle” as an analogy of the human body (2 Corinthians 5:1). He indicates that Christians will ultimately be given a body composed of spirit, “which is *from heaven*” (verse 2). In his previous letter to the church at Corinth, he had already explained exactly *when* that reward would be given (see 1 Corinthians 15).

By the time Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, he knew that he would soon be martyred.

Concerning his own impending death, again using symbolic language, he wrote, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand...Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love [long for] his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6,8). Notice that Paul understood his reward would be given not immediately following death, but “in the future” at a specific point in time. This scripture also shows that receiving “the crown of righteousness” (eternal life) is associated with the resurrection at the return of Christ. Again I refer you to 1 Corinthians 15, the entire chapter.

It is evident that:

- Ecclesiastes 9:10, “...for there is *no* work, *nor* device, *nor* knowledge, *nor* wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest”
- Psalms 6:5, “For in death there is NO REMEMBRANCE of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?”
- Psalms 146:4, “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; IN THAT VERY DAY HIS THOUGHTS PERISH”

These and many other verses do not “jive” with the doctrine of “going to heaven” immediately upon death. Christ’s direct first-person declaration was, “And NO man hath ascended up to heaven” (John 3:13). All scriptures harmonize together perfectly as long as no man attempts to read his preconceived notions INTO them. Christ later added for emphasis, “and the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

The Bible *repeatedly* uses SLEEP as an analogy of DEATH (1 Kings 2:10; 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:4). In sleep, we are oblivious to our surroundings and totally unaware of the passage of time. The Bible says that’s what death is like. Yes, upon death the spirit does “return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7) but it is *not* conscious (Ecclesiastes 9:5). The spirit returning to God does not mean some journey to a given destination, but simply indicates that it is in God's safe keeping.

The patriarch Job answered this same matter very plainly. He asked, “If a man die, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?” and then he answered, “all the days of my appointed time will I wait, TILL MY CHANGE COME” (Job 14:14). This is the SAME change the Apostle Paul mentioned, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [in death], but WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED”—when?—“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, AT THE LAST TRUMP: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised [resurrected] incorruptible, and we shall be CHANGED” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). This takes place in a split second at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ!

When studying the Bible, it's very important not to over-literalize symbolic, poetic language. Paul’s use of the phrase “absent from the body” is merely intended as a metaphor for death.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Where Are Lazarus and the Rich Man?* [LRM]
- *Is Elijah in Heaven?* [ELH]
- *What Happens When You Die?* [CD# 465]
- *Soul—Mortal or Immortal?* [CD# C334]

Q Does Luke 18:16-17 imply that infants should be baptized?

A No. Many times, people who are “locked in” to certain beliefs will argue isolated “proof texts” of things that appear to back their doctrinal beliefs. Often, to those whose minds have not been opened to the truths of Scripture, these proof texts they use seem like valid arguments to prove their point against the writings of the Bible. This is a case in point.

Luke 18:16–17 reads, “But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”

First, this scripture does not even mention baptism. The parallel accounts show that these children were being brought to Jesus so that He would lay hands on them and bless them (Matthew 19:13–15 and Mark 10:13–16).

Baptism is more than just laying hands on someone and sprinkling water on his head. It is total immersion in water picturing the burial of the old man, the old way of life (Romans 6:3,4).

There is no biblical basis for the doctrine of infant baptism. You can’t be baptized until you first *believe* Jesus Christ is your Savior (Acts 8:35–37) and then *fully repent* (Acts 2:38). Obviously, an infant is incapable of doing either of these. “Confirmation” at ten or twelve years of age is not biblical.

Secondly, the word “as” in verse 17 does not mean that individuals must receive God’s Kingdom while they are children. Jesus was explaining that to receive God’s Kingdom, a person must be “as” or like, a little child in *attitude*—humble, faithful, teachable, unpretentious—or God will not accept him. Matthew 18:3–4 fully explains this. A Christian must yield to and trust his spiritual Father for everything, just *as* a small child does his physical parents. A Christian needs time to develop the fruits of the spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23). This is not applicable to infants and small children.

When Peter gave his first inspired sermon on the day of Pentecost, the hearers were “... pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*” (Acts 2:37–38).

Our *Statement of Beliefs* says, **BAPTISM:** *The ceremony of water baptism is performed by immersion, for the forgiveness of sins, upon true repentance and acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice. After this ceremony, and as a result, one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Baptism symbolizes the renunciation of the past sinful way of life, the burial of the old man in a watery grave, and the emergence of a new, Spirit-led man living with Christ’s mind and following in His footsteps. (Matthew 3:13–16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1–8; Colossians 2:12.)*

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Is Water Baptism Required for Salvation?* [WBR]
- *Ten Facts You Should Know About Repentance* [TFR]
- *Statement of Beliefs* [SBF]
- *How to Study Your Bible* [STB]
- *How to Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *Age of Reason* [CD# C558]

Q I had a preacher tell me on two separate occasions that if you did not speak in tongues that you could not consider yourself a Christian. Is this church doctrine or just one man's belief? What does the Bible say?

A Largely due to media exposure today, charismatic churches are becoming very popular. Some believe part of the reason is that they involve “audience participation” in various forms of call and response, emotionalism, and what they call “speaking in tongues.” However, such things are NOT the criteria for truth. God’s Word is! It is not our mission to arbitrate, evaluate, or judge other organizations, religious or otherwise. Our mission is to put the truth of Almighty God into the hands of those who are seeking His will in their lives and to preach the Good News of Christ’s soon-coming Kingdom to earth (Isaiah 58:1; Matthew 28:19–20).

The Bible NOWHERE says that one must speak in tongues or he or she is not a Christian! We urge you to study 1 Corinthians 14—sometimes referred to as “the tongues chapter”—in your own Bible and carefully compare its teachings with those of modern-day charismatic organizations. For example, verse 27 states that only *two* or *three* should speak in tongues (the Greek word, γλωσσαι, *glossa*, means *known foreign languages*) in a service—*never* at the same time, but *in turn*, and *not at all* if no *interpreter* is present (verse 28). Another oft-ignored scripture is verse 34, “Let your women keep *silence* in the churches.” Is this what these churches teach? Christ asks, “And *why* call ye me, Lord, Lord, and DO NOT the things which I *SAY*” (Luke 6:46)?

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Must You Speak in Other Tongues to be Saved?*
- *The Miracle of Pentecost* [MPT]
- *How to Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *The Gift of Tongues* [CD# C504]
- *What the Bible Says About Tongues* [CD# 721]
- *What is Required for Salvation?* [CD# C545]

Q Where in the Bible does it say that you should pray in tongues because the devil is listening?

A The Bible *nowhere* says you should pray in tongues because the devil is listening.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Must You Speak With Other Tongues to Be Saved?* [TNG]
- *The Devil, You Say?* [DEV]
- *The Gift of Tongues* [CD# C504]
- *Should You Speak in Tongues?* [CD# C569]
- *What the Bible Says About Tongues* [CD# C721]
- *What Is the Holy Spirit?* [CD# C541]

Q What does it mean to be “slain in the spirit”?

A “Slain in the spirit” is a term used within the rapidly growing charismatic, or Pentecostal,

community. It describes a religious behavior in which an individual falls to the floor “as though slain.” This usually happens during an event they interpret as a personal encounter with the Holy Ghost. Often a significant amount of time is spent singing, praying, and “working up” an audience during the church service before this point. Attendees are then prayed over and touched by the service leader or leaders. When they perceive the Spirit of God has fallen upon them they fall, usually backwards, into the arms of “catchers,” deacons, ushers, or orderlies who stand behind them to prevent injury and possible resulting lawsuits. Beliefs often associated with this phenomenon include divine healing, receiving visions, and hearing God speak.

Being “slain in the spirit” is neither described nor prescribed in the Bible. It is notably a practice that is forced *upon* the Bible, not a truth derived *from* it. It is, at best, a psychological phenomenon, or, at worst, of Satanic origin. Many call it a stage show designed to bilk money from its adherents. Others attribute the phenomenon to mass hypnosis, autosuggestion, peer pressure, or a desire to experience what others have experienced. Many go to these services just to “have a good time.”

These curious events are called by many different names, including, *slain in the spirit, going down, falling out, falling down backwards, drunk in the spirit, sleep in the spirit, overcome by the spirit, holy laughter, resting in the spirit, and the sleep blessing*. Similar phenomena can be observed in pagan rites around the world. As best we can tell, Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter—a woman who preached in the holiness, or Pentecostal movement of the 1880s—started this practice by falling down as though “struck by God,” and would often go into an epileptic or trance-like state in her performances. She died in 1924, but her legacy of falling down backward in church services has lived on.

There is absolutely NO scripture ANYWHERE that mentions the church or individual believers in it as being “slain in the spirit.” Jesus’ disciples were never “catchers” for people Jesus knocked down! The harm is that these goings-on deceive people, give false hope, and obfuscate the true Gospel. (Read Matthew 24:4–5,11,24; and 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 in your own Bible, warning about deceivers.)

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Must You Speak in Tongues to Be Saved?* [TNG]
- *Should You Speak in Tongues?* [CD #C569]
- *The Gift of Tongues* [CD# C504]
- *Dealing With Demons* [CD# C604]

Q During the Easter week, I found this scratched picture in a closet and it looks like Jesus is crying. I believe that He is suffering tremendously, and the whole world is suffering too at the present time. Is that a miracle or coincidence? Please explain it to me.

A First, regarding Easter, be sure to request our free CD, *Easter: Truth or Tradition?* This revealing CD will give you much more background material than could possibly be explained in a few paragraphs here.

Jesus warned repeatedly about *false* ministers and *false* Christ’s (see Mathew 24:4–5,11,24 in your own Bible).

Secondly, the Second Commandment prohibits the use of anything that represents God or could easily become an object of worship: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not

make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Exodus 20:3–5).

Since Jesus is God (Hebrews 1:8), this would directly forbid any pictures or likenesses of His person. In truth, no one knows what Jesus looked like. Thus, any artist’s conception of what He might have looked like is inherently false.

Jesus warned further, “Howbeit IN VAIN do they *worship* Me [yes, it is possible to worship Christ in vain!], teaching for doctrines the commandments of *men*. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold *the tradition of men...*” (Mark 7:7–8).

We know that Jesus Christ was Jewish (Hebrews 7:14), and that He was a carpenter (Mark 6:3). He was not womanish in appearance and would have therefore looked like most other Jewish men of that day—masculine, with short hair—and, due to spending so much time outdoors, He most likely would have looked somewhat rugged and weathered. Never forget: Satan the devil is the great counterfeiter.

Think for a moment! Would *you* feel honored if someone used a fake picture to represent you? The prophet Isaiah described Christ in this way (Isaiah 53:2): “For He [Christ] shall grow up before Him [God the Father] as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: *He has no form nor comeliness*; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” It was His actions and message that were to attract attention, not any overly attractive physical features.

The vast majority of the pictures of Christ have absolutely *no* resemblance to the way He actually looked. In fact, most pictures and statues of Christ are therefore a *direct opposite* of how He is described in the Bible. These false images give us a mistaken impression of the true Jesus Christ, and are, in fact, a part of the devil’s great master deception, and should be treated as such. Some speculate that since Satan actually appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), nothing would be more clever than to have deceived Christians worship the very image of Satan himself.

Christ is typically depicted incorrectly with long hair, and a soft, sad, sanctimonious look. Paul, upon inspiration from Christ, wrote (1 Corinthians 11:14) that it is WRONG—in fact, “a shame”—for a man to have long hair!

If we think of Jesus’ appearance at all, we should think in general terms, at least, of the way He looks *today*. He inspired the apostle John to describe His present appearance in these words: “His head and his hair were WHITE LIKE WOOL, as WHITE AS SNOW; and His eyes were AS A FLAME OF FIRE; ... and His countenance was as the sun shines in his strength” (Revelation 1:14,16).

The shortest verse in the Bible is found in John 11:35: “Jesus wept.” The Greek word here has the connotation of silently bursting into tears in contrast to the loud lament of the group (see verse 33). His tears were not generated from mourning, since He was to raise Lazarus, but out of grief for a fallen world entangled in sin-caused sorrow and death. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:3–4).

We read in Luke 19:41, “And when He was come near, he beheld the city [Jerusalem], and wept over it.” He lamented in Luke 13:34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!”

Romans 8:22 tells us, “For we know that *the whole creation* groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” Yes, Jesus is saddened over the rebellious sins of mankind, but He is not weeping over it today. The good news is that He is sovereign, and everything is under control.

There is a plan for mankind, and everything is going according to that plan. (Send for our free booklet, *God's Seasonal Plan* [GSP].) He is soon returning to this earth in glory and power and will set up His ruling government to bring everlasting peace and harmony. Be sure to read Isaiah 2:2–4 and all of Isaiah 11 and 12 in your own Bible to see how this will be done.

And finally, you asked, “Is that a miracle or coincidence?” Of course one can only speculate. Perhaps it was a coincidence that you associated the thoughts you mentioned with the so-called picture of Christ—or perhaps God has led you to come into contact with this work of God. You be the judge.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *How Was Passover Replaced by Easter?* [WCP]
- *What You Should Know About Demon Possession* [DEM]
- *Easter: Truth or Tradition?* [CD# C725]

Q Since the Bible predicted there would be false prophets, isn't it only logical that there are also false Christians? How can we tell the true from the false?

A *How true!* Jesus warned repeatedly: “... Take heed that *no* man deceive you. For *many* shall come *IN MY NAME*, saying, I am Christ; and *shall deceive many*” (Matthew 24:4–5, 11, 24). “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. *Ye shall know them BY THEIR FRUITS...*” (Matthew 7:15–16). He went on to say, “Not every one that *saith* unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matthew 7:21–23). Christ went on to say in Mark 7:7, “Howbeit *in vain* do they *worship* me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of *men*.”

Notice that it is possible to actually worship God in vain—in a false, ineffective, futile way! This can be the result of false conversions—people who *think* they are “saved” when in reality they are not. They are deceived. The Bible definition (not Webster’s) of a Christian is one who has, and is following the leading of God’s Holy Spirit abiding in him. To *whom* does God give His Holy Spirit? To those who OBEY Him (Acts 5:32 and Acts 2:38). This is a far cry from those who have merely had an emotional “conversion experience” and “gave their heart to the Lord” at a church or camp meeting. Christ said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16–20). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23).

The overall guiding principle can be found in Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not ACCORDING TO *THIS WORD* [the Scriptures], it is because there is no light in them.” Also be sure to read Deuteronomy 12:30–32.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Is Water Baptism Required for Salvation?* [WBR]
- *Once Saved, Always Saved?* [OSA]
- *How to Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *How to Build Godly Character* [BCG]
- *Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen* [CD# C958]

Q The Bible says there would be false prophets; so, wouldn't they be teaching false Christians? Is that true or false?

A It is sad, but true, that there are many false conversions—sincere, but deluded people who believe they are Christians—but are in fact deceived. A deceived person does not know he or she is deceived, or they would not *be* deceived. Christ repeatedly warned, “For *many* shall come *in My name* [that is, saying they are coming “in the name of Christ”], *saying*, I am Christ, and shall deceive *many* [the original Greek implies *most*]” (Matthew 24:4–5, 11, 24). False Christians listen to and enjoy false ministers (Isaiah 30:10; Jeremiah 5:31; 2 Timothy 4:3–4).

Second Corinthians 11:13–15 goes on to say, “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.” *Read that again* from your own Bible!

Yes, it says *Satan has ministers*—many more, in fact, than God has—masquerading, or posing, as if they are ministers of Christ! “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not *according to this word*, it is because *there is no light in them*” (Isaiah 8:20).

There have always been, and there always will be, false spiritual leaders in *this* world who profess to represent God, but in fact do not represent the God of your Bible. Some may even be *sincere*, but are deceived. The Old Testament identifies them, warns of them, and cautions people to stay away from them. The New Testament does the same. Moses contended with them in Egypt (2 Timothy 3:8). Jeremiah was in conflict with them in Judah (Jeremiah 23). Ezekiel opposed them and called them foolish prophets that followed their own spirit and had seen nothing (Ezekiel 13:3). Our Lord warned of them as false Christ’s and false prophets who would show great signs and wonders (Matthew 24:24). The apostle Paul fought against them as preachers of “another [false] gospel” and vendors of doctrines of demons (Galatians 1:6–9).

The beloved apostle John warns, “If there come *any* unto you, and bring not *this doctrine* [the Bible], receive him *not* into your house [that is, into your *mind*], neither bid him God speed (2 John 10). We must be careful who we listen to and “prove all things” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) by the Bible, because there are many “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Luke 10:3; Acts 20:29) who would wrest the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Can a Christian Be Unconverted?* [CCU]
- *America’s Greatest Sin* [AMS]
- *How to Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *New Age Deception* [CD# C681]
- *Prophetic Hysteria* [CD# C606]
- *Beyond Appearances* [CD# C611]
- *The Spirit of Antichrist* [CD# C551]
- *End-Time Warning to the Church* [CD# C076]

Q Could you please tell me the church’s stand concerning crosses? Is it a pagan symbol?

A Historically, the pagans had been adoring a cross centuries before Christ. It was a symbol of the false god Tammuz (see *The Two Babylons* by Hislop, p. 197–205). Four centuries after Christ’s death, professing Christians borrowed the practice of adoring the cross from the pagans they were inviting into the church. Many pagan customs were given “Christian” names and retained. But the true Church of God has never observed those customs.

Many wondered about the *shape* of the instrument Christ was nailed to—was it a stake or a cross? There are different opinions among scholars on this question. Dr. Bullinger in his *Companion Bible* (Appendix 162) maintains that only an upright stake was used. Other authorities generally contend that the stake often had a crosspiece attached.

The Romans who crucified Christ are known to have used “crosses” of various shapes. Some were just upright timbers, others had crosspieces attached either at the top or a little below the top.

The word “cross” in the New Testament comes from the Greek word, σταυρος, or *stauros* [stow-ros']. And according to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, the Greek listed as #4716 is defined as “a stake or post (as set upright), i.e. (specially), a pole or cross (as an instrument of capital punishment); figuratively, exposure to death, i.e. self-denial; by implication, the atonement of Christ:—cross.”

Etymologically, *stauros* simply means a “stake” or “pole.” But this word was used in literature in reference to poles of various shapes, including those with crosspieces. It was like our English word “pole.” We commonly speak of telephone poles—which may or may not have one or more crossbeams attached.

It is interesting to note that the earliest representations of Christ never show Him on a cross. “In the catacombs Christ is never represented hanging on the cross...” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Vol. 14, p. 273). In her well-documented work, *History of Our Lord as Exemplified in Works of Art*, Mrs. Anna Jameson says: “It must be owned that ancient objects of art, as far as hitherto known, afford no corroboration of the use of the cross in the simple transverse form familiar to us, at any period preceding, or even closely succeeding, the time of Chrysostom...” (Vol. 14, p. 273). Chrysostom lived from 345–407 A.D.

Still, we have found no conclusive *biblical* proof of the exact shape of the *stauros* on which Jesus died. *If* it were important for us to have this information, God would probably have given us a complete description! The important thing is the fact and meaning of Christ’s sacrifice for us—and what He is doing now—not the shape of the torture stake on which He died.

Many professing Christians have fallen into the custom of *adoring* the cross—a practice which the Bible *never* approves (Exodus 20:4–6).

Realize this: the *shape* of the tree or *stauros* upon which Christ died does not really matter! In one sense, it is like “meat offered to idols” (1 Corinthians 10:19) since it has absolutely no bearing on our worship. Christ is no longer dead. He is alive forevermore! We should think of Him as He is now—glorified and sitting at God’s right hand in heaven as our Advocate—not as a dead Savior hanging limply on a cross. The living Christ now saves us by His life (Romans 5:10). He lives in us if we are really Christians (Romans 8:9), and His life in us is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). We should adore the living Christ, not the instrument upon which He died, whatever its shape may have been!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Our Assurance of Salvation* [SAL]
- *Conspiracy Theories* [CD# C747]
- *Easter: Truth or Tradition?* [CD# C725]

- *The Enormous Scope of Christ's Death* [CD# C528]

Q A friend told me that Jesus is not coming back again. She said once you accept Jesus in your heart, that *IS* the second coming of Jesus Christ. Is this true? I need to know. She said that she is a spiritualist.

A You asked, “Is accepting Jesus in to my heart the second coming of Christ?” No, it is not. Belief, or “accepting Jesus into your heart,” and His second coming are *two entirely different things*.

We must always beware of well meaning teachers who try to “spiritualize” away the plain, impossible-to-misunderstand scriptures in favor of their own private interpretations or denominational biases (2 John 10).

The belief that merely “accepting Jesus into your heart” *is* the second coming of Christ is a result of reading the Bible with “tunnel vision” and preconceived ideas which ignore the many, many plain scriptures telling us what it is. Certainly faith and belief *are* requirements, yet we are told, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: *the devils also believe, and tremble*” (James 2:19), but they will not *repent* and *obey* God!

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will take place *mightily, powerfully, bodily, visibly, publicly* and *gloriously*, not secretly or “in the heart.” The fulfillment of this one-time event is called “the Day of the Lord” in over thirty prophecies. We are told in Revelation 1:7, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; *and every eye shall see him*, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.”

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 we are told, “*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout*, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” The same events are described in Matthew 24:30,31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13; 5:3. “And his feet shall stand *in that day* [the time of His return] upon the mount of Olives” (Zechariah 14:4). This is hardly a mere acceptance of Jesus into one’s heart! We are cautioned to “*Watch* therefore: for ye know *not* what hour your Lord doth *come*” (Matthew 24:42).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Is the Kingdom of God Here Now?* [KGH]
- *The Second Coming... and Beyond* [SCB]
- *Things to Do While Waiting For Jesus to Return* [WFJ]
- *Welcome to the Church of God International!* [WEL]
- *God's Providential Plan* [CD# C790]

11

Family and Personal Issues

Q Do you have any materials on marriage and remarriage?

A Yes, we do! We have several great messages on CD regarding marriage, divorce, and

remarriage. Consider the items mentioned below as *suggested reading and listening*. Since we do not send out unsolicited materials, please request them by either title or number. All our materials are absolutely FREE, of course.

Many of your questions will be answered by reading 1 Corinthians 7:1–40 in your Bible.

The topics of marriage, divorce, and remarriage are far too vast and often too complicated to be addressed in depth in a mere Q and A format. If you have any specific questions or need to counsel with one of our ministers, please call us at **(903) 939–2929**. They would be more than happy to talk with you.

In the meantime, we invite you to visit us frequently on the Internet at www.cgi.org. Feel free to read, download, or send for the many booklets, articles, and sermon CDs you will find there.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Christian Principles of Parenting* [CPP]
- *The Sacred Meaning of Marriage* [CD# C775]
- *Dating, Engagement, And Marriage* [CD# C614]
- *Emotionalism* [CD# C713]
- *Marital Fidelity* [#C623]
- *Conflict* [CD# C656]
- *Why Do Christians Have Problems?* [CD# C682]
- *The Importance of Emotional Maturity* [CD# C603]
- *ABCs of Life* [CD# C651]

Q Why does God allow us to go through so many troubles, trials, and sufferings? I am deeply troubled and am thinking about giving up on Christianity altogether.

A Your letter went into much detail, describing many of the trials and sufferings you are enduring. Our hearts and prayers go out to you in the many hardships you are facing.

Some seem to think God’s people never encounter difficulties or tests, but are blessed with continual smooth sailing. Nothing could be further from the truth! The great men of God, whose lives pleased Him as recorded in the Bible, were constantly meeting trials, tests, and troubles of every sort, and were being constantly forced to cry out to God for deliverance.

Let us share some of the trials of the saints with you so that you may *be encouraged* and realize that we understand, and that YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

Listen to God’s own proclamation: “MANY are the afflictions of the *righteous*: but the Eternal delivereth him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19).

“For I was envious,” said David, “of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked... They are not in trouble as other men... Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.... For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning” (Psalm 73:3–14).

“We must through *much tribulation* enter into the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall suffer persecution*” (2 Timothy 3:12).

“If we SUFFER, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12).

“For as the *sufferings* of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ. And whether *we be afflicted*, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the *enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer*” (2 Corinthians 1:5–6).

But is God unfair? Does He hate Christians and punish them, while He loves the ungodly and

prospers them? *Not at all!* This question has troubled millions!

There is a great PURPOSE in the trials, tests, tribulations, and sufferings the Christians must endure. For these are the very means of strengthening *character*—of developing fine, uplifting, strong Christians.

Contrary to what many would have us believe, God does *not* bless the ungodly with wealth. One does *not* acquire wealth by planting “seed money” in the hope of getting more wealth. This false doctrine only makes the preachers who preach their “health and wealth” gospel rich. Most people acquire worldly wealth in one or both of two ways: by setting their hearts and minds on acquiring it to the exclusion of all else, until, without realizing it, the pursuit of *money* becomes their god; or by dishonest means.

But God does bless those who seek Him *first*—not always with great money and wealth, but always, in the *end*, with all spiritual blessings that money cannot buy. “Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness,” admonished Jesus, “and all these things [material acquisitions in shelter, food, clothing, etc.] shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). That is Jesus’ promise.

God desires to see His servants prosper. He says so through David and John. Yet the development of godly *character* is far more important to Him than temporary material riches. Thus, He corrects and chastens every son and daughter whom He loves. To develop this godly character, He allows His true children to fall into troubles and difficulties, to face trials and tests for their strengthening. Right, godly *choices* must then be made. But if we *endure* these tests and trials, hard though they may be—and if we seek our God *first*, along with His righteousness and His Kingdom, putting material interests *second* in our hearts, then in His own due time, God will always prosper His children, even in a material way.

Let us go on. “But *we glory in tribulations* also: knowing that *tribulation worketh patience*” (Romans 5:3). Therefore it produces GOOD in and for us.

“My brethren, *count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2–3).

“Beloved, think it *not* strange concerning *the fiery trial which is to try you*, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but *rejoice*” (1 Peter 4:12–13).

Moses suffered affliction in order to lead the children of God, choosing this rather than the riches of the king’s palace and the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25).

David suffered constant criticism and false accusation, his enemies continually tried to unseat him, his son tried to kill him, and his trials were so great sometimes it seemed God would never come to his rescue—yet God always did! Truly these trials teach us to be patient—for it often seems an eternity before God finally delivers us. Yet, God has always intervened before it was too late!

God chose Paul to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, and the Lord said, “For I will shew him how great things he must *suffer* for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).

And late in life, Paul wrote: “In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments” [people today would probably call Paul a crook, a racketeer, an imposter, and a jailbird!], in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings” (2 Corinthians 6:4–6). Paul outlined even more of his troubles and sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23–28. Also be sure to read Hebrews 11, “the faith chapter.”

It is true that some servants of God may be called upon to endure more trials, troubles, and tests of faith than other Christians—but we read that *every* true Christian shall suffer persecution, and meet fiery trials, sorrows, troubles, and tests of faith in this life. Perhaps they will receive a higher reward in the Kingdom.

We may not always understand *why* we undergo everything we go through *at the time*, because for now “we see through a glass darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yet there is encouraging HOPE! We confidently encourage you to prevail in *prayer* and enduring *faith*.

Christ said, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30). He said in Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.” Are we answering His knock—His call?

God’s inspired Word assures us that God is faithful, and that we will *not* be tempted *beyond what we can bear* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Of course, we are unable to tell you *specifically* how to deal with your family situations—these must be handled wisely on a case-by-case basis—but we have several publications which can help you. We are confident that this information, if diligently applied, will answer many of your questions and help you along with your walk with Jesus Christ and God our Father.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Comforter, Counselor, Helper* [CHC]
- *How to Be More Effective in Your Prayer Life* [YPL]
- *The Miracle of Healing* [HLG]
- *Can a Christian Be Unconverted?* [CCU]
- *The Challenge of Discouragement* [CD# C653]
- *Why Christians Have Problems* [CD# C682]
- *From Suffering to Glory* [CD# C510]
- *When Bad Things Happen to God’s People* [CD# C605]
- *Dealing With Grief* [CD# C584]

Q Should believers put their dear children in the government schools?

A The Bible is totally silent about which schools that we should or should not enroll our children. Regardless, *the Bible principle* of child rearing is found in Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go,” and Deuteronomy 6:7, “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” Simply put, it is important that we as parents “get there *first* with the *most*.”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Bending the Twig* [BTW]
- *Christian Principles of Parenting* [CPP]
- *Understanding the Commandments* [UTN]

Q Should young people join the military?

A The subject of Christians in the armed forces has been debated, both pro and con, in the past. Let us quote from our *Systematic Theology Project*, “The Christian,” page 10: *Questions have*

arisen about a Christian's responsibility toward military service. It is axiomatic that human warfare and the attitudes behind it are the exact antithesis of God's law and the Christian way of life (James 4:1–2). Therefore, a Christian, who must put God's laws before man's (Acts 5:29), can in no way conscientiously participate in warfare. A Christian's firm conviction in this regard in no way negates his feelings of loyalty to his country, nor lessens the amount of positive Christian service he is willing to render for his country. His loyalty is, however, even deeper to his God and to his religious beliefs, and it is to God that he must be loyal when conflict between God and man arises (Acts 5:29). True patriotism thus puts one's country second only to one's God.

However, please know that persons serving in the military are warmly welcomed in our services.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *How to Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *When Jesus Steps Into Your Story* [CD# C952]
- *Sir, We Would See Jesus* [CD# C621]
- *In Enemy Territory* [CD# C661]

Q Some churches say women should not wear pants or cut their hair. What does the Bible actually teach on this?"

A Over the years, many have asked about biblical guidelines for women's clothing. What are God's revealed standards? Let's understand one thing. God looks on the *heart* (1 Samuel 16:7). He is more concerned with the *inward attitude* than with the outward appearance. The Kingdom of God is not clothing and dress any more than it is meat and drink (Romans 14:17). Some overzealous, but unknowledgeable professing Christians have placed undue emphasis on wearing certain colors or styles of clothing. They have believed this or that is more "spiritual."

In truth, God's guidelines on this matter of clothing and dress are very general. God expects His women to dress in "modest apparel" (1 Timothy 2:9)—that is, not overly flamboyant and garish. A Christian woman should not be an "exhibitionist" in attracting undue attention to herself by wearing provocative or "loud" clothing.

By the same token, this does *not* mean that Christian women should be drab, colorless, or tasteless dressers! The Christian is to be a *light* to the world, an example of *balance* and good taste. We should *not* be so out of step with the fashions of society that we stand out like the proverbial "sore thumb"! Clothes may be fashionable but not immodest or unduly garish. Apparel should be appropriate for the occasion—swimsuits are for the beach, not church services! Overalls are for work, not church services.

Jesus Christ even gave a parable about an inappropriately dressed wedding guest—and the symbolism in both physical and spiritual ways is quite compelling (Matthew 22:10–13).

Women's slacks may be worn when the occasion warrants. This violates *no* Bible principle.

The Bible *principle* is stated in Romans 13:7, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; *honor to whom honor.*"

In the Old Testament, God gave a law which stated: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God" (Deuteronomy 22: 5). This is a reference to transvestitism. It does NOT refer to a woman wearing slacks that are *designed* for women!

It is natural for those who are overzealous, but lacking in knowledge, to become self righteous about various aspects of women's clothing and set up "yard stick" regulations. Sometimes men are far more concerned about such things than the Creator Himself!

At the same time, be aware that there is a tendency to plunge headlong into the opposite ditch and feel that there are *no* guidelines for Christian dress and grooming! There *are*. But they are not meant to become an obsession or a fetish. What is the *example* set by the pastors' and deacons' wives of your church? The "meek and quiet spirit" of a truly converted Christian woman will be reflected in the kind of clothing she selects for herself. She will understand the *balance*. She will lean to neither extreme. She will wear what is appropriate and stylish for any given occasion—but with proper modesty and decorum. And God will look on the *heart* of such a woman with approval!

You also asked if it is wrong to cut your hair. Some women believe that it is entirely wrong—a sin—to cut their hair. This mistaken belief is derived from the misapplication of a statement that Paul wrote to the Christian women at Corinth.

Notice in 1 Corinthians 11:13–15, Paul says: "*If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her.*" But because long hair is mentioned, some are afraid to cut their hair at all! Women's hair, even though cut, if it is *long enough to look feminine*, is appropriate. There is NO definite "Bible length," except that it must appear as a *glory* and a *covering* to the wearer.

You will have to make the final decision, based on God's Word, concerning the best length of hair for you.

The general principle in all these things is this: God is FOR the ladies—not against them! Men—and their church organizations—are often much more restrictive than God! God wants ladies to look GOOD without being slaves to the latest trend, and to SHINE as Christian examples to the world, not be under the yoke of manmade "yard stick" restrictions!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *What is Sin?* [SIN]
- *The Church That Jesus Built* [CJB]
- *Assurance of Salvation* [SAL]
- *Welcome to the Church Of God International!* [WEL]
- *Get Right or Get Left* [CD]
- *Are You Giving God Your Best?* [CD# C575]

Q What does the Bible say about women wearing makeup?

A Actually, the Bible has much less to say about makeup than some would have us believe. God's Word NEVER forbids women to wear makeup! Some who are overzealous, but lacking in knowledge, become Pharisaically self righteous about makeup and point out that wicked Queen Jezebel wore makeup (2 Kings 9:30). Yes, she did, but that is *not* a law condemning Christian women for wearing makeup *in moderation*. Jezebel was condemned because she was *wicked*, not because she wore makeup! The general principle is this: God is FOR the ladies—not against them! Some men—and their authoritarian hierarchical church organizations—are often much more restrictive than God! God wants ladies to look GOOD without being slaves to the latest trend, and to SHINE as Christian examples to the world, not be under the yoke of "yard stick" restrictions! The "meek and quiet spirit" of a truly converted Christian lady will be reflected in both her behavior and appearance.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Welcome to the Church of God International!* [WEL]
- *Women in The Church* [CD# C630]
- *Something About Mary* [CD# C554]
- *The Sacred Meaning of Marriage* [CD# C775]
- *Are You Giving God Your Best?* [CD# C575]

Q What is the meaning of the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–13)?

A Many commentators agree that this parable is one of the most difficult of all the parables to understand. One main reason for our problems with the parable is the great cultural distance separating us from the Mediterranean world of 2000 years ago. Some of the customs and values of Jesus' day differ significantly from those of our modern Western societies.

The parable tells the story of a steward who, when accused of financial malfeasance, wastes even more funds in an attempt to ingratiate himself with his employer's clients. The steward is then, seemingly inexplicably, commended by his employer (verse 8) for his wisdom in handling difficult matters. Finally, disciples of Jesus are encouraged to emulate the steward's example of forethought, mercy, and forgiving the debts (sins) of others. Compare the principle in Matthew 6:13–15, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses [debts, or sins], your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive *not* men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Christ is not encouraging us to be unjust stewards. When the master in the parable became aware of what the unjust servant had done—in effect, *repenting* of what he had done and doing his best to make amends—he commends him for his judiciousness and resourcefulness in dealing with others. What Christ is encouraging us to do is to forgive our enemies and do good to all men, so that when *we* are cast out, or come upon hard times, we, too, will be well received by those whom we have befriended by seeing how we live, how we treat others, and by what we teach.

As a result of this parable, "...the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him" (Luke 16:14) or treated him with the utmost contempt because they understood the parable as an attack on their covetousness and, like the worldly wise, thought His doctrine foolish.

As a digression, it is interesting to note that there are other "unsavory" characters in Jesus' parables such as the unjust judge, the neighbor who does not want to be bothered in the night, and the man who pockets someone else's treasure by buying his field, etc. We see several examples of those in Scripture who made friends of those of this world, who served them well during their time of trouble. Abraham befriended both Pharaoh and Abimelech, king of Gerar. Isaac did the same. David befriended Jonathan, the son of King Saul, and when Saul cast David out by attempting to pin him to the wall with a spear, David's friendship with Jonathan served him well. Again, the lesson: we would be wise to make friends, not enemies, of people in the world.

I hope this helps you see that it is by obeying Christ, loving and forgiving those who may be indebted to us, and by doing good to all men regardless of our circumstances, that we will be benefited.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Tithing—Is It For Christians?* [TIC]
- *The Church That Jesus Built* [CJB]
- *How To Be A Real Christian* [REL]
- *Parables* [CD# C815].

Q I am a longtime cigarette smoker. *I know I should quit but I feel I just may not be ready to stop just yet. I've been praying for an answer on this. Is smoking a sin? Does the Bible say anything specific about it?*

A In recent years, much controversy has raged over the harmful effects of cigarette smoking. Most people do not stop to examine *why* they smoke. Most people form habits early in life and do nothing to change them. Eventually, these habits are as “natural” as eating, breathing, and sleeping. The Bible does not *directly state* that smoking is a sin. But as a rule of common sense, neither does the Bible say, “Thou shalt not drink cyanide or jump off tall buildings” either. Clearly, however, the Bible does teach *many principles of right human conduct and behavior*, clearly showing that habits such as smoking violate God’s absolute laws of *love toward God* and *love toward fellow man* (Matthew 22:36–40). We need to ask ourselves, “When I smoke, am I trying to please God, other people, or *myself*?” If we answer honestly, we will see we are not smoking to please God or others, but ourselves, our habits, and our desires.

God’s Word says, “What? Know you not that *your body is the temple* of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and *you are not your own*? For you are bought with a price: THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (I Corinthians 6:19–20). We certainly do not glorify God in our bodies when we pollute it with smoke and poisons! This alone should be strong incentive to stop smoking.

Medical science has demonstrated that smokers are not only slowly killing themselves—which is prolonged suicide, or self murder—but are also harming those inhaling it as *secondhand* smoke. This is a violation of the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13).

In truth, if we have *any* “addictive” habit, including smoking, we are *slaves* to it. That little cigarette holds *rule* over us, demanding obedience! Such addiction is a form of idolatry—placing some *one* or some *thing* ahead of God. This is a violation of the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). God commands us to “Set your affection on things *above*, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2).

Another little-thought-of facet of smoking is that smoking not only harms your health and those around you, it also destroys a Christian’s *testimony* for the Lord. Could we imagine Christ, our example, lighting up a Camel? No, *never!*

Overcoming any sin or habit is not easy. Christians battle three enemies: 1) Satan; 2) the pulls of the world; and 3) our own fleshly desires. There are many programs on the market to help you quit smoking. Pick one and stick to it. Talk to your physician. Above all, seek God’s help, guidance and strength in overcoming the smoking habit. Paul said, “I can do *all* things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 4:13).

Suggested listening:

- *Cause and Effect* [CD# C762]
- *When Jesus Steps Into Your Story* [CD# C952]
- *What Does God Require?* [CD# C850]

Q Is it a sin to drink alcohol? My church teaches it is a sin.

A This is a common question today, since so many religious organizations equate drinking any

form of alcohol with sin. What *is* sin? Many preachers and churches either do not know or will not tell. We should not take any man's—or any organization's—opinion on this matter, but look directly into the Word of God!

First, what *is* “sin”? Turn in your own Bible to 1 John 3:4. Here we read the *Bible's* (not Webster's or any man's) definition of sin. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for *SIN IS the transgression of the law!*” Sin is, by Bible definition, the breaking of God's law that is based upon the Ten Commandments given in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy chapter five. Notice, there is no mention of alcohol here.

There are thirteen original Hebrew and Greek words translated “wine” in our English Bible. How do we know which ones mean fermented drink? To find the answer, do not go to Aristotle, Pliny, or any scholar or board of men, but go to the Bible itself. By comparing its *usage* and *context*, the Scriptural meaning can be plainly understood by all without prejudice.

First, the Bible does not say it is wrong to drink alcohol. However it *does* say we should not tarry *long* at the wine (Proverbs 23:29–31). In other words, *it is wrong to get drunk!*

Jesus' first miracle was turning water into *wine*. The Greek word here is οἶνος (*oinos*, pronounced oy'-nos) and means fermented wine (John 2:1–10). It would not have been complimented as “good wine” (verse 10) at the wedding supper if the partakers had been switched from wine to “grape juice” in the middle of the wedding feast!

Christ was falsely called a “winebibber” (Matthew 11:19) because He was seen to drink wine, but *in moderation*. He was not accused of being a winebibber because He drank grape juice.

The Apostle Paul advised Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach's sake and his oft infirmities (1 Timothy 5:23). The word for “wine” is here again “*oinos*,” the same word Christ used in the story of the Good Samaritan who bound up the wounds of the stricken man with oil and *wine*. The wine (*oinos*) used here was of sufficient strength to be an *antiseptic*. One would not pour “grape juice” or molasses on a wound!

The original Hebrew word for wine in Genesis 9:21 is נַיִן *yayin*, (pronounced yah'-yin), where Noah “drank of the wine and was *drunken*.” In Genesis 14:18 we read, “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and *wine* (*yayin*) and he was the priest of the most high God.”

Psalms 104:15 speaks of “wine” (*yayin*) that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.”

Proverbs 31:6 says, “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.” The Hebrew word “strong drink” here is שֵׁכָר *shekar*, (pronounced, shay-kawr'), meaning an intoxicant, i.e., intensely alcoholic liquor.

Judges 9:13 says allegorically, “And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?”

To show the *balance*, the Greek word *oinos* used in Ephesians 5:18 warns, “And be not *drunk* with wine wherein is excess.” Drunkenness is absolutely *condemned* in the Bible (see 1 Corinthians 11:21; Matthew 24:49–51; Luke 12:45; 21:34; Romans 13:13; and 1 Thessalonians 5:7–8).

Galatians 5:21 says quite pointedly that drunkards shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

God *created* the fermentation process—it is of *God*, not the devil—and gave us wine and alcoholic beverages to learn to *use them properly*—and to develop character by the proper exercise of wisdom and self control. Prohibition is not God's way—and it does not develop character. It is for our welfare and happiness that God has commanded us *not* to use alcoholic beverages IN EXCESS or for a wrong purpose. Most well meaning people simply do not know where to draw the line between temperance and excess. Such people had best ABSTAIN TOTALLY until they know they

can be “temperate in all things.” The proper use of alcohol is a *great responsibility*. But it is only the wrong USE that becomes sin.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *What Is Sin?* [SIN]
- *How You Can Be an Overcomer* [HBO]
- *Overcoming Addictions* [CD# C740]
- *Overcoming What?* [CD# C680]
- *Games Sinners Play* [CD# C709]

Q I once knew God, but due to circumstances, turned my back on Him. I have been a great sinner. Am I cut off forever from Him due to all this neglect?

A Absolutely not! Jesus *died* for people just like you and me! The events in your life are truly heartrending, to be sure, but be of good cheer—there is good news! “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath *begun* a good work in you will perform it *until* the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6)! In other words, God is not through with you yet! Sometimes we *feel* He is finished with us, when in reality, He has barely begun.

Your letter indicates acknowledgement of your shortcomings. Yet we know God’s grace—His unmerited, undeserved pardon—is far greater than our greatest sin. The Scripture tells us, “For *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Regrettably, it seems most of us must be humbled by life before we begin getting our priorities in order God’s way. Your letter indeed indicates a broken and contrite heart. Reread the entire 51st Psalm and make it your own. Remember there is far more hope for a confessed sinner than for a conceited saint. It is far better to know you have a problem than live a life in the belief that all is well. The best bridge between despair and hope is Jesus Christ!

Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son who “came to his senses” and returned to his father (Luke 15:17–24). His father received him lovingly, openly, and unconditionally! *Repentance* is being sorrowful for your sins and mistakes to the point that you don’t live in them any longer. *Humility* is realizing that, by and of ourselves, we are nothing, but must rely on the grace—the unearned and unwarranted grace and forgiveness—of Jesus Christ! The Bible assures us, “There is therefore now *no condemnation* to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). Believing what God *said* is *faith*. No matter how horrendous we feel our sins have been, there is forgiveness. The “unpardonable” sin is rejecting God and His way completely, deliberately going contrary to what He says. From your letter, it is obvious that you have acknowledged mistakes and seek His forgiveness. Be assured, He will *never* turn you away! We will pray for you, that God will strengthen and bless you as you follow Him.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Man’s Awesome Destiny* [MAN]
- *Things to Do While Waiting for Jesus to Return*
- *God’s Desire For Repentance*
- *Would Jesus Attend Your Church?* [CD# C565]

Q Why does God allow suffering? It seems that God could devise a system to draw us to

Him without having to inflict pain on us, or our loved ones, or our pets, or our neighbors. Even as limited as our intelligence is, I think God could have devised a way for us to understand without pain. Angels do not suffer—they believe in God.

A This dilemma has haunted mankind from time immemorial. *If* God is all knowing, all powerful and all good, it is asked, why does He *allow* pain, suffering and evil to exist in the world? It is the tinderbox of atheists and agnostics. The question implies that allowing pain and suffering, war and evil is somehow incompatible with God’s goodness, or that somehow God is really to blame. Be assured, however, this is not the case.

First of all, it is commonly *assumed* that this is God’s world. Yet His Word, the Holy Bible, reveals that *Satan* is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). There is no “contest” between God and the devil. *If* there were, it would appear that the evil one is wining hands down, and God would not be all powerful! Adam and Eve made a poor *choice* in the Garden of Eden when they went “independent” from God and *chose* the tree of the knowledge of good and evil over the tree of life (see Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–6). Their progeny has been going the way contrary to God’s revealed laws and commandments ever since (1 John 1:8). At various times God announced, “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; *A blessing, if ye obey* the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: *And a curse, if ye will not obey* the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known” (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). Again, He said, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore *choose life*, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). It is man’s ways, so contrary to God’s ways, that have brought the world to its present condition. God has always revealed His ways—His laws, His commandments, His statutes—to mankind. Yet He observed, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

Secondly, suppose God had taken the only alternative, **FORCING** man, *against his will*, to live according to His laws? Can you imagine, for instance, the utter frustration of a person wanting to light up a cancer-causing cigarette and, *lo!* some invisible angelic force suddenly prevented him from moving his hand to his face? Or a person wanting to say an unkind word to another human being was suddenly struck dumb? Mankind, with his present nature, would rebel and tell God to go mind His own business and “Stop shoving Your religion down our throats!” Thus, God has given mankind *free moral choice*.

Thirdly, many skeptics have set up a humanistic syllogism in blaming *God* for man’s suffering. It goes something like this: “Pain is bad. A loving God would eliminate all pain. He has not done so. So therefore there cannot be a God like the one you Christians worship.” Think for a moment! It is true that pain is not fun. It was not meant to be! But pain is there for very good and helpful reasons. Have you ever thought of the *downside* of insensitivity to pain? It warns. It protects. It teaches. We normally avoid painful situations; it is necessary for our growth and development. Far from being an argument against God’s creative power and redemptive love, pain attests His goodness as a natural alarm to our physical bodies; a warning that something is amiss. It is also a great incentive for mutually caring about others, as in helping less fortunate persons in the community. And, most of all, pain and suffering are reasons to seek the One who alone can deal with our eternal needs. In Romans 8:22 we read, “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” In other words, all nature struggles under the burden of suffering and distress which *sin* has caused.

Fourthly, the Scriptures make it plain that God did not create the world in the state we find it

now, but evil came as the result of the selfishly independent nature of man. Man has brought evil upon *himself* by egotistically choosing his own way apart from God's way. Remember, mankind has separated himself from God, not vice versa (Genesis 3:8). Jesus, through His selfless suffering and sacrifice, shows us the way back.

And *lastly*, God's plan for man is to ultimately reproduce His own kind—the God kind—through mankind (Genesis 1:26). This involves a change in human nature by developing godly *character*—the ability to think and act as God thinks—along with a metabolic change from physical to spirit by means of a resurrection. Godly character cannot be created automatically by fiat—it must be developed through sometimes painful experience! Mankind must turn from his own ways, thoughts, and habits to become God-minded. It is rightly said that experience is not always the *best* teacher—but it is the *dearest!* And righteous character cannot be instilled without free moral agency: the desire to choose right over wrong—every time.

You also noted, “Angels do not suffer—they believe in God.” True, good angels do not suffer. They are “locked in” to God's ways. But in Matthew 8:29, we read where certain demons cried out to Jesus, saying, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to *torment us* before the time?” These words show they recognized Jesus Christ and anticipated His final triumph and judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 show that a time of torment *is* coming for evil spirits. Although these wicked angels (demons) are not physical and do not have physical nerve endings as do human beings, there *is* a torment and suffering awaiting them. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus says to the wicked regarding the Day of Judgment, “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, *prepared for the devil and his angels.*”

God has given mankind approximately 6,000 years to go his own way and learn through the lessons of “aversion therapy” and the school of hard knocks that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23) apart from God.

The good news is, that although evil is here and it is real, it is also *temporary!* Jesus is coming again, this time to restore all things and to enforce His rule; and as a result, utopia will envelop the earth (See all of Zechariah 14; Isaiah 2:3; Jeremiah 50:4–5; Psalm 110:2). May God haste that day!

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Real Reasons Why Christ Came to This Earth* [CCE]
- *What Is the Real 'Gospel Truth'?* [RGT]
- *God's Hand in Healing* [CD# C613]
- *Can Good Come From Evil?* [CD# C665]
- *Why Christians Have Problems* [CD# C682]
- *God's Permissive Will* [CD# C674]
- *When Bad Things Happen to God's People* [CD# C605]
- *Understanding Christian Responsibility* [CD# C664]

Q After a lifetime of troubles, despair, disappointment, and hard knocks, I've decided it is high time I get serious about my spiritual life. Please give me a summary of the basic steps I must take to be come a Christian. Thank you.

A First of all, we wish to congratulate you and encourage you as you begin your life as a Christian. It is the *most important* and *exciting* decision you will ever make!

You asked for a summary of the basic steps to take regarding the Christian walk. In the book of

Matthew, chapter 19, verses 16–17, we read that a similar question was proposed to Jesus Christ: “And, behold, one came and said unto Him, ‘Good Master, what good thing shall I *do*, that I may have eternal life?’ And He [Christ] said unto him, ‘... *if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*’” This is a plain and simple answer from Jesus Christ Himself.

Again, we read in 1 John 5:2, “By *this* we know that we love the children of God, when we *love God, and keep His commandments.*”

Similarly, 1 John 5:3 says, “For *this is* the love of God, that we *keep His commandments*: and his commandments are *not* grievous.”

There are many who will tell you that all you have to do is confess Jesus and accept Him into your heart and you will be saved. But is that *all* the Bible says?

We see from these verses mentioned above that commandment keeping (all ten!) is *very important*. In Matthew 22:36–40, a lawyer came to Christ, tempting Him, and asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Christ broke the commandments into two broad categories; the first four of the Ten Commandments show *how to love God*; the last six show *how to love your fellow man*. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang *all* the law and the prophets.’”

Of course, as a disciple or learner of Christ, you must become intensely involved with God’s Word, the Holy Bible. It goes without saying that you must *read* it, *study* it, *pray* to draw closer to God, and even *fast* occasionally. *Repentance* of our sins is a prerequisite (Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3,5; 1 John 3:4) followed by *baptism* (Acts 2:38). Following baptism and the *laying on of hands* (1 Timothy 4:14; Hebrews 6:2) you will receive God’s Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you through the rest of your life as you follow Christ. For further details, be sure to send for the suggested items below.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Ten Commandments* [TNC]
- *How to Study Your Bible* STB]
- *How to Be a Real Christian* [REL]
- *Things to Do While Waiting For Jesus to Return* [WFJ]
- *Ten Simple Rules* [CD# C861]
- *Discipleship* [CD# C846]

Q How could Solomon have had so many wives (1 Kings 11:1–3)?

A First Kings 11:1–3 indicates that King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, many from lands of which God had previously instructed the Israelites to avoid intermarrying with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites. This was in defiance of the Lord’s command to the children of Israel, “...Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: *for* surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.”

Solomon’s accumulation of many women was both lustful and political, and not lawful. God knew that such intermarrying would lead to the worship of false gods. Why, then, did Solomon do this?

History reveals that Solomon was very aggressive in his foreign policy. In sealing treaties in ancient days, it was customary for a lesser king to give his daughter in marriage to the greater king

(in this case, Solomon). Every time a new treaty was sealed, Solomon ended up with more and more wives and concubines. These women were considered “tokens of friendship” and “sealed” the relationship between the two kings. It may be that Solomon was not even personally acquainted with many of these wives, even though he was married to them.

Exodus 34:16 warns that multiplication of wives leads to sensuality, and eventually to an apostasy no less fatal in effect than downright idolatry.

In multiplying wives unto himself, Solomon was utterly and willfully disobedient to God. He was apparently so obsessed with lust, power, and wealth that it overshadowed his spiritual life, and he was eventually turned to some of the false gods of the women he married.

“And the LORD was *angry* with Solomon, *because his heart was turned* from the LORD God of Israel” (1 Kings 11:9). Lust, power, and wealth become a form of idolatry that ultimately turns the heart from God and His Word (Colossians 3:5). Whenever a person violates one point of God’s law, it has a domino effect and soon affects others. James 2:10 says, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” In the New Testament, elders and deacons—who were to be explicit *examples* to their congregations—were likewise warned against having multiple wives (1 Timothy 3:2,12; Titus 1:6).

In marrying more than one woman, Solomon was going against God’s revealed will regarding monogamy. From the very beginning God created *one* woman for *one* man (see Genesis 1:27; 2:21–25). Deuteronomy 17:17 explicitly instructs kings—and, by extension, those under his rule—*not* to “multiply wives.” So Solomon sinned in two ways: 1) he engaged in polygamy, and 2) he violated God’s commandment against marrying pagans, which ultimately led to his own apostasy.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Q&A Book—Questions and Answers Volume 1* [QUE]
- *Heresies Ancient and Modern* [HAM]
- *Ten Facts You Should Know About Repentance* [TFR]
- *Resolving Marital Conflicts* [CD# C522]
- *Dating, Engagement, and Marriage* [CD# C614]

12

Miscellaneous

Q Is it OK to observe Thanksgiving or Valentine’s Day?

A The Thanksgiving holiday was established in comparatively recent years by the pilgrims as a time to thank God for His provision and protection. It is, of course, not mentioned in Scripture—but the principle of attending and celebrating national holidays is made clear in Scripture. Notice the example of Christ in John 10:22. His attendance at the “Feast of Dedication” illustrated that it is not wrong to attend or celebrate a national holiday established for an honorable purpose.

The American Thanksgiving Day does *not* have a pagan origin, despite the claims of certain fringe sects. National holidays are just that—holidays, not holy days. They are times of secular pleasure and gratitude, nothing more. Paul admonished us to “give thanks always” (Ephesians 5:20).

What God expressly forbids is the observance of *pagan* festivals, which substitute for or are mixed with GOD’s holy days! We are never to adapt customs the heathen used in serving their gods

to worshipping the true God!

Most people never question what they do or why they do it; they simply continue in their hand-me-down traditions. But God is very particular as to how we worship Him. Read what God commands His people concerning pagan customs and traditions: “*Learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are vain*” (Jeremiah 10:2–3). Also notice Christ’s words in Matthew 15:9: “...*in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*”

Throughout the Bible, God describes the heathen as those who worship *anything but* the one true God. He calls such people and their practices “pagan.” True Christians understand that God detests any customs, practices, and traditions rooted in paganism.

Like Christmas, Easter, Halloween, New Year’s, and other holidays of this world, St. Valentine’s Day is another attempt to “whitewash” perverted customs and observances of pagan gods and idols by “Christianizing” them.

As innocent and harmless as St. Valentine’s Day may appear, its traditions and customs originate from two of the most sexually perverted pagan festivals of ancient history: the feast days of Juno Februata and Lupercalia. Let’s examine them briefly.

- On February 15, Romans celebrated *Lupercalia*, honoring Faunus, god of fertility. The Romans celebrated Lupercalia to honor the hunter god Lupercus. Men would go to a grotto dedicated to Lupercal, the “wolf god,” located at the foot of Palatine Hill, where Romans believed the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, were suckled by a she-wolf. The men would sacrifice a goat, don its skin, and run around lashing women with small whips, an act which was supposed to ensure fertility.
- The Romans also celebrated a holiday on February 14th to honor Juno Fructifier, queen of the Roman gods and goddesses, as well as goddess of marriage. In one ritual, women would submit their names to a common box and men would each draw one out (thus the saying today, *Be My Valentine*). These two would be a couple for the duration of the festival. Both rituals were designed to promote both sexual immorality and fertility.
- In A.D. 494, Pope Gelasius “whitewashed” the day, renaming the festival of Juno Februata as the “Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary.” The date of its observance was later changed from February 14 to February 2, then changed back to the 14th again. It is also known as Candlemas, the Presentation of the Lord, the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, and the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

Notice the strong words of Deuteronomy 12:30–32! “*Take heed to yourself that you are NOT ensnared to follow them [the pagans], after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do NOT inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way... Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall NOT add to it nor take away from it*” (NKJV).

Yes, Satan has deceived the whole world (Revelation 12:9) in multiple ways—especially when it comes to intimate relationships. St. Valentine’s Day is just one of his “innocent looking” tools of deception. An informed Christian knows that he must actively come out of this world, out of its pagan infested customs, practices, and traditions. Revelation 18:4 warns us to “*Come out of her [the world’s system of things], my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*” If one is caught up in this world’s cycle of holidays, he or she needs to study, pray, and diligently follow God’s direction as given in His inspired Word, the Bible.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The International News* [INT]

- *Watch and Be Prepared* [CD# C742]

Q Is it OK to eat monkey meat?

A No. See Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14.

Suggested reading:

- *Have the Old Testament Dietary Laws Been Abolished?* [DLA]

Q In the book of 1 Samuel 17:54, can you tell me what David did with Goliath’s head after he brought it to Jerusalem? Did he bury it and if so, where did he bury it?

A 1 Samuel 17:54 simply reads, “And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.”

Some have speculated as to why he brought Goliath’s head to Jerusalem—to *terrify* the Jebusites, who at that time still held the fort of Zion (2 Samuel 5:7)—or for some other reason. The truth is, it is not recorded in the Bible, and no one knows for certain.

There is also no indication that the head was embalmed or in any way preserved, so in short order, considering that climate, it undoubtedly began to decay and rot like any dead carcass. It was probably buried, burned, or given to the dogs. But again, there is no biblical record of it. Further, it is not a salvation issue.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Bible and Archaeology* [CD# C733]

Q Please explain Luke 16:16, where it says, “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”

A Note first, in context, that Jesus was addressing the covetous Pharisees, who were deriding Him while justifying themselves (Luke 16:15–16).

Many antinomian [no law] teachers delightfully take this verse out of context and argue, “See, until John! John is dead. The law is done away!” This understanding, of course, would fly in the face of Jesus’ *plain* statement in the very next verse, verse 17: “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.” (Also see in your own Bible: Matthew 5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17; and 21:33).

John the Baptist’s ministry marked the turning point in redemptive history. Prior to that, the great truths of Christ and His Kingdom were “veiled” in the types and shadows of the Old Testament and promised in the writings of the prophets (cf. 1 Peter 1:10–12). But *John the Baptist introduced the King Himself!* The Pharisees, who thought of themselves as experts in the law and the prophets, missed the significance of the very One to whom the law and the prophets pointed!

All through the Old Testament, prophets spoke of grace being given to Gentiles; they did not fully understand all that was involved in God’s saving Gentiles through a suffering Messiah (see Colossians 1:26–27). The Old Testament prophets predicted *both* the suffering (Isaiah 53) *and* glory (Isaiah 11) of the Messiah, without distinguishing that the former would be fulfilled at His first coming, and the latter at His second.

“... and every man presseth into it” (referring back to Luke 16:16; also cf. Jeremiah 29:13). While the Pharisees were busy opposing Christ, multitudes of sinners were swarming around Him in droves! The language of this expression speaks of violent force, signifying the *zeal*—the enthusiasm, spiritual passion and energy—with which sinners were seeking with all their hearts, rushing almost as if “by force” to enter the Kingdom (cf. Matthew 11:12).

We agree with you wholeheartedly regarding so-called modern day prophets. We know of no so-called prophets today. Christ warned, “And *many* false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive *many*” (Matthew 24:11). Also see: Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:30; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1.

Christ said, “Wherefore *by their fruits* ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). As you noted, the life of a true minister—or prophet!—of God, must line up with the requirements of God’s Word as designated in 1 Timothy 3:1–10 and Titus 1:5–9.

Suggested reading:

- *How to Be a True Christian* [REL]
- *The International News* (quarterly subscription) [INT]
- Visit our web site at www.cgi.org

Q Please explain Ecclesiastes 10:19, which reads, “A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.”

A It is truth that a *text* without a *context* is often only a *pretext*, and by lifting certain verses out of context, many tend to read their own private meanings into them. Contextually, in Ecclesiastes 10, verses 1–20, Solomon is drawing together assorted examples of the wisdom he has both scrutinized and touted. God had given Solomon wisdom beyond all the kings of the earth (1 Kings 4:29–30,34; 5:12). Verse 19 of Ecclesiastes 10 expresses the attitude of the carousing princes (verse 16) and the partying king (verse 18), who thinks money will meet every demand, granting whatever one longs for. E.W. Bullinger’s *Companion Bible* comments on this verse, “Answereth all things=maketh everything respond (to their requirements): i.e. will procure both (feast and wine).”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Statement Of Beliefs* [SBF]
- *The Importance of Spiritual Maturity* [CD# C603]

Q Do you really believe money is the root of all evil as the Bible says in 1 Timothy 6:10?

A Many quote only the first part of the verse, but leave out the rest, contextually. The verse reads in full, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while *some coveted after*, they have *erred from the faith*, and *pierced* themselves through with many sorrows.”

Some translations, such as the *American Standard Version*, read, “for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” The often overlooked portion of the verse shows that Paul was warning Timothy about those who leave the faith *in pursuit of money!* It is the **inordinate love** of money that is a root of evil, not the money itself. Money, if used wisely by one acting as a steward, is a blessing (Ecclesiastes 5:19; 6:2). It is the *greedy*, rapacious love of money that is the source of every kind of sin. Men covet, murder, cheat, lie, steal, defraud, rob, run houses of ill repute, sell drugs, guns, and pornography, etc., all for the love of money. Judas is an example of one who sold

his Master for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Q&A Book—Questions and Answers, Volume 1* [QUE]
- Visit our Website at www.cgi.org

Q Should we use the term “Mother Nature,” or “The Father’s Creation” ?

A Hebrews 1:2 says, “Hath in these last days spoken unto us *by His Son*, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, *BY WHOM ALSO HE MADE THE WORLDS.*” There *is* no “Mother Nature.” The term is a tribute to a pagan deity, which excludes the God of your Bible.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Awesome Power of God* [APG]
- *Man’s Awesome Destiny* [MAN]
- *New Age Deception* [CD# C681]
- *In Spirit and in Truth* [CD# C 548]

Q Do you have scriptures proving that a biblical day starts at night?

A Yes, we do. The Bible lists all the seven days of creation as, “the evening and the morning”—the evening always coming first (see Genesis 1:5; 1:8; 1:13; 1:19; 1:23; 1:23; and 1:31). Summing up the first six days of creating, God pronounced *everything* He made as “very good.” The seventh day, the Sabbath, had a special blessing and was sanctified (set apart for holy use). See also Exodus 20:8–11.

God made the choice of words. It is very clear that each day consisted of an evening and a morning (the result of a 24-hour rotation of the earth on its axis), which is consistent with a 24-hour day. This would make no sense if God meant thousands of years.

It should be remembered that the creation account given in Genesis chapter one was written much later than the event itself, and gives only the very briefest overview. Undoubtedly, there was *much* going on “behind the scenes” that was not recorded. God created everything instantly, complete, altogether operational, and fully mature. There is no need to expand the time beyond what the Bible says. God could have created everything in six seconds, but chose to do it in six days. God did not need eons of time to create. Man—in an effort to support his theory of evolution—needs billions of years. DNA and information coding demonstrates the impossibility of evolution.

God established the pattern of creation in seven days that constituted a complete week.

“But when the word ‘day’ [Hebrew *yom*] is used with a numeral (cardinal or ordinal), as one, two, three, &c., or first, second, third, &c., ‘evening and morning’ (Gen. 1), or the ‘seventh day’ (Ex. 20:9, 11, &c), it is defined, limited, and restricted to an ordinary day of twenty-four hours.” (*The Companion Bible*, E.W. Bullinger, Appendix 11, p. 14.)

Suggested reading and listening:

- *God’s Seasonal Plan* [GSP]
- *Three Days And Three Nights—Was Jesus Crucified on Friday and Resurrected on Sunday?*
- *Evolution—Fact or Fallacy?* [EFF]

Q Did Ezekiel see an alien spacecraft (Ezekiel 1:4–6)?

A In Ezekiel 1:4–6 we read: “And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness *was* about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.” Was this a UFO? Many New Agers think so, and allege Ezekiel saw extraterrestrial beings. But this is reading something *into* the text that is not really there.

The context indicates that Ezekiel was witnessing a vision of God (see verse 1). Later in the chapter we read, “This *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (verse 28). God gave the vision to Ezekiel, but Ezekiel related the vision in his own words.

The “living creatures” mentioned in the passage were *angelic beings*, that had four faces and four wings (verse 6, compare Ezekiel 10:14). They compare to the angels mentioned in Isaiah 6:2 and especially the “living creatures” (angels) which are said to be around God’s throne (Revelation 4:6).

Ezekiel said plainly, “I saw visions of GOD”—not aliens. Compare Ezekiel 1:1; 2:4; and 3:4,27. Suggested reading and listening:

- *UFO’s Exist—But What Are They?* [UFO]
- *What You Should Know About Demon Possession* [DEM]
- *New Age Deception* [CD# C681]
- *Beyond Appearances* [CD# C611]

Q I have a couple questions concerning the Bible. The first has to do with Balaam. I would like to know exactly why Balaam is looked on unfavorably. Is it because God had originally told him to go with Balak’s people, didn’t go with them, but when they came back a second time, is it because Balaam let them stay the night and would even consider this thing and when the Lord came back and told him to go with them that he went even though the first time the Lord told him not to? Is that why the Lord was upset with him, that he would even consider going?

A Balaam was from Pethor, a city on the Euphrates River, perhaps near Man, where the existence of a cult of prophets whose activities resembled those of Balaam have been found. It is evident that although Balaam “knew” God, he often used omens (Numbers 22:7; 24:1) and soothsaying (Joshua 13:22). Many are deceived by Balaam’s grandiose affirmation mentioned in Numbers 22:18–19 (read it in your own Bible). Though the Lord told him not to go (v. 12), Balaam hoped He would change His mind and permit him to go. God sometimes permits man to go his own way and pay the consequences. At Balaam’s persistence and pretended piety, God did permit him to go (v. 20), but expressed His displeasure with Balaam for his love of money (v. 22; cf. 2 Peter 2:15).

Balaam practiced magic and divination (24:1) and eventually led Israel into apostasy (31:16). Balaam told Balak that he could not *curse* Israel because God had *blessed* them, but taught him *how to cause Israel to corrupt themselves* by engaging in acts of sexual immorality with the women of Moab (25:1–3), and thus bring a curse upon *themselves*. Later scriptures identify Balaam as a *false prophet* (Deuteronomy 23:3–6; Joshua 13:22; 24:9–10; Nehemiah 13:1–3; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15–16; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14).

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Old Testament Speaks Out* [CD# C507]
- *How to Increase Your Faith* [CD# C557]
- *End-time Warning to the Church* [CD# C076]

Q What was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, Revelation 2:6,15?

A Many have conjured up fanciful ideas, but the answer is really very simple. The word “Nicolaitanes” is from the Greek *nikao*, meaning “to conquer,” and from *laos*, “the people,” or “laity.” It means, in essence, “conqueror” or “overlord” of the people. There is no ancient authority for a sect of the Nicolaitanes. Symbolically, it refers to the earliest form of a *hierarchical* clergy or priestly order.

On at least one occasion, there was strife among Christ’s disciples about which of them should be accounted the greatest. But Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are considered RULERS over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones EXERCISE AUTHORITY over them. Yet *it shall NOT be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your *servant*. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be *slave* of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to *serve*, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42–45, NJKV). God is clearly against harsh, stern, controlling church hierarchies because they tend to substitute man made rules, laws, and traditions in place of God’s Word. For example, Christ condemned the pompous Pharisees, saying, “Why do ye also transgress the *commandment* of God by your *tradition*” (Matthew 15:3,6 and Mark 7:9,13)?

You can find this same attitude of *humility* and *ministerial servitude* amplified in Matthew 23:11; 20:26–27; Luke 9:46–48; 14:11; 22:25; and 1 Peter 5:5–6.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Sprit of Antichrist* [CD# C551]
- *Discipleship* [CD# C846]
- *The Church That Jesus Built* [CJB]
- *The Seven Churches of the Apocalypse* [SCA]
- *Is Your Church Doing What Jesus Did?* [CD# C668]

Q Does God hear the prayers of the unconverted? Would they be of any effect?

A Everyone begins life unconverted. The good news is that God does not expect us to be perfect Christians all at once. None of us will *ever* achieve “perfection” in this life. Repentance—turning from sin—is a lifelong process and gets God’s attention. Jesus said, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). The only thing we have to do to begin a relationship with God is talk with Him and be receptive to His Word, the Bible.

Some claim that God will never answer the prayers of an unbeliever, and quote John 9:31, which reads, “But we know that God heareth not hear sinners.” And then they read no further. The rest of the verse says, “...but if any one be God-fearing and do his will, *him he hears*.”

The following biblical examples describe God hearing and answering the prayers of the *non-converted*. In most cases, the prayer is combined with repentance. In some, God responded out of compassion or in response to the genuine faith of the person.

- 1 John 5:14–15 tells us God answers prayers based on whether they are asked *according to His will*. If an unbeliever asks a prayer of God that is according to His will, nothing prevents God from answering such a prayer in His own time and way.
- In John 3:5–10, the people of Ninevah *believed* God, *repented*, and were spared.
- In Genesis 21:14–19, God mercifully heard the cries of Hagar and Ishmael and spared them from certain death.
- In 1 Kings 21:27–29, wicked king Ahab fasted and mourned over Elijah’s prophecy pertaining to his posterity. God responded by not bringing about the calamity in Ahab’s lifetime.
- In Mark 7:24–30, the Syrophenician woman—a Gentile—besought Jesus to deliver her daughter from a demon, and she was cured.
- In Acts 10:4, Cornelius, a Roman centurion, prayed and fasted (verse 30) and was shown the way of salvation.
- In Jeremiah 29:13, God makes promises that are applicable for *all* men: “And ye shall *seek me*, and find me, *when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*”

As Christians, we are encouraged to come **BOLDLY** unto the throne of grace to find help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14–16). We are told that when we ask for anything according to God’s will, He hears and will grant our prayer (1 John 5:14–15). There are many other, stronger, promises for Christians concerning prayer as well, such as those in Matthew 21:22; John 14:13; and John 15:7.

Yes, there are instances in which God does not answer the prayers of an unbeliever. At the same time, in His grace and mercy, God can—and often does—intervene in the lives of unbelievers in response to their prayers. A very basic scripture may be found in Hebrews 11:6: “But without *faith* it is impossible to please him: for he that *cometh* to God must believe that *he is*, and that he is a rewarder of *them that diligently seek him.*”

Suggested reading and listening:

- *Ten Facts You Should Know About Repentance* [TFR]
- *How to Be More Effective in Your Prayer Life* [YPL]
- *When Tragedy Strikes* [WTS]
- *Are Humans Spiritually Depraved?* [CD# C539]
- *Intercessory Prayer* [CD# 714]
- *Helping Hands and Praying Lips* [CD# C925]
- *Will You Fight Jesus Christ at His Return?* [CD# C764]
- *Watch and Be Prepared* [CD# C742]

Q Psalm 110:1 says, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” What does this mean?

A Psalms 110:1 reads, “[A Psalm of David] The LORD [Hebrew, הַיְהוָה, WHVH] said unto *my* [David’s] Lord [Hebrew, אֲדֹנָי, Adoni], Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” This important scripture is repeated in Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42–43, and Acts 2:34. God repeats things for emphasis. Look them up in your own Bible.

The answer is fairly simple. David was made supernaturally aware of a *conversation* between God the Father and David’s Lord (Adoni), who was Christ the Messiah, saying that Christ would sit at the Father’s right hand until His [Christ’s] Second Coming, at which time His enemies would

be subjugated to Him.

This was a prediction respecting the exaltation of Christ. To be raised to the right hand of a ruler was an indication of favor, trust, and power. Other scriptures mentioning Christ sitting on the right hand of the Father can be found in Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; and 10:12.

To make “*Thine enemies thy footstool*” further clarifies Christ’s exaltation. A footstool is that which is under the feet when we are sitting—implying that we have it under subjection, or in our control. So He shall put all enemies under His feet—all His spiritual foes—all that rise up against Him (Psalm 2:9,12; Hebrews 10:13; 1 Corinthians 15:25).

From the preceding scriptures, it is obvious that there are presently *two* Beings in the one God Family, God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Son. This is also alluded to in Genesis 1:26 where we read, “And God [the Hebrew word, *Elohim*, translated God, is a uni-plural noun such as family, team, or group, consisting of one unit but composed of more than one member] said, Let US make man in OUR image, after OUR likeness.” John 14:23 says, “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and *my Father* will love him, and WE will come unto him, and make OUR abode with him.” He went on to say, “...and the word which ye hear is *not mine*, but the *Father’s* which *sent* me” verse 24). That fact that Christ instructed His followers to pray to “*Our Father* which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9) shows that Christ—*one* person of the Godhead—was in one location while the Father in heaven was in *another*.

This distinction between God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is made right down to the Bible’s last chapter, where the heavenly throne coming down to earth is described as “the throne of God *and* of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1, 3). These statements are not difficult to understand unless we have been taught to try to make them say something they do not say. Jesus did *not* say He was the same *Being* as the Father, or part of some unscriptural Trinity, but that He would be at the Father’s *right hand*, awaiting the working out of God’s time and purposes.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *The Q & A Book—Questions and Answers, Volume One* [QUE]
- *One God, One Lord* [CD# C546]
- *The Real Nature of Jesus Christ* [CD# C 559]
- *What Is the Holy Spirit?* [CD# C541]

Q In the Old Testament we have a few instances of hearts that had been hardened by God. God told Moses that he would harden the heart of Pharaoh in Exodus 4:21. The same was said in Exodus 7:3 and 14:4. If God sometimes hardens people’s hearts, why this was done and how would you know if God hardens your heart? So does God merely choose someone randomly whose heart He wishes to harden for no other reason than causing opposition to His people?

A No, He does not. God is a just God. Hardening a *believing* heart would not be according to God’s revealed character.

Prior to Exodus 4, Pharaoh had *already* tightened his grip on the nation of Israel out of fear of their numbers (Exodus 1:8–11), and had ordered Hebrew midwives to murder the male babies when they helped Israelite women give birth (1:15–16). Pharaoh had *already* set himself up as opposed to God, and because of this, he was used to bring glory to God. In each of the verses where God tells Moses that He will harden the heart of Pharaoh, God also includes the *purpose* of

why He would be doing it. In Exodus 4:21–23, we find that God would “harden” Pharaoh’s heart so that Pharaoh would not let the people of God go. Pharaoh *already* had no intention of letting the children of Israel go. The Exodus experience was a *fulfilled prophecy* made to Abraham in Genesis 15:13–14. God knew *in advance* that such a “heartless” ruler would oppress His people in Egypt. From Exodus 4:21 onward, we see that God intended to use the *already* corrupted heart of Pharaoh to execute His plan of freeing the nation of Israel that culminated in Exodus 14. The purpose He gives in Exodus 7:3 (“that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt”) coordinates with the purpose He gives in Exodus 14:4 (“I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord”) which is the same purpose He gives for hardening the hearts of the Egyptians (the Egyptian *army*, to be more exact) in Exodus 14:17. In other words, God *used* Pharaoh’s *already* hardened heart to accomplish His purpose. God “hardened” Pharaoh’s heart in the sense that He orchestrated circumstances that made Pharaoh’s already hardened heart, or mindset, evident. Thus, we find that the “hardening” of men’s hearts by God *is always a consequence of their own self-hardening*.

So what application does this have for Christians and people in the world today? It emphasizes the fact that God will not deal indefinitely with people who have *allowed* their hearts to become corrupted. In the first chapter of Romans, we are introduced to a group of people Paul says were “without excuse” (Romans 1:20). These people *knew* God (Romans 1:21) yet they treated him *as though* they did not, participating in idolatry and other sins (Romans 1:23). Because of this, God gave them over to “vile affections” (verse 26), which Paul describes as depraved or “reprobate” minds in verse 28. All that happened to these people in Romans 1:24–32 came to pass because *they* had darkened their hearts (1:21). What makes a heart darkened? Look to Romans 2:5, where Paul tells another group of people who are “without excuse” that they have stubbornness and unrepentant hearts. This same idea is discussed by Paul again in a letter to the church at Thessalonica in 2 Thessalonians 2:11. Also note Romans 9:14–18.

The bottom line is that converted Christians do not need to worry about God hardening our hearts, but we must beware that we don’t harden our *own* hearts by not *willingly obeying* what God reveals in his written Word, the Bible.

Suggested reading and listening:

- *What Is the Unpardonable Sin?* [UPD]
- *Overcoming Mind Blindness* [CD# C243]
- *Maintaining Our Priority* [CD# C564]
- *Dealing With Demons* [CD# C604]

All Scripture quotations were taken from the King James Version except as noted.

Copyright © 2011 The Church of God International, Tyler, Texas.

All rights reserved, Printed in U.S.A.

Text: Lloyd W. Cary