

**SURVEY  
OF THE  
OLD TESTAMENT**

**An Overview Of The Basic Message  
Of  
Genesis Through Malachi**

**by**

**Ed Mathews**

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS BOOK

The following survey is written as an overview. It is introductory in nature. It covers the major ideas of the inspired text from Genesis to Malachi (with insights from the time between the Old and New Testament).

The material is divided into 39 parts. Each part has 4 elements:

- . A devotion from the section of Scripture being studied.
- . An analysis of a selected section of the biblical text.
- . A theological theme from the passage under review.
- . A dilemma in the material examined.

This book also includes an Introduction and Addendum to the Old Testament. Altogether there is enough information to fill a Sunday morning or a Wednesday evening Bible Class for two years.

The class teacher should get class members to:

- . Read the text of Scripture to be studied (before class).
- . Write devotions (and read them in class).
- . Solve the dilemmas before class (and discuss their conclusions in class).

This will rescue the class from being a "lecture." And, more importantly, such student participation results in greater learning.

The purpose of this survey is to stimulate a serious examination of the Old Testament. If this is accomplished, let the Lord be praised. If errors are found in what follows, charge them to me.

Let the study begin!

Ed Mathews  
June 15, 2022

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Story telling has always been a way of transmitting traditions and values. So it was in ancient Israel. Reading and writing was a profession of the few. Therefore, people communicated by stories. The stories of Israel took many forms.

- . Origin narratives
- . Social and religious laws
- . Songs of singers
- . Wisdom of sages
- . Announcements of prophets

All of these forms are found in the Old Testament story.

### I. What Is The Old Testament?

The Old Testament is the holy book (or sacred Scripture) of the people who, at different times in history, have been called Hebrews, Israelites, or Jews. The Old Testament has 39 books, spanning thousands of years of history, written down between 1400 BC and 400 BC. This was the Bible of Jesus, the apostles, and the early Church. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, the Gospels and the letters were regarded (by Christians) as inspired. Once these writings were given the status of Scripture, the Hebrew Bible was called the Old Testament and the Christian material was called the New Testament, Hebrews 9:15-17; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34.

### II. What Literary Forms Carry The Message?

A. Narrative. The term *narrative* means “story.” It is not surprising to see that the majority of the Old Testament is in story form. However, Old Testament narrative was not a common literary device in the ancient Mediterranean world. Most of the information about gods, goddesses, kings, queens, heroes, and villains in antiquity was passed down in poetry.

B. Law. Legal codes are also part of the fabric of the Old Testament story. They are found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The legal material regulated business affairs, family life, religious ritual, judicial courts, and moral behavior. In short, it gave structure to life.

C. Poetry. It is no surprise the Psalms and Song of Songs are written in poetic form. So, also, are large portions of the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, Obadiah, and Malachi. Narrative gives time and place to the story (Judges 4) while poetry gives praise (or condemnation) to the subjects of the story (Judges 5). These two literary forms are complimentary—the former mentioned the people and the

places involved whereas the latter celebrated the deliverance of God.

D. Wisdom. Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are also written in a poetic style with a special twist—they are “one liners,” pithy sayings of the sages on how to get along with others and how to deal with the difficult questions of life, Proverbs 2:1-5.

### III. What Was The Defining Event In The Story?

The Old Testament starts with the story of creation—though that is not the defining event in the history of Israel. The exodus was. Israel became a distinctive people in their deliverance from Egypt, Deuteronomy 6:1-10. That watershed event was told and retold in narrative, song, and poetry throughout the subsequent history of the Hebrew people.

The exodus made Israel aware of herself as a nation of folks with a common experience. Like a person growing-up, Israelites began to ask: “*Who are we?*” “*Where do we come from?*” “*Why are we here?*” as well as “*Where are we going?*”

When people begin to ask these questions, they look at their history. So Israel sifted through her stories to answer these ultimate inquiries. The process drove them back to their origins: creation, the patriarchs, and slavery. As time moved on, their history expanded: the exodus, the conquest, and nationhood were added. Thus, additional narrative, poetry, and song were included. And, when the tragedy of the exile occurred, Israel recognized the real possibility of forgetting her past. Hence, a concerted effort was made to preserve the history of the rulers of Israel and Judah. The invention of writing aided a great deal to this effort.

### IV. How Did The Story Get Written Down?

Did someone suddenly decide to write the Old Testament? Or was the process more complicated than that? The apostle Peter said, “*Holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Spirit of God,*” II Peter 1:21. God initiated the activity. And, from several other passages, it is clear He prompted its continuance along the way.

A. The Event. Nothing happens without a cause. Something must have triggered the writing of the Old Testament. This much is obvious: The Old Testament grew out of events and circumstances in the life of the Jews.

B. The Story. The people who experienced these events and circumstances told others what happened, Deuteronomy 6:6-9. Every family had their stories that the parents passed down to their children through the generations. Telling these stories over the centuries became the foundation for interpreting life.

C. The Interpretation. When things happen to us, we interpret them in light of

our story. Everyone does: Jews and Gentiles, the majority and the minority, males and females, the rich and the poor. The Old Testament grew out of such hindsight.

D. The Adjustment. At some point in the life of Israel, someone (or, more likely, a group of people) looked back at the past and concluded that God had:

- . called their ancestors out of paganism
- . protected them during their nomadic existence
- . sold them into slavery
- . rescued them from bondage
- . chose them as a special people
- . made a covenant with them
- . gave them a mission
- . warned them of failure
- . sent them into exile
- . returned them back to their land

This story convinced Israel that she was a distinct people with a purpose. Though the periodic traumas of her history challenged that conclusion, the story remained an anchor and a compass for the Jews. Collecting and preserving these materials was important to those who believed that that story was their unique heritage and their guiding beacon.

## V. How Did The Old Testament Develop?

The development of the Old Testament can be compared to a river and its tributaries. A river does not begin full size. Rather, it starts as a trickle that becomes a creek that joins with other creeks to form a river. So it was with the Old Testament. God spoke to various people, at different times, and under diverse circumstances, Hebrews 1:1. The accumulation of these messages from God became what we call the Scriptures, II Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:2; II Peter 1:19-21. God gave His word to human beings. Human beings preserved His message in two stages: oral and written form.

A. Oral. The first streams of the Old Testament message were the oral traditions: poems of victory, stories of ancestors, and memories of great events. Values were formed and beliefs were sanctioned. The storyteller was the teacher and the story was the medium through which he taught. When the extended families gathered for worship, stories were shared. The inventory of narratives grew over time. Whether God calling Abraham out of Ur, whether Jacob outwitting Esau, whether Joseph becoming Prime Minister of Egypt, or whether Israel making the golden calf, each story remembered saints and sinners, each story had an important lesson to teach. A country without its stories is a people without a compass. Hence, the oral

traditions needed to be written so they could be preserved and, in turn, be the preserver of the nation, Isaiah 40:9; I Corinthians 10:11.

B. Written. It is difficult to say when the smaller streams of tradition were put together into a larger narrative. Likely, Moses made the first efforts in that direction, Exodus 17:14; 24:3,4. Joshua followed suit, Joshua 24:25,26. Solomon continued the process, I Kings 2:29-34. Jeremiah also wrote down what God told him to preserve. These (and other) streams came together to form the river of information called the Old Testament.

Today, we expend considerable energy archiving the precious materials of our nation—Constitution, Bill of Rights, Gettysburg Address, presidential papers, etc. So, also, Israel archived her most meaningful literature.

Thus, as a river finally reaches the ocean, the Hebrew Bible finally took shape in the form we now have it. The Old Testament became the valued possession of the Jewish nation and (her offspring) the Christian faith.

#### VI. When Did The Final Product Emerge?

The finished collection (described above) was called the “canon.” Originally, the word canon referred to “*a measuring stick*.” When the term was applied to literature, it meant a body of writing that was considered sacred (because it contained the message of God). The process by which these literary works achieved a sacred status is called “canonization.”

There were many writings circulating in the ancient times:

- . Book of Jashar, II Samuel 1:17,18
- . Annals of the Kings of Judah, II Kings 21:17
- . Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel, II Chronicles 16:11

There were also many materials circulating in the later history of Israel:

- . I and II Esdras
- . Tobit
- . Judith
- . Baruck
- . Song of the Three Jews
- . Susana
- . Bel and the Dragon
- . I and II Maccabees

Why were these books not included in the sacred collection? There were three tests used to determine the canon:

- . Date of Composition
- . Ring of Authenticity
- . Depth of Spirituality

For a document to be included in the Old Testament, all three criteria had to be applied and passed:

- . The Law (or the Pentateuch) was canonized long before 1000 BC, II Kings 22:8-10. It was revered as the Word of God before 500 BC, Nehemiah 8:1-3,5,6.
- . The Prophets were given sacred status before the birth of Christ, Luke 24:25-27.
- . The Writings (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) were canonized in 120 AD.

The Jews took the canonization process very seriously. It is no small matter determining what one should consider the sacred text. We have inherited the product of their cautious deliberations. Should we not treat the Old Testament with an equal reverence like they do?

## **“WERE YOU THERE, BILL?”**

*“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, Genesis 1:1.*

How you regard the first sentence in the Bible determines how you view the rest of the Bible. The Scriptures begin with a simple statement: *“In the beginning God....”* If that is accepted, everything else can be believed. If that is rejected, everything else is denied. Faith or doubt starts at Genesis 1:1.

There is no better explanation for the existence of the universe than *“in the beginning God....”* Compared to that assertion, all other theories are silly. Take, for example, the explanation offered by the famous scientist, Carl Sagan. He said,

*“An alien spaceship happened to fly by the earth millions of years ago. Finding no intelligent life, the aliens emptied their wastebasket and departed for other planets. In the wastebasket was a tomato. The tomato rotted. The bacteria from the rotten tomato grew, evolved, and became an animal. Further mutation occurred. The animal became a human. Therefore, we are the offspring of a rotten tomato!”*

Such an explanation is foolish, irrational, and degrading. In a court of law, only eyewitness testimony is accepted. Hearsay is inadmissible. Only those who have first hand knowledge can speak. Only God can vouch for creation, Job 38:4-11.

Two men—Joe and Bill—were discussing the Bible. Joe believed in creation. Bill did not. *“How can you believe in such a story?”* Bill asked. *“Because I have the personal testimony of Someone who was there when it happened,”* Joe replied. *“And only His testimony is admissible as evidence.”*

It is presumptuous to doubt Him, Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:18-20. Only a fool says, *“There is no God,”* Psalm 14:1a; 53:1a.

I will trust my all to Him alone,  
Whose word is truth and light;  
I would rather walk by faith in Him  
Than go on alone by sight.

*“Unless you believe, you will not understand,”* Augustine.

## **BEGINNINGS, Genesis 1:1 - 5:32**

The word “genesis” means beginning. Hence, the Book of Genesis is literally a book of beginnings: the universe, man, sin, and so on.

### I. Creation

The Bible does not offer any proof that God exists. It simply assumes He is. The Bible states what God did: “*He created the heavens and the earth,*” Genesis 1:1.

A. Proofs Of Creation. Science cannot fully prove nor completely disprove divine creation. We rely solely on Scripture for verification, Psalm 90:1,2; John 1:1-3; I Corinthians 8:5,6; Colossians 1:15,16; Hebrews 11:1,2. Furthermore, Scripture implies that everything created was made without preexisting material, Hebrews 11:3; cf. Romans 4:17. The Lord merely spoke it into existence, Genesis 1:3,6,9,14,20,24; Psalm 33:6,9.

B. Interpretations Of Creation. In order to explain dinosaur fossils, the creation is interpreted in various ways.

1. The “Gap” Theory. This view places millions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. And, it requires substituting the term “became” for the word “was” in Genesis 1:2. Then, one can argue that Genesis 1:3-26 is the account of restoring the earth to its original condition in six days. Dinosaurs and cavemen were present before the chaos. Thus, the fossils are explained (though the “gap” theory at best twists the Bible to fit its bias).

2. Six “Ages” Theory. Other people view the six days of creation as six ages of indefinite duration. This interpretation allows ample time for the data of science. Though creation occurred over millions of years, according to “six ages theory,” God portrayed His creative activity as six (twenty-four hour) days. This position is possible since the word “day” (or yom in Hebrew) can mean:

- . twenty-four hours, Exodus 20:8-11
- . span of time, Genesis 26:1
- . years, Genesis 18:11
- . long life, Psalm 91:16

Since yom does not specify an exact amount of time, the six “ages” theory is possible (but not necessary). A valid Christian faith does not have to decide the precise length of “day” in the creation story. The Genesis account is the most reasonable record of how everything known came into existence. Something was. Therefore, something is. That something was a powerful, intelligent, Creator God.

C. Processes Of Creation. When the earth was brought into existence, it was “*formless and empty*,” Genesis 1:2. Actually, it was a massive lump of mud, II Peter 3:5, like a sponge immersed in water, Psalm 104:6-9. In six days, God organized the world as we now know it. A “formless” and “empty” glob of mud was made into a beautiful planet. There is no “excuse” for doubt, Romans 1:20.

D. Results Of Creation. Two outcomes of creation require further explanation.

1. Expanse, Genesis 1:6. Some versions use the word “firmament.” We call it “sky.” Ancient people believed the heavens were a dome-shaped bowl (or cover) over the earth, Job 37:18. This “bowl” had doors and windows, Psalm 78:23, which were also called floodgates, Genesis 7:11; 8:2.

2. Rest, Genesis 2:3. Why did God rest? Was He exhausted? No! What, then, does “*He rested*” mean? He ceased from creating. He was finished with His world-making, Hebrews 4:4. In other words, on the seventh day, the Lord “abstained from work of creating,” Exodus 31:17. Ever since He has been busy maintaining what was made.

## II. Fall

“*God saw all He had made and it was very good*,” Genesis 1:31. Humankind was put in a beautiful garden called Eden, Genesis 2:15. They occupied themselves in caring for the garden. Adam and Eve had eternal life as long as they did not eat the forbidden fruit, Genesis 2:16,17. They disobeyed, Genesis 3:6, because they wanted to “be like God,” Genesis 3:5. They were removed from Eden, barred from the tree of life, Genesis 3:23,24. They lost eternal life. Work became a burden. Childbirth was painful. Life lost its joy, Genesis 3:17-19. Thus, we are still seeking relief from the misery caused by the disobedience—a simple sin with disastrous results.



## PURPOSE OF GOD

The Lord did not create the universe merely to have something to do. As an intelligent Being, He certainly had a reason for making the world. But what was that reason?

### I. Testimony of Scripture

The goal for creation must be the most valuable, the most fruitful, and the most comprehensive in terms of good. God is perfect, Psalm 18:30a; Matthew 5:48; Romans 12:2. Since the Lord is flawless, His purpose for creation cannot be trite or trivial. He intended the best. His original handiwork was “very good.” Because God is perfect, His purpose for creation must be perfect. Otherwise, His claim to perfection becomes an empty boast.

The purpose of creation ultimately terminates in God. He is the reason for the existence of all things. “*For from Him, through Him, and to Him are all things,*” Romans 11:36. The presence of the universe is strictly a matter of His deciding to create it, Revelation 4:11. He created it “*for His glory,*” Isaiah 43:6,7, that is, to make Himself known. If He had not created the heavens and the earth, He would have remained invisible, unknown, hidden from view. His creative work is His finger print in time.

Creation adds nothing to the glory of God. If it added anything to Him, He would not be complete in Himself. The same is true of an artist. His work does not add anything to His skill. It merely demonstrates the skill he already possesses. Therefore, the goal of creation is within God—revealing the glory He already possessed.

### II. Testimony Of Reason

God was not lonesome in heaven. For, if He created humans to find companionship, He failed (since most people reject Him). Human happiness was not the reason for creation. If He created the earth for humans to be happy, He failed (since most people are miserable). The plan of God was not a failure. He did not make a mistake. The Lord “*does nothing wrong,*” Deuteronomy 32:3,4.

Reason says the greater importance must be favored over the lesser importance. The greater purpose of creation is God (not man). Humans have always been slow to grasp that idea. They have tended to worship what was made rather than the Maker, Romans 1:21-25.

The purpose of creation focuses on the Creator. Creation does not increase His

greatness. It simply reveals it. Likewise, a tree does not add to its nature when it bears fruit. It merely demonstrates its nature as a fruit-bearing tree. So creation is solely an expression of the grandeur of God. He alone is worthy of the glory creation displays, Psalm 115:1. Hence, though we add nothing to who He is, we do everything we can to show what He is, I Corinthians 10:31; whether in evangelism or in service, I Peter 4:11; cf. I Peter 2:9.

Life has dignity according to what we put ahead of ourselves. Thus, we desire the greater gifts of ministry, I Corinthian 12:31; cf. Jeremiah 45:5a. The purpose of creation in no way was meant for the sake of human beings. It was to make known the majesty of God.

Many object to this idea. Physical imperfections and moral evils abound. The scars on the landscape of creation seem to contradict the divine statement that the world was “very good,” Genesis 1:31. However, God issued the original “very good” with full knowledge things would go wrong (in the same way a person stocks their medicine cabinet with full knowledge that someone will become ill). The present imperfections in creation are a direct result of human sin, Romans 8:20-22. These present imperfections are not the fault of God, but are used by Him to help man see his need for redemption, II Corinthians 4:17,18.

## **EXPLAIN BEING CREATED IN THE “IMAGE” OF GOD.**

In reference to the creation of man, the phrase “image of God” is found three times in the Old Testament and two times in the New Testament. Obviously, then, the primary sources of information are few.

### I. Linguistic Considerations

God proposed to make mankind in His “image” and “likeness,” Genesis 1:26. But, in Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 9:6, only “image” is used. And, in Genesis 5:1, only “likeness” is found. To complicate matters, “image” and “likeness” is preceded with a word that can be translated “in” or “after,” Genesis 5:3. Thus, “in the image of God” or “after the likeness of God” is both correct understandings of the phrase.

The term “image” is sometimes rendered “phantom,” “shadow,” or “dream,” Psalm 39:6; 73:20. It seems the writers of Scripture were struggling to express a difficult idea. They apparently did not want us to be overly literal in thinking we are exactly like God.

### II. Interpretative Conclusions

A. Man Bears A Physical Resemblance To God. This resemblance is similar to the “likeness” of Seth to Adam, Genesis 5:3. So, some would argue, a physical likeness must not be excluded. But, since God is spirit, how can those in the flesh bear a physical likeness to non-flesh? cf. Deuteronomy 4:15-18; John 4:24.

B. Man Has A Spiritual Likeness To God. Human beings are “self-contemplating” creatures who “think,” “feel,” and “decide” as free moral agents. This places them above the animals. And, as a consequence of their elevated dignity, man rules over all other creatures, Genesis 1:28; cf. Genesis 9:1,2; Psalm 8:3-8.

The references in the New Testament to the “image of God” point to the “reflection of a prototype,” I Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9. The realization that Christ is the “exact representation” of God negates our being “exactly like” the Lord, John 12:44,45; 14:9. And, well should that be the case, since Christ is, in the truest sense, the “image of God,” II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15. Thus, we are similar to God but not exactly like Him.

## RAINBOWS

*"I set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign," [Genesis 9:13](#).*

A rainbow is colors of light painted on a dark canvass. A rainbow is the child of a storm, the sun shining through a sky filled with tears.

The rainbow became the symbol of a divine promise to never again destroy the earth with water, [Genesis 9:11](#). Rainbows remind us of the cross. When the light of heaven met the clouds of judgment at Calvary, a beautiful promise of forgiveness came into view. It is the token that someday we will be with God around His rainbow-circled throne in heaven, [Revelation 4:1-3](#).

The rainbow is a parable. It tells everyone that nothing good comes into life without passing through the storm clouds of sorrow. Whether the birth of a child, writing of a novel, or the winning of a championship, pain is part of the accomplishment.

Yet pain alone cannot bring the rainbow of joy into our life. The tears below must be bathed in the sunshine from above! Unless the light of God shines on our clouds of distress, there can be no rainbow of relief, no promise of hope, no redeeming qualities in our suffering, [Job 3:20-26](#). Human pain is only worthwhile when it opens our eyes to the promised rescue of God, [I Peter 4:12-16](#).

Whenever we experience trouble, look for the rainbow and allow the sunshine of heaven to paint our black clouds with dazzling colors. Did He not promise, "*When I bring clouds...I will remember,*" [Genesis 9:14-16](#)? Praise the Lord, His grace is guaranteed, His comfort is assured.

Through gloom and despair,  
We look beyond our fears.  
The soul has no rainbow,  
When our eyes have no tears.

The Father in heaven sees a rainbow in every teardrop that is shed on earth.

## **THE FLOOD, Genesis 6:1 - 11:32**

After their expulsion from the garden, Adam and Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel. Bad feelings festered between them. The brothers became alienated. The first murder in human history occurred, Genesis 4:2b-5,8. Abel had offered a “*better sacrifice*” (than Cain), Hebrews 11:4. Jealousy ended in homicide.

The sin of Cain was characteristic of his descendants. Human life had little value, Genesis 4:23. Revenge, selfishness, and arrogance began to dominate the world. Though the people lived long—Adam 930 years, Seth 912 years, Mahalalel 895 years, and Methuselah 969 years—they did not live well, Genesis 6:5-7.

Some folks have difficulty accepting the ages (at death) of the pre-flood people. Their longevity seems excessive. The doubters propose a solution: change the word “years” to “months.” Certainly a different picture emerges. For, then, Adam died a 77.5 years, Seth at 76 years, Mahalalel at 74.6 years, and Methuselah at 80.75 years. But, when one tries to “fix” the Scriptures, they end up getting into a fix! For, in the same context, Adam would have become a father at 10.8 years, Seth at 8.75, Mahalalel at 5.4, and Methuselah at 15.6 years of age!

Actually the longevity in Genesis 5: reflects the pristine condition of the earth, the absence of contagious diseases, and the purity of the gene pool. The soil, the water, and the air were not yet polluted. Long life was possible. People got plenty of exercise and did not eat fast food. They were healthier. There were fewer viruses. The land was sparsely populated. Epidemics were unknown. Thus, one must not compare now to then. For our apples are not equal to their oranges.

### I. The Flood

There were numerous flood stories in circulation in ancient times. For example, the Akkadians had a story about an overcrowded earth.

*The people were so numerous and noisy that the gods decided to destroy them. Several attempts were made—disease, drought, and famine—but none of that worked. Finally, the gods flooded the earth. Afterward, a quieter world appeared. Now the gods are using various means to control the population so that the world does not become noisy again.*

The flood story in the Bible is very different. Humans were sinful, Genesis 6:11-13. The purpose of the flood revolved around the moral condition of men rather than the peevish attitude of the gods.

Many attempts have been made to confirm the flood story—including attempts to find the ark. None of the efforts have been conclusive. The truth of the flood does not depend on scientific evidence. The story of Noah reflects (1) the attitude of God toward sin, (2) the concern of heaven to preserve creation, and (3) the grace of God to establish a boundary for human behavior.

## II. The Boundary

Earth was no longer the paradise it had been. Formerly, man and beast lived in peace and harmony, Genesis 2:19,20. Then, the beasts began to fear humans (who become masters over them), Genesis 9:1,2. And, whereas humans used to shed blood without restraint, after the flood they became accountable for such behavior, Genesis 9:4-6. The world had become lawless. God gave it law and order. The reckless shedding of blood was especially singled out as taboo.

## III. The Covenant

God made a covenant (or agreement) with Noah, Genesis 9:8-17. The Lord initiated the agreement. It was evidence of His mercy toward the survivors of the flood.

## IV. The Tower

Humanity was not only united in language but also in rebellion against the Lord, Genesis 11:1-4. Men had a problem with sin. The rebellion took the form of building a tower. The insurrection was nipped in the bud. People lost their ability to communicate, Genesis 11:8,9. Overcoming sin is the focus of the rest of the Bible.

In the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the narrative deals with humanity as a whole. It was the story of everyone and their fascination with “doing their own thing their way.” The lights suddenly dim. A lone spotlight focuses on center stage. The drama of history took a major turn. Instead of all humanity under the microscope, the narrative narrows to one nation (through whom the message of divine deliverance is addressed to all the inhabitants of the earth).

However, before that nation takes the stage, God calls a person—Abraham. Then, through him, Israel is born—a people who the Lord chooses to be His special messengers.

## WRATH OF GOD

God is frustrated when His will is opposed or His love is rejected. He expresses His wrath in private and public disasters—though not all catastrophes should be seen as divine punishment.

### I. Wrath Of God In The Old Testament

God gets angry, Isaiah 12:1. His vexation is often described as “*overflowing rage*” or “*fierce anger*.” It sends disease, famine, and death on evildoers. God is depicted as devouring, demolishing, crushing, and slaughtering those who disobey His will, Psalm 78:56-59. Occasionally, His wrath appears peevish and unpredictable, Exodus 4:24; II Samuel 6:7 (though such understandings are the product of our inability to fully comprehend the transcendent, inscrutable nature of God).

A. Wrath And Sin. The anger of God is invariably provoked by deliberate human sin, Joshua 7:1. This is obviously true in the case of the flood, Genesis 6:5-7. Actions of injustice among the people of God ignite His rage, Isaiah 1:23-25. Idolatry does, too, II Kings 22:16,17. God punishes humans “*as their deeds deserve*,” Jeremiah 21:14. Otherwise, lawlessness would prevail and the world would become an intolerable place to live.

B. Wrath And Rescue. The anger of God is like the discipline of a parent. It is the expression of His concern for our welfare, Numbers 14:18. It is very significant that the name of God connected with the wrath of God is always Jehovah—the covenant making deity, II Kings 24:20. In other words, there is a close association between the wrath of God and the covenant with His children, Amos 3:2. It is His love for them that causes Him to discipline, Hebrews 12:7-11. However, if the betrayal of the covenant provokes His fury, His love constrains His anger, Psalm 103:8-13.

### II. Wrath Of God In The New Testament

The anger of God does not disappear in the New Testament. Actually, it stands out more boldly. The reason for His fury is the same—disregard for His will, Mark 3:5. Jesus reacted with angry irritation at the arrogance of His disciples. Behind the forceful cleansing of the temple, Mark 11:15, and the harsh words to the unbelieving crowd, John 8:44, was a deep indignation at hypocrisy and a stout reaction against greed.

A. Wrath And Salvation. Due to His hatred of sin, God was moved to provide for our salvation, that is, the wrath that despised evil was the wrath that crucified Christ, Romans 5:8,9; I Thessalonians 5:10. Therefore, “*there is now no*

*condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”* Romans 8:1. Though He was treated like a sinner, Matthew 27:24, He knew no sin, II Corinthians 5:21, so that we could be spared the fury of the Lord. It is by His grace we are saved, a kindness that was motivated by its opposite—anger toward disobedience, Titus 3:3-5a.

B. Wrath And Holiness. With a conscious awareness of divine outrage against sin, the early Christians were encouraged to be holy, Hebrews 10:26-29. To rest in complacent security in the kindness of the Lord, is to invite the wrath of heaven, Romans 3:8. A Christian who has died to sin should no longer live as a sinner, Romans 6:1-4. The children of God must not trifle with wickedness lest they fall again under the wrathful condemnation of God, Hebrews 2:1-3.

When all is said and done, one can conclude that the New Testament differs from the Old Testament regarding the wrath of God on two important points:

- . The New Testament takes an even graver view of the anger of God than the Old Testament because all avenues of escaping His fury have been exhausted (if salvation in Christ is rejected).
- . The New Testament announces reconciliation with God that is unknown in the Old Testament. In Jesus Christ, God is our friend. Hope replaces fear. Hence, far from an occasional hint of divine wrath, the New Testament echoes with warnings of judgment. The expulsion from the garden and the flood of the earth are reminders that we must take life seriously.

The New Testament begins with a mention of “*the wrath to come*,” Matthew 3:7, and ends with its fury in full bloom, Revelation 20:15,16. The wise will beware. The rest will burn!



## WAS THE FLOOD LOCAL OR WORLDWIDE?

People disagree. Their reasons are as different as their conclusions.

### I. Arguments For A Local Flood

#### A. It would be Impossible to put all the Animals and Birds in the Ark.

1. But there were fewer varieties of animals and birds in the day of Noah.
2. The ark had a capacity of 522 railroad cars. If the average size of the 35,000 varieties was a sheep it would only take 146 railroad cars to carry them.
3. The animals and birds may not have been fully grown.

#### B. The Words "All" and "Every" Are Figurative, Genesis 6:7, 17-20, 23.

1. It is a dangerous policy to rewrite Scripture.
2. The flood becomes a meaningless, local deluge.
3. What about other verses with those words, Matthew 28:18-20; II Peter 3:9.

#### C. It would be Impossible for Noah to Round-Up all of the Animals and Birds.

1. The Lord brought the animals and birds to the ark, Genesis 7:8.
2. God implanted a migratory instinct in them (like some of them have today).

The flood story is a test of faith. Do we believe God is powerful enough to cause such a disaster? If so, the flood was a worldwide phenomenon. If not, why care?

### II. Arguments For A Worldwide Flood

#### A. A Huge Boat was Necessary.

1. The purpose of the flood was to destroy everything, Genesis 6:11-13.
2. A worldwide flood illustrated a universal judgment, II Peter 3:3-7.
3. Everything perished, I Peter 3:20; II Peter 2:5; cf. Luke 17:26,27.

#### B. The Covenant With Noah.

1. Only a worldwide flood respects the inspiration of Scripture.
2. The universal deluge maintains the significance of the rainbow.
3. The issue is more than believing in the big rain. It is preparing for the final Judgment, II Peter 3:10-14.

## VICTORY THROUGH DEFEAT

*“... he touched the socket of his hip so that his hip went out of joint,”*  
Genesis 32:24,25.

The night of wrestling was a turning point in the life of Jacob. The context of this event explains the importance of the occasion. Up to that time, Jacob had—by cunning shenanigans—directed his own life. His trickery was over. Returning home, to an unknown future, he had no control. He could no longer depend on His own devices.

In those adverse circumstances, God was seeking to guide the life of Jacob. The all night struggle ended in a dislocated hip—a constant reminder that Jacob was unable to control his destiny. Jacob surrendered, sought a blessing, and God took over, Genesis 32:26-32.

The significance of touching the tendon of the hip is instructive. That is the strongest tendon in the human body. Yet, God, with a mere touch, overcame Jacob in his strongest place. Is not this what the Lord does today? He takes over our greatest strengths in order to bless us with greater potential, I Corinthians 12:7-10.

God does not want believers who are self-confident, who rely on their own skill. The Lord is looking for those who lean on Him. Heaven does not want self-assured, cocky followers. Instead, the Lord enlists the reluctant, Jeremiah 1:4-8. Jehovah wants those who wait for Him, for those who depend on His strength to move forward in His work.

When the Lord wants something done, He searches for those who have surrendered. He looks for those who have bowed to Him, who allow Him to become their source of strength. And, when He finds them, He is able to bless them with His power. Have we had a Damascus road experience?

God alone the victory gives,  
 If in trusting faith we rely.  
 “Surely in me He lives:  
 And He will conquer, not I.”

There is victory in defeat when we permit Christ to take over our life.

## THE PATRIARCHS, Genesis 12:1 - 50:26

With the story of Abraham, Genesis moves from the broad sweeping view of history to a focus on one nation: the Jews.

### I. The Times

Any further back than 1000 BC is at best a guess. Nevertheless, it is generally thought that Abraham was born around 2000 BC in Ur, Genesis 11:31. Ur was not far from modern day Bagdad, Iraq.

The patriarchs of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are portrayed as nomadic people—continually in search of pasture for their herds and flocks. Their chief mode of transportation was the donkey (since camels were not yet in general use). Grandparents, parents, and children lived together. The patriarch was the chief decision maker. The eldest son usually succeeded him in leading the family. They lived in tents. They measured wealth in terms of children and cattle.

A. Abraham. The Lord called Abraham to leave his country—the well-watered Mesopotamia to the semi-arid Canaan, Genesis 12:1. Abraham is promised land in Palestine.

- . Land promised, Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:7,8.
- . Promise fulfilled, Joshua 21:43-45.

The inheritance of the land was conditional, Joshua 23:15,16. Therefore, if the conditions were not met, the land would be lost, Deuteronomy 30:17,18. Like a clay jar, the nation would be “smashed.” And what is left would be “beyond repair,” that is, the land will not be restored to Israel, Jeremiah 19:1-11,13.

While the biblical narrative presents the patriarchs as men of God, they certainly had their warts and wrinkles. For example, famine forced Abraham to go to Egypt. Out of fear, he gave his wife (Sarah) to the king, Genesis 12:10-13. This scenario was repeated in Philistia, Genesis 20:1,2. And, later, Abraham—upon the encouragement of Sarah—had a child by her slave maid, Genesis 16:1-3. His action, in each case, must not be judged by our cultural norms. Abraham followed ancient law. His flaw was forgetting to trust God.

The biblical narrative also describes the great faith of Abraham. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old. Though he dearly loved his boy, God asked him to sacrifice his son, Genesis 22:1-15. This deed enshrined Abraham as a man of colossal faith. He is revered in three world religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

B. Isaac. Of the patriarchs, Isaac receives the least attention. He is pictured as a shy, quiet, meditative person dominated by the people around him. His wife Rebekah was one of those people, Genesis 27:1-10. Again, the biblical narrative shows these ancient people to be much like we are. They worshiped God one moment and ignored Him the next.

C. Jacob. This man lived a life of trickery. He fooled his blind father into blessing him (instead of his older brother Esau), Genesis 27:30-35. Jacob fled. During his escape, he had a dream about a stairway (or ladder) to heaven. God promised to be with him, Genesis 28:12-15. Once in Iraq, the former home of his grandfather, he marries two of his cousins—Leah and Rachel—while working for his father-in-law (the brother of his mother, Rebekah), Genesis 27:37-39. Again, due to his deceptive maneuverings, Jacob had to escape. God intervened to protect the patriarch from whom the nation of Israel would be formed, Genesis 31:20-24. A few weeks later, Jacob had to face Esau again. He pleads for divine protection, Genesis 32:9-12.

D. Joseph. Like his grandfather Abraham, Jacob was forced to go to Egypt because of a famine. Joseph, one of his sons, was sold by his brothers to a caravan of Ishmaelites (the descendants of Abraham through the slave woman). Over the next 15 years, Joseph rose from slavery to second-in-command in Egypt. This would have taken place during the Hyksos occupation of Egypt. Later, the Egyptians take back their government from the Hyksos. Likely, this explains why, generations later, a new king came to power that “*did not know Joseph*,” Exodus 1:8; cf. Genesis 45:7. The compelling story about the ensuing bondage of Israel is another proof of divine providence at work, Exodus 3:7,8.

## II. The Lessons

The story of the patriarchs has much to say about God and His relationship with the world—particularly Israel. These stories convinced the Jews that they were the specially chosen people of God. Obviously the Lord had to work through imperfect men. They were the only kind of people available. Is that not also true today?

## PROVIDENCE OF GOD

The word “providence” means the continuous care of God that allows everything in the universe to fulfill its original purpose. Creation explains the existence of things. Preservation explains its continuation. And providence explains its supervision. This truth is verified in two ways.

### I. Scripture

The Bible is full of statements about the care of God for animals, Matthew 6:26, and humans, Psalm 66:7. The Lord cares for those who trust Him, Isaiah 64:4. He supplies the needs of His people, Romans 8:28. And He punishes the wicked, Psalm 11:6. In His infinite wisdom, He overrules man in the same way humans colonize bees.

In respect to evil, the providence of God operates in four different ways:

A. Preventive Providence. God sometimes prevents sin. By grace (rather than obligation), the Lord keeps His people from error, Genesis 20:6. He uses parents, Ephesians 6:1-3, governments, Romans 13:1-4, and fellow saints, Galatians 6:1,2, as His preventive agents.

B. Permissive Providence. Sometimes the Lord allows humans to act out their evil intentions. He simply refuses to prevent it—not because He is ignorant, passive, or indulgent, but because He is determined to correct it, Psalm 81:11,12.

C. Directive Providence. God sometimes directs the evil intentions of humans to ends unforeseen by man. The Lord simply orders evil to flow one direction or another to control the harm it inflicts, Genesis 50:20. The evil of the brothers was directed to benevolent ends they did not intend. Providence overruled.

D. Determinative Providence. God sometimes determines the boundaries of evil. Wickedness is infectious, capable of infinite expansion. In determining the growth of sin, God does not alter its character nor involve Himself in its guilt, I Corinthians 10:13.

### II. Reason

The character of God—His justice and benevolence—guarantees the existence of providence. It is not surprising that He cared for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bring His purposes for them to fruition. The destiny of individuals and nations is not completely in human hands. The future is subject to a higher power. The moral order (although imperfect) cannot be accounted for without recognition of divine

providence. Vice is discouraged and virtue rewarded in ways beyond full human comprehension, Proverbs 19:21.

Some people object to such an understanding. They believe in casualism. Casualism maintains that chance (not divine providence) molds the future. This teaching stresses the causal, accidental, unplanned nature of all events. We can accept casualism IF it is merely another name for human ignorance, that is, a label for trivial occurrences in life which have no apparent meaning. In this way, chance is coincidence that humans cannot understand and need not be troubled about. For instance, the casual meeting of strangers is not necessarily the providence of God, although God could have arranged the meeting of the strangers, Ecclesiastes 9:11. Such a theory is rejected IF chance means the absence of all divine connections in all historical events. Chance is not cause. Chance is merely happenstance, Luke 10:31.

When casualism is taken to an extreme, it ties the hands of God, shuts Him up in heaven, and restricts His activity on earth. It breeds pessimism. Casualism does not explain the uniform sequence of events in nature. Chance is mindless. But the world reflects purpose. It is predictable—the product of a designing, superintending intelligence. Therefore, reason demands not only a cause, but a sufficient cause, for the flawless functioning of nature and the predictable outcomes in world events.

People reject divine providence because they often mistake an event as the special care of heaven when it is only coincidence. It is true that mistakes in judgment are made. However, such mistakes are a reflection on the ignorance of man rather than the activity of God. Providence (rightly understood) gives insight into the control of heaven over the events on earth. We are compelled by nature to believe in the providence of God.

To believe is not to KNOW the design but to trust that there IS a Designer caring for and overruling the processes of history. We are often guided without knowing it, protected without seeing it, healed without being aware of it, Isaiah 42:16. We often act more wisely than we understand and afterward look back with surprise on what has been accomplished, Ephesians 3:20.

## DID GOD APPROVE THE DECEIT OF JACOB? Genesis 31:6-9

One has to wonder how could God bless the conduct of Jacob? For, in truth, the patriarch did many unsavory things: he lied to his dad, stole the inheritance from his brother, cheated his father-in-law, etc. He went along with his wife taking the household gods that belonged to her father. Yet he is one of the fathers of our faith. It is enough to make one blush!

As far as the behavior of these ancient people, their deceptions are not given as an example of acceptable conduct. Jacob was a first-rate, world-class deceiver. His father-in-law was, too. This was (and still is) the culture in that part of the world. Nevertheless, Jacob credits his prosperity to God (and not to his trickery), Genesis 31:6-9.

Certainly Laban knew he could not accuse Jacob of unfairness, Genesis 31:38-42. And the Lord had warned him not to do so, Genesis 31:12. So Laban merely complained about Jacob sneaking away secretly, Genesis 31:25-28. Jacob defends his quick departure. He was afraid, Genesis 31:31. He had good reason to be concerned. Laban had considerable suspicion because of the decrease in the number of his livestock, Genesis 31:1,2. Jacob did not lie. He only withheld information regarding his quiet escape.

Rachel, on the other hand, had stolen the household gods, Genesis 31:34. Why? According to the law of Hammurabi—which was the law where Rachel had grown up before fleeing with Jacob—the one who had the household gods would inherit the estate of the father when he died. She had taken the idols to ensure her future welfare that (as it turned out) was unnecessary, Genesis 35:1-4. She had not trusted the promise of God, Genesis 28:15.

Jacob and Rachel should be emulated for their faith in God (not for their skills in deceiving). They were less than perfect people. God spared them for the greater purpose He was bringing to the world through them. This is precisely the reason why He gives us His mercy—for the greater good of the world. His grace is not a reward for our goodness.

## GOD'S PART AND MAN'S PART

*“Take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door frames,”*  
Exodus 12:7.

Nine disasters had come upon Egypt. Water was turned into blood, frogs covered the countryside, lice attacked every creature, flies were everywhere, boils afflicted the cattle, boils afflicted the humans, storms brought hail, swarms of locust ate all the vegetation, and there were three days of darkness. The land, the cattle and the people were devastated.

All of this happened to Egypt. The part of the country where the people of God lived was spared, Exodus 8:21-23; 9:3-6; 11:6,7. Up to the ninth plague, Israel had done nothing to prevent being harmed. They simply sat quietly waiting—God did all the work. Now things were about to change.

Israel had been exempt from the wrath of God until the tenth (and last) plague. They were not better than the Egyptians. It was simply because God chose to spare the Israelites. Suddenly the Lord held His people responsible. They must obey or suffer the consequences, Exodus 12:12,13.

Notice the change. This final disaster would inflict both Egyptians and Israelites who were unprepared. Israel must do something. In the first nine judgments, the children of God were spared by grace. In the tenth plague, they were spared by work.

The whole matter came down to faith. If they did not believe, they would not obey. Grace was the secret to avoiding divine punishment. However, obedience was required, James 2:14-24.

Today we will suffer eternal punishment if we fail to believe and obey. It is often said humans do nothing to be saved. The truth is humans who do nothing are lost, II Thessalonians 1:6-9. Everyone is already lost, dead in sin, separated from God. It is easy to remain lost. Simply do nothing. It takes effort to be saved.

God does not do for us what He has given us to for ourselves. That is the significance of putting the blood on “the doorposts and the lintel.”



## SLAVERY IN EGYPT, Exodus 1:1 - 11:10

The Israelites had settled east of the Nile River in the Land of Goshen, Genesis 47:27. Joseph died. The Hyksos invaded Egypt. Eventually, two and a half centuries later, the Hyksos were driven out. The new Egyptian ruler did not know Joseph. He was concerned about the increasing number of Hebrews living on the eastern frontier of Egypt, Exodus 1:6-10. His plan for dealing with the Israelites was slavery, Exodus 1:11-14. This occurred around 1450 BC, 1 Kings 6:1.

### I. Moses

If the exodus is the Declaration of Independence for Israel, Moses is her George Washington. Famous people with humble beginnings are a familiar theme in both ancient and modern literature.

A. Childhood In Egypt. Pharaoh issued an edict for population control, Exodus 1:22. Moses' mother ignored the edict, Exodus 2:1-10. Though raised in the house of Pharaoh, Moses did not forget the plight of his people, Exodus 2:11,12; cf. Hebrews 11:24,25. Moses fled, Exodus 2:15. Near Mt. Sinai, Moses married, had a family, and worked as a shepherd for 40 years, Exodus 3:1. Meanwhile, back in Egypt, things were not going well for the Hebrews, Exodus 2:23-25.

B. Call From God. The Lord had a plan for rescuing His people. The plan required human leadership. Moses was called, Exodus 3:7-10. He had deep reservations.

- . He was not the right person, Exodus 3:11,13.
- . The people would not believe God called him, Exodus 3:13-15.
- . He was not a good speaker, Exodus 4:10.

When asked to do things, we tend to make excuses? The Lord refused to let Moses dodge responsibility, Exodus 3:12; 4:11,12. Yet Moses persisted, Exodus 4:13. Finally, God won! Moses went back to Egypt.

### II. Pharaoh

The task of Moses was not an easy one. Pharaoh was a powerful ruler. Moses was the son of slaves, a keeper of sheep. What right did Moses have for requesting the release of his people from slavery?

A. His Attitude. Pharaoh rejected the request, Exodus 5:1-9. The Israelites vented their frustration on Moses, Exodus 5:21. Moses complained to God, Exodus 5:22,23. God promised to take action soon, Exodus 6:1. Indeed, God did act—though months passed before anything happened.

B. The Plagues. The struggle that unfolds is a battle between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt. The Egyptian deities were nature gods. Jehovah met them on their home court! All of the plagues display the control of God over creation: water, insects, cattle, storms, and people. These events are later celebrated as the sovereign power of Jehovah over the impotent deities of man, Psalm 78:43-50.

In approximately 12 months, 10 plagues were sent against Egypt in order to change the mind of Pharaoh, to secure the release of Israel. At first, Pharaoh was unmoved, Exodus 7:22,23; 8:19. Later, after several devastating plagues, Pharaoh initially granted permission but later changed his mind, Exodus 9:27,28,33-35. Finally, when the land of Egypt was completely ruined, Pharaoh commanded Israel to leave, Exodus 12:31,32!

Beyond a doubt, the plagues displayed the superior power of God, Exodus 14:31. The plagues were an assault on the deities of Egypt, Numbers 33:3,4.

|                      |                                    |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Nile turned to blood | Hapi: Nile god                     |
| Frogs                | Heket: Frog god                    |
| Boils on cattle      | Hathor: Cow god and Apis: Bull god |
| Hail                 | Seth: Storm god                    |
| Locust               | Min: Vegetation goddess            |
| Darkness             | Atum: Sun deity                    |
| Death of firstborn   | Osiris: Deity of Pharaoh           |

The plagues were a vivid visual aid to teach Israel that God—as their deliverer from slavery—should be obeyed, Deuteronomy 5:15. The God who brought order out of chaos in the creation made chaos in the order of Egypt.

## COVENANT OF GOD

The word *covenant* means “an agreement.” In the ancient world, agreements tended to have a particular form:

- . A preamble, such as, “*These are the words of . . .*”
- . History of the relationship between the covenant parties.
- . Stipulations of the agreement.
- . Public reading of the covenant.
- . List of witnesses.
- . Blessings (if kept) and curses (if broken).

The covenant was validated by an oath or promise by both parties to keep the agreement, II Chronicles 15:12-15.

### II. Secular Covenants

Secular covenants indicate agreements that do not include Jehovah. This category of agreement is expressed in three types.

A. Suzerainty. In suzerainty covenants, a superior authority obligates an inferior authority to demands dictated by the superior. Usually some prior inducement is necessary before the inferior power yields to the superior power, Ezekiel 17:11-14.

B. Parity. In parity agreements, the parties have equal power. The covenant is like a peace treaty, Genesis 31:44,45; cf. 26:25-31. God cautioned Israel about making such parity (or peace) treaties with the pagans in Canaan during the conquest because these agreements would have been sealed in the name of an idol god, Exodus 23:32; 34:12; Deuteronomy 7:2; Judges 2:2. Taking an oath in the name of a pagan deity would leave Israel vulnerable to heathen worship.

C. Promissory. In a promissory covenant, an existing relationship with another party is reaffirmed. It was a guarantee of a future keeping of a former agreement. It was a covenant renewal, II Kings 23:3; Nehemiah 10:28,29.

### II. Biblical Covenants

There are several agreements that bound God and His people to mutual obligations.

A. Abrahamic Covenant. The oldest form of agreement was the promise Jehovah made with Abraham. The patriarch asked God to guarantee that the promise of a child and a land was genuine, Genesis 15:1-8. The Lord obliged by making a covenant with Abraham, Genesis 15:9-20. It seems likely that passing between the

pieces of the slaughtered animals and birds was a very graphic way of proclaiming that the fate of the promisor will be that of the victims if he (or they) violate(s) the covenant, Jeremiah 34:17,18.

B. Davidic Covenant. God bound Himself in a sworn agreement that the dynasty of David would continue forever, II Samuel 7:11b-16. This agreement was woven into the fabric of the Hebrew faith, Psalm 89:3. The promise took on messianic implications, Hebrews 1:8.

C. Mosaic Covenant. Undoubtedly, the most influential covenant in Israel was that issued by God at Mt. Sinai. It followed the typical covenant form.

- . The preamble: *"God spoke all these words,"* Exodus 20:1.
- . History of their relationship: *"I am the God who brought you...,"* Exodus 20:2.
- . Stipulations: the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:3-17.
- . Public reading, Deuteronomy 5:22; 31:9-13.
- . List of witnesses, Deuteronomy 5:4.
- . Blessing and cursing, Deuteronomy 28:1-68.

The covenant God gave at Mt. Sinai was sealed with an oath, Exodus 24:3.

The Old Testament covenant tradition helps explain several passages in the New Testament. For example:

. The blood of the old covenant, Exodus 24:8, is mirrored in Calvary where the blood of Jesus ratifies, establishes, or seals the new covenant, Matthew 26:28.

. The obligation to keep the old covenant, Deuteronomy 31:12, is reflected in the stern warning to be faithful to Christ, Hebrews 10:26-31.

Covenant language is a powerful encouragement to take our faith seriously. Do we?

## HOW COULD ISRAEL PLUNDER EGYPT? Exodus 3:21,22

The KJV translates the verb “*to plunder*” with the words “*to borrow*.” The verb is commonly translated “*to ask*,” “*to request*,” or “*to inquire*.” There are only two instances in the Old Testament where it is translated “*to borrow*.” Exodus 22:14 and II Kings 6:5. “*Borrowing*” is also implied in II Kings 4:3. Still none of the cases of “*borrowing*” contain the sense of forced compliance.

In Exodus 3:22; 11:2; and 12:35, it does not appear there was any intention of returning the jewelry and garments. The items were seen as gifts (as Israel was preparing to depart from Egypt never to return). The Egyptians seemed well aware of that intention. Yet, they were under no illusion of being robbed.

Why were the Egyptians so willing to donate their treasures to the Israelite slaves? In the context, the Egyptians were afraid more disasters would befall them. They wanted Israel to leave, Exodus 12:33. Plus, it is quite clear that God caused the Egyptians to be favorable to the request, Exodus 12:36.

The word “*plunder*” meant “*to strip off*,” or “*to spoil*” as in taking “*booty of war*.” Obviously, the word is used here in a non-literal sense. There was no battle. The Israelites did not take up weapons. They simply made an oral request. To be sure, there was the compelling factor of the Egyptian fear that moved them to be generous. Yet, figuratively speaking, the Egyptians were plundered by the departing Hebrews, (as if Israel was taking booty in war).

Is there an ethical justification for “*plundering*” the Egyptians? Since it was a voluntary handing over of valuable items, it would actually be closer to giving a group of mistreated slaves a “going away gift!”

The whole episode is recorded to heighten the effect of the plagues. Pharaoh finally caved in. His subjects surrendered their possessions. In every way, God triumphed over a reluctant ruler and an obstinate population. Thus, Israel would always remember that their freedom from slavery was accomplished by the “*mighty hand*” of the Lord, Exodus 3:19.

## WHAT ARE YOU EATING?

*"This is the bread which the Lord has given you," [Exodus 16:15](#).*

The manna was perfect—good for children and adults—a complete food. It was like Jesus—our bread from heaven, [John 6:25-35](#).

There are three kinds of Christians: bottle-fed, spoon-fed, and fork-fed. New converts will likely be fed by others. Older believers should feed themselves. And mature saints will feed their fellowman, [Hebrews 5:11-14](#).

The Bible offers three kinds of food: milk, bread, and meat. This course is attempting to feed you meat so that you can become a teacher of others. Too many people are perpetual babies—in a state of arrested spiritual development, always depending on others for spiritual nourishment—rather than digging the food of God out of the Scriptures on their own.

The Christians in Berea were *"more noble"* because they received the message *"eagerly"* and examined the Scriptures *"daily,"* [Acts 17:11](#). They did not take the easy path of little effort. They did not go to church to be served. They did not practice a lazy religion.

We must not be like the lady who was asked by a friend what she believed? *"I believe what the church believes,"* she said. And what does the church believe? *"The congregation believes what I believe."* Well, fine, the friend responded. What do you and your fellow believers believe? *"We believe the same thing,"* she said.

What do you believe? Did you read it in your Bible? Did someone else merely tell you? Do you know where (in the Scriptures) your faith is found?

What are we eating? How often do we eat solid food from the word of God? Do we spend more time snacking on secular books or spiritual books, on human ideas or divine knowledge?

We are what we eat. Are we stuffed with Jesus? [John 6:47-51a](#).

Infants, adolescences, and adults,  
His children all.  
Some have grown to maturity,  
Others still remain small.

Tragically, it is possible to be a believer and still starve to death!

## **THE EXODUS, Exodus 12:1 - 40:38**

The plagues were so severe that Pharaoh “*drove*” (or “*threw*”) the Hebrews out of Egypt, Exodus 11:1. Approximately 2 million people left slavery, Exodus 12:37.

### I. The Route

It is difficult to pin point the exact route of the exodus. After 3,500 years, the names of towns, rivers, and mountains have all changed. This much seems certain—they did not take the easy route, Exodus 13:17,18.

### II. The Preparations

The Passover Feast celebrated the exodus. It was a family festival consisting of roasted lamb, Exodus 12:1-4. It was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, Exodus 12:8.

The word “*passover*” comes from the Lord passing over Egypt. He spared the firstborn male children in Israel while killing the firstborn boys in Egypt, Exodus 12:24-27.

The Israelites ate the Passover Feast in haste—fully prepared to leave Egypt, Exodus 12:11. For the Hebrews, it was a joyous celebration, Exodus 12:17. For the Egyptians, it was a sad occasion, Exodus 12:29,30.

### III. The Difficulties

The march to freedom was complicated by several threats.

A. The Egyptians. God guided the Israelites on their journey, Exodus 13:21,22. But, as it had happened before, Pharaoh changed his mind, Exodus 14:5-9.

B. The Sea. The Egyptian army trapped Israel at the sea. The Hebrews bitterly complained, Exodus 14:10-12. Moses stood his ground, demonstrated great faith in the face of enormous danger, Exodus 14:13,14. The Lord opened the sea. The children of God escaped. He closed the sea. And the Egyptians drowned, Exodus 14:21-28. All of this occurred at night, Exodus 14:21,27.

C. The Desert. The desert tested the faith of the people and the leadership of Moses. At the first oasis, the water was bitter. The people grumbled, Exodus 15:22-24. Then, a few days later, Israel grumbled, again. The food was in short supply, Exodus 16:2,3. In both cases, God provided. He gave them manna for the next forty years, Exodus 16:35.

D. The Amalekites. An even greater threat confronted the Hebrews. They were attacked by a fierce tribe of nomads—the Amalekites, Deuteronomy 25:17-19. The Israelites went to battle under the command of Joshua, Exodus 17:8-13.

E. The Leadership. The Israelites finally arrived at Mt. Sinai after 3 months and 175 miles of travel through some of the most desolate land in the world. God was with them. Yet, many decisions had to be made. Many disputes had to be settled. Moses organized a judicial appeal system for handling these day-to-day problems, Exodus 18:13-26.

#### IV. The Covenant

The people became the treasured possession of God, Exodus 19:3-6. The Lord made a suzerainty covenant with them—the Ten Commandments. We still keep all but one of the commandments, Exodus 20:8. Which one? The Sabbath commandment was given to Israel only, Exodus 31:13. And the old covenant—including the Ten Commandments—has faded away, II Corinthians 3:7-11.

In order to aid in the worship of God, a mobile tent (or tabernacle) was built. The people willingly donated building materials. Bezalel and Oholiab supervised the construction, Exodus 36:1-7. The tent had 10 components:

1. Courtyard enclosed by 7½ foot curtains
2. Tent (45 X 15 feet) divided into two rooms
3. Holy Place (30 X 15 feet) only priests could enter, Exodus 30:20
4. Most Holy Place (15 X 15 feet) where God dwelt
5. Altar of offering
6. Laver for washing (made from brass mirrors, Exodus 38:8)
7. Lampstand (or menorah), Exodus 27:20,21
8. Altar of incense
9. Table of bread
10. Ark of the covenant (with the “mercy seat”), Exodus 25:17-22

The presence of God came to hover over the tent, Exodus 40:34. It fulfilled a promise He made with Israel to be with them, Exodus 29:44-46. His glory filled the tabernacle. Plus, the cloud provided protection from the heat during the day and light in the camp at night.



## UNIQUENESS OF GOD

God revealed Himself to Israel. This disclosure occurred among societies that believed in a pantheon of gods. The belief in one God (among people who believed in many gods) could only come from a divine revelation. Jehovah was utterly unique.

I. *"There is no one like the Lord," Exodus 8:10.*

The God of Israel was without equal. No god was like Him. Several phrases are used to express this uniqueness. For example, the Lord said, *"There is no one like Me in all the earth," Exodus 9:14.* And Moses stated, *"There is no one like the God of Israel," Deuteronomy 33:26.* "No one like" indicates singularity, one-of-a-kindness.

II. *"Who among the gods is like you?" Exodus 15:11.*

Besides comparative statements, rhetorical questions were used to express the uniqueness and singularity of God, Deuteronomy 3:24; 4:34. Jehovah is beyond comparison among all divine beings. There is simply none like Him, none even approaching equality with Him. He is magnificent in holiness, awesome in splendor, and extraordinary in accomplishment. The anticipated answer to these "who is like" questions was always "none." When the questions referred to the Lord, the expected reply was "none but Jehovah."

III. *"The Lord is one" Deuteronomy 6:4.*

The escape from slavery and the passage through the wilderness shaped the identity of Israel, an identity that required them "to love Jehovah with all their heart, soul, and strength," Deuteronomy 6:5. To confess that Jehovah is "one," was to claim that no other God existed. Therefore, idols were not to be made or worshipped, Exodus 20:4,5; Deuteronomy 29:16-18. They were merely man-made pieces of detestable, useless, ineffective, dead stone or wood, Deuteronomy 27:15. Gods cannot see, hear, eat, or smell, Deuteronomy 4:28. They only disappoint and embarrass those who trust them.

The Lord made Himself known completely apart from idols, Deuteronomy 4:12-18. Moses asked to see the Lord. But human eyes cannot see Him. His glory is beyond our comprehension, Exodus 33:18,20; cf. Job 11:7-9. Moses only saw His back, Exodus 33:21-23. Hence, he did not see God as He really was. *"No one can see God and live."* But His Son has made Him known, John 1:18. Yet there will always remain a certain incompleteness in our understanding of Jehovah, while we live on this side of eternity, I Corinthians 13:9-12.

## WHO IS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD? Exodus 23:20-23

One of the most perplexing issues in the Old Testament is the “Angel of the Lord.” Who was he?

The word “angel” means messenger. Angels are sent by God to deliver instructions or announcements. The “Angel of the Lord” seems to be a special emissary from God.

### I. He Identified Himself As God, Exodus 3:2-6.

While tending sheep, Moses sees a burning bush that is not consumed by the fire. Moses investigates. He is confronted by the “angel of the Lord,” Exodus 3:2. The angel identifies Himself as God, Exodus 3:4-6. He had earlier appeared to the patriarch Jacob, Genesis 31:11-13. Moses takes off his shoes.

### II. He Is Identified By Others As God, Genesis 16:9,13.

Hagar, the slave of Sarah, was running back to her home in Egypt. While in the desert, she was visited by the “angel of the Lord.” She identified the angel as God. Knowing that humans die if they see the Lord, Exodus 33:20, Hagar must have been surprised that she was still alive.

### III. He Demanded Worship, Joshua 5:13-15.

While meditating on his strategy for conquering the Promised Land, Joshua saw the “angel of the God.” The messenger demanded worship which neither the law allowed, Exodus 20:3, or angels requested, Revelation 22:8,9. The “angel of the Lord” must be equal with Jehovah, a visible presence of the invisible God.

### IV. He Was Sent By God, Exodus 23:20-23.

God assures the safety and success of Israel by sending an angel to lead them. The name of God was given to this angel, Exodus 23:21. However, the Lord does not give His name to any created being (man or angel). Hence, “the angel of God” must be God. And, because He is God, He must be obeyed. No one must trifle with the Lord.

### V. He Was Not Himself Jehovah, Exodus 32:33,34.

The Israelites had just made an idol—the golden calf, Exodus 32:1-4. This was a super stupid thing to do. God was irate, Exodus 32:9,10. Moses pled for lenience, Exodus 32:30-32. God, in effect, delays their punishment. He sent an angel to guide them (since He refused to go with them), Exodus 33:2,3.

From the evidence mentioned above, it is clear that the “angel of the Lord” is the pre-incarnate Jesus, the Son of God. He is God Himself, already engaged in His intercessory work, prior to taking on flesh through the virgin birth.

## REMEMBER THE ONIONS

Onions are mentioned only once in the entire Bible. They are associated with Egypt. God had given Israel manna. The people wanted onions—the food of slavery.

The onions were symbolic of bondage. Manna represented freedom. The comparison is obvious—the one stands for our former sinful live while the other points to our new live in Christ, Romans 8:5.

When Moses delivered Israel, they left Egypt but Egypt did not leave them. They still longed for their former life, Numbers 11:1,5,6. They liked the onions!

This is a picture of our spiritual deliverance. We are saved but not freed from our former desires, Romans 7:21-24. What we need is a new nature that will overcome the old sinful self, Romans 8:1-4. The Scripture nowhere teaches that the old man disappears when we are baptized.

There is a constant struggle for mastery between the two parts of us, Galatians 5:17. Every Christian is keenly conscious of this war going on in them—the desire for onions and the need for manna.

Our entire spiritual development depends on whether the onions or the manna wins the battle. Take an inventory. Examine your activities. How much time do you spend in the word, in prayer, and in practice? That is the manna! Then add up the hours consumed in frivolous pursuits, idle talk, and questionable entertainment. These are the onions! The results will indicate whether you are living by the flesh or by the Spirit.

Are you dead in sin or alive in Christ? Are you living by the old self or by the new self? cf. Colossians 3:1-10. If we examine ourselves, it is easy to differentiate between the onions and the manna.

Help me be on guard;  
My foe is on the rise.  
Satan presses hard  
To draw me from the skies.

Going to heaven requires dying to the things of this earth. If we refuse to do it now, we will not get a chance to do it later!

## WILDERNESS, Leviticus 1:1 - Deuteronomy 34:12

The life of Israel was centered in the tent (or tabernacle) of worship. Jehovah was to be the centerpiece of their existence.

### I. The Organization

The *Book of Leviticus* lists the laws that God gave to guide His people. These laws included feast days, altar sacrifices, priestly duties, and moral obligations. The *Book of Numbers* described how God led Israel from Mt. Sinai to the Transjordan. It is a story of repeated sin and constant grace.

A. Preparations For Leaving Sinai. A census is taken both before and after the 40 year hike through the wilderness to show that God was faithful, Numbers 1:1,2; Numbers 26:1-3. The results indicate: (1) the numbers are round figures; (2) the tribe of Simeon had sinned, Numbers 25:6-15; and (3) God was with them, cf. Numbers 2:1-33 and 26:1-51.

B. Layout Of The Camp. The tabernacle was located in the center of a tent city for security reasons, Numbers 1:53. The camp was 3½ miles per side.

C. Order Of The March. The cloud hovered over the encampment. When the cloud moved, the people broke camp and followed the cloud, Numbers 9:15-23. Trumpets were used to communicate the order to march, Numbers 10:1-10. The sequence of the march was orderly and efficient, Numbers 2:1-34. A relative of Moses, Hobab, was asked to be “*the eyes*” of Israel in the wilderness, Numbers 10:29-32. Though he initially refused, he later consented, Judges 1:16; I Samuel 15:6.

### II. The Separation

Israel was to remain separate from paganism. This was facilitated by various regulations:

- . Sacrifice only in the tabernacle, Leviticus 17:3,4.
- . Do not practice incest, Leviticus 18:1-6.
- . Refrain from hybrids, Leviticus 19:19.
- . Forbid tattooing, Leviticus 19:27,28.

The Hebrews did not live in a vacuum, isolated from the rest of the world. They influenced the pagans. The pagans influenced them. God was trying to form a nation—free from idolatry—that would draw the pagans to Jehovah. Therefore, Israel had to reject all heathen practices, Deuteronomy 18:9-14. We, too, must live

separate from the world, II Corinthians 6:14-18.

### III. The Test

The journey from Mt. Sinai to the Transjordan was about 200 miles. The Hebrews took down and set up camp over forty times in 40 years! The stress of desert, nomadic life was enormous. The wilderness tested the faithfulness of Israel. And, unfortunately, they failed time and time, again.

A. Complaining, Numbers 11:1. Evidently the “hardships” were the cause of the disobedience. For some reason, only some on the outskirts of the camp griped. God does not like complaining, Philippians 2:14-16.

B. Cowardice, Numbers 13:1-3, 26-29. When the vote was taken, ten out of the twelve spies were reluctant to march into the Promised Land, Numbers 13:30-33. The majority was wrong! God withdrew His blessing. The people took things into their own hands with disastrous results, Numbers 14:39-45.

C. Rebellion, Numbers 21:4-7. The Israelites were slow learners. They continued to rebel against God. The harshness of the desert and the monotony of the manna wore them down. The message of the Old Testament is a reminder of our sinfulness, Romans 3:10-18. The unfaithfulness of man does not stymie the faithfulness of God (or alter His plan of salvation).

### IV. The Results

In spite of the setbacks, God brought them to the Transjordan. They were poised to conquer the land God had promised to give them. In the conquest, the Israelites were to destroy the pagans *and* their gods, Numbers 33:50-53. The reason for this extermination was twofold:

- . Their sin condemned the heathens, Genesis 15:16.
- . Their religion would cause Israel to sin, Numbers 33:55,56.

The conquest was a serious undertaking. Our victory over the world is, too. If we do not triumph over sin, sin will triumph over us. Which way do we prefer to live—as conquerors over sin or as slaves to sin? Israel had to decide. So do we!

## FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

The Hebrew word for “faithful” means firm, stable, or dependable, Psalm 36:5-7. As an unchanging God, He is consistent with Himself, true to all He has spoken, I Corinthians 1:9.

### I. Examples Of His Faithfulness.

We are surrounded with reminders of His dependability, Hebrews 1:10-12; James 1:17. In everything He does, the stability of God is seen.

A. In Nature. The “laws of nature” are not blind forces. They are the outworking of the divine will. The consistency in nature is the shadow of His faithfulness. The movement of the planets, the succession of the seasons, the migration of animals, birds, and fish, and reproduction “after its kind” has been uniform since the beginning. Upon that predictability, we depend for navigation, food production, measuring time, and planning for the future, Ecclesiastes 3:4. To the atheist, these are accepted facts for which no explanation is offered. To the Christian, they are evidence of the faithfulness of God.

C. In Judgment. The world confuses good and bad. The law courts make mistakes. But God is dependable, Isaiah 3:10,11. He is fair in all of His judgments, Job 8:3. There are times when the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer. However, in due time, God will be found right. We complain of unfairness, Habakkuk 1:12,13. God responds with the assurance that evil will get its due, Habakkuk 2:12-14. Our task is to trust Him and wait patiently.

C. In Grace. History is the record of His reliability. He promised His people the land of Canaan. He delivered, Joshua 23:14. He promised to send a Messiah. He delivered. God is faithful, Hebrews 10:23. He said He would keep our temptations within the limits of endurance, I Corinthians 10:13; I Thessalonians 3:3. And He delivers. He vowed to forgive our sins, I John 1:9. And He delivers. He said He would make us holy, I Corinthians 1:8,9; I Thessalonians 5:23,24. His faithfulness is our comfort, our security. Christianity is not a hoax. He delivers!

### II. Significance Of His Faithfulness.

The faithfulness of God suggests at least two things.

A. He Is Not Human. It is a given that people frequently change their minds—due to immorality, ignorance, or instability. They learn to lie as children, Psalm 58:3. They believe everyone lies like they do, Psalm 116:11. As a maker of idols claims his gods are like him, so liars think God is, too, Psalm 115:8.

B. He Does Not Lie. The promises of God are certain. Whether promises of blessing or cursing, His words will come to pass. God does not change His mind, Malachi 3:6. With Him there is no variance; therefore, we should be greatly encouraged, Hebrews 6:18. The promise of eternal life is guaranteed because God is faithful, Titus 1:2. His word will not pass away, Matthew 24:35. Because He is faithful, should not we be faithful? Does any excuse, any rationale for deliberately disobeying the Lord have merit in light of His faithfulness? God cannot break His promises anymore than He can cease to exist.



### WHO WERE THE RABBLE? Numbers 11:4

In this text, the word for rabble is also translated “*mixed multitude*,” “*other people*,” or “*aliens*,” Exodus 12:37,38.

These people were a mixed group of foreigners—neither Egyptian nor Israelite—that left Egypt with Israel in the exodus. They were likely fellow slaves who had suffered a similar fate as the Hebrews.

As neighbors of Israel, these foreigners were probably fellow victims of the oppression of Pharaoh. Like the Hebrews, they were happy for the opportunity to escape slavery. The enthusiasm of the fleeing Israelites was contagious. When the children of God left Egypt, the mixed multitude simply joined the procession. Certainly the recent miraculous actions of God made it easier for the rabble to make up their minds. Knowing that God was with Israel, these aliens naturally expected great benefits in going with them (though they had not factored in the hardships of the journey).

The rabble did not have a deep faith in Jehovah. Their ideas, thoughts, values, and ambitions were different from Israel. Their motive for joining the exodus was self-centered. They were merely caught up in a wave of excitement.

The mixed multitude was not forbidden to join Israel (though they became a snare to the Hebrews). They occupied a very low status among the people of God, Deuteronomy 29:4,10,11. Still, their negative influence should not be underestimated. They were a grievous vexation to Moses, Numbers 11:11-15.

Beyond the exodus narrative, the word for rabble is translated “*those of foreign descent*,” “*foreign people*,” or “*foreigners*,” Nehemiah 13:3; Jeremiah 25:20,24; 50:37. Perhaps, due in part to the less than happy experience with the mixed multitude, each post exodus use of the term, is in a context of divine judgment (or wrath).

The church is often home to “*foreigners*,” a place where people with self-interest are found. Our first inclination is to get rid of them. Jesus forbade our doing so, Matthew 13:24-31. Instead, we must be vigilant. Seek their good. Beware of their influence. Do what is right.

## WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?

*“Israel has sinned; they have violated My covenant, that I commanded them to keep,  
Joshua 7:11a.*

A great sin had been committed. No one knew it (accept the person who did it). Achan had taken some items (after the conquest of Jericho) which had been dedicated to God, Joshua 6:17-19.

The instructions were clear. Achan disobeyed. The Lord was angry, Joshua 7:1. The results were disastrous: thirty-six men were killed in the next battle. And the people became discouraged, Joshua 7:2-5.

The guilty person must be found. Sin cannot be ignored, Joshua 7:12. One by one the people of Israel were examined until Achan was discovered, Joshua 7:14. He could not hide. And, once his guilt was established, he was immediately executed, Joshua 7:15, 19-21, 25.

We can hide in the crowd, but stand before God as an individual. Judgment is a personal matter. Unless we confess, we will suffer the consequences of our sins.

On a stormy winter evening, a man went to church. Other than the preacher, he was the only person there. Whenever the minister said something about sinners, the man figured the minister was referring to him. Whenever the preacher said something about getting right with God, the man figured the preacher was talking to him. The man took the lesson personally. He applied it to himself. Hence, that wintry night, the whole audience turned to the Lord!

We are not invisible. God knows. He will surely ask us: *“What have you done?”* This is far more than a survey of the Old Testament. It is a preparation for our moment before the judgment bar of heaven.

We need Jesus to the end;  
He is the our best friend;  
No one else will do;  
He alone is kind and true.

The crowd is not our refuge. Jesus is our hiding place.

## THE CONQUEST, Joshua 1:1 - 24:33

The patriarchs were promised both posterity and land, [Genesis 28:13,14](#). The Book of Numbers confirms that the posterity promise was kept. The Book of Joshua shows that the land promise was kept. Hence, the study of Joshua is important for understanding the faithfulness of God.

### I. The Invasion

The story of the conquest of the Promised Land was direct and rapid. The takeover proceeded in a straightforward fashion. God reaffirmed His guidance. He encouraged Joshua to be courageous, [Joshua 1:1-6](#).

A. Preparations. The people were ordered to get ready, [Joshua 1:10,11](#). Joshua called on the three tribes that had already settled in the Transjordan to reassert their pledge to assist in the conquest, [Joshua 1:12-16](#). The help of God did not preclude human preparation. Two spies were sent to check out Jericho. They are detected. Rahab—an innkeeper—hide them, [Joshua 2:1-7](#). Did she lie? Yes. Like Abraham, [Genesis 12:12-20](#), and David, [1 Samuel 21:2](#), she made up a falsehood, [Leviticus 19:11](#); [Proverbs 12:22](#); [Ephesians 4:25](#), but is remembered for her faith, [Hebrews 11:31](#); [James 2:25](#). Her action is precarious at best.

B. Crossing Jordan. It was early spring. The river was at flood stage: swift and deep. It was impossible to wade or swim, [Joshua 3:14-17](#). And it was exactly 40 years—to the day—since Israel ate the Passover in Egypt, cf. [Exodus 12:1-3](#) and [Joshua 4:19](#).

### II. The Conquest

Israel stopped receiving manna, [Joshua 5:10-12](#). And Joshua conversed with the Angel of the Lord, [Joshua 5:13-15](#).

A. Central Campaign. Two battles are fought—both in unconventional ways.

1. Jericho. The people marched “quietly” around this heavily fortified city once every day for six days (with trumpets blaring), [Joshua 6:8-11](#). On the seventh day, they circled the city seven times. After shouting, the walls “*collapsed*” so that the army could go “*straight*” into the city, [Joshua 6:15,16,20](#). Obviously God gave them the victory.

2. Ai. Ten miles away the small town of Ai posed no threat (though Israel suffered her first defeat there), [Joshua 7:3](#); [8:25](#). Achan was the problem. Once eliminated, Joshua used a clever strategy to take the city, [Joshua 8:3-8](#).

B. Southern Campaign. The enemy used deceit (though in the end God gave Israel victory).

1. Gibeon. The victories at Jericho and Ai frightened the people in the nearby town of Gibeon. In order to negotiate a peace treaty, they resorted to a ruse, Joshua 9:3-6. In three days, the deceit was discovered, Joshua 9:16. The Gibeonites lied because they were afraid, Joshua 9:22,24 (which was predicted, Exodus 15:13-16). So the Gibeonites remained with Israel as slaves for centuries, Joshua 9:15,27; I Samuel 21:1-6.

2. Amorite Kings. The army of the Lord made a whirlwind sweep through the southern part of Canaan destroying every city in the area, Joshua 10:40-42. The success is attributed to the Lord who "*fought for Israel*." Consequently, everyone in the country refrained from saying bad things about the Hebrews, Joshua 10:21. These were stunning victories by a poorly equipped army against superior forces in fortified cities!

C. Northern Campaign. Like the south, the list of battles in the north was a "role call" of success (though it took a "long time," Joshua 11:18). It took seven years of continuous war to root out the pagans from Canaan, Joshua 11:19,20.

### III. The Settlement

Once the land was subdued, it was distributed among the tribes of Israel by "lot," Joshua 14:1,2; cf. Numbers 26:52-56. It was a common belief that the outcome of the lot was the "decision of God," Proverbs 16:33; cf. Acts 1:23-26. Hence, there were no disputes regarding the division of the land.

God had kept His promise, Joshua 21:43-45. Therefore, Israel ought to serve Jehovah, Joshua 23:6-8. The Israelites are reminded that, since God blessed them as He promised, surely He would curse them as He promised (should they disobey), Joshua 23:14-16. Jehovah keeps His promises. Count on it!

## POWER OF GOD

God is omnipotent. “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” Genesis 18:14a. No! He does whatever pleases Him,” Psalm 115:3. In other words, “*with God all things are possible,*” Matthew 19:26. He is able to do all things, though He may chose not to do somethings. Or, to put it differently, He can do all He wants, but not necessarily do all He can.

### I. Clarifying Omnipotence

God is not a slave to His power, since His power is under the control of His holy will. His almighty power is under an almighty restraint. The explosion of dynamite leaves no power in reserve. The exercise of divine power uses only what is required. Moreover, human action is not rendered impossible by divine omnipotence. Rather it exists because of it, Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 2:12,13.

God is omnipotent—though He cannot make a square a circle. God cannot do what is a logical contradiction. For example, God is truth; therefore, it is impossible for Him to lie. So, when it is said, God is omnipotent, it is understood that He is able to do anything that does not involve a contradiction to who He is or anything He has made.

Can God create a stone that is too heavy for Him to lift? If He could create such a stone, He would not be omnipotent! Likewise, if He could not create such a stone, He would not be omnipotent!

Logic of this sort is valuable in that it reveals the difficulty in speaking about God. One of the concerns of Bible study is the meaning of words. Words with a certain meaning in secular life often take on a more sophisticated meaning in spiritual discussions. “*Omnipotence*” is just such a word.

Take the problem of pain. If God is good, He would wish for everyone to be free of pain. And, if God is almighty, He would be able to eliminate pain. But many people have pain. Therefore, God is either not good or not all powerful or both!

### II. Defining Omnipotence

What, then, is meant by the words “*God is omnipotent?*” It does not mean God can do everything. For, once He opts to do certain things (or behave in certain ways), all other possibilities are excluded.

How can God be omnipotent, if He cannot do all things? For example, He cannot be tempted. He cannot sin. He cannot go to hell? Or is it because He is omnipotent that

He cannot do these things?

### III. Recognizing The Powers Of God

God is God not because of some external pressure forcing Him to be God but because He is in His very nature God. He is reliable not because He is forced to be reliable but because of a deliberate decision on His part to be that way. And, when He made up His mind to be reliable, He was excluded from being unreliable.

God has absolute power before He commits Himself to a course of action. Once He makes such a commitment, His absolute power becomes relative power. The distinction is important but difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, an illustration may help. Before creation, God had an array of options: He could create or He could not create. He could have done either. That was His absolute power. But, once He chose to create, He eliminated the “not create” option. His absolute power became relative omnipotence, relative to the choice He made. Choosing to do something means choosing not to do something else. God could no longer not create.

This leads to an apparent contradiction. When God makes choices, He makes limitations for Himself. If He makes us with a free will, then He must allow us to make decisions. God deliberately limited His possibilities. Is that a contradiction? No! If God is really capable of doing anything, then, He must be able to make decisions that create limitations (or restrictions) on His actions.

### IV. Understanding Divine Limitation

God can limit Himself, Philippians 2:6,7. Christ did. He “emptied” Himself, that is, suspended His use of His divine prerogatives (in order to take on flesh). He set aside His omnipotence, John 5:19. Notwithstanding, He maintained the moral attributes of God while incarnate—righteousness, holiness, and love.

God has all power—even the power to lay aside His power temporarily and become man. God choose to become powerless —to die on a cross so that we can be saved.

God had absolute power. He made choices that limited that power relative to the choices He made. Nevertheless, outside the circumference of His choices, He maintains His omnipotence. In other words, since He chose to save us in Christ, then He is limited to saving us in Christ. And, if we remain in Christ, no one will be snatched out of His hand.

## **EXPLAIN THE LONG DAY, Joshua 10:12-14.**

The Book of Joshua mentions several miracles. None is more widely discussed than the prolonged day during the battle of Gibeon, Joshua 10:12-14.

### I. The Problem

If the earth stopped in its rotation for twenty-four hours, huge catastrophic consequences would have occurred. Those who believe in the omnipotence of God, however, do not find that a problem (since He could have easily prevented such a disaster by merely suspending the physical laws of nature for twenty-four hours).

### II. The Solutions

A. Sun Delayed. It does not seem absolutely necessary (on the basis of the biblical text) to think that the earth was suddenly halted in its rotation. The passage says, the “*sun delayed going down*,” Joshua 10:13. In other words, the earth may have slowed down. However, the text says the sun “*stood still*,” Joshua 10:12.

B. Long Night. Some suggest that Joshua prayed early in the morning—the sun was in the east and the moon in the west, Joshua 10:12. The hailstorm prolonged the early morning darkness that facilitated the surprise attack, Joshua 10:9-12. The whole incident should be called the “long night.” Though this interpretation does not require the stopping of the earth, it does not fit Joshua 10:13.

C. Less Heat. Another possibility suggests “stand still” means “cease.” Hence, Joshua was actually praying for the sun to cease pouring down heat on his weary troops. The hailstorm accomplished this. Yet, that hardly squares with 10:13.

D. Long Day. Astronomers in Egypt, China, and India have concluded that a day is missing in the calendar. This missing day dates from the time of Joshua. Though enticing, no firm data has been submitted to confirm the theory.

E. Bent Rays. Others suggest that this was miracle. The Israelites were able to do two days of battle in a twenty-four hour period. The earth did not stop rotating. Joshua measured time by the length of sunlight. Consequently, God may have caused an optical illusion—continuing sunshine beyond the normal sunset—by a special refraction (or bending) of the rays of the sun.

Miracles are not to be explained so much as they are to be believed!

## QUALITY AND QUANTITY

*"There are still too many men,"* Judges 7:4

We live in a time of measuring quantity. So, if something is big, we notice: whether a big score, a big car, a big house, or a big gift. If something is small, we usually pay little (or less) attention.

When a church is large, we want to get on the bandwagon. If the church is small, it is often ignored. If the preacher boasts of huge crowds, he is successful. If he labors in a small congregation, we feel sorry for him. Yet there is absolutely no precedent in the Bible for such an attitude.

God is not nearly as interested in quantity as in quality, Luke 21:1-4. Gideon had 32,000 men ready for battle. God said, *"too many!"* Gideon reduced his troops to 10,000. God said, *"There are still too many!"* The Lord wanted quality not merely quantity. Gideon ended up with 300. God was pleased.

Why did God decrease the 32,000? Why did He reject the 10,000? Why did He prune down the troops to 300? Judges 7:1-4. The reason was clear. The 32,000 and the 10,000 would take credit for a victory. But, when the 300 overcame the thousands of enemy soldiers, Judges 7:12, the little army would know it was the Lord who won the battle. In the work of God, the flesh must have no reason to boast, Deuteronomy 8:10-18.

How often we detect pride in the exaggerated reports about the number of conversions. Yet heaven rejoices over the one sheep rescued rather than the ninety-nine that remained safe, Luke 15:3-7.

Jesus began His world mission with twelve reluctant disciples. That was plenty for turning the world upside-down. Today religion is popular. There are many mega-churches. There are thousands of missionaries. But the solution lies in quality not quantity. We will be stronger in the spirit if we are weaker in the flesh, II Corinthians 4:5-7.

For the wheat to multiply  
The grain must die,  
So death to "self" we see  
Is the way God measures quality.

The fewer apples on the tree, the bigger each apple will be!



## THE JUDGES, Judges 1:1 - 21:25

The Book of Judges covers 350 years of history (or from 1400 – 1050 BC). The events occurred after the death of Joshua, Judges 1:1. The Book of Judges differs from the Book of Joshua in two important ways: (1) it repeatedly mentions the failure of Israel to drive out the pagans, Judges 1:21; 2:3, and (2) it mentions more of the cruelties of war, Judges 1:6; 3:20-22.

### I. Failure Of Israel

The Hebrews did not drive out all of the pagans in the conquest of Canaan, Judges 1:27-33. Since Israel did not eradicate paganism, the heathens became a problem to the Israelites, Judges 2:1-5. The Hebrews soon began to worship idol gods, Judges 2:11-13. The unfaithfulness of Israel became the pretext for the punishment of God, Judge 2:14,15.

### II. Deliverance Of Judges

The neighboring pagan tribes attacked Israel. Yet, after a time, the mercy of God would send deliverers, Judges 2:16-19. This cycle of

- . relapse
- . retribution
- . repentance
- . rescue

occurs seven times in the Book of Judges. At no time was all of Israel involved. God was wonderfully patient. He used the pagans to test “the obedience of Israel,” Judges 2:22; 3:1.

### III. Consequences Of Occupation

Israel repeatedly failed the test. The punishment from God is introduced with a formula (or set of words), Judges 3:7-9; 4:1-3; 6:1, etc. “To sell” Israel means to give them into the hands of their enemy, cf. Deuteronomy 32:30,31.

A. Physical. Each time Israel disobeyed, every time they were “sold” to the enemy, life became difficult—oppression, cruelty, and mischief occurred. The severity of the punishment evoked a cry for help from the people of God, Judges 6:2-6; 10:6-10. The Lord would respond. A deliverer was raised up to lead the people in driving out the oppressors from the land, Judges 10:29-31. God was patient with a people that did not seem to learn from their mistakes.

B. Spiritual. Samson was the last deliverer. His actions seem wild, arrogant, and foolhardy. Almost all of his behavior is associated with illicit love affairs, Judges 14:1-3. These were rugged times in Israel. Spirituality was at a low ebb. For, although Samson was a worshipper of Jehovah and a hero in Israel, he was governed by his passions. He eventually dies a victim of His own sin. Thus, Samson was a deliverer that needed deliverance. And, like Samson, Israel needed a deliverer, too.

1. Idolatry. The last five chapters of Judges furnish a description of the results of repeated lapses into sin, namely, a weakened spirituality, Judges 17:6; 21:25. "*As they saw fit*" can be rendered "*did what was right in their own eyes.*" The people were making and worshipping idol gods (while the tabernacle was close by), Judges 17:1,4; 18:27-31. This whole scenario is a sad departure from the covenant of Sinai.

2. Immorality. When the floodgate of sin is opened, evil runs rampant. A traveller stopped at a house for lodging. Some homosexuals in the town asked the host to give them the man so they could have intercourse with him, Judges 19:11-30. The spirituality of Israel was in ruins. Soon God would send prophets to remind Israel of her obligations—as a chosen people—to obey the Lord.

## PATIENCE OF GOD

The word “patience” is rarely found in the Old Testament, cf. Job 6:11; Proverbs 25:15; Ecclesiastes 7:8. In each case, the idea is to wait with persistent expectation, an endurance of present circumstances. Patience is not only a passive resignation but also an active contending with hindering hostility.

### I. An Active God

The writers of Scripture use familiar analogies to describe God. A potter serves to illustrate the active patience of the Lord.

A. As A Potter, Jeremiah 18:6. God is frequently visualized as the great Potter of Heaven, Job 10:9; Isaiah 64:8; Romans 9:19-21. As a potter, the Lord is in control. Though the clay often resists the shaping of the potter, God fully intends to mold us. Given our rebelliousness, much patience is required.

B. With A Purpose. A potter works with a design in mind. So God, by His providential grace, seeks to make us into the obedient servant that exists in His infinite will, II Timothy 2:20,21.

C. Who Patiently Works. Jehovah is not content with a misshapen pot. He aims to make a useful vessel of noble purpose. When the clay (us) does not yield, He begins again. New circumstances, new responsibilities, and new afflictions are sent to change the status quo, Job 23:13-16; Psalms 22:14. The Lord confronts us in order to determine “*what is in our heart*,” Deuteronomy 8:2. Obviously, the patience of God is our salvation, II Peter 3:9.

### II. A Passive God

A second analogy to describe the patience of God is that of a parent. When the child knowingly disobeys, the parent may passively withdraw to allow the child to learn from its mistakes.

A. As A Parent, Hosea 5:15. God has often withdrawn from His people—left them to their own devices. These times of withdrawal are filled with apparent contradictions. Our merciful God allows misery so we will seek the happiness found in Him, Isaiah 45:7-10.

B. With A Plan. God abandons His children when they have abandoned Him. He leaves them because they already left Him! II Chronicles 32:30,31. Imagine being hooked on drugs, growing weaker, and nearing death. You reach out to God but God does not return the gesture. Would you not feel forsaken? Would that not bring

you to your knees? Psalms 44:23-26.

C. Who Patiently Waits. In good times, we say to ourselves, "*God is good?*" In bad times we ask, "*Where is God?*" Psalm 32:3-7; Isaiah 55:6,7. God withdraws so that we may return. As a patient parent, He allows us to learn the hard way. When encircling troubles block our way, we recognize our limitations, and turn to Him for mercy. He is patient, Hosea 11:1-7.

## HOW COULD GOD ENCOURAGE MARRYING A PAGAN ?

Samson visited the Philistines. These heathen neighbors held Israel in a humiliating bondage. God wanted Samson to deliver His people, [Judges 13:5](#). However, Samson was too concerned with his personal interests to assume the responsibility of a deliverer.

The enormous strength of Samson overshadowed his meager dedication to God. He developed a willful spirit that was completely self-centered. Hence, the only way to get him to subdue the Philistines was to get him into a squabble with them over one of his personal interests, [Judges 14:19,20](#). Samson became irate, [Judges 15:1-5](#). The plan of God was working, [Judges 14:4](#). The Lord used the self-interest of Samson to liberate Israel.

The Philistines organized a militia to punish Samson for burning their crops. Their plan backfired, [Judges 15:6-8](#). Not to be out done, the Philistines retaliated, [Judges 15:9,10](#). Samson used their aggression as an excuse to take further revenge, [Judges 15:15](#). He justified his actions in a most selfish way, [Judges 15:11b](#).

His marriage to a pagan woman was not approved by his parents, [Judges 14:3](#). It is a mistake to conclude from this passage that God sanctioned the marriage. For, the Lord had strictly prohibited such behavior, [Deuteronomy 7:1-4](#). Rather, God used the forbidden relationship with the Philistine woman—whom Samson was going to marry regardless of what anyone (including God) said. In other words, Jehovah employed the rebellious spirit of Samson to accomplish His will for His people. Is this not the same thing He did with Pharaoh in order to deliver His people from slavery? Is it not what He did with Judas (and the Jews) in order to bring about the death of Jesus (so that the world might be saved)? cf. [Acts 2:22-24](#).

## CAN THIS BE NAOMI ?

Naomi left Bethlehem in the flower of womanhood. She had a husband and two children, Ruth 1:1. While in Moab, her sons married local women. Ruth was one of those women. In time, the husband and sons of Naomi died, Ruth 1:3-5. She went to Moab full. She returned from Moab empty, Ruth 1:20,21.

What a difference ten years made. The local people in Bethlehem were shocked. Hardships had taken a toll. Perhaps her back was bent and her hair was grey. Certainly her countenance was sad. Naomi was now a childless widow.

Have we had a similar experience? Someone we know goes away. Later, after the bitter blows of life, they return. They are different. Their hope has grown dim. Their quick smile is replaced by a long face. We shake our heads and cover our mouths in stunned surprise: *"Is this really him (or her)?"* we ask.

### I. Naomi Was A Pilgrim

This life is temporary. All relationships, jobs, homes, hobbies, and possessions will pass away. Everyone (and everything) is terminal, I Peter 1:24,25a. Certainly Naomi was reminded of her mortality. We are, too. There is always something to remind us that earth is not our permanent home. We long for a better place. That longing keeps us centered in God, II Corinthian 4:16-18.

### II. We Are A Traveller

While we are young, we start on our journey with a cheerful heart. Brave and noble, we are ready to take on the world. We meet the vicissitudes of life with courage and energy. Our armor of faith is new and bright. Our spiritual enthusiasm is keen and fresh. We go forth full of hope and enterprise.

No one would want it otherwise. To be determined and unflinching is a great attitude. Happy visions fill the mind. New strategies are waiting to be tried. After awhile, however, sobering realizations come home. Things do not turn out as we hoped. Battles are won and lost. Friends come and go. Weariness replaces the bravado. Tough experiences bring strange discoveries. It is not as easy as we once thought it was.

Those who knew us stare in disbelief: *"Is this really you?"* We have changed. Living is no longer simple. Nevertheless, if we keep our faith, we will continue to sing with a hearty voice. In spite of the tears, life is good. We stand tall in the Lord (though mellowed in spirit). We endure the pain because life can be painful. We praise God for His kindness, Ruth 2:20. The finish line is just up ahead!

## **RUTH, Ruth 1:1 - 4:22**

The Book of Ruth stands in stark contrast to the Book of Judges. During a period of unparalleled violence, war, and cruelty, a story of love, kindness, and loyalty is a welcome sight, a breath of fresh air. It reminds us that—when all around appears bad—there is good to be found.

The story of Ruth unfolds in an uncomplicated style, in a straightforward fashion. The events recorded in Ruth occurred in roughly 1100 BC (which is parallel to the latter part of Judges). One of the neat treasures of this material is the mention of various local customs.

### I. Choice Of Ruth

The story begins with tragedy. A famine is devastating Judah. Naomi and her family are forced to move to a foreign country, Ruth 1:1. The famine may have been triggered by the invasion of the Midianites, Judges 6:1-6.

A. Struggles Of Naomi. Naomi lived tens years in Moab (part of that time as a widow), Ruth 1:3-5. Her sojourn in Moab was further complicated by the recent hostility between Israel and Moab, Judges 3:12-30.

B. Decision Of Ruth. The situation in Israel improved. Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem, Ruth 1:6. She begged her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, Ruth 1:8,9. At first, they refused, Ruth 1:8-10. And, though Orpah changed her mind, Ruth remained with Naomi, Ruth 1:18. She “*clung*” to her, Ruth 1:14 (the same word used in Genesis 2:24; cf. Joshua 23:8; Psalm 63:8).

### II. Reward Of Jehovah

The god of the Moabites was Chemosh, I Kings 11:7. Children were offered as burnt offerings to Chemosh, II Kings 3:26,27. Ruth decided that Jehovah would become her God, Ruth 1:16.

A. Boaz Meets Ruth. Boaz was a relative of the deceased husband of Naomi, Ruth 2:1. He was wealthy. Ruth picked the “gleanings” in the field of Boaz, Ruth 2:2,3; cf. Leviticus 19:9. Boaz treats Ruth kindly, Ruth 2:8,9. He had heard of her kindness, Ruth 2:11,12. She accepted his generosity with polite respect, Ruth 2:13. Seemingly, he could not do enough for her, Ruth 2:14-16. The workers were not to make fun of this poor foreigner.

B. Boaz Wants Ruth. Ruth was industrious and frugal, Ruth 2:17,18. An “*ephah*” was a bushel (or 25 pounds of grain), a three-week supply of food for two people.

She was a virtuous woman, Proverbs 31:14. That would attract any man in an ancient, agrarian culture. Naomi was elated. Boaz was a redeemer, Ruth 2:20; cf. Leviticus 25:25.

C. Boaz Marries Ruth. Naomi acted as a matchmaker. She advised Ruth to help Boaz state his marital interest in her, Ruth 3:1-10. According to our customs, the boldness of Ruth seems morally questionable, yet it was not so in ancient Israel. Her action was simply the way a widow could ask a kinsmen to marry her. No indecency was involved, Ezekiel 16:8. Boaz seems to be attracted to Ruth. He hesitated, perhaps, because he was older, Ruth 3:10. Eventually, Boaz marries Ruth. She became the great-grandmother of king David, Ruth 4:13,17. The real significance of the story is that a pagan woman becomes part of the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew 1:5,6.



## MERCY OF GOD

The word “mercy” has a variety of meanings. When applied to God, it denotes an inner feeling expressed in kind actions. Generally, however, it points to divine love demonstrated in saving acts of grace toward His covenant people.

There are several words in Hebrew for mercy. These terms are translated “*to have compassion,*” “*to show favor,*” “*to be gracious,*” “*to spare,*” “*to pity,*” or “*express steadfast love,*” Genesis 19:16; Isaiah 63:9.

### I. Familial Love

One of the Hebrew words for “mercy” is derived from a term meaning “womb.” Therefore, originally mercy was connected to a motherly feeling—the love of a mother for her child, Isaiah 49:15. The idea was expanded to Jehovah having compassion as a father, Psalms 103:13, and as a loving husband, Ezekiel 16:1-8.

### II. Covenant Care

It is a mistake to define the mercy of God solely in terms of an inner feeling. The mercy of God in the Old Testament—like His faithfulness, His righteousness, and His judgment—are bound up in His covenant relationship with Israel, Exodus 33:19. Not once is the mercy of God granted to those outside the covenant. Though mercy can be a feeling, II Chronicles 36:15, it is never expressed apart from a concrete, outward act of divine compassion, a loving deed of God toward His covenant people. The mercy of God is shown in many different ways:

- . forgiveness (whereby a relationship is restored), Deuteronomy 13:17.
- . deliverance from enemies, Nehemiah 9:27,28.
- . fulfillment of His promise, Jeremiah 33:25,26.
- . bringing Israel back from exile, Ezekiel 39:25.
- . restoration of fellowship with His people, Hosea 2:19,23.

Whatever the specific act of compassion, it was outward proof that God, who had made a covenant with Israel, still cared for her—by providing for and protecting her, Isaiah 54:10. The Lord fulfilled His covenant obligations—like a loving husband—not out of duty but out of kindness. Hence, Israel could appeal to the mercy of God for help in any situation—not because she was good but because she was in covenant with the Lord, Daniel 9:18,19. That claim rested completely on her agreement with heaven. Because He had chosen her, Israel raised her voice pleading for His compassion, Joel 2:13,14. When all else failed, Israel believed the covenant mercy of God would remain, Isaiah 49:13; Zechariah 1:16.

### III. Compassionate Concern

There are a few passages in the Old Testament where the action of God consists solely in merciless behavior toward negligent humans, Lamentations 2:17,21; 3:43; Ezekiel 7:9; 8:18; 9:10; 24:14. In each case, (though not mentioned), the covenant relationship is the basis of the pitiless action. In other words, His compassionate concern is given and withheld in full view of His gracious agreement laid down at Mt. Sinai.

The Old Testament understanding of His mercy is carried over into the New Testament without alteration, Luke 1:50,54,72,78; I Peter 2:10. The New Testament use of the term “mercy” is only comprehended in light of the Old Testament, Romans 12:1; Ephesians 2:4,5; James 5:11; I Peter 1:3. In the New Testament, the Church is the chosen people. The new covenant in Christ is the foundation of His mercy toward us, Romans 8:38,39. That mercy, however, must not be taken for granted.

## HOW DO DEUTERONOMY 25:5-10 AND RUTH 4:3-8 DIFFER ?

In Deuteronomy, a childless widow is to be taken by a surviving brother as his wife. A son to this union will become an heir of the estate of the deceased husband/brother. Thus, the name of the dead man will not become extinct. If the surviving brother refuses the role of the substitute husband, the widow may lodge a complaint, remove his sandal, and spit in his face. The surviving brother who refuses is publicly disgraced, Deuteronomy 25:10.

In Ruth, there are echoes of the Deuteronomy instruction. However, several additional features are present.

1. If there was no surviving brother (which there was not, Ruth 1:3-5), then the levirate obligation applied to the closest relative (who was unnamed), Ruth 4:1-4.
2. If a relative agreed to serve as a proxy husband, he was obligated to buy the property of the deceased (which is mentioned in Leviticus 25:25) without the wife included in the bargain.
3. In the case of Ruth, a Moabite, there was a possible question about her descendants, Ruth 4:5,9,10; cf. Deuteronomy 23:3. Whether the Deuteronomy stipulation applied to a Moabite woman married to a Hebrew man (much less a Moabite convert) is an arguable point. The foreign status of Ruth, however, is certainly mentioned (twice)!
4. Because she was a Moabite (or because she had no desire to humiliate her redeemer), Ruth did not remove his sandal nor spit in his face. Actually, the unnamed redeemer removed his own sandal, Ruth 4:7,8.

Though these four features are obvious additions (or deletions) to the Deuteronomy passage, none of them contradict the levirate obligation outlined in Deuteronomy 25. The men followed the basic rules in Ruth 4. The failure of Ruth to carry out her role in the negotiation amounted to a forfeiture of her right to disgrace the refusing redeemer.

Regarding the law against incest with the wife of a brother, Leviticus 18:16, it did not apply in the case of a levirate marriage. The brother was dead. If Ruth had had a son with Mahlon, her first husband, than she would have been ineligible to marry a surviving brother (or any other relative such as Boaz).

## JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

*“How long will you keep getting drunk,” I Samuel 1:14?*

Hannah—the mother of Samuel—had gone to the tabernacle to plead with God to give her a son. At the time, she was childless, I Samuel 1:1,2. If she was given a son, she vowed to dedicate him to the Lord, I Samuel 1:11.

When Hannah went to the tabernacle, she begged in prayer for the blessing of a child. Eli, the priest, was at the door of the tent of meeting. He observed her intense prayer, I Samuel 1:9,10. She was praying silently—her lips moved but she made no sound, I Samuel 1:12,13. Eli hastily concluded that Hannah was drunk, I Samuel 1:14. His rash judgment mistook a brokenhearted woman for a wino.

There is something here to be learned. We ought not to make quick decisions until we know all the circumstances. If we know all the facts, our attitude would often change from censure to sympathy, Matthew 7:1-5. Often hidden motives explain outward actions, Numbers 22:21-31. It is embarrassing to realize our quick conclusions have perfectly rational explanations.

A beekeeper was placing some extra boxes on a beehive. The bees had filled all the other boxes previously placed on the hive. One bee misunderstood the beekeeper's intentions. Supposing he was an intruder, the bee stung the beekeeper. It cost the bee its life. The bee can be excused—its motive seemed right—but the rash judgment of the insect was still fatal.

Do not judge others. Get the facts and, then, leave the judgment to God, Proverbs 2:1-11.

Be kind when you judge another's acts,  
Be sure to gather all the facts.  
Let love take control before you decide;  
Breathe a prayer for wisdom—do not deride.

Guard against destroying others by rash judgments and hasty words.

## **STEALING THE ARK, I Samuel 4:1 - 6:21**

The Books of I and II Samuel are some of the most skillfully composed literature in the Old Testament. Three imposing personalities fill the contours of the narrative: Samuel, Saul, and David. The Book of Judges ends with a reference to the lack of a king in Israel, Judges 21:25. The Books of I and II Samuel chronicle the beginning of the Davidic dynasty.

The lives of Samuel, Saul, and David are mentioned sequentially (though their lives are intimately intertwined). Samuel anoints Saul as the first king. Later, Samuel anoints David as the second king. A struggle for power ensues (with Samuel busy in the background). The Books of I and II Samuel answer two important questions: (1) how did Israel get a king and (2) why did the monarchy become the Davidic dynasty?

### I. The Battle Of Ebenezer

A major crisis loomed on the horizon. And, in a strangely twisted way, it became a rationale for wanting a king. Israel was in a state of confusion. Philistia was threatening to attack. The Philistines were trained, organized, and experienced. Things were looking grim for Israel, I Samuel 4:1,2.

A. The Battle Plan. The Philistine strategy was to cut the country in half (similar to the war plan of Israel in the conquest of Canaan centuries earlier). Since the Philistines had iron weapons that were far superior to the equipment of the Hebrews, the prospects of Israel were bleak. The first engagement on the battlefield ended in heavy losses for Israel. In desperation, they decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield, I Samuel 4:6-9. However, the presence of the ark did not change the outcome, I Samuel 4:10,11.

B. The Disastrous Result. The second day of battle also went badly for Israel. The Philistines killed the sons of Eli, captured the sacred box, and caused the death of Eli (the priest in charge of the tabernacle), I Samuel 4:12-18. What was called the Glory "*had departed from Israel*," I Samuel 4:22.

### II. The Captivity Of The Ark

After the defeat at Ebenezer, the Philistines attacked Shiloh and demolished the tabernacle, Psalms 78:60-62; Jeremiah 7:12; 26:7-9. The wrath of God was visited on Israel for her stupidity.

A. Sojourn In Philistia. The Philistines carried the symbol of the presence of Jehovah home in triumph. Before long, however, they wished they had never seen

the ark.

1. Disgrace of their god. The Philistines put the ark in the temple of their chief deity—Dagon—to belittle Jehovah. The mockery backfired, I Samuel 5:1-4.

2. Disease among the people. The presence of the ark also caused the Philistines to get skin tumors. So they moved their trophy of victory to other towns. The same results occurred, I Samuel 5:6-12. Panic set in. The ark became a trophy of defeat. The people were anxious to send it back to the Hebrews. It had thoroughly devastated their god and demoralized the people.

B. Return To Palestine. The Philistines decided the ark was bad luck. They conferred with their pagan religious leaders about the best way to send the sacred box home. Two instructions were given: (1) make a guilt offering and (2) use a new cart pulled by mother cows, I Samuel 6:1-3, 7-9. The cows would not abandon their calves unless God overrode their natural instincts and forced them to do so. The cows obeyed the Lord. When the ark was found by the Hebrews, they made a sin offering to God, I Samuel 6:13-15. Unfortunately, curiosity got the best of those who found the ark—they peeked inside, I Samuel 6:19,20; cf. Numbers 4:17-20. The ark was moved to a town—8 miles from Jerusalem—where it remained for 70 years! I Samuel 6:21-7:1.

This whole episode (of the capture and return of the ark) reinforces a fundamental truth: the God of Israel is the only true God who deserves our reverent respect.

## PRESENCE OF GOD

God is everywhere, Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:23,24. He fills the universe. This is not merely a potential presence but a real presence of the Lord throughout the entire creation at the same time. We call it His omnipresence.

### I. Statements From The Bible.

When the Scripture says He “*dwells in the heavens*,” it is not limiting Him to the celestials, but exalting Him above the earth. Actually all of God is everywhere, II Chronicles 6:18,19. There is no multiplication or division of His being. The one essence of God occupies the entire universe simultaneously, II Chronicles 6:5,6. God is not compelled to be present everywhere. So He can (and does) withdrew His presence when conditions are such that He voluntarily abandons a certain place or people, II Chronicles 32:30,31; Hosea 5:6. He dwells in His creation on His own free will. The universe depends on His presence for its existence and maintenance, Job 38:4-41.

### II. Theories Of The Theologians.

The omnipresence of God resembles nothing known to human beings. It causes the scholars to spin their own theories. These suggestions have varying degrees of value. They reflect the best thinking of finite creatures struggling to grasp an infinite Creator. The effort is worth the exercise if it ends in humility before the Lord (rather than pride among men), Romans 11:33-36.

A. Deist Idea. Deism says God created the world. The universe—according to deism—functions without the continuing presence of the Creator. Though it affirms God as the Maker, it minimizes His providential care. In other words, after creation, God left. He remains gone, unconcerned. There is no need to pray. He is not listening. Deism basically says that humankind is on its own. However, that creates more problems than it solves.

B. Shared Causation. This view avoids the absentee-God difficulty of deism by insisting on the presence of God in creation. His activity is, however, restricted to being a *primary* cause. Nature and man are *secondary* causes. God, as a primary cause, according to this view, works through the secondary causes to maintain the world like a musician playing a violin. Although God can act without secondary causes (in miracles, for instance) He normally works through secondary agents. This view respects the reality of natural causes while acknowledging the primacy of God. Thus, natural disasters and human sins can be explained without directly blaming the Lord—for how does a good violinist play well on a faulty violin. But, since the secondary causes (nature and mankind) are created by God, the problem

of evil is merely deferred rather than avoided.

C. Process Thought. Some have concluded that God created the world. He endowed it with the ability to develop on its own in a process of gradual improvement. The Lord may nudge the process using “sympathetic influence,” but He does not control the outcome. The process view avoids blaming the Lord for evil, but does not recognize His power. Process thought appears to strip God of His deity. Indeed, is God really being discussed by process thinking? Is not process thought merely shared causation without an active primary cause?

D. Existential Influence. This approach tries to sidestep many of the tricky questions concerning the omnipresence of God. Existentialism focuses mainly on human existence. The “presence of God” in the world is restricted to His impressions upon the thoughts of people through His written word—whether read or proclaimed. This passive influence exhausts the perimeters of His presence. While that avoids many of the difficulties with a belief in omnipresence, it curtails His active involvement in the world. It makes prayer unnecessary. Direct divine intervention becomes impossible. It overlooks an essential element in the Christian faith—the personal interaction of God in history.

E. Sovereign Presence. According to this view, God created the universe, dwells in it, and maintains a powerful presence over it. All events are totally subordinate to His control and guidance. Humans cannot make God present. Bringing the ark to the battlefield did not force Him to be there. Rather, it demonstrated a serious misunderstanding of His sovereign presence. God was there. The people simply neglected to acknowledge Him. Do we? Matthew 28:18-20.



## **RECONCILE I SAMUEL 8:7-9 WITH DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20**

The plan of God for Israel included a king—a dynasty from the tribe of Judah, Genesis 49:10. In anticipation of that event, the Lord laid down some basic guidelines for this monarch to follow, Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Therefore, when the people asked for a king in the days of Samuel, they were not straying from the plans of God, I Samuel 8:5. In view of the fluctuating fortunes of Israel under the judges, it is not surprising that the people asked for a king.

Samuel was displeased. So was God, I Samuel 8:6,7. The reason for the displeasure of the Lord had to do with an assumption of the Hebrews. They thought they should mimic the form of government that their pagan neighbors had, I Samuel 8:20. Israel was merely conforming to the world around them. They were setting aside Jehovah as their king. They had forgotten that God had called them out of the world to walk in covenant fellowship with Him as a testimony to the heathen nations, Exodus 19:3-6.

Jehovah predicted that Israel would have a monarch. He promised it to Abraham, Genesis 17:6. He said that that king would come from the tribe of Judah, Genesis 49:10. He scolded them for their worldly motive in wanting a king. He warned them of the consequences of their choice, I Samuel 8:10-18. The people did not listen, I Samuel 8:19. In time, they regretted their actions. However, once the choice was made, the die was cast, the future was set, II Chronicles 10:11.

## EBENEZER

*“Samuel took a stone, set it up at Mizpah, and called it Ebenezer, saying,  
‘Thus far God has helped us,’ “ I Samuel 7:12.*

The Philistines unexpectedly attacked Israel, I Samuel 7:7-9. God threw the invading army into a panic. He sent a violent thunderstorm to frighten them, I Samuel 7:10. In order to remember this event, Samuel built a stone monument, I Samuel 7:12.

Like Israel, we, too, must remember the help of God. There is much to gain in taking an inventory of His blessings in our lives. He has come to our rescue on numerous occasions. We have not always understood His leading but we invariably find His way is best, Philippians 1:12-14.

A missionary was prepared to go overseas. With much effort, he had found support, obtained a visa, and was ready to board the plane. Suddenly he became ill. He was confined to bed for a week. This turn of events was disappointing. What did God have in mind? Why was the missionary delayed? Two days later all doubt was cleared away. The airplane—that he was scheduled to take—crashed. Everyone on board was killed. The illness that caused the missionary to postpone his departure became his Ebenezer! Psalm 119:173-176.

What is your Ebenezer? How has God protected you in the past? Can you name the day? Can you remember the incident? Your Ebenezer is a source of confidence for facing the future with the proper courage as a child of the Most High God.

The Lord has helped me.  
When my way was steep,  
He led me over high mountains  
And through waters deep.

He turned my weakness into strength.  
So in confidence I can say,  
Let me raise my “Ebenezer,”  
He has led me all the way.

It is certain, if God takes us on stony paths, He will provide strong shoes.

Psalm 115:9-11.

## **SAMUEL, I Samuel 1:1 - 3:21; 7:2 - 8:21; 12:1-25**

Samuel was a hinge in history, a turning point in the story of Israel. He was the last judge and one of the first prophets among the Hebrews.

### I. Samuel And His Mother.

A. His Childhood. The father of Samuel was a polygamist. The wives of Elkanah were Peninnah and Hannah. The two women were “rivals” (though Elkanah favored Hannah who was childless), I Samuel 1:1,2,4-6. Elkanah did not seem to grasp the pain of barrenness—which is typical of men, I Samuel 1:7,8. Eventually, Hannah had a son. She dedicated him to the Lord, I Samuel 1:21-28.

B. His Ministry. Samuel trained for the priesthood “*under*” Eli, I Samuel 2:11. The sons of Eli were bad examples, I Samuel 2:12. They were greedy, irreverent, and immoral, I Samuel 2:13-17,22. Though Eli tried to restrain them, his boys did not listen, I Samuel 2:23-25. In spite of the negative influence, Samuel grew up to be a fine, young man, I Samuel 2:26; cf. Luke 2:52. Notwithstanding, religion in Israel was at a very low ebb, I Samuel 3:1. At that crucial juncture, God called Samuel, I Samuel 3:10,11. Jehovah promised to with Samuel, I Samuel 3:19-21.

### II. Samuel And His People.

Samuel served in several vital roles during his lifetime.

A. Judge. Samuel called a national assembly. He told the people to put away all their idols, I Samuel 7:3,4. The Israelites had adopted pagan fertility cult gods—Baal and Ashtoreth—which required sexual immortality of both men and women, Hosea 4:10-14. Israel repented. They turned to Jehovah. Samuel was a successful judge among the people of God, I Samuel 7:15,16.

B. Prophet. Samuel was also described as a “*seer*,” I Samuel 9:8,9. In earlier times, a prophet was called a seer. His job was to speak to the people for God. Thus, when Israel asked for a king, Samuel delivered the warning of God to the Hebrews, I Samuel 8:4-9. The people did not listen. They insisted on having a king like their neighboring nations, I Samuel 8:19,20. It was in the role of a prophet that the aging Samuel met Saul—the future king.

C. Anointer. God told Samuel to anoint Saul (which symbolized his being chosen as a leader), I Samuel 9:27 - 10:1. In Hebrew, the term “*chosen one*” is Messiah. In Greek, the word “*chosen one*” is Christ. In time, the word came to specify the chosen Savior of the world. At first, Saul seemed reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership, I Samuel 10:17-24. The old judge and prophet, Samuel,

had completed his assignment. He laid out the regulations of the kingship. Then he went home, I Samuel 10:25. Israel was ready to start a whole, new chapter in her illustrious history. Few realized where their king would take them.

## KINGSHIP OF GOD

The term “*king*” is applied to God forty-one times in the Old Testament.

### I. Idea Of A King

Jehovah was understood to be a king from ancient times. Kingship was basic to Semitic thinking. All Semites thought their gods were kings—leaders of the people, Exodus 19:5,6. Kings commanded the army and dispensed justice, II Samuel 15:2.

A. God As King. Jehovah was first addressed as king in the song of Moses (after crossing the Red Sea), Exodus 15:18. The powerful King of Israel subdued the enemy of His people, Numbers 24:7b. Hence, they should remember their King lest they become proud, Deuteronomy 8:10-14. The kingship of God was not a dictatorial authority but a benevolent protection, not an office but a function, not a title but an action.

B. God As King Of Israel. The throne of God in Israel was above the Ark of the Covenant, Numbers 10:35,36. The tabernacle was His “dwelling,” Exodus 25:8, and, later, the temple was His royal residence, II Kings 19:14,15.

C. God As King Over The Entire World. The Lord was viewed as influencing history throughout the whole earth, Psalms 11:4; 103:19. Jehovah was king on earth and in heaven (forever), Psalms 5:2; 74:12; 145:13. The notion of a king limited to heaven was foreign to the understanding of Israel, Matthew 5:34,35. Therefore, the idea of Israel needing an earthly king was rejected by Samuel, I Samuel 8:4-7. In effect, Israel was rejecting God as their King.

### II. Reign Of God

The prophets of Israel used the familiar categories of the surrounding nations when speaking of their God as King: conflict and confidence.

A. Conflict. Jehovah waged a running battle with the fertility cults and idol gods.

1. Against Fertility Cults. Baal was the warrior king who supposedly controlled the elements of the storm, that is, the clouds, lightning, thunder, wind, and rain. Hence, God employed the elements of nature to defeat Baal—controlling Baal with what Baal supposedly controlled, Joshua 10:11. Hannah portrayed Jehovah as a mighty warrior. He granted fertility and dispensed justice. In other words, Baal was useless, I Kings 18:24,37,39.

2. Against Idol Gods. The war of God continued throughout the Old Testament

against idolatry, Isaiah 41:21-24,29. The god makers were created by God, Isaiah 54:16. The idol makers used wood but Jehovah created the trees. Idol makers refined, shaped, and molded their gods, while Jehovah refined, shaped, and molded His people, Isaiah 44:2,9-11; 46:6,7; 48:10,11. In other words, Jehovah was the active King of the universe while idols were merely passive products of human imagination. God does not share His glory with the gods, Isaiah 42:8.

B. Confidence. The Lord gave His people tangible evidence of His sovereignty. The successful conflict with the cults and gods led to confidence—the defeat of idolatry, the destruction of divination, Israel 47:11-15. The kingship of God issued into a confident hope for the future, Isaiah 9:6,7. The throne names of God indicated the nature of His kingdom. They bolstered confidence in His reign.

1. Wonderful Counselor. The counsel (or plan) of God will prevail, Proverbs 19:21.

2. Mighty God. Like a mighty warrior, Jehovah will reign supreme.

3. Everlasting Father. God, as King, is a protector of the poor and helpless, Psalm 72:1,2,4,13,14. His assistance is “everlasting.” It has no limits, it includes all the poor, Psalm 132:13-15.

4. Prince Of Peace. Shalom will characterize His kingdom, Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:6-9.

All of these throne names are applied to the Messiah who will reign forever on the throne of David, Isaiah 9:7. God is in control. The kingdom is secure. The future is filled with hope.

## DID GOD CHANGE HIS MIND?

*“Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: ‘I am grieved that I have made Saul king,’ “ I Samuel 15:10,11.*

God, who knows all things, knew Saul, as a king, would be a failure. Still He appointed him to be the first earthly monarch in Israel. And, during the early years of his reign, Saul proved to be an effective force against the enemies of Israel, I Samuel 11:1-11.

God knew that eventually Saul would disobey Him. He knew that a king from Judah would set on the throne, Genesis 49:8-10. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. David (his successor) was from the tribe of Judah. It was no surprise to God that Saul was not the beginning of a long dynasty.

Still, Jehovah was upset that Saul ignored His will, I Samuel 13:5-14. The Lord “grieved” over Saul. The Hebrew word is “*had regret.*” The term indicates “*a deep emotional concern,*” I Samuel 15:11. The word does not suggest that God was unaware of what Saul might do. Rather, the term merely indicates that the Lord was disappointed that Saul did what he did, I Samuel 15:29. The word translated “regret” in verse 11 is the same word translated “change His mind” in verse 29.

The Scripture is quite clear. God knew from the beginning what the outcome would be. He did not change His mind (though people can and do change their minds). When humans change their minds, it makes it look like the Lord has changed His mind. But God does not do that, Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17.

## GENUINE OR FAKE?

*“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart,”*  
I Samuel 16:7.

For thousands of years, pearls were a prized treasure. Millions of oysters were examined by hand to harvest a handful of gems. However, recently, the market was flooded with pearls. Jewelers were skeptical. There had not been so many pearls before. Were they genuine or fake? Upon careful examination, the pearls were actually made by oysters. So why were there suddenly so many?

The mystery was finally solved. The Japanese had found a way to cause every oyster to produce a pearl. They implanted a foreign object—lead buckshot—in the shell of each oyster! The oyster secreted a fluid around the irritant that hardened into a glistening pearl. The process took months. But, once it was finished, the pearl harvesters simply extracted their treasure from the oyster. The result was called “cultured” pearls. Outwardly, they were equally as beautiful as the real thing. But, when x-rayed, they were shown to have “false hearts.”

This is like many human beings. People can appear good on the outside but are full of corruption on the inside, Matthew 23:27,28. In other words, it is common for people to be “cultured” fakes, Jeremiah 3:6-10; II Peter 2:1-3. Religious people with false hearts will fool unsuspecting people but they will not fool God. For the Lord does not judge by outward appearance but by the content of the heart.

Are we “cultured” hypocrites” or “genuine pearls”? Jesus said, *“Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God,”* Matthew 5:8.

The quality of our heart is revealed by our attitude toward Calvary.



## **SAUL, I Samuel 9:1 - 11:15; 15:1-35; 28:1-24; 31:1-13**

Saul was tall and handsome, I Samuel 9:1,2. Samuel was told that he would have a visitor the next day. The visitor turned out to be Saul. Samuel was to anoint Saul the king of Israel, I Samuel 9:15-17. Samuel treated Saul with respect, I Samuel 9: 18,19. Saul was told that Israel “*desired*” him to be their king, I Samuel 9:20b. Saul could not believe it, I Samuel 9:19. Saul was honored at a banquet, I Samuel 9:22-24. The next day Saul was anointed king, I Samuel 10:1.

### I. His Early Success

Saul did not immediately take the throne (though the Spirit of God had “changed” his heart), I Samuel 10:9a. Some people doubted his credentials for leading the nation, I Samuel 10:27. Saul had not displayed the qualities the people wanted, I Samuel 8:19,20. The opportunity to demonstrate his military skill came soon enough, I Samuel 11:1-5. Saul was infuriated, I Samuel 11:1-6. He gathered a huge army and defeated the Ammonites, I Samuel 11:8,11. Then the people recognized Saul as their king, I Samuel 11:14,15a.

### II. His Terrible Mistakes

The Philistines gathered a large army that frightened the Israelites, I Samuel 13:5-7. The situation was urgent. Time could not be wasted.

A. Unauthorized Sacrifice. Samuel had told Saul to wait. The old prophet would meet the king in seven days, I Samuel 10:8; 13:8. Because Samuel delayed and the troops ran, Saul took matters into his own hands, I Samuel 13:9. The real error here was assuming he could offer sacrifices (like pagan kings did). It cost him the throne, I Samuel 13:13,14.

B. Unauthorized Action. God commissioned Saul to settle matters with the Amalekites, I Samuel 15:1-3. Saul won the battle but lost the war. He changed the clear command of God, I Samuel 15:19. God was grieved, I Samuel 15:10,11. Saul began to make excuses, I Samuel 15:13-15. Samuel would not listen to his feeble justifications for disobeying the Lord, I Samuel 15:16. Saul tried to plead innocent, I Samuel 15:20,21. He blatantly sinned. No excuse would cover his error. The Lord rejected Saul as king, I Samuel 15:22,23. Is this not a lesson for us today?

### III. His Maniac Moods

Since God rejected Saul, the Spirit of the Lord left Saul, I Samuel 16:14. The king suffered seasons of depression and melancholy that produced feelings of

suspicion and anger. Saul became so possessed by this malignant spirit that he even tried to kill his own son, I Samuel 20:30-34. It was suggested that music might charm away the evil spirit, I Samuel 16:15,16. They found David who was brought to play the harp for the ailing king, I Samuel 16:21-23. After David had embarrassed Saul, by subduing Goliath, the king became jealousy of David, I Samuel 18:5-9. Saul tried repeatedly to kill David, I Samuel 18:10-16, 20-29; 19:8-17.

#### IV. His Disappointing End

Saul went to fight his life-long enemy—the Philistines. All of his sons were killed in the battle. The king was critically wounded. So, lest he be captured by the enemy, Saul committed suicide, I Samuel 31:1-6. It was a disappointing conclusion to a promising career. The reason for his sad end was the lack of submission to the Lord. God does not deal kindly with those who ignore Him, I Samuel 31:8-10.

## SPIRIT OF GOD

The word “spirit” in the Old Testament is applied to God, to the manifestations of God, and to the divine element in mankind.

### I. Meaning Of The Term

The Hebrew word ruch means “movement of air,” “a breeze,” “wind,” and, thus, “a breath,” John 3:8. As a life principle, the “spirit” dwells in humans and animals, Job 27:3; Isaiah 42:5; Zechariah 12:1. The spirit belongs to God.

Ruch occurs as the expression “Spirit of God” ninety-four times in the Old Testament. The “Spirit of God” moved prophets to utter warnings, II Samuel 23:2, and to impart administrative powers, I Samuel 11:6. The phrase “Spirit of God,” therefore, indicated the presence of God in man, Psalm 139:7.

### II. Essence Of God

“*God is spirit,*” John 4:24. He does not have a physical body. The nature of His being is spirit rather than flesh. However, in order to make Jehovah comprehensible, physical characteristics are occasionally attributed to Him, Exodus 33:21-23. As belief in the universality of God increased, the concept of Him having a material body decreased, Isaiah 40:18-22.

### III. Manifestation Of God

Special appearances of God are variously called the “Spirit of the Lord” or “Spirit of wisdom,” Isaiah 11:1-3. In each case, the phrase is a feeble attempt to describe the presence of a spiritual being in a physical environment, cf. Ezekiel 3:12-14.

### IV. Divine Element In Mankind

In creation, it was indicated that humans have a limited likeness to God, Genesis 1:26,27. They have the breath or spirit of God in them, Genesis 2:7.

A. Image Of God. Because we are made in the image of God, we have intelligence and personality. The words “image of God” also expresses our transformation through the presence of God in us, I Corinthians 15:49; II Corinthians 3:18.

B. Temple Of God. Since we have personality—thought, feeling, and will—like God, we can have fellowship with Him. Our spiritual nature—which is from God—makes it possible for the Spirit of God to dwell in us, Romans 8:9-17. Human beings

can be the home (or temple) of God on earth because we have been given the image and likeness of our Maker, I Corinthians 6:18-20. His presence in us ought to be obvious to those around us. To claim the indwelling of God and live like the devil is a gross misrepresentation of the Lord in a society that does not understand the difference. Dare we mislead them?

## IS I SAMUEL 18:10a POSSIBLE IN VIEW OF JAMES 1:13?

Only good comes from God, James 1:17. Originally everything in creation was “*very good*,” Genesis 1:31. And God does not tempt us with evil, James 1:13. In fact, He is so pure that He cannot look at evil, cannot tolerate wickedness, Habakkuk 1:13a. His purity requires that He differentiate between right and wrong.

Yet it is absolutely necessary that God punishes sin—no matter how much compassion He might have for the wicked. The Lord brings disaster as a consequence of sin so that people may learn that He is the Almighty, that there is no other God but Jehovah, Isaiah 45:5,6. It is a painful lesson to learn. Nevertheless, it is the result of a process that is deliberately set in motion by man, James 1:14,15.

In the case of king Saul, he knowingly flaunted the commands of God: offered an unauthorized sacrifice and changed the instructions of heaven. The Lord took His Spirit from Saul. This left the monarch vulnerable to satanic influence—just like Judas became open to satanic prompting after he negotiated with the Jewish authorities to betray Jesus, John 13:2.

In the beginning, God established the law of cause and effect. Saul stepped over that law. In other words, his disobedience triggered the consequences. His actions cut himself off from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It left him a victim of the malignant spirit of depression that increasingly drove him to irrational paranoia.

Although Saul acted as an agent of the devil, his evil behavior was the penalty of a divine law, Ezekiel 18:20. In the last analysis, all penalties for sin come from the Lord in response to the actions of man, Ezekiel 18:25-29. Saul was guilty. He suffered the consequences.

The law of cause and effect also applies to us. And, should we ignore it, we will reap the same harvest.

## DIVIDING THE SPOIL

*“All will share alike,” I Samuel 30:24c.*

David established an enduring principle, I Samuel 30:25. He had gone to battle with 600 men. There were 200 soldiers who were *“too exhausted”* to enter the fight, I Samuel 30:9,10. The 200 were left to guard the supplies. After the battle, the 400 objected to sharing the spoils of war with the 200, I Samuel 30:21,22. David, however, stepped in and scolded the selfish soldiers, I Samuel 30:23,24.

The same principle applies today: *“all will share alike,”* I Corinthians 3:1-9. Some will serve on the front lines. Others will serve behind the scenes. Some will suffer the heat of the day. Others will barely break a sweat, Matthew 20:9-14. Some will travel thousands of miles to proclaim the Good News. Others will remain at home.

Everyone should contribute what they can, Ephesians 4:16. The work of guarding the supplies is just as important as participating in the fight. Some of us may go. Others of us will help go. All of us can pray. If you are—or become—one of those who cannot be on the front lines, you are needed *“to guard the supplies.”* This is indispensably important to the final outcome. When the Lord returns, the reward will be the same regardless of where you served (as long as you participated in the cause of Christ).

Never a soldier in fierce conflict  
 Could a higher honor bring  
 Than recognize those who perform  
 Secret service for the king!

No ministry for heaven is more important than any other ministry. No saint is more prestigious than another saint, I Corinthians 12:21-26. We are all members of the same team. We are all working toward the same goal. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

## DAVID: KING OVER JUDAH, I Samuel 16:1-23; II Samuel 1:1 - 4:12

I Samuel recorded approximately 80 years of history. II Samuel records 40 years. Though both books are the same length, obviously II Samuel has more day-to-day detail in the narrative.

After the death of Saul, his son, Ishbosheth, was too weak to unite the people of God. David, already popular among the southern tribe of Judah, was the only person with the charisma and intelligence to build a united nation. But, for the first 7 years, David was king over Judah only.

### I. David Becomes King

After mourning the tragic death of Saul, David went to Hebron (20 miles south of Jerusalem) as God directed him to do, II Samuel 2:1-3. About three thousand people, accompanied him, I Samuel 27:2,3. While in Hebron, the tribe of Judah chose him as their king, II Samuel 2:4a.

In the meantime, the general of the army of Saul, Abner, put Eshbaal on the throne of Saul, I Chronicles 8:33. The name "Eshbaal" meant "*man of Baal*." The writer of II Samuel changed his name to "Ishbosheth" which means "*man of shame*." Ishbosheth ruled from the Transjordan over the northern tribes of Israel, II Samuel 2:8-11. The nation was divided.

A. Civil War. Before long, a civil war broke out. Men with ambition sacrificed lives to take control over a shattered nation. Abner wanted Ishbosheth to be the sole monarch. After all, he was the rightful heir to the throne. So, to that end, he met Joab, the commander of the army of David, in mortal conflict at the pool of Gibeon, II Samuel 2:12,13. A grizzly, two-stage battle ensued.

1. Hand-To-Hand Combat. First, a contest of twelve combatants from each side fought to the death in a grim spectacle of wasted human life, II Samuel 2:14-16.

2. Army-Against-Army Warfare. Second, the armies engaged each other on the battlefield. The army of David prevailed, II Samuel 2:17. Heretofore, Abner and Joab had been friends. But, in the struggle, Abner killed Asahel, II Samuel 2:18-23. Evidently the butt end of a spear was sharp enough to stick in the ground, I Samuel 26:7. The victory was a lopsided blowout for Joab and the army of David, II Samuel 2:30,31.

B. Internal Strife. The battlefield rarely settles anything for very long. After a disagreement with Ishbosheth, Abner transferred his allegiance to David, II Samuel 3:9,10.

1. Abner Changes Sides. David is willing to accept Abner if Abner would bring Michal, the wife of David, back to him, II Samuel 3:12,13. This request was made for several reasons: (a) It would demonstrate the allegiance of Abner. (b) It would reunite David with his wife (who had been unjustly taken from him by Saul). (c) If the daughter of Saul was reunited with David, it would curry the favor of the ten northern tribes. And (d) it would eliminate a problem if Abner was killed in the rescue attempt.

2. Joab Commits Murder. Abner succeeded in delivering Michal to David, I Samuel 3:14,15. Joab became jealous since a reconciliation between Abner and David might diminish the influence of Joab (the nephew of David). Moreover, Joab could not forgive Abner for killing his brother (Asahel). Joab murdered Abner in cold blood, II Samuel 3:26,27.

Such brutality was the order of the day—an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth! At the hands of treacherous men, Ishbosheth was assassinated, II Samuel 4:5-8. David was not favorably impressed (as the assassins had hoped). David had these wicked men executed, II Samuel 4:9-12. As nauseating as this shedding of blood was, David followed the will of God in such matters, Deuteronomy 19:13.



## WAR OF GOD

The idea of war declared, led, and won by Jehovah Himself saturates much of the Old Testament narrative. These wars of God are called holy wars.

### I. The Holy War

*“The Lord is a warrior,”* Exodus 15:3. When that conviction is coupled with His power to win battles, a holy war ideology is born, I Samuel 17:47.

A. Preparation. Holy war must have the sanction and participation of God, Exodus 17:16; Numbers 31:3. *“Inquiring of the Lord”* was the usual practice for determining the will of God in such matters, I Samuel 28:6; 30:7,8; II Samuel 5:19,23. In general, defending the Promised Land was a holy war. The only exception was when God invited an invader into Israelite territory in order to punish His people, cf. Judges 3:7-10; etc.

B. Leadership. The military commander in a holy war did not lead in his own name or by his own skill. He was prepared for his leadership by a special endowment of the Holy Spirit, Judges 6:34; etc. If the Spirit was withdrawn, military leadership was removed—as in the case of Saul.

C. Conduct. The soldiers did not fight alone. God went to war with them, Deuteronomy 20:4. The holy war was *“the battle of God,”* I Samuel 18:17. Hence, the battle cry was *“the Lord has given them (the enemy) into our hands,”* Judges 3:28; 7:15; I Samuel 7:8. The willingness of David to engage Goliath is evidence of this confidence in God being with the combatant, I Samuel 17:45-47.

D. Outcome. There were outcomes in holy war. When a city was subdued, it was (1) spared if it accepted the terms of peace, Deuteronomy 20:10,11. (2) Men were killed if it refused the terms of peace, Deuteronomy 20:12-15. Or (3) it was utterly destroyed if the city was within the boundaries of the Holy Land, Deuteronomy 20:16-18. The latter outcome was called the “ban.” It emphasized the sacrificial nature of a holy war. In other words, the war looked beyond the day of battle to a time of peace that the victory brought. The war was the means of making a peace offering unto God—whereupon prosperity for the people of Israel ensued.

### II. The Later Developments

The war of God reached its greatest influence during the time of the judges. It took on new and different features thereafter.

A. During The Kings. When Israel got a central government under a king, holy

war became a policy of the king to serve his own purposes. A prophet gave the divine verdict regarding the wars of the kings, II Kings 22:5,6. Symptomatic of this change is the increasing importance attached to international treaties as a means of guaranteeing security, I Kings 15:18,19; II Kings 16:7-9.

B. Among The Prophets. While the prophets regarded universal peace as the goal, they were not opponents of war, Isaiah 11:6-9. For, the prophets—more than once—supported the king in his military ventures, I Kings 22:15. However, they were far more often against war. Since the grounds for holy war were missing, they were compelled to speak against such conflict. The necessary prerequisite of holy war (or the ban) was an uncompromising trust in the power of Jehovah. This is what Israel lacked. Rather, they trusted in material wealth, strength of their army, and political diplomacy, Isaiah 31:1; Jeremiah 9:23,24; 17:5; Hosea 7:11; Amos 2:13-16. Israel had chosen “*to mix with the nations,*” Hosea 7:8, that is, to become like the pagans. God permitted them to be a nation like the other nations (caught between the world powers). And, in time, the people of God, with their tiny army, became plunder of war, Isaiah 5:25-30. This is holy war against those who once waged holy war! The prophets saw the war of God as an instrument of judgment against sinful nations—His sovereign control over human history. He punished evil wherever it appeared (in Israel or in a heathen nation).

B. After The Exile. With the fall of Israel, another radical change in the idea of war occurred. Israel ceased to exist as a political entity. It lost its capacity to wage war. Holy war became a non-issue. Therefore, in the ministry of Jesus, war was not a central concern. He was the Suffering Servant not the Commanding General. He scolded Peter for relying on his sword, Mark 14:47,48. Certainly Christ could have marshaled “*twelve legions of angels*” to make war (and avoid arrest) in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:3. Jesus never spoke directly against war since it was the business of the Romans on the frontiers of their empire. The subject was not relevant to His audience in Palestine.

The apostles reinterpreted the holy war using spiritual imagery, II Corinthians 10:3. The struggle of the Christian is not against human beings but against demonic powers, Ephesians 6:10:10-12. The Christian calling is to make peace between God and man as well as between all men, I Peter 3:10,11.

### WHY DID GOD TAKE DAVID'S SON ? II SAMUEL 12:18a.

One of the profoundest insights in the Bible is the true meaning of death. Without the Scripture, death is a fearful experience, a final conclusion. If we view death as the end, dying is an awesome event.

The Bible, however, makes it plain that—regardless of how it looks—death is not final. The Lord assures us that all believers—everyone who trusts in Him—“*will never die,*” John 11:26. Christ has “*destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,*” II Timothy 1:10. Death has been robbed of its sting, the grave is deprived of its victory, I Corinthians 15:54-57. Hence, “*blessed are those who die in the Lord,*” Revelation 14:13.

In the case of children who die in infancy, they are spared a life of pain, heartbreak, and tragedy because of their early departure from this world. Certainly there is heartache for the parents but the child is spared. And, with those babies that are taken “home” before the age of accountability, God holds them securely in His arms. This is precisely the reason for the change in behavior of David, II Samuel 12:19,20. When the child died, David resigned himself to the inevitable: David would go to the child, but the child would not return to David, II Samuel 12:21-23.

David had a quiet confidence in the grace of God—even in a heart-rending situation like the death of his son. And, moreover, he understood why the Lord took away (from the guilty couple) the fruit of their illicit passion, II Samuel 12:7-10. David realized that he needed to be punished—even though forgiven—as a reminder that he must bear the earthly consequences of his sin, must patiently endure those consequences as a natural part of his repentance, II Samuel 12:11-14.

## THE WRONG SWORD

*"There is none like it; give it to me," [1 Samuel 21:9c](#).*

David was in trouble. Yet, instead of relying on God, he chose the unwieldy weapon of a dead warrior, [1 Samuel 21:8,9](#). David was running from king Saul, [1 Samuel 21:10](#). Rather than trusting God, David trusted in the weapon of his enemy. This is all the more remarkable because David—a short time earlier—publicly stated, in his encounter with Goliath, that the Lord does not save with sword or spear, [1 Samuel 17:45-47](#). However, on this occasion, David chose the sword of Goliath!

How often—when we struggle with the world—do we trust in the ways of men in order to win the victory? David actually lied, [1 Samuel 21:1,2](#). He was not doing the business of the Saul. He was running from the king. Then, later, out of fear, he had to feign insanity in order to save his own skin, [1 Samuel 21:10-15](#). We, like David, get caught up in the entanglements of the earth and tell falsehoods to save face. We end up looking foolish in the eyes of others.

The strongest of saints must constantly seek their strength in the Lord, [Ephesians 6:10-18](#). Though fully clad in the armor of God, we are told to pray. May we take heed lest we fall to the deceptive schemes of the world.

I know not the way  
That I must take,  
But I can trust and pray  
He will not forsake.

Fear God and your enemies will likely respect you!

## DAVID: KING OVER ISRAEL, II Samuel 5:1 – I Kings 2:46

After the death of Ishbosheth—who was the rightful heir to the throne—David ruled another five and a half years from Hebron, II Samuel 5:1-5. Then David captured the heavily fortified city of Jerusalem, centrally located between Judah and Israel, and made it his capitol, II Samuel 5:6-10.

The choice of Jerusalem was a shrewd move because it was a neutral site. Heretofore, it had not belonged to either Judah or Israel. More importantly, David proved his leadership skill, namely, his military prowess in defeating the Jebusites.

### I. Public Challenges.

David needed to unite the people as well as revive the religion. He wasted no time in doing both.

A. Returning The Ark. After the ark was returned by the Philistines, it resided in a pagan home for more than 70 years. David was determined to bring it to his new headquarters in Jerusalem, II Samuel 6:1-5. But his plan was poorly conceived:

- . It was supposed to be covered, Numbers 4:5,6.
- . It was supposed to be carried by the Kohathites, Numbers 4:15.
- . It was supposed to be carried with poles, Numbers 7:6-9.

Uzziah died because David did not observe these rules, II Samuel 6:6,7. The king was publicly embarrassed. After a three-month delay, David finally brought the sacred box to Jerusalem. He put it in a small tent in his palace patio, II Samuel 6:17. The ark would remain there until Solomon, the son of David, built the temple three decades later.

B. Defeating The Enemy. Saul could not defeat the Philistines. Indeed, the Philistines defeated Saul. So David took on the challenge, with the blessing of God, and overcame the enemy, II Samuel 5:17-21. David led his army on a stunning series of victories, II Samuel 8:1-6. By the end of his reign, Israel controlled more territory than any other time in her history. *“The Lord gave David victory everywhere he went,”* II Samuel 8:14b.

### II. Private Mistakes

It seemed like nothing could go wrong. Yet, at such moments, we can be most vulnerable, I Corinthians 10:12. David, at the apex of his success, made some very bad decisions.

A. A One-Night Stand. David was a good man—a fair and just ruler, II Samuel 8:15. Nevertheless, he committed a classic blunder, a premeditated and intentional sin, II Samuel 11:1-5. David, who was already a polygamist, tried to cover up his evil deed by committing another atrocity, II Samuel 11:6-15. Big misdeeds inevitably lead to bigger misdeeds. David successfully concealed his sin from humans, but miserably failed to hide them from God, II Samuel 11:26,27.

B. Trouble In The Palace. From his foolish mistake, the house of David became the scene of horrible crimes, feuds, scandals, and miseries of all kinds.

- . Amnon raped Tamar, II Samuel 13:1-15.
- . Absalom killed Amnon, II Samuel 15:23-29.

The moral failures of David—coupled with his failure to control his children—resulted in a bitter harvest. The life of David was spiraling out of control.

C. Coup In The Capitol. Absalom began a systematic campaign to undermine his father, II Samuel 15:1-6. He was in open rebellion, II Samuel 15:7-12. David was forced to abandon the throne, II Samuel 15:13,14. It was a very sad day for the king, II Samuel 15:30. During the coup, he poured out his heart to God, Psalms 55:1-15. David was reduced to the status of a beggar, II Samuel 17:27-29. But, in spite of his circumstances, he was confident God would reinstate him to the throne, Psalms 3:1-8. The revolt was crushed. Absalom was killed. David returned to Jerusalem.

In his waning days, David grew weaker, II Samuel 21:15-17. His physical condition continued to deteriorate. He could not keep warm. So a beautiful, young virgin slept in his bed, I Kings 1:1,2. This custom is similar to an early American practice called “bundling.” A successor was publicly anointed. Solomon would be the next king, I Chronicles 28:1-8. David was buried in Jerusalem, Acts 2:29.

## SON OF GOD

God promised David that Solomon would succeed him on the throne. Moreover, God would be a father to Solomon and Solomon would be a son to God, II Samuel 7:11b-14. Since Solomon was in filial dependence on God, he was to render filial obedience to God.

### I. Old Testament Significance

The phrase “*son of God*” denotes a special connection with God: as a “*divine being*,” Daniel 3:25, or a “*loyal follower of God*,” Exodus 4:22,23; Deuteronomy 1:31; 8:5; Jeremiah 3:19; 31:9,20; Hosea 11:1. Solomon was a “*son of God*” in the latter sense, that is, a king in Israel that was obligated to obey God.

### II. New Testament Meaning

The phrase “*son of God*” became a Messianic expression in the New Testament—sometimes alluding to Jesus’ divine origin and, at other times, to His filial obligations, but always to His unique status as Lord and Savior.

A. The Gospels. In the Gospels, “*Son of God*” is a favorite designation for Jesus, Mark 1:1, whether from the lips of demons, Mark 3:11, the disciples, Mark 8:29, the high priest, Mark 14:61, or a Roman soldier, Mark 15:39. Even Jesus referred to Himself as the “*Son of God*,” Mark 14:61,62. These designations carry a variety of meanings in the Gospels.

1. Obedient Son. The phrase “*Son of God*” suggests a filial relationship with the Father in heaven, Luke 2:49. Jesus felt obligated to obey God, Matthew 7:21; 10:32,33; 20:23; 26:29. Hence, He submitted to the cross, Mark 14:36.

2. Chosen Messiah. As a “*Son of God*,” Christ was anointed by God to be the chosen Messiah, Luke 4:41; 9:35.

B. The Letters. The letters of the apostles fleshed out the statements of the Gospels regarding the “*Son of God*.”

1. Paul. Paul said that Christ, as the Son of God, was pre-existent, Philippians 2:5-8. The apostle was called to reveal the Son of God, Galatians 1:15,16, which Paul did to the Corinthians, II Corinthians 1:19. They were invited to fellowship with the Son of God, I Corinthians 1:9.

2. Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews said that the Son of God was the spokesman for the Father, Hebrews 1:1,2. Now the Son is enthroned in heaven

at the right hand of His Father, Hebrews 1:4. To substantiate this filial relationship, the author of Hebrews quotes II Samuel 7:14 in Hebrews 1:5. Despite being a son, or, perhaps, because of being a son, Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered, Hebrews 5:8,9.

3. John. In his Gospel, John affirmed that the Son of God was not of human origin, John 1:14,18; 8:58; 13:3. He was sent to save the world, John 3:16. He was equal to God, John 5:18. He was unfailingly loyal to the Father. The letters of John further affirm that Jesus—as the Son of God—cleanses His people with His blood, I John 1:7, as well as, destroys the work of the devil, I John 3:8, and gives eternal life to those who trust Him, I John 4:9,10.

Obviously the phrase “*Son of God*” has a rich and varied significance. The unrelenting theme throughout its long history is submission—a demand for full faith in and loyalty to the Son of God, I John 3:23,24a; 5:5,20. As sons of the Most High, we are called upon to obey (which may include suffering for His sake).



### **GIVEN HIS SINS, WAS DAVID FULLY DEVOTED? I Kings 11:4.**

Before David became king, he committed several sins. For example, he lied to the high priest, I Samuel 21:2. He also deceived the king of Gath (and, in order to hid the truth, he killed many people), I Samuel 27:10,11.

These dastardly deeds, coupled with what he did after he became king, places his good name in jeopardy. Though his “one night stand” with Bathsheba, and the subsequent cover up in killing Uriah, are by no means the only shameful blots on his record, they are doubtless the most remembered.

The harsh treatment of his wife, Michal (the daughter of Saul), II Samuel 6:21-23, his brutality against the Moabite captives, I Samuel 8:2, and his following the advice of satan (for prideful reasons) in counting his fighting men, I Chronicles 21:1, are all wicked behavior.

In light of all of these (and other) incidents, David was not a perfect saint. Indeed, he had great courage, he displayed superb military leadership, he composed many psalms, but he had his darker side, too. How, then, can the Scriptures say that he was “*fully devoted to the Lord?*” I Kings 11:4; 15:3, that he was “*a man after God’s own heart*” who did everything God wanted him to do, Acts 13:22.

The reasons for these descriptions of David lie in his great faith in the power and grace of God. Both I Kings 11:4 and 15:3 are comparing the idolatry of Solomon and his son, Jeroboam, with the faithfulness of David to Jehovah. The word translated “*fully devoted*” actually means to be “*complete,*” “*whole,*” or “*at peace*” with someone. Therefore, the heart of David belonged to Jehovah rather than to Baal, cf. Psalm 23:1.

The stupidity of his affair with Bathsheba crushed David, Psalm 32:1-7. Like us, he blundered. Yet he also repented. A lesser man might have killed the one who exposed his error, II Samuel 12:7-10. But David took his medicine, he faced his sin, Psalm 51:3-5.

David, in this way, was a model for every believer. The passage in question does not overlook his flaws. Instead, it looked beyond his flaws. He was a man after the heart of God not in sinning but in searching for righteousness once he had sinned. In other words, he confronted his sin with faith in the Lord rather than persist in flirting with idol gods. David, then, was at peace with Jehovah.

## SEEING IS BELIEVING

*"I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes,"*  
I Kings 10:7.

The queen of Sheba had heard great things about Solomon—his wisdom, his wealth, and his God, I Kings 10:1. It seemed too good to be true. So she traveled eighteen hundred miles to see for herself, I Kings 10:4. The proof was in the seeing!

This is something like pumpkin pie. Without the spices, pumpkin out-of-the-can is not very good. Pumpkin by itself is flat, almost tasteless, and disgusting. Add ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and salt and the pumpkin becomes a great pie. The spices make the difference. You can substitute carrots, squash, or sweet potatoes for the pumpkin, add the spice, and you get practically the same results. The proof is in the tasting!

We too must add the spiritual spices to our Christian life. Or, like pumpkin, we will be flat and tasteless, II Peter 1:5-8. Do we exude the fragrance of Christ? Are we refreshing, happy believers? There is nothing exciting about a grumpy, sour, critical, negative saint, Matthew 5:14-16. Christ living in us is the spice that makes our life attractive. People shun disgusting believers. The recipe for a contagious life is the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22,23. The cookbook of God says to "*think about such things*," Philippians 4:8. They will make a great Christian pie.

Be like Jesus, this is my song,  
 At home and at school;  
 Be like Him, all day long!

If your mind dwells on the things of God, your actions will have the fragrance of heaven, the flavor of the Lord.

## SOLOMON, I Kings 3:1 – 11:43

The story of Solomon fits into three segments: the rise, the shine, and the decline of the son of David, I Kings 1:1 – 11:43.

### I. The Rise

The narrative begins with Adonijah, one of the sons of David and a legitimate heir, occupying the throne, I Kings 1:5,6. Through some palace shenanigans, Adonijah declares himself king (without David knowing it), I Kings 1:24-27. So, while Adonijah was celebrating his coronation, the news of Solomon becoming king was announced, I Kings 1:38-48. Adonijah submitted to Solomon, I Kings 1:49-53. So the kingdom of Solomon “*was firmly established,*” I Kings 2:12. God was with Him, II Chronicles 29:25.

A. His Marriage. Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh as a political alliance between the two countries, I Kings 3:1. She was not his first wife, cf. I Kings 14:21 and I Kings 11:42,43. Solomon brought his Egyptian princess to Jerusalem (but not into the palace of David), II Chronicles 8:11. Later, she was moved to the palace of Solomon, I Kings 9:24. Because the temple was not yet built, Solomon and his people offered sacrifices “on the high places,” I Kings 3:3.

B. His Request. Solomon went 5 miles northwest of Jerusalem to offer sacrifices. There he asked God for wisdom, I Kings 3:7-9. God was pleased because Solomon asked for the sake of others, I Kings 3:10-13. The Lord honored his unselfishness. He is remembered for his majesty, Matthew 6:29; 12:42.

1. Officers. The list of officers is out of chronological order (since two of the officers had married daughters of Solomon), I Kings 4:11,15. Nevertheless, the list shows the advanced development of the administration under Solomon: secretaries, recorders, advisors, managers (of the palace as well as of forced labor), and tax collectors. It was a well organized, central government.

2. Splendor. Israel was prosperous and secure, I Kings 4:20,21,24,25. The court of Solomon ate sumptuously, I Kings 4:22,23. A “*cor*” is 90 gallons! Therefore, the provision for ONE DAY was equivalent to 2700 gallons of flour (that would yield 20,000 pounds of bread) enough to feed 14,000 people! Solomon also had a huge corral of horses, I Kings 4:26 (though the law clearly prohibited his doing so, Deuteronomy 17:14-16). Solomon openly imported them from Egypt (another direct violation of the will of God, II Chronicles 1:16,17; cf. Isaiah 31:1). Did he not know that that was wrong? Why would he ignore the commands of God?

3. Wisdom. God gave Solomon great wisdom, I Kings 4:29-31. The wise of that

time understood geometry, astronomy, medicine, botany, and biology. Solomon did, too, I Kings 4:33. People came from all over the world to hear his wisdom. The queen of Sheba was “*overwhelmed*,” that is, became “faint,” by what she saw and heard, I Kings 10:4,5.

## II. The Shine.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of Solomon was building the temple.

A. Construction Of The Temple. Hiram, king of Tyre, helped gather the stone and wood in exchange for food, I Kings 5:1-9; cf. Acts 12:20. The stone was quarried “dressed,” namely, ready to put in place (with no further chiseling required), I Kings 6:7. They were “great” stones—12 foot and 15 foot cubes—weighing several tons each, I Kings 7:9,10. There were 180,000 laborers on the project—working alternately one out of every three months, I Kings 5:13-16. The temple took seven years to complete, I Kings 6:37,38. Its layout was similar to the tabernacle (though twice as large). The gold used in the temple was equal to \$500,000,000 (at \$450 an ounce) not including the precious wood and gem stones, II Chronicles 3:4c-9. The temple was not only a place of worship but a storage chamber for valuable treasures, I Kings 7:51. No wonder the house of God became a target for military plunder, I Kings 14:25,26; II Kings 24:10-13; 25:13-15. The temple of Solomon stood for almost four centuries—960-586 BC!

B. Dedication Of The Temple. Solomon continued to construct buildings for 13 more years in Jerusalem, I Kings 7:1. However, upon the completion of the temple, a two-week dedication was held, I Kings 8:65,66. In the ceremony, Solomon stated the purpose (or “cause”) of Israel, I Kings 8:56-60. She was to proclaim Jehovah. As His messenger, Israel was to remain faithful, I Kings 9:1-9.

## III. The Decline

A. Idolatry. In his latter years, Solomon appeased his pagan wives by putting idols on the Mount of Olives, I Kings 11:1-8. The Lord became angry and took the kingdom away from him, I Kings 11:9-13.

B. Trouble. At the end of his 40 years on the throne, foreign invaders began to attack Israel, I Kings 11:14,23-25. Cracks were appearing in the foundation of the empire.

C. Death. Solomon did many good things. But his good was offset by his bad. He had been blessed above other men but failed to live above other men. What he had in wisdom, he lacked in common sense. Compromise with paganism was his undoing. A great beginning turned into a tragic ending, I Kings 11:41-43.

## WORSHIP OF GOD

The term “*worship*” means homage—the attitude and activity that recognizes the worth of the person or thing to which the homage is addressed. Worship embraces both the piety and the ritual synonymous with a reverent life.

### I. Significance Of The Word

In the Old Testament, the terms translated “worship” signify “*to serve*” or “*to prostrate oneself*.” Additional words translated “worship” are “*to draw near to*” and “*to seek the face of*.”

### II. Development Of The Practice

A. Patriarchal Ritual. Cain and Abel offered a sacrifice, Genesis 4:3,4. “*At that time*,” the Scripture says, “*men began to call on the name of the Lord*,” Genesis 4:26. Noah made an altar for burnt offerings, Genesis 8:20. Later, worship was expressed with altar and offering, Genesis 22:9-13. Jacob piled up stones and “*offered a sacrifice*,” Genesis 31:54; 35:6,7. Israelite worship in Genesis was rudimentary and personal.

B. Mosaic Worship. The struggle between Moses and Pharaoh was initially over worshipping Jehovah—the God of the Hebrews, Exodus 5:1-3. In the wilderness, Moses established the covenant connection of worship, Exodus 24:3-8. When the Hebrews took over the Promised Land, they encountered the heathen sanctuaries. Israel was to destroy the pagan altars, Deuteronomy 7:1-6. Unfortunately, the covenant was forgotten, I Samuel 2:12-17.

C. Monarchial Influence. David attempted a revival. He brought the ark back to Jerusalem. He wrote many of the great psalms. He made careful preparations for building the temple (though it was left to Solomon to actually construct the House of God).

D. Temple Ceremony. The rites and festivals long familiar to Israel were incorporated into the temple worship. At Jerusalem, the saints came to rejoice before the Lord. With their tithes, first fruits, and sacrificial offerings, they joined one another in the sanctuary. Music, solos, and anthems were heard. Holy processions were common. The telling of sacred stories as well as petitions, prayers, vows, confessions, and promises echoed within its chambers. Sacred meals and spiritual washings were regularly observed. People meandered through the courtyards where God put His name, where He bestowed His blessings. The temple was where Israel found spiritual refreshing and discovered covenant mercy. No

wonder the true Israelite longed to dwell in the House of the Lord, Psalm 27:4. The purpose and character of Old Testament worship was to seek the face of God, Psalm 27:8. Regrettably, the purity of the temple ceremony was not preserved. Idolatrous elements slowly crept into the sacred worship. The people were warned, Deuteronomy 18:9-13. They did not listen, Isaiah 2:6-9; Hosea 8:4-6; Amos 5:21-27.

### III. Focus Of Their Worship

Old Testament worship focused on God. He was the author of sacrifice, Leviticus 17:11. He expected homage. Genuine piety recognized and articulated the worth of the Lord. Worship was performed not merely to derive a blessing but to give respect. It centered on the presence of God among men. The worshipper "called on the name" of God. The phrase actually meant to "call with the name," that is, to utter the name in an act of reverence. In so doing, the name of God was "*put on*" the worshipper, Numbers 6:22-27. In other words, the seal of His ownership was placed on the contrite. They, in turn, were to live as one that belonged to Jehovah, I Corinthians 6:19,20.

**EXPLAIN THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN I Kings 5:13 and 9:22.**

*“Solomon did not make slaves of the sons of Israel,” I Kings 9:22. He treated them as free men, as citizens of honorable standing. Yet, in I Kings 5:13, “Solomon conscripted laborers from all Israel—30,000 men.” And, it should be noted, that besides the 30,000 Israelites, there were 70,000 carriers and 80,000 stonecutters, I Kings 5:15. Is there a contradiction here?*

It is fair to assume that the “carriers and stonecutters” were not Israelites, that is, they were the “*slaves*,” i.e., men from Phoenicia. The Hebrew word for “slave” in 9:22 is abed, while in 5:13 the word for “laborers” is hammas. Therefore, there is no contradiction between I Kings 5:13 and I Kings 9:22.

In addition, it is worth recognizing, that Solomon used the “slaves” (abed) on several building projects including the temple, I Kings 9:15-21. In addition, the conscripted Israelite labor force (hammas) was maintained until the close of the reign of Solomon, I Kings 11:28. The “house of Joseph” was the Israelite laborers (or hammas) from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

Consequently, Solomon walked a very thin line in his ambitious building bonanza. He enslaved foreigners and enlisted Israelites. The one was forced-laborers while the others were selected-workers. The one was bondmen while the others were freemen. Solomon kept the Law of God by the skin of his chinney-chin-chin!

## A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

*“The king said to the man of God, ‘Come home with me,’ “[I Kings 13:7](#).*

Jeroboam, a wicked king, had invited a prophet of God to come to his house and be refreshed. The prophet refused. God had forbidden him to do so. The house of the king was full of sin, [I Kings 12:25-33](#). The prophet showed the king his wickedness in setting up altars to idol gods, [I Kings 13:1-6](#). Jeroboam pretended to be grateful. God, however, did not want his messenger loitering in an evil house, [I Kings 13:8-10](#).

If you were to invite someone to the place where you live, what would your guest find? Would it be a room, an apartment, or a house full of gossip, riddled with negative thinking? Would it be a place of smutty jokes, careless talk, and immoral behavior? A house is not at home unless God lives there.

Is your abode one of joy and happiness? Is it a place of refuge from hypocrisy, faultfinding, ranker, and gloom? Or is it a recital of complaints and criticism? Can you honestly invite others home—a place where they can be refreshed, uplifted, and drawn closer to the Lord? [Proverbs 3:33](#); [14:11](#); [24:1](#).

Most people have a house—a shelter from the weather—but know nothing about a home. Home is a retreat full of love, security, quiet, and peace. Home is an escape from the evil of the outside world. No wonder heaven is called our home! I have requested my grave marker to say, *“Not here. Gone home!”*

Oh, think of years in childhood fair,  
Of mother’s love and father’s care.  
How much greater heaven will be,  
Home sweet home—you will see!

A godly home is the vestibule of heaven.



## A DIVIDED NATION, I KINGS 12:1 - 16:34

After the death of Solomon, representatives from across the nation came to complain about the burden of working on the royal construction projects, I Kings 12:1-5. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and legitimate heir of the throne, refused to lighten the burdens of the people, I Kings 12:13,14. The people rebelled, I Kings 12:16. The nation of God was fractured by the ensuing strife. Jeroboam, the spokesman for the complainers and not a legitimate heir to the throne, became ruler over the northern ten tribes of Israel. Rehoboam continued to rule over the southern tribe of Judah. The nation was never united under one king again!

### I. Sin In The North

Jeroboam was installed as king in the north (or Israel), I Kings 12:20. He reigned over the greater part of the nation—Israel had the stronger economy, the larger population, the major highways, and the most productive land.

A. Reign Of Wickedness. The conflict between Israel and Judah had been brewing since the rebellion of Absalom, II Samuel 19:41-43. In order to keep people from going to Jerusalem (in Judah) to worship, Jeroboam set up a golden calf (as an idol god) 8 miles north of the holy temple, I Kings 12:26-30. Jeroboam also built Baal shrines elsewhere and appointed non-Levites to the priesthood, I Kings 12:31,32. He was a thoroughly wicked king. Though warned by a prophet of God, Jeroboam continued in his sinful ways throughout his entire life, I Kings 13:33,34.

B. Parade Of Horror. After the death of Jeroboam, kings in Israel came and went rapidly—often at the hands of an assassin.

|        |                  |                      |
|--------|------------------|----------------------|
| Nadab  | Reigned 1 Year   | Murdered By Baasha   |
| Baasha | Reigned 12 Years | Died A Natural Death |
| Elah   | Reigned 1 Year   | Murdered By Zimri    |
| Zimri  | Reigned 7 Days   | Committed Suicide    |

In each case, the summary of the reign of these men was “*he did evil in the eyes of God,*” I Kings 15:26; 16:7. Their only qualification for becoming king was a lust for power. Their only legacy was “*causing Israel to commit sin,*” I Kings 15:30,34; 16:2,13.

### II. Folly In The South

Rehoboam had been foolish in disregarding the request of his burdened subjects. The flames of animosity between Israel and Judah grew into open hatred. Political unity was sacrificed, national strength was sabotaged, and religious fellowship

was destroyed. The golden era of the Hebrew people became past history.

A. Rule Of Futility. The reign of Rehoboam was quite unsuccessful. Not only did he have to deal with the revolt of the northern tribes of Israel, he was attacked on his southern border by Egypt. Rehoboam was forced to pay an enormous bribe to Egypt to save Jerusalem from destruction, II Kings 14:25,26. Rehoboam also introduced Baal worship and male prostitution in Judah, I Kings 14:22-24. The glory days were gone!

B. Effort At Reform. After Rehoboam died, Asa became king. He ruled 41 years. He is credited with making an attempt at ridding Judah of idolatry, I King 15:11-14. He gets an "A" for his effort at religious revival.

How did God view the division between Judah and Israel? The Lord said, "*He caused it,*" I Kings 11:9-13; 12:15a, 21-24. The nation was "*broken apart*" so that grace might "*break through*." God was beginning to separate a remnant of His people unto Himself so that they (Judah) might be His conduit of salvation to the whole world.

## HISTORY OF GOD

Can the Christian understanding of history fellowship with the secular view of history? The believer views history as the footprints of God, the movement of time under the control of the Lord, Acts 2:23. The non-believer thinks otherwise. The tension between the two is vital to the Christian faith.

### I. Relationship To The Facts

The word “fact” comes from the Latin term *factum*. It means a “thing done,” that is, something that really happened. Yet, it is common to hear the same fact interpreted in different ways. This comes home to us almost daily when we listen to the media.

A. Close Proximity. In the New Testament, the writers recorded events as eyewitnesses. Yet, the telling of what was seen still differed. For example, at the resurrection, the Gospels say: “an angel descended,” Matthew 28:2 “a young man sitting,” Mark 16:5, “two men stood,” Luke 24:4, and “two angels...sitting,” John 20:12. Though the witnesses recorded different facts, the main point stands.

B. Distant Recall. In the Old Testament, the events recorded are long past. Therefore, it makes deciding what really happened more difficult to determine. The fact and the interpretation of the fact become the fabric of the story. These stories were powerful influences in the life of a nation: whether the exodus, the wilderness wandering, or the conquest of the Promised Land. The Jews believed the facts were under the control of Jehovah. He was behind what happened. His hand was on the helm of history.

### II. Method Of The Writers

There are two types of historical literature.

A. Secular. A contemporary historian will relate an event to the social, economic, and political elements surrounding it. God is not part of the equation. The focus is on the earth. Heaven is not considered. Man in society forms the circumference of secular history. This type of interpretation is not found in the Old Testament

B. Sacred. The writers of the Old Covenant saw history as the handiwork of God. Their stories were infused with evils to be denounced and good to be commended. For instance, I and II Kings as well as I and II Chronicles were interspersed with moral evaluations. The common epitaph was (so and so “*did evil in the sight of the Lord*”). Only two exceptions were recorded, II Kings 18:4,5; 22:2.

### III. Interpretation Of The Events

Though the Old Testament contains different styles of narrative, God is center stage in each style.

A. The Beginnings. The first eleven chapters of Genesis moved the story of time from Creation to Abraham. The focus started with the universe and narrowed down to one nomadic family. God was present every step of the way, Genesis 1:1,26,27; 3:8,9, 23,24; 6:5-8; 9:1-3; 12:1-3.

B. The Stories. The Old Testament continued the saga of the beginnings with stories of God making good on His promise to Abraham. He formed the descendants of the patriarch into a nation through whom He tried to draw the pagans to Himself. The stories chart a stumbling course of advance and setback through slavery in a foreign country, a triumphant escape, and settlement in the Promised Land. The whole saga reverberates with faith in the purpose of God that must be fulfilled despite the hindrances of nature and man, Genesis 45:8; 50:20.

C. The Prophets. The Old Testament messengers used history in an assortment of ways.

1. The Past. The pre-exilic prophets had surprisingly little to say about the patriarchs. Abraham is mentioned once, Micah 7:20, Jacob once, Hosea 12:3,4, and the wilderness wanderings five times, Hosea 11:1; 12:9; Amos 2:9-11; 3:1,2, Jeremiah 2:2,3.

2. The Present. The prophets were uncompromising in their belief that Jehovah was the Lord of history. His judgments were universal, Isaiah 10:5-15; Jeremiah 37:9,10. The political extinction of the Hebrew nation and the deportation of the people were not the work of ruthless pagan powers but the chastisement of heaven.

3. The Future. History was not a meaningless succession of recurring cycles of events. History was under His control, was moving toward a predetermined conclusion. The ideal future was pictured in terms of a return to the peace of Eden, Isaiah 11:6-9, with a longevity of and abundance for mankind, Isaiah 25:6-8. A physical resurrection was predicted, Daniel 12:2,3. A new heaven and new earth was expected, Isaiah 65:22-24. Yet, by the end of the Old Testament, there is a distinct feeling of incompleteness. God had not finished His work. More was still to come.

### **DID ELIJAH SEND A LETTER AFTER HE DIED? II Chronicles 21:12-15**

Obviously he could not. The question presupposes something that never happened, namely, that Elijah died before Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, occupied the throne.

Actually Elijah was still alive in the reign of Ahaziah, the immediate predecessor of Jehoram, king of Israel, II Kings 1:1-17a. Hence, two Jehorams were on the throne: one in Israel (848-842 BC) and one in Judah (850-842), II Kings 1:17b.

In all probability, the aged prophet would have lived on for another few years until the true character of Jehoram of Judah demonstrated itself, II Chronicles 21:4. It is likely his bloodthirsty wife, Athaliah, daughter of the infamous Jezebel, encouraged Jehoram of Judah to kill his brothers with the sword. She herself tried to exterminate all the heirs to the throne a few years later, II Kings 11:1.

It is true that the translation of Elijah to heaven is mentioned in II Kings 2:1-11 (before the reign of Jehoram of Judah, II Kings 8:16). Though it must be remembered, that the narrative of I and II Kings shifts back and forth between the reign of various kings and the careers of different prophets. So the writer of I and II Kings carried a story to completion by removing it from a strict chronological sequence to a more thematic development.

As Elijah later approached the end of his prophetic ministry, the most important theme to the writer of II Kings was Elisha taking the place of Elijah. Hence, the writer tells of the prophetic succession in I Kings 19:9-21 out of sequence. Afterward, the writer backtracks and picks up the story on the political front in Israel and Judah in II Kings 3:1ff. Such a literary style is called “proleptic,” that is, “telling a future event as if it was happening in the present.” A similar proleptic procedure was used in II Kings 19:37 which actually took place in 681 BC, though it is placed in the story before the illness of Hezekiah, II Kings 20:1, that occurred 32 years earlier in 713 BC.

So in II Chronicles, there is no mention of the passing of Elijah (whether before or after the reign of Jehoram of Judah). Consequently, there is not a problem in chronological sequence. In all probability, the letter of Elijah—to Jehoram—was composed and sent in 847 BC, shortly before Elijah was taken up into heaven by the fiery chariot, II Kings 2:11.

## WHY PRETEND?

*“Why this pretense?”* I Kings 14:6

The wife of Jeroboam was pretending. Her son was ill and she wanted the blind prophet to help the boy get well, I Kings 14:1-4a. But she did not want the aging prophet to know who she was.

The Lord told the prophet about the rogue, I Kings 14:4b,5. She thought she could disguise herself and fool the man of God. Yet, before she could spin her web of deception, the prophet asked her, *“Why this pretense?”* Her clever trick was exposed. Her disguise had failed.

We are like her. We try to camouflage our sin. We pretend to be someone else. This has been the practice of human beings since the dawn of time. Jacob deceived his father Isaac. David tried to hide his sin with Bathsheba. Likewise, the Pharisees were spiritual hypocrites, too, Matthew 23:27,28.

Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, *“You can fool some of the people all the time, all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time.”* How true! And, it is equally true, you cannot fool God any of the time! Camouflage is pretense. Pretense is lying. Lying is sin.

A group of students at an Ivy League school attempted to hoodwink their biology professor. They took the body of a moth, added the legs of a grasshopper, the wings of a dragonfly, and the head of a cricket. The students presented their deception to the professor. *“What kind of a bug is this?”* Without any hesitation, the professor said, *“This is a humbug!”*

Are we pretending? There is a likelihood that we will succeed sometimes. But God always knows, Hebrews 4:12,13. It is high time we quit being a humbug. Why pretend being someone (or something) we are not?

May I never, never stray,  
Make me humble, I pray;  
Help me not be a sham,  
Keep me true to who I am .

Hypocrisy is a double-edged sin—a lie pretending to be the truth. May I be what others see—no more and no less.

## A SEASON OF STRUGGLE, I KINGS 17:1 - 22:53

The division between Israel and Judah was final. The trouble for these two nations was just beginning. Both countries had been weakened by the schism. Both were vulnerable to attack. And neither could do much about it. So, ironically, for the sake of protection, Israel and Judah began to make alliances with each other (and with other nations).

### I. Fragile Alliances

A. Military. Instead of relying on God, the kings of Israel and Judah scampered after whomever would offer a willing hand. A few years later, God called His people “*obstinate children*” for making such silly alliances, Isaiah 30:1,2.

B. Political. It was common for political alliances to be formed by marrying the daughter of a foreign king (like Solomon marrying the daughter of Pharaoh). For example, Ahab, king of Israel, married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, I Kings 16:30,31. Jezebel had a huge negative influence on Israel. Ahab began to worship Baal—the god of Jezebel. He set up altars to this fertility cult god throughout the land of Israel, I Kings 16:32,33. Moreover, Jezebel slaughtered the prophets of Jehovah and appointed Baal prophets in their place, I Kings 18:4a,19b. The political alliance between Israel and Sidon proved to be disastrous, I Kings 21:25,26. Furthermore, the sons of Ahab and Jezebel were wicked rulers: Ahaziah, I Kings 22:51-53 and Jehoram, II Kings 3:1-3. Unfortunately, the evil influence of Jezebel did not stop there. The daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, Athaliah, married Jehoram, king of Judah, to form a political alliance, II Kings 8:16-19. Athaliah was the mother of Ahaziah, king of Judah, II Kings 8:25-27. Later, Athaliah took command by murdering (all but one) of the heirs to the throne of Judah, II Kings 11:1-3. Athaliah was as wicked as her mother (Jezebel). She tried to exterminate the royal family through which the Messiah was to come. She failed. These were troubled times. The alliances of Israel and Judah proved supremely detrimental to their spiritual welfare. Hence, the Lord sent prophets to warn His people.

### II. Powerful Prophets

Though there were prophets before this time, the age of prophets began with Elijah, Luke 9:30. The word “*prophet*” means “one who speaks for another,” Exodus 7:1,2. The prophets among the people of God were spiritual giants:

- . They proclaimed the message of Jehovah
- . They delivered His message even when it was risky
- . They believed God was in control

None of the prophets enjoyed great popularity. Many were killed. Some prophets spoke lies. Therefore, the people were to discern the good prophets from the bad prophets, Deuteronomy 18:21,22. We must make similar judgments today.

A. Elijah. Elijah confronted Ahab. He told the king (who worshipped Baal—the god of rain) that there would be a three-year drought. In other words, Baal was challenged at his own game, I Kings 17:1. The drought was devastating, I Kings 18:5. The lesson was obvious: Baal was impotent. Hence, Elijah prayed for rain and rain returned, James 5:17,18. Ahab called Elijah a troublemaker. Elijah accused Ahab of being the problem, I Kings 18:16-19. At Mt. Carmel, on the site of Baal worship, Elijah embarrassed the Baal prophets once and for all, I Kings 18:21. Elijah was completely exonerated. Jehovah was God! I Kings 18:39.

B. Elisha. Elisha took the mantle of a prophet from Elijah. He was made from the same mold. Elisha confronted the king of Israel and frustrated the plans of the king of Syria. The king of Syria was irate, II Kings 6:8-14. The orders to capture Elisha failed. Elisha trusted in God. God blessed His messenger. Elisha was calm and composed in the face of an enemy attack, II Kings 6:15-17. Elisha subdued the enemy with prayer. He singlehandedly captured the invaders and led them to the king of Israel who fed them and set them free, II Kings 6:18-23.

Elijah and Elisha had different personalities. The one was a very private person. The other was a very public person. Nevertheless, both of them were courageous advocates for Jehovah in a time when such a stance was not popular. If we had lived in their day, what would we have done? What are we doing today when standing for God is not popular?



## JUSTICE OF GOD

There are three closely related words in the Bible: just, justice, and justify. God is just. He dispenses justice. And He justifies the faithful. These three words deal with a basic human problem. Only the Lord has a solution. The matter hinges on the justice of God.

### I. Vocabulary Of Justice

The justice of God permeates the narrative of Scripture. It is a fundamental element in the Bible.

A. Old Testament. God is just. He makes sure justice is done to the accused, Psalm 35:24-28; 40:11-16. Justice takes the form of punishment for the guilty, Isaiah 5:13-16, and vindication for the opposed, Isaiah 62:1-5. The Hebrew word for “justice” is sometimes translated “*righteousness*,” Isaiah 51:1a,5,8. The justice of God is clearest in His dealings with sinful people. Israel was often guilty. God condemned them because He was just, Exodus 23:6,7; Proverbs 17:15. Nevertheless, because God is fair, God does not merely punish. No! He uses His punishment to turn people back to Him so that He can redeem them, namely, “*justify the wicked*,” Romans 4:5.

B. New Testament. In Greek, the word “*justify*” means “to treat right,” “to be fair toward,” or “to declare innocent,” Matthew 12:37. Justification is the foundation of our salvation: Christ died for our sins. We are treated as innocent (though we have sinned), Romans 5:1,2.

### II. Theology Of Justification

God is righteous, Genesis 18:25. Therefore, He always does what is right or fair, Deuteronomy 32:4; Job 8:3; 37:23; Psalm 89:14. Divine justice includes obligations on those who are in covenant with Him. When Israel failed to keep her covenant obligations, Jehovah punished her. It was a sign of His justice, Isaiah 42:24; Ezekiel 39:21-24.

A. Old Testament. As the history of Israel unfolded, it became obvious that—if humans were to be declared innocent—they would need divine help. The Old Testament story is based on the premise that help would come from the Sovereign Lord, Isaiah 50:7-9. He will deliver His people, Isaiah 46:13; 51:4-8. God alone was their Savior, Isaiah 43:11. For humans, to be right before Jehovah was a problem. The Old Testament suggested trusting God, but offered no final solution as to how God could pardon sinful humans, Job 9:2; 25:4-6.

B. New Testament. It is left to the New Testament to solve the problem. Paul stated that everyone was a sinner (which the Old Testament clearly demonstrated), Romans 3:10-12,23. The apostle, however, offered a solution: all who give up assuming humans can attain moral excellence on their own can be justified by God, that is, be treated just as if they had never sinned (though they were sinners). Justification (or the acquittal of sinners) is based on two premises.

1. Fact. The prerequisite for salvation is the acknowledgement of sin, Psalm 51:1-4. Everyone without exception is involved in and corrupted by it. We are facing eternal death, Romans 5:12. If, then, we are to be justified, we must be delivered from sin (which has power over us), Romans 7:24. God has provided this deliverance in Jesus Christ, Romans 3:24,25; 5:6-9.

2. Faith. Humans needed deliverance but do not deserve it. The possibility of our salvation rests solely in the goodness of God. We are asked to believe, to trust in His arrangements for our justification. Hence, we are justified by His “grace” through our “faith,” Ephesians 2:4-8. According to the inspired text, that is the justice of God.

### DOES I Kings 22:37,38 FULFILL I KINGS 21:19?

In I Kings 21:19, dogs would lick up the blood of Naboth and the blood of king Ahab. But did the dogs lick up the blood of Ahab “*in the place*” where Naboth died? For Naboth died in Jezreel, I Kings 21:1-14, while Ahab died near the pool of Samaria, I Kings 22:37,38. Jezreel was the summer capitol in northern Israel. Samaria was the winter capitol not far from Jerusalem.

There are two plausible explanations.

1. It is not likely Naboth was stoned outside of Samaria since Naboth actually lived in Jezreel (forty miles away), I Kings 21:1. Stoning was usually done close to the scene of the crime. Surely Naboth was taken “*outside the city*” of Jezreel for execution, I Kings 21:13. It is highly unlikely he was taken all the way to Samaria.

2. Ahab was wounded in a battle at Ramoth Gilead, I Kings 22:29-36. He died some time later. As the army of Israel retreated back toward Samaria, they could pass through Jezreel on their way home to bury Ahab, I Kings 22:37. Perhaps, the soldiers, transporting the body of Ahab, stopped just outside Jezreel at a pool—called the pool of Samaria—to wash the blood of Ahab out of his chariot, I Kings 22:38.

But would a pool in Jezreel be called the pool of Samaria? It is possible. Likely Jezreel already had a pool before the summer palace of Ahab was built there. So, when this second palace was constructed, along with its accompanying water supply, this second pool was quite likely called “*the pool of Samaria*” in honor of Samaria (though it was located in Jezreel). Not all pools connected with ancient towns bore the name of the town where the pond was located (especially when an older pool already existed). In Jerusalem, for example, there was the pool of Siloam, the pool of Bethesda, and the pool of Shelah.

Since the pool of Samaria was used by prostitutes, it was probably not the only pool in use, I Kings 22:38. The pool of Samaria was likely built later as part of the landscaping for the summer palace. When the troops, carrying the body of Ahab back to Samaria for burial, stopped briefly in Jezreel, they washed the nauseous reminder of the sad event of that day from the chariot of their slain monarch—as “*the word of the Lord had declared,*” I Kings 22:38.

## WHEN THE BROOK DRIES UP

*"... the brook dried up . . .,"* I Kings 17:7.

Elijah had told king Ahab that a severe drought was coming, I Kings 17:1. Then the Lord instructed the prophet to go away. Elijah went across the Transjordan to the Kerith ravine, I Kings 17:2-4. Without complaint, Elijah did what God said, I Kings 17:5,6.

There are some interesting lessons in this story. Elijah obeyed God. Yet, even in obeying, there were disappointments. *"The brook dried up,"* I Kings 17:7. God tested Elijah even after the prophet had shown submission to the Lord. Would Elijah call it quits? Or would he continue to rely on God? Again, without complaint, the venerable prophet followed the instructions of Jehovah, I Kings 17:8,9.

Surely, it was disappointing that the brook dried up? Surely, it was uncomfortable walking through the parched countryside to the foreign nation of Sidon. Surely, it was humbling to rely on a destitute, pagan widow for food. Still Elijah shows no hesitation, I Kings 17:10,11. The directions of God are reliable. What He says can be trusted.

The will of God does not always make sense. Elijah must have had questions. Did the prophet understand the Lord? He asked the widow, but she was out of food. She was no better than the "dried up" brook! I Kings 17:12. Why did God want Elijah to walk all that way to starve in a strange land? Sometimes we experience difficulty while standing in the very center of the will of heaven. Yet God was faithful with new instructions, I Kings 17:13,14.

What do you do when your brook dries up? How do you react when your brook of friends, your brook of plans, or your brook of dreams go dry? Do you turn to the Lord? His promises are sure, Psalms 91:9-16.

God will take care of you till the end.  
For, He is our Father and our Friend.  
He guides and protects His own,  
He will take care; so trust Him alone.

In spite of the storm, if God is the Captain, sailors on His ship will not drown.

## PERIOD OF OPPRESSION, II KINGS 1:1 – 13:24

The reign of king Ahab of Israel and his daughter queen Athaliah of Judah left a scare on the history of the Hebrews. Ahab (and wife Jezebel) reintroduced Baal worship, while Athaliah ruled with unstinting violence. These actions lead to a slow but steady drift away from God.

### I. Folly Of The Kings

During this period of time, the whims of human beings continually trumped the will of God. As in the days of the Judges, everyone seems to do “*what was right in his own eyes.*” Truly it was an era of oppression (similar to the constant violence of oppressive regimens today).

A. Jehu. While Joram, the son of Ahab, was on the throne, Jehu, commander of the army of Israel, was anointed to be the next king, II Kings 9:1-13. Jehu immediately sets out to solidify his power. He killed Joram (who was in Jezreel recovering from battle wounds). King Ahaziah of Judah was visiting him. Jehu meets them at the vineyard of Naboth. Bloodshed ensued, II Kings 9:14-29. Going on to Jezreel, Jehu came to the house of Jezebel. Jehu had her thrown out of the second story window into the street. When soldiers came by later to pick up her body, dogs had eaten all but the head, hands, and feet of Jezebel, II Kings 9:30-37. Jehu appears to be doing the will of God in this bloody slaughter! Jehu continues his rampage. He killed all the remaining family members of Ahab and Jezebel, II Kings 10:1-11. He also killed the relatives of Ahaziah, king of Judah, II Kings 10:12-14. Then, pretending he was a Baal devotee, he called a meeting of Baal priests and slaughtered them, II Kings 10:18-27. Obviously Jehu had a zeal for the Lord—when such zeal served his own purposes—but lacked a thoroughgoing commitment to do the whole counsel of God, II Kings 10:28,29.

B. Joash. When Ahaziah was killed by Jehu, Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel and mother of Ahaziah, made herself queen of Judah. She proceeded to slaughter the royal family (which included some of her own children and grandchildren). Only one heir to the throne was spared. A daughter of Athaliah, sister of Ahaziah, and aunt of Joash (the son of Ahaziah), rescued baby Joash, II Kings 11:1-3. When Joash was seven, he was crowned king right under the nose of Athaliah, II Kings 11:12-14. The queen was deposed. The coup succeeded. Athaliah was killed. Young Joash reigned over Judah, II Kings 11:15-21. Nevertheless, the sword figured prominently in the religious zeal that followed. To his credit, Joash repaired the temple (though he did not remove the pagan altars), II Kings 12:2,3. The son of Jehoiada (the courageous priest who kept Joash safe and crowned him king), Zechariah, was stoned to death on orders from Joash, because Zechariah called for repentance, II Chronicles 24:17-22; cf. Matthew 23:35.

## II. Fury Of The Lord

Religion was merely a show. Jehu destroyed Baal worship but was careless in his personal life. Joash did right “*while Jehoiada lived*” but became angry when Zachariah (the son of Jehoiada) issued a call for repentance.

God had had enough of this spiritual pretense. He sent a foreign invader to punish the sin of His people in Judah, II Kings 12:17,18; II Chronicles 24:23,24. God also sent a foreign invader to punish Israel during the reign of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, II Kings 13:1-3. The period of oppression was a bitter experience, II Kings 14:26.

During these sad events, the faithful must have turned again and again to Scripture. By this time, the Books of Genesis through II Samuel were written. The faithful could read the admonitions of Samuel (spoken two centuries earlier). They could review the life of Saul—especially his shallow faith. And, like us, they were able to reassure themselves—by reading the story of David—that God blesses those who obey Him. The faithful hung on in hope for a new and better day in the future.

## GRACE OF GOD

The conduct of the kings of Israel was irreprehensible. Why did God allow the Hebrew nation to continue? They deserved swift punishment.

The grace of God is His unearned, spontaneous love of sinful man. This emotion lies at the heart of the New Testament and is one of its distinguishing features.

### I. Grace In The New Testament

Grace is a favorite term of Paul. He used it 101 times in his letters (whereas the word grace is found only 51 times in the rest of the New Testament, that is, 101 times in 86 pages compared to 51 times in 266 pages)!

A. From God. Grace comes to humans from God, I Corinthians 15:10; II Corinthians 9:14; Ephesians 3:7. It is His "*indescribable gift*" to mankind, II Corinthians 9:15.

B. Through Jesus Christ. The grace of Christ is demonstrated in His obedience to God in becoming human, in His lowly birth, by His ministry, by His faithfulness that led Him to the cross, and in His mighty resurrection—all done "*for our sake*"—though there is nothing about us that even remotely deserves such kindness, II Corinthians 8:9. Therefore, grace is attributed to God and to Jesus Christ, Romans 5:15; I Corinthians 1:3; II Thessalonians 1:12.

C. To Humans. Grace is offered to human beings by God—so that good things may occur in our life which we cannot make happen on our own. This gift is not a reward for good conduct. Rather, it is a kind gesture born out of unearned compassion to rescue human beings from their own failures, Ephesians 2:1-5. Obedience to the commands of God is called "*works*." If we try to gain the approval of God through obeying His will, we will miserably fail. Grace is no longer grace if it can be earned, Romans 11:6. We are unacceptable to God because of our sin. Grace makes us acceptable in spite of our mistakes (though we must not go on deliberately sinning so that more grace may be given to us), Romans 6:1-4.

### II. Grace In The Old Testament

The concept of grace is not confined to the New Testament (nor to the letters of Paul) though its clearest articulation is found there. Still, there was a clear awareness in the Old Testament that God was willing to forgive those who did not deserve forgiveness, Psalms 32:1-5; 51:1-4; 130:1-8; 143:1,2. God would clean the unclean, Ezekiel 36:25-29. This sense of unmerited divine favor was expressed in the early history of the Hebrew nation: in the exodus, Deuteronomy 1:29-31; in the

wilderness wondering, Deuteronomy 2:7, and in occupying the Promised Land, Deuteronomy 6:10-12. For, the whole exodus-wilderness-conquest experience was an unearned, undeserved gift from the compassionate hand of God, Deuteronomy 8:10-18. All of this was NOT due to the righteousness of the people. It was a gift not a reward, Deuteronomy 9:4-6.

In the Old Testament, the concept of “grace” is expressed in the phrase “unfailing love.” In the New Testament, “grace” is described as a “gift.” It is never earned. It is never a payment for work, Romans 4:4,5. Rather, “grace” is a “free” gift. It is always depicted as something “given,” Ephesians 3:7; 4:7.

The fact that the Hebrew nation (for all of her sin) continued to live in a land they did not own is a clear demonstration of the grace of the Almighty.



**EXPLAIN THE CONTRADICTION: II Kings 9:6-10 and Hosea 1:4.**

There is no question about Jehu carrying out the orders of God, II Kings 9:7,8. He killed the kings of Israel and Judah, forced the city elders of Samaria to decapitate the seventy sons of Ahab, and massacred the Baal priests, II Kings 10:1-10, 18-27. And, after the slaughter, Jehu is commended for his actions, II Kings 10:30.

In a later period of his career as king, Jehu did not enjoy great success as the defender of his country (Israel). He lost all of the Transjordan to King Hazael of Damascus, II Kings 10:31-33. The son of Jehu, Jehoahaz, was reduced to complete vassalage by Hazael, II Kings 13:3. But the great grandson of Jehu, Jeroboam II, was blessed by God in restoring all of the lost Transjordan, II Kings 14:23-27.

On what basis, then, did the prophet Hosea pronounce judgment on Jehu, Hosea 1:4,5? Was it not the impure motive with which Jehu carried out the command of God to destroy the family Ahab? He did what the Lord said out of personal interest. In annihilating the family of Ahab, he secured for himself the throne of Israel. Thus, there was a clear advantage in obeying that command of God. But his fidelity to the Lord was shallow. For Jehu did not abstain from idolatry, II Kings 10:28,31. These mixed motives surfaced in the actions of the descendants of Jehu, too, II Kings 13:2. The grandson of Jehu did not do much better, II Kings 13:10,11. And, Jeroboam II, the great grandson of Jehu, was also two-faced, II Kings 14:3,4.

The important principle set forth in Hosea 1:4 was that when blood is shed—even in obedience to God—guilt is imputed to the shedder of blood IF his motive is tainted by self-interest rather than a sincere concern for the purity of the faith. This is the difference between Elijah and Jehu. Both slaughtered Baal priests. Elijah was not condemned. Jehu was. The one was zealous for the Lord. The other was zealous for himself.

So, with what motive do we obey the Lord? Do we incur guilt for our pretending, our lying to God? cf. Acts 5:1-6. There is a fine line between the two—but a line nevertheless. We do well not to ignore that line!

## DO YOU GET IT?

*“Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there,”*  
Isaiah 28:10.

A man held up two coins that totaled 55 cents. He told his audience, *“One of the coins was NOT a nickel!”* How could the man hold up two coins totaling 55 cents?

Few people get the answer on the first try (though, if they hear the riddle again and again, most can figure it out eventually).

Advertising is based on the “power of repetition.” Therefore, some striking phrase is repeated until it makes a permanent imprint on our mind. For instance, *“You are worth it,” “Pick up the pace,” “What do you have in your wallet?”* and *“When it rains, it pours.”* The advice: *“Say it briefly and say it often”* is sound counsel.

That is the meaning of the words in Isaiah, Isaiah 28:9-13. God was trying to get the attention of Israel. He was trying to warn them of impending doom. He repeated His message time and time again. They heard the words but failed to grasp the significance, Isaiah 30:15-18. Israel did not get it!

One of the important rules in reading the Scripture is “repetition.” The first time you read a passage, you may miss the meaning. Some truths require frequent repetition before they stick in our minds. Hence, we should read the Bible slowly and read it often. It is not how much you read, but how frequently you read. Reading a few verses with understanding is far better than reading an entire book without any comprehension, cf. Acts 8:30.

Now back to the riddle. The man held up two coins that totaled 55 cents. One of the coins was not a nickel. How could the man claim to be holding 55 cents?

Did you get it? Do you need to hear it again?

One of the two coins was not a nickel. It was a fifty-cent piece. The other coin was a nickel! It is all in how you read the riddle or how many times you read it. How do we read the Bible? How often do we read it?

I read Your word so sweet,  
 Like honey in the honeycomb;  
 A joy to read over and over,  
 So the truth can finally come home.

Study His word to be wise; believe it to be saved; understand it to be holy.

## TIME OF HOPE, II Kings 14:1-29, Hosea, and Amos

During the fifty years of history under consideration, the neighboring countries that had harassed Israel and Judah earlier, became politically and militarily weak. In the absence of threatening attack, both Israel and Judah enjoyed a measure of prosperity. It was a time in which hope seemed to be a right and proper attitude.

### I. Condition Of The People

Though things seemed good, if the truth were known, a fatal spiritual decay was eating away at the foundation of the Hebrew nations.

A. Israel. During most of this period, Jeroboam II was ruler over the northern tribes of Israel, II Kings 14:23. He is remembered for two things: (1) his evil influence, II Kings 14:24, and (2) his military success, II Kings 14:25. Since these victories extended as far as Damascus, they were stunning accomplishments, II Kings 14:28. However, as we will see in a minute, things in Israel were about to take an abrupt turn, Hosea 6:4-10; Amos 8:4-6.

B. Judah. Uzziah was king over the southern tribe of Judah. Early in his fifty-two year reign, while still new to the throne, Uzziah “*did right in the eyes of the Lord*,” II Chronicles 26:3-5. So Judah became very strong. Uzziah conquered the Philistines to the west and the Ammonites to the east, II Chronicles 26:6-8. Things were good until Uzziah “*became powerful*,” II Chronicles 26:9,10,14,15. Then pride took over, II Chronicles 26:16-19. The king knew better but did not do better! Near the beginning of Uzziah’s rule, Isaiah is called to be a prophet. His message (and that of his contemporary prophets) was straightforward. Judah was like a beautiful, termite infested house, Isaiah 6:1-13, cf. Joel 2:1,2; Amos 2:4,5.

### II. Message Of The Lord

A remarkable group of men was called by God to be prophets. They furnished a large portion of the Old Testament text. These gallant men had three characteristics that distinguished them from the earlier prophets—Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, etc. They

- . spoke to the people (rather than to the king)
- . applied the will of God to social conditions (instead of political failures)
- . wrote down their oracles (or inspired announcements)

Though unpopular in their day, later generations realized the truth of what they said. This realization led to the preservation of their message.

A. Amos, Amos 1:1. Israel was condemned for her gross immorality, Amos 2:6-8. The women were drunkards, Amos 4:1. Israel was doomed, Amos 5:1,2. She refused to listen, Amos 5:10. Instead, Israel trusted in her idol gods, Amos 5:25-27. She simply thought the good days would never end, Amos 6:4-7. The message of Amos was not well received, Amos 7:10. The prophet went home (to Judah). Thirty years later, Israel went into exile, Amos 9:8-10.

B. Hosea, Hosea 1:1. Israel had become a spiritual prostitute. She left Jehovah and loved Baal, Hosea 2:13. Therefore, the prophet couched his message in divine complaint and divine condemnation.

1. Complaint. The complaint of God against Israel was threefold:

. Ignorance, Hosea 4:6.

. Pride, Hosea 5:5. The Lord does not measure a nation by her gross national product, space program, or technological expertise. God measures nations by their moral integrity.

. Wickedness, Hosea 7:11. The Jews had become burnt in politics and uncooked in religion, Hosea 7:8.

2. Condemnation. The exile of Israel resulted from two conditions:

. Corruption, Hosea 9:9. "*As in the days of Gibeah*" is a reference to Judges 19:10-30. The religion of Israel had become rotten.

. Idolatry, Hosea 9:10; 11:1,2; 13:1,2. It was common for idol worshippers to kiss their gods as a sign of respect, I Kings 19:18.

Israel was in trouble, Hosea 13:15,16. God had spoken, Amos 3:7,8. The Lord wanted to forgive but would not force stubborn sinners to repent.

In a horrible car accident, a young wife was severely hurt. She remained in a coma for three years while her husband patiently waited by her bedside.

Suddenly she regained consciousness. Her first words were "*I have been on a long journey. Where have you been?*"

The husband bravely replied, "*I have been waiting for you to return!*" That is precisely the attitude of God toward wayward sinners, Hosea 14:9.

## JUDGMENT OF GOD

Occasions of punishment—both individual and national—are acts of divine judgment [Isaiah 26:9](#); [Hosea 5:1-3](#). These judgments occur in history and in eternity, [John 12:31](#); [Hebrews 9:27](#).

### I. The Judge

God is judge, [Genesis 18:25](#); [Isaiah 33:22](#); [James 5:9b](#). In (or through) Jesus, God judges everyone, [I Corinthians 4:4](#). Christ claimed during His ministry to judge for the Father, [John 8:16](#). He judges the whole world, [II Timothy 4:1](#). And, at the end of time, His saints will assist in the judgment, [I Corinthians 6:2,3](#).

### II. The Judgment

The works and words of Jesus are the basis of the judgment, [John 12:47-50](#). The attitude of people toward Him will determine their eternal destiny, [John 3:16-18](#).

A. Nature Of Judgment. Like the providence of God, the judgment of God in time is an invisible, temporary, ongoing process. The judgment of God in eternity will be a visible, final, one time event. It will take place when Christ comes again, [II Thessalonians 1:7b,8](#), after the resurrection of the dead, [John 5:28,29](#). Human courts of law do not satisfy the requirements of justice in history, [Job 21:7-13](#). Only the final judgment of God will do that. All crimes that are hidden—as well as every good that is suppressed—will be brought to light and receive their just due!

B. Object Of Judgment. The purpose of the final judgment will not be for collecting evidence (for God already knows). The purpose of the final judgment will not be for pleading a case (for our destiny will have already been determined). The purpose of the final judgment will be to pass sentence, that is, a “*revealing*” or “*making known*” the final outcome, [Romans 2:5](#); [I Timothy 5:24,25](#). The life of every person is a parchment. The original writing may have faded but its ink has penetrated the whole thickness of the paper. The chemistry of God will bring to light the hidden memories. These past attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds will vindicate the past judgments of God in time and the final judgment of God in eternity.

C. Subjects Of Judgment. Everyone without exception will stand before the judgment bar of God, [Ecclesiastes 12:14](#); [II Corinthians 5:10](#). When the Lord returns, all the dead will be raised and all the living will be changed prior to their appearance before the judgment seat of heaven, [Revelation 20:11-13](#). It will be an awesome sight. It is certainly better to willingly pay the price of obedience now than to forcibly pay the penalty of disobedience later, [Hebrews 10:26-31](#).

D. Grounds Of Judgment. The foundation of divine judgment is justice. God is always fair, Job 8:3. He does not show favoritism, Romans 2:9,10. The Lord is unbiased and impartial, Romans 2:12. Since “*everyone has sinned and fallen short of the approval of God*,” we are urged to accept Jesus, Romans 3:20-26. In short, the only hope for the human race is Christ, John 8:24; 14:6; Acts 4:12; I John 5:10-12. That truth is not only the basis of the future judgment but also the motivation for the present mission, Romans 10:12-15. In this light, the words of the Old Testament prophet take on a seriousness worthy of our close attention: “*prepare to meet your God*,” Amos 4:12c.

### WHO IS THE “MORNING STAR?” Isaiah 14:12.

In other versions of the Bible, the word helel is rendered “star of the morning,” “dawn bringer,” or “Lucifer.” The Hebrew term helel means “shine brightly.” Hence, the idea of a “shining one” is not amiss. The Latin version used heosphoros or “morning star” which the King James rendered “Lucifer.”

Obviously the word is a poetic name for a nation, Isaiah 14:3-12. The nation of Babylon is characterized as the “morning star.” This is similar to the word “Jeshurun” the “upright” (which was applied to Israel), Deuteronomy 32:15; 35:5,26; Isaiah 44:2. There is much speculation (but no definitive conclusion) regarding who the “morning star” was. Some apply the term to a particular Babylonian king. Others prefer to think it is satan. Probably both are straining the point.

The “morning star” was a composite of all the boastful Babylonian monarchs which the devil manipulated, Isaiah 14:13-15. Their fate would be disaster. God would bring them down, Isaiah 14:22,23.

The kings of Babylon are tauntingly addressed as the “morning star” that appears temporarily and then vanishes in the bright light of the sun. The rulers of Babylon had grand plans that came to naught (like every other power hungry ruler since that time), Daniel 2:29-45. Certainly satan was behind this parade of nations which “bit the dust.” But, “Lucifer,” in Isaiah 14:12, is not satan but the proud Babylonian monarchs.

As “the morning star,” these rulers shined brightly but quickly faded. Every nation comes and goes. The United States will not be an exception. Our country—like the nations before her—will rise, shine, and decline. Only the kingdom of God will last forever.

## COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM

*“Do not trust a neighbor; put your confidence in a friend,” Micah 7:5.*

Israel had become a polluted stream. God was not pleased. What was once clean was now filthy. And the people of God did not seem to care.

*“What does righteousness and wickedness have in common? What fellowship can light have with darkness? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?” II Corinthians 6:14b-16.*

The Brule River—the boundary between Northern Michigan and Wisconsin—is a beautiful, clear, sparkling stream. It is full of trout. But, a few miles downstream, it converges with the Iron River. The Iron River is reddish-brown—loaded with iron ore sediment.

Where the two rivers join, the streams flow separately—the right half of the river is clear and the left half is an ugly orange. Rocks, logs, and an uneven river bottom cause the two rivers to mix together. The Brule becomes dirty. The trout do not live in the murky water.

Life is like that. Righteousness is polluted by unrighteousness. Good is overrun by bad. The clean is contaminated by the unclean.

It is sad but true. Evil associations defile good folks. Hence, Isaiah counseled, *“Depart, depart, go out from there. Touch no unclean thing,” Isaiah 52:11*. And, the apostle Paul wrote, *“Come out from them and be separate,” II Corinthians 6:17*.

To dilly-dally with evil is playing with fire. Do not form alliances with sinners. *“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers,” II Corinthians 6:14a*. Maintain purity by staying unmixed with impurity, II Corinthians 7:1b.

Shun evil, bad language disdain,  
Honor His name, do not take it in vain;  
From sin, stay clear;  
Live in faith and love all year.

Scholars are known for their wisdom, mothers for their children, fools by their words, and Christians because of their friends.



## **DEMISE OF ISRAEL, II KINGS 5:1 – 17:41; Micah**

A mighty oak can be destroyed either by rotteness or by wind. If both forces attack the tree—one from within and the other from without—the oak is surely doomed. So it was for the northern tribes of Israel.

Inner spiritual decay had already taken a toll. Now, from without, a storm was brewing. The king of Assyria was annexing nation after nation to his empire. Israel was in his path of conquest. They were on his agenda for annexation!

### I. The Last Days Of Israel

During the reign of Menahem, the Assyrians, under king Pul (also called Tiglath-peleser) invaded Israel. Menahem had invited him to help control some rebellious Israelites. Pul made Menahem a vassal and required a heavy tribute payment, II Kings 15:17-20. A few years later, Pul was back. In the reign of Pekah—the successor to Menahem—inhabitants of several northern cities in Israel were carried off to Assyrian exile, II Kings 15:27-29; I Chronicles 5:26. Hoshea, assassinated Pekah, II Kings 15:30. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. God was exasperated. Israel did not care. Hoshea was the last king of Israel, II Kings 17:1-6. King Shalmaneser of Assyria finished the judgment of God against His sinful people, II Kings 17:7-23. The final demise of Israel occurred in 722 BC.

### II. The Impending Destruction Of Judah

King Ahaz was still on the throne in Judah when Israel went into exile. He literally saw the smoke of Samaria from Jerusalem. Still he did evil in the eyes of the Lord, II Kings 16:1-4. He went to meet king Pul (Tiglath-peleser) of Assyria in the city of Damascus. While there, he saw an altar to a pagan god. He was so enamored by it, he had a replica built and put in the temple of God in Jerusalem, II Kings 16:10-14. Ahaz was an evil man who had a negative influence on the people of Judah.

A. Vengeance Of God. Micah was the messenger of the Lord during these audacious developments in Judah, Micah 1:1. The prophet spoke to the king. The ruler had confiscated the property of the poor to pay the tribute to Tiglath-peleser, Micah 2:1,2. The poor were treated like a butcher cutting meat, Micah 3:1-3. The powerful thought they were immune to the judgment of God, Micah 3:9-11. The prophet predicted the fall of Jerusalem, Micah 3:12.

B. Vindication Of God. The people of Judah regarded Jehovah as a hard Master who made unjust requirements. They wanted to know what it would take to satisfy the Lord, Micah 6:6,7. They believed the Lord was unfair. He required too much. The prophet disagreed. The commands of God for Judah were threefold:

- . Act justly
- . Love mercy
- . Walk humbly

The demands of the Lord were a blessing (not a burden), Micah 6:8. The problem with Judah was sin, Micah 6:9-13. God was willing to forgive if the people were willing to repent, Micah 7:18-20. Unfortunately, they did not turn to Jehovah. Approximately 135 years later, Judah also went into exile (as Micah had predicted).

## HOLINESS OF GOD

The people of Israel and Judah had difficulty grasping the distinctive nature of God. We do, too. It is helpful to realize that, more than any other word, “holiness” expresses the essential character of the Lord, Isaiah 6:3.

The Scripture says, “*God is holy*.” He is pure (that is, separate from sin), mysterious, and incomprehensible. Yet, He resides within the everyday experiences of human beings. In other words, earth is crammed with heaven!

### I. Meaning Of The Word

The basic significance of the word “*holy*” is “separateness,” Leviticus 20:26. The holy is separate (or distinct) from the common and unclean, Leviticus 10:10; Ezekiel 22:26; 44:23. When holiness is treated as though it was ordinary, the separateness becomes profane.

### II. Associations Of The Word

A study of the things most frequently associated with “holiness” reveals that vast diversity and richness of the term.

A. Fire. Holiness is often mentioned in conjunction with fire, Exodus 3:2-5. The New Testament also reflects the same connection between holiness and fire, Hebrews 12:28,29.

B. Fear. God is an awesome God. His presence evokes awe and reverence as well as dread and terror, Genesis 28:16,17. An understanding of a holy God causing terror persists throughout the Old Testament, Psalms 89:7. Therefore, He is consistently called “awesome,” Exodus 15:11; I Samuel 7:23; Psalms 99:2,3; 111:9; 145:6. To grasp the significance of His awesomeness, it is important to notice that the word “great” is often used with the word “awesome,” Deuteronomy 7:21; Nehemiah 1:5. Hence, God is majestic, marvelous, incredible, and extraordinary, Psalms 95:3; 104:1. There is no other God like Him.

C. Taboo. There is an insurmountable, infinite difference between God and man. Humans, therefore, are forbidden to draw near to Him. He is unapproachable, Joshua 5:15. When God descended on Mount Sinai, the place was taboo, off limits, forbidden territory, Exodus 19:12,13,20,21. Whoever touches holy things will experience the same fate, Numbers 18:3; I Samuel 6:19,20. It is apparent God is not man and man is not God, Psalms 9:19,20; Isaiah 31:3; Hosea 11:9b. Thus, we must not trivialize God (or the things that belong to God).

D. Unsearchable. Man cannot fully fathom God. His mysterious ways are beyond human wisdom, Job 11:7-9. Knowledge of Him exceeds our grasp, defies our knowing, Psalm 139:6. No one can penetrate His plans or His purposes, Isaiah 40:13,14; I Corinthians 2:11. All comparisons are futile. All effort is wasted. There is nothing on earth like Him. God is above. Man resides below. Consequently, we should walk in humility, careful to mind our mouth, Ecclesiastes 5:2.

E. Wonderful. The ways of God are not the ways of man, Isaiah 55:8,9. The secrets of the Lord are beyond our calculation, understanding, or control because they are holy, Psalm 77:13,14. Even His name is above our understanding, Judges 13:18. We may search out the “hidden things” of God but we will not find them, Isaiah 45:15; Jeremiah 33:3. The “hidden things” cannot be found because they are “too wonderful,” Job 42:3.

From this brief review, the following ideas emerge:

- . Holiness is much more than mere purity. Fear, awe, terror, wonder, and taboo are closely related to the holiness of God.

- . Holiness is more than what has been discussed. Holiness also includes “jealousy,” “wrath,” “power,” and “might” which explains holiness as the basis for judgment and redemption.

- . Holiness has different meanings. In the Old Testament, the holy is localized in particular places or certain practices. In the New Testament, holiness is ascribed almost exclusively to God, Matthew 6:9; I Peter 1:15,16.

### EXPLAIN THE CONTRADICTION: Hosea 8:13 and 11:5

The prophet Hosea says that Israel “*will return to Egypt,*” [Hosea 8:13](#). Then, a couple of chapters later, he says, they “*will not return to Egypt,*” [Hosea 11:5](#). Sounds confusing. And it is until one takes a closely look.

There are two senses in which Israel could “return to Egypt.” (1) They could physically go to the nation along the Nile (which Hosea 11:5 says will not happen). (2) They could return spiritually to the values of Egypt (which Hosea 8:13 indicates they did).

God had forbidden Israel to adopt the values of Egypt. In other words, the people of God were not to trust in horses and chariots (the military equipment of the ancient world), [Deuteronomy 17:16](#). Israel was not to rely on material things. It would lead to materialism. Solomon flagrantly ignored that advice, [I Kings 10:26-29](#). His disobedience turned the people of Jehovah back to Egypt, namely, the arrogance found in material wealth, [Hosea 12:8](#).

This is the figurative sense that Hosea intended in 8:13. They built “altars for sinning”—probably Baal worship. They “*regarded the law of God as something alien,*” [Hosea 8:12](#). In effect, Israel had returned to Egypt spiritually.

Certainly, when the last clause of 8:13 is taken literally, it would appear to be a threat of deportation to Egypt. In hindsight, we know nothing like that ever happened. Israel was deported to Assyria (which Hosea 11:5 says).

The word “*return*” in Hosea 8:13 is an imperfect verb indicating incomplete action. Israel was “becoming like Egypt,” in the process of becoming pagan in their attitude toward God. Rather than come to God in sincere repentance to do His will, they offered sacrifices to buy Him off, to earn His favor—just like the pagans in Egypt (and elsewhere) did.

The Bible often uses a name of a country, a city, or a person as a symbol of wickedness, cf. [Isaiah 1:9,10](#) (though Sodom and Gomorrah no longer existed); [Revelation 18:9,10](#) (though Babylon was destroyed five centuries earlier).

Israel did not return to Egypt but she did become like the Egyptians.

## TRUST

*“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid,” Isaiah 12:2.*

Two Christian women were talking about their faith. One of them said, *“I have found a passage that helps me so much: ‘When I am afraid, I will trust in You,’ ” Psalm 56:3.*

The other lady replied, *“Indeed, that is a great verse—helpful and comforting in fearful times. But I have found a better passage.”*

*“Really!”* the first woman replied. *“Yes! It says, ‘I will trust and not be afraid,’ ” Isaiah 12:2a. What a blessing to rely on the promises of God so that fear does not take hold. Rather than wait for desperation to set in—when we are at the end of our rope—we can simply trust God (because there is nothing more to do).*

A tourist was walking along the shore of the Dead Sea. He lost his balance and fell into the briny water. Since the water was deep and he could not swim, he thrashed about in desperation—afraid he would sink. He flailed frantically. At last, completely exhausted, he could struggle no more.

What a surprise! The salty water held him up. He could float effortlessly. He was not going to drown. He did not need to struggle. All he had to do was surrender to the salt water.

So it is in our spiritual walk. God is there. He holds us up. We will not be drowned in the swirling waters of life IF we put our trust in Him, Psalm 56:4.

It is fruitless to expend our energy flailing about attempting to rescue ourselves. If we would just cease our floundering, abandon our fears, and trust the promises of God. Then we would know the safety He offers, Romans 8:31-39.

Simply trusting in every way,  
Trusting in the stormy day;  
Even when my faith is small,  
Trusting Him will resolve it all.

When life puts a heavy burden on you, God puts His comforting arms around you.

## TIME OF UNCERTAINTY, II Kings 18:1 – 20:21 and Zephaniah

When Israel was defeated, the king of Judah was Hezekiah. This ruler lived during the latter days of Isaiah and the ministry of Zephaniah. Perhaps, it was the influence of Isaiah that made Hezekiah such a good king, II Kings 18:1-6.

Things looked promising. God was obviously protecting Judah—they stood while Israel fell. And, as long as there was no threat of foreign invasion, they felt secure. It appears that they said: *“Surely God is our salvation; we will trust and not be afraid,”* Isaiah 12:2.

Unfortunately, when their enemies come against them, they quickly retreated to political agreements and military weapons. God was abandoned in favor of human arrangements.

### I. Predicament Of Hezekiah

Early in his reign, Hezekiah was very successful, II Kings 18:7,8.

A. Political Alliances. Merodack-baladan, the king of Babylon, had tried to take over the throne of Assyria. He failed. Hence, in order to try again, he asked other nations to join him against Assyria. Hezekiah of Judah and Tirhakah of Egypt did. The coup failed again. Hezekiah was vulnerable to the anger of Assyria (the nation that had recently carried Israel into exile).

B. Military Invasion. So far Hezekiah had done fairly well, but he was about to be tested. Assyria was on the move south toward Jerusalem, II Kings 18:13-15. Hezekiah paid a dear price. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was not finished. He sent a huge army to the outskirts of Jerusalem, II Kings 18:17. Sennacherib threatened Hezekiah, II Kings 18:19-25. This was a frightening situation. Isaiah told Hezekiah not to be afraid, II Kings 19:5-7. It was hard not to be distressed. The future looked grim. Tirhakah of Egypt could come to the aid of Hezekiah, but Sennacherib laughed at that idea, II Kings 19:9-11. So Hezekiah prayed, II Kings 19:14-19. God responded, II Kings 19:35,36. Hezekiah passed the test.

C. Spiritual Temptation. A few years later, Hezekiah became ill. Isaiah told him to *“put his house in order!”* II Kings 20:1. Again the king prayed. And, again, God answered. Hezekiah was spared, II Kings 20:4-6. Merodack-baladan heard of his good fortune and sent gifts, II Kings 20:12,13. Pride was the downfall of Hezekiah, II Chronicles 32:24-26. Why did God continually test Hezekiah? So that Hezekiah might learn what was inside himself, II Chronicles 32:31,32.

### II. Message Of Zephaniah

The prophet forecasted the fall of Judah in the coming "*Day of the Lord*," Zephaniah 1:14-18. His message can be divided into three parts.

A. Declaration Of Judgment. Zephaniah pronounced a certain doom on all those who worshipped idols, Zephaniah 1:4-6. King Hezekiah had attempted to purge idolatry from the land but had not fully succeeded. Therefore, God would not allow His people to ignore Him. He would act. He would disturb those who complacently remained undisturbed, who thought He would "*do nothing*," Zephaniah 1:12. We should set up and take note!

B. Exhortation To Repentance. Genuine repentance might save the faithful remnant of Judah, Zephaniah 2:1-3. The prophet pronounced doom on the nations surrounding Judah—Philistia, Moab, Ammon, and Assyria—because they disrespected Judah, Zephaniah 2:8-10. In view of the judgment against other nations, Judah should repent, Zephaniah 3:6,7.

C. Promise Of Redemption. The pagans did not listen, so the prophet turns to his own countrymen. The Lord would protect the faithful few, Zephaniah 3:8,11-13. Jehovah would again dwell among them, Zechariah 13:14-17. God promised to bring a remnant of Judah back from exile, Zephaniah 3:19,20. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of their return from captivity (which we will study in a few weeks).



## COUNCIL OF GOD

The concept of a council (or an assembly) of divine beings sitting together with God—making decisions concerning affairs in heaven and on earth—was a persistent item in the language and imagery of the ancient world.

### I. Heavenly Council In The Mediterranean Culture

The council of God is rooted in the oldest traditions of the Mediterranean worldview. The heavenly council was part of the government of the universe—a projection of the earthly political experience onto the stage of celestial activity.

A. Babylon. The Babylonians believed the whole universe was governed by an assembly of immortals—a rule that was seen in the forces of nature. This power captivated the Babylonians with great awe. As a consequence, they viewed the heavenly council as an assembly of the gods. The religious literature of ancient Babylon described the council as the highest authority. In the assembly, the course of history and the fate of all things were decided. Before these final decisions were made, proposals were discussed at length—sometimes even heatedly debated by the gods. The leader of the assembly was the god of heaven—Anu.

B. Greece. The idea of the gods in council—with the king of the gods in charge—is clearly present in the literature of ancient Greece. The gods of Mount Olympus, in assembly with Zeus presiding, is a common scene in the writings of Homer.

C. Canaan. Closer to the biblical material were the religious ideas of the pagan Canaanites. El, the Father of Years, reigned over the council of gods as a king. The council was called the “Assembly of the Gods.” This expression is also found in a Hebrew song, Psalm 82:1.

### II. Heavenly Council In Biblical Literature

The heavenly council was a common concept in the ancient world. The assembly of the gods had an identical structure and function in the earliest Babylonian, Greek, Canaanite, and Hebrew societies.

A. Inspired Scripture Texts. The stinging rebuke of Eliphaz, a friend of Job, asked if Job was privy to the deliberations in the council of God, Job 15:1-9. The Psalms depict God as respected in the “*assembly of the holy ones*,” Psalm 89:5-8. Jeremiah scolds the false prophets of his day as babbling fools who have not stood in “*the council of the Lord*,” Jeremiah 23:15-18,22. Those assembled in the heavenly council are called “*angels*” (some versions say “*sons of God*”), Job 1:6-8, “*holy ones*,” Job 5:1; 15:15,16; Psalm 89:5,6, or “*mighty ones*,” Psalm 29:1,2. The heavenly council may

also be referred to by the pronoun “us” or “our,” Genesis 1:25; 11:7; Exodus 15:11.

B. Dead Sea Scrolls. The idea of a heavenly council appears numerous times in the literature of the Dead Sea scrolls. These manuscripts refer constantly to “*the community of the faithful*” and “*the heavenly assembly.*” The scrolls go to great length to explain how the “*heavenly council*” finagled some of the prophets to lie to king Ahab and queen Jezebel, cf. I Kings 22:19-23.

When all is said and done, it is obvious there is a distinct difference between the biblical concept of the “heavenly council” and the pagan understanding of the “celestial assembly.” In the heathen sources, each member of “the community of the faithful” is an autonomous manifestation of a force in nature, while the biblical literature always pictures “the holy ones” as servants of Jehovah. The “gods” are reduced to “angels.” In the Bible, therefore, a current worldview concept in ancient cultures is reshaped and employed to convey a common understanding of God and His celestial council analogous to a human king surrounded by his assembly of advisors.

### DOES AMOS 8:11,12 ALSO APPLY TO TODAY?

The ministry of Amos was to the northern tribes of Israel near the close of the reign of king Jeroboam II (793–753 BC), Amos 1:1. The first part of Amos chapter 8: deals specifically with the approaching demise of Israel, Amos 8:1-6. The actual defeat of Israel, during the Assyrian siege of Samaria, occurred in 722 BC (or thirty-five years after the prophet spoke this message). The end was near. Their defeat would be a bitter experience, Amos 8:7-10.

The warning of Amos regarding the “*famine of hearing the words of the Lord*” refers directly to the final decades of the history of Israel, Amos 8:11,12. The message of Amos is the final warning for these rebellious, disobedient people. Their frantic search for comforting words from God are similar to the hopeless search of king Saul near the end of his reign for some word from the Lord, I Samuel 28:4-7. The lesson seems loud and clear: there comes a time, when people, who ignore God, will be ignored by God!

In Amos 8:11,12, the phrase “the words of God” was not referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. They were the words of special guidance sought in times of crisis. God is eager to help those who want to be helped, Psalms 37:39,40; Hebrews 4:14-16; 13:6. But He will not tolerate deliberate disobedience forever. And, should we push beyond the limits of His grace, as Israel did, we will be left without the special guidance of God. Heaven will be silent. We will be on our own!

The warning given by Amos to Israel applies today. Wherever there is rebellion against God—whether by nations or individuals—terror will follow if people fail to take heed. These words are spoken for our instruction, Romans 15:4. Do not ignore the words of Amos, cf. Jude 3-7.

## EAT HIS WORDS

*“When Your words came, I ate them: they were my joy and the delight of my heart,” Jeremiah 15:16.*

Have you ever been forced to “eat your own words?” It is a humiliating experience. For whatever reason, when we admit our mistake, “eating our words” is often called “eating crow.”

However, the words of God ought to be eaten! The prophet Ezekiel used the same metaphor, Ezekiel 3:3. The meaning conveyed by “eating the words” of God refer to the cost of discipleship

We are instructed to read the message of the Lord, Psalm 119:41-48. And, when we have digested His words, when we have put His instructions into practice, there is a price to pay. The will of God will be “sweet as honey” in our mouth but “bitter as gall” in our belly. In other words, there will be loneliness, ridicule, and rejection, Jeremiah 15:17.

We long to have friends, to be popular, but finding such acceptance is often denied when we practice our Christian faith. Friends can be cruel—society can turn against us—when we refuse to participate in their evil. At such times, we are faced with a dilemma: will we pay the price and accept the consequences of our faith in a hostile environment? Jeremiah 26:1-8.

There may be times of doubt. Will God keep His promise or will He be like “a deceitful brook,” Jeremiah 15:18. In the rainy season, the wades in Palestine are full of water. But, in the dry season, they have no water. That is to say, the brooks cannot always be depended on for refreshment. Will God let us down when we “stick our neck out” for Him, when we are faithful to His word?

The Lord promised to be with the prophet, Jeremiah 15:19-21. And God will be with us in those trying times when our faith is belittled IF we turn to Him, Joshua 1:7-9.

Our watchword in life,  
The map for our route,  
Is His inspired word,  
To be taken in and lived out.

The person who occasionally samples the word of God will never acquire a taste for it?

## DAY OF DOMINATION, II KINGS 21:1-18; NAHUM

A few years earlier, Hezekiah, king of Judah, had tried to restore the religion of God. The revival did not have a lasting effect. The good that Hezekiah attempted to do was completely undone by his son—Manasseh.

### I. Sin Of Manasseh

Manasseh reinstated pagan worship throughout Judah, II Kings 21:1-9. Those who protested against paganism were put to death, II Kings 21:16; Jeremiah 2:29,30. Tradition says that it was during the bloody reign of Manasseh that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two, cf. Hebrews 11:32-38.

A. Folly On Earth. Judah considered herself innocent, Jeremiah 2:35-37. God knew better, II Kings 21:10-15; Jeremiah 15:4. Warped understanding of ourselves is a common mistake in the human family.

B. Punishment From Heaven. During the reign of Manasseh, Assyria was at the apex of her power. Manasseh foolishly rebelled against Assyria. The king of Judah was taken like a criminal and imprisoned in Babylon, II Chronicles 33:10,11. After the humiliation, he was returned to Jerusalem, II Chronicles 33:12,13. Manasseh tried to undo what he had done, but Judah was beyond making amends, II Chronicles 33:15-17.

During the greater part of the reign of Manasseh, Judah had been dominated (both politically and religiously) by Assyria. Yet, in spite of that, the prophet Nahum predicted the fall of Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria.

### II. Vengeance Of God

Nahum was a contemporary of Jeremiah. The Book of Nahum has one subject: the demise of Assyria, Nahum 1:1. This was a daring message since Assyria was the most powerful nation in the world (and showed no signs of collapse). In keeping with his name—Nahum means “comfort”—the prophet announced the end of Assyria who had dominated Judah for so long, Nahum 2:2.

A. Vengeance Declared. Nineveh was an awesome fortress whose walls were—100 feet high and 30 feet thick—wide enough for three chariots to ride side by side simultaneously. The wall had 1200 defense towers, i.e., a defense tower every 30 feet and a moat 140 feet wide and 60 feet deep. Nineveh was a formidable challenge, but God said she was going down, Nahum 1:2,3; 2:13.

B. Vengeance Described. The predictions of Nahum were remarkable—accurate

to the smallest detail.

| PREDICTION                    | FULFILLMENT   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. <u>Nahum 1:10; 3:1</u>     | The night Nineveh was defeated her rulers were engaged in a drunken orgy.                                     |
| 2. <u>Nahum 2:6; 3:14</u>     | The Tigris River, on whose banks Nineveh was built, flooded, collapsing large sections of the fortress walls. |
| 3. <u>Nahum 2:1,3-7</u>       | The soldiers actually became confused in their hasty preparations to defend the city.                         |
| 4. <u>Nahum 3:12,13,15-17</u> | The strength of Nineveh quickly faded and the soldiers soon retreated during the siege.                       |
| 5. <u>Nahum 2:8,9</u>         | The commanders tried to rally the troops but the city was abandoned to the plunderers (the Babylonians).      |

The defeat of Nineveh was so complete that its ruins eventually perished from sight. Three hundred years later, Alexander the Great stood on the very site of Nineveh "*wondering where that grand city was!*" The location of Nineveh was only reestablished in 1842. All that remains are two large, barren mounds of dirt, Zephaniah 2:13-15.

B. Vengeance Defended. The defeat of Assyria was due to her unparalleled cruelty, Nahum 3:18,19. The Assyrian rulers boasted of tearing arms off of men, torturing pregnant women, and killing innocent children. They were the inventors of crucifixion, Nahum 3:1-7.

God is a jealous God. His commandments must be obeyed. For the wages of sin is death, Nahum 1:3a. He is in control. His power cannot be resisted, Nahum 1:5-8.

## JEALOUSY OF GOD

The word “jealous” (and related terms “envy,” “zeal,” and “fury”) occurs numerous times in the Bible.

### I. Words For Jealousy

A. Hebrew. In the Old Testament, the phrase “to be jealous” signifies the general feeling of rivalry, intolerance of disrespect, Genesis 37:10,11; Zechariah 1:14. The concern for being replaced or the apprehension over the loss of affection is quite often attributed to God, Exodus 20:5; Joshua 24:19; Nahum 1:2.

B. Greek. Several terms are used to express a range of feelings—from “envy” to “apprehension” to “suspicion” to “bitterness,” Matthew 27:15-18; Acts 5:17,18; Romans 11:11; Galatians 5:26. Though the idea was usually described as a human emotion, it was occasionally seen as a divine attitude, James 4:4,5.

### II. Actions Of Jealousy

In the Old Testament, jealousy was a single-minded devotion that produced strong feelings toward self and others.

A. Old Testament. Jealousy can either be envy of or zeal for another.

1. Human Jealousy. The Philistines envied Isaac because of his great wealth, Genesis 26:12-14. Rachel was jealous of Leah because she had children, Genesis 30:1. Moses was opposed by some of his countrymen over being their leader, Numbers 16:1-3. The faithful are not to be jealous of sinners, Proverbs 23:17. Jealousy causes vengeful fury, Proverbs 6:34, which—if overdone—can be very detrimental, Proverbs 14:30.

2. Divine Jealousy. God is provoked by idolatry, Deuteronomy 32:16, and by disobedience, Deuteronomy 4:23,24. Willful departure from the covenant causes the jealousy of God to break forth in destructive judgment, Ezekiel 5:13; 16:38; 23:25. Covenant jealousy demands total obedience. For, the name of Jehovah is “Jealous,” Exodus 34:14.

B. New Testament. The jealousy of God—so prominent in the Old Testament—recedes (to some extent) into the background in the New Testament.

1. Human Jealousy. Jealousy of others is the opposite of agape love, I Corinthians 13:4. But, Paul used jealousy in a positive sense to explain his feelings toward the Corinthians, II Corinthians 11:2, a covenant jealousy expressed in terms

of being engaged. Most often jealousy is viewed in a negative way as a “*work of the flesh*,” Galatians 5:20; cf. Mark 15:9,10; Romans 1:29; Philippians 1:15; I Timothy 6:3,4; I Peter 2:1.

2. Divine Jealousy. The author of Hebrews foresaw judgment as a “fury of fire” against the adversaries of God, Hebrews 10:26,27. Likewise, Paul feared that the Corinthians would “*provoke the Lord to jealousy*,” I Corinthians 10:18-22. God demands the full devotion of His children, a single-minded allegiance to Him, Numbers 25:11-13; I Kings 19:9b,10. This kind of jealousy characterized the life of Paul, Galatians 1:14. Zeal (born of jealousy for God) is a good thing as long as it focuses on good things, Titus 2:11-14; II Peter 3:13. God is jealous over us. He wants us to be jealous over Him.



### RECONCILE JEREMIAH 7:22,23 WITH EXODUS 20:24.

The prophet Jeremiah was announcing the message he received from God. In other words, it was Jehovah who said, *"I did not speak to your fathers, or command them, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices, Jeremiah 7:22.* Had God forgotten? The words in Exodus seem quite clear, Exodus 20:24.

The verse in Jeremiah seems to be a denial of any sacrificial requirements being issued in the days of Moses. Yet, passage after passage in the Pentateuch indicates that God had in fact laid such stipulations on His people, Leviticus 1:1-3; 2:1-3; 3:1-5; Numbers 15:1-7. In each passage, the instructions were introduced with the words *"and the Lord said to Moses."*

Jeremiah (7:22,23) is quoted by skeptics to "prove" that the sacrificial regulations given by Moses were not from God. Those who do not respect the sanctity of Scripture accept the single statement in Jeremiah and reject the repeated statements in the Pentateuch. This is a precarious method of Bible interpretation.

Let us look closer at the text. Jeremiah 7:22,23 obviously refers to circumstances prior to Exodus 20. When Israel was in the desert (before they arrived at Mt. Sinai), the Lord had given them one command: *"Obey Me," Exodus 19:1-6*. God said nothing about sacrifices and offerings during the march from Egypt to Sinai. It is those days in the wilderness before Sinai that is in view in Jeremiah 7:22,23.

The whole thrust of Jeremiah 7 is that sacrifices and offerings are acceptable only when the worshipper comes to the altar with an obedient heart, Jeremiah 7:21-26. Israel was to see herself as a holy people called out to a new, trusting relationship with God expressed in willing obedience to His commands. Apart from such a yielded life, no sacrifice or offering would please the Lord.

Hence, the two passages are in complete harmony. Indeed, Jehovah said nothing about sacrifices and offerings before Sinai. What He emphasized was full obedience. Without that commitment, altar rituals were meaningless hypocrisy, Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-27.

In principle, does this not apply to us today? Absolutely! Going to church is meaningless if our weekday behavior honors the devil!

## BREAKING GROUND

*“Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among the thorns”*  
Jeremiah 4:3.

The prophet compared Judah to a field that was unplowed. Because of the neglect, the ground was full of weeds. Sadly, in spite of the kindness of God, Judah *“planted wickedness and reaped evil,”* Hosea 10:12,13.

Salvation involves the initiative of heaven and a response of earth. The Lord gives, but humans often refuse to receive, Matthew 23:37.

Forgiveness is like a rope. If the rope of rescue is not grasped, salvation is impossible. Hence, the uncertainty of redemption lies not in the offer of God but in the response of man.

. Unplowed Ground. It is difficult to break up unplowed ground. Former actions turn into rigid habits. The soil of our life becomes hard and resistant.

Without realizing it, we change. We are like those who have received the saving grace of God and then become fallow ground. We allow weeds to grow up in our life.

. Unplanted Soil. How long has it been since we accepted Christ? Is the fruit of righteousness growing in our hearts? Is there a promise of a bountiful harvest? Or, is our spiritual life at a standstill? Are we allowing weeds to spring up here and there? Should we re-plow and re-plant the soil of our soul? Isaiah 28:23-26.

Is it time to scatter seed in order to gather a crop. We must not continue to plow the ground that has already been plowed. It is time to sow seeds of righteousness. But, vice cannot be sown, if virtue is to be grown, Galatians 6:7,8.

When my harvest is past,  
 Shall He say at last,  
 Enter and take your place?

Will He receive golden sheaves,  
 Ripened fruit, not faded leaves,  
 When I see Him face to face?

It is not enough for the farmer to love the harvest. He must also hate the weeds.

## FALL OF JUDAH, II KINGS 21:19 - 25:30; Habakkuk

The collapse of Judah occurred just like the prophets predicted—swift and painful. It happened in 586 BC.

### I. The Fading Dynasty

The religious revival started by king Hezekiah did not last. During the long (55 year) reign of Manasseh (son of Hezekiah), pagan worship was reinstated throughout Judah, II Kings 21:1-6. Though Manasseh repented in his old age, the damage was done, II Kings 21:16.

A. Amon. The son of Manasseh was on the throne for two years. He was a wicked king, II Chronicles 33:21-23. The people had had enough. Amon was assassinated and his son (Josiah) took the throne, II Chronicles 33:24,25.

B. Josiah. Josiah was an eight-year-old child when he was crowned. It is likely (since Josiah was so young) that the high priest advised him in the early years of his rule. Josiah obviously followed the advice of Hilkiyah, II Kings 22:1,2. He purged the land of idolatry, II Chronicles 34:3-5. Then he set about to repair the temple in Jerusalem (which was more than 350 years old), II Chronicles 34:8-11. In the process of the renovation, the “Book of the Law of God” was found, II Chronicles 34:14-19. The king was aghast. The Passover had not been celebrated for centuries, II Kings 23:21-23. Josiah attempted to renew the covenant, to revive the obedience of Judah, II Chronicles 34:29-32. Though the light of righteousness seemed to shine brightly, the sunset of Judah was only two decades away.

C. Jehoiakim. The death of Josiah brought radical changes to Judah. The next king, Jehoahaz, a son of Josiah, lasted three months! Egypt deposed him. Jehoahaz died in an Egyptian prison, II Kings 23:31-34. Jehoiakim replaced him on the throne. He ruled for eleven years. He was a wicked man, II Kings 23:36,37. During his reign, Babylon invaded Judah as a punishment from the Lord, II Kings 24:1-4. The son of Jehoiakim, named Jehoiachin, was the next king. He lasted three months! He surrendered to the Babylonian invaders. He was taken as a prisoner to Babylon (where he eventually died), II Kings 24:8-12a,15,16. The Lord had spoken.

D. Zedekiah. Zedekiah, an uncle of Jehoiachin, was put on the throne, II Kings 24:17. The prophet, Jeremiah, advised Zedekiah to surrender to the Babylonians. Instead, Zedekiah revolted against Babylon, II Chronicles 36:11-13. He tried to escape but was captured, II Kings 25:1-7. Zedekiah carries to this day the distinction of being the last king of Judah. He died in Babylonian captivity, II Kings 25:27-30. All of this because the people of Judah would not listen to God, II Chronicles 36:15-17. What is the lesson for us in all of this?

## II. The Unfolding Judgment

Things began to rapidly unravel when Egypt and Babylon gained power. Assyria was defeated by Babylon in 612 BC (during the final days of king Josiah).

A. Necho. The king of Egypt mustered his troops and marched north in order to challenge the recently victorious Babylonians. Necho had to pass through Judah. Josiah assumed Necho was attacking Judah. Josiah went out with his small army to engage the huge army of Necho. The results were disastrous, II Chronicles 35:20-24. Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish (on the Euphrates River).

B. Nebuchadnezzar. Since Egypt had been defeated, Babylon moved south to subdue Syria, Philistia, and Judah. The coming of Babylon, under the command of Nebuchadnezzar, was an awesome event. The prophet, Habakkuk, was deeply disturbed. How could God allow a pagan nation to plunder His people? Habakkuk 1:1-4,12,13. The Lord responded by saying, "*The plunderers (meaning Babylon) will some day be plundered,*" Habakkuk 2:6-8. Yet, in the meantime, the plundering continued.

1. First Deportation. Babylon repeatedly marched south to Judah. With each invasion, additional towns were attacked, inflicted with pain, and destroyed. The first attack occurred in 606 BC during the reign of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah 25:1,8-11. As a very young man, Daniel was carried off into captivity.

2. Second Deportation. The Babylonians returned in 596 BC, deposed Jehoiachin, and took a young lad, Ezekiel, captive.

2. Third Deportation. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, II Kings 25:8-12. The city was destroyed. Nothing remained but a heap of rubble, Lamentations 1:1-11.

Jerusalem was shrouded in silence. What were the few stragglers thinking? Is not the fall of Judah similar to the death of nations today? Should we not take note, learn, and obey lest we suffer the same fate?

## RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

The devastation that accompanied the defeat of Judah is puzzling. It raises several questions. Why did God abandon His people? Was He righteous in doing so?

### I. Meaning Of The Term

The word “righteousness” in the Old Testament carries a meaning foreign to the western mindset. Failure to understand the Hebrew definition of the term leads to unfortunate conclusions, such as, the Old Testament stressed law while the New Testament emphasized grace. The word “righteousness” does not denote “doing right” but implies “fulfilling the demands of a relationship.” When God or man fulfilled the conditions imposed by a relationship with others, he was righteous. In other words, there was no norm for righteousness outside the relationship itself.

### II. Application Of The Term

The Hebrew word for “righteousness” is translated in a variety of ways: sometimes by “righteous acts,” Judges 5:10,11, at other times by “truth,” Psalms 52:3, or “prosperity,” Proverbs 8:18, occasionally by “vindicate,” Jeremiah 51:10, or to “plead the case of another,” Micah 7:9. When the contexts of these verses are carefully examined, it becomes clear that “righteousness” has to do with relationship, that is, he who was “righteous” fulfilled the requirements laid on him by the relationship in which he was involved. Thus, a “righteous” man kept his agreements, the covenants he makes with others. Relationship (rather than law) was the driving force behind his actions.

A. In Social Relations. David was righteous because he refused to kill Saul (with whom he had a covenant), I Samuel 24:14-19. David “swore with an oath” that he would not harm the descendants of Saul when he (David) became king, I Samuel 24:20-22. David also made a covenant with the son of Saul—Jonathan, I Samuel 18:1-4. Therefore, because of his agreements with Saul and Jonathan, David did not harm the son of Jonathan—Mephibosheth, II Samuel 9:1-11. Generally speaking, the righteous man in Israel was he who fulfilled his obligations to his family, community, and king, Psalms 15:2-4. Hence, those who murdered enemies were considered righteous, Judges 5:24-27, while those who murdered a covenant partner were unrighteous, II Kings 10:9.

B. In Religious Matters. Because Israel stood in covenant relationship with God, righteousness was a religious concept. To be righteous, Israel had to fulfill the demands of her covenant responsibilities, Exodus 19:4,5. Within this relationship (born out of grace), the law was given. The law was meaningless without the covenant. Law merely clarified what that relationship required. Obedience to the

law did not make a man righteous. The keeping of his covenant agreements did. Israel broke covenant, severed her relationship with God. Consequently, the Lord handed them over to the Babylonians, Isaiah 42:24,25. He tested them in the furnace of affliction because they defamed His name, Isaiah 48:9-11. She had forgotten her relationship with God, but He had not forgotten His relationship with her, Isaiah 49:15. In other words, He had not divorced His wife, Isaiah 50:1. He would bring her back from exile, Isaiah 54:5,6. His covenant, His word, His agreement with her still stood, Isaiah 40:8.

Israel had hope because Jehovah kept His covenant responsibilities, Isaiah 54:14. God was righteous (even when He punished covenant breakers or, perhaps, because He punished covenant breakers), Psalm 111:3. In short, His righteous judgments were His saving judgments, Isaiah 45:20,21.

### WHEN DID EDOM DISRESPECT ISRAEL, OBADIAH 13,14?

The difficulty in these verses is the tense of the main verbs. Are they past, present, or future? Various versions demonstrate the problem.

| TENSE   | TRANSLATION   | VERSION   |
|---------|---|---|
| Past    | You should not have entered... looked...laid hands on...delivered up        | KJV, RSV, Amplified, Contemporary English Version |
| Present | You went...you looted... you made yourself rich... you stood...you killed   | Living Bible                                      |
| Future  | You must not march... seize...wait...hand over in the day of their trouble. | Hebrew, Modern Language Version, ASV, NIV         |

The question is “when did Edom disrespect Israel?” The Hebrew uses the negative imperative verbs “*do not enter...do not gloat...do not take...do not stand...do not deliver.*” This points to a situation that might arise in the FUTURE. There was a long standing grudge between the two nations, II Samuel 8:13,14; I Kings 11:14-18; II Kings 8:20-22; 14:22; 16:5,6; II Chronicles 20:2. A hateful, anti-Israel feeling existed among the Edomites. They were eager to get even with their relatives, Genesis 25:23; 27:41; Numbers 20:14-18.

The Hebrew implies that Jerusalem was still standing. No particular time was given for the hateful actions of Edom. The descendants of Esau disrespected Israel on several occasions. Edom certainly gloated during the Babylonian siege of the sacred city in 586 BC, Psalm 137:7; Lamentations 4:21; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:5,6. The pain inflicted on Israel resulted in an affliction of pain on Edom, Psalm 35:17-26.

Edom got her due in 581 BC when Babylon (on their way to Egypt) crushed the vengeful nation, Jeremiah 35:17-26. However, the Edomites rebuilt. So a century and a half later, the prophet Malachi predicted the eventual annihilation of Edom, Malachi 1:4,5.

This happened in 164 BC. After Israel was taken into captivity, the Edomites moved north into southern Judah. They made Hebron their capitol. The area became known as Idumea. “*Judas Maccabeus fought against the children of Esau because they besieged Israel. He conquered them and took their spoils...He utterly destroyed them,*” I Maccabeus 5:3-5. Edom is no more. Vengeance belongs to God! He will repay. And, quite obviously in the case of Edom, He did.

## BIG PRAYERS

*“Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know,” Jeremiah 33:3.*

The context of this passage indicates that the final siege against Jerusalem (in 586 BC) was underway, Jeremiah 33:4,5. The noise and confusion of the battle filled the air. Panic was setting in. Nevertheless, the Lord suggested the prophet pray.

There was good reason to pray. Though defeat and exile were right around the corner, God promised to bring His people back from captivity, promised to renew their prosperity, Jeremiah 33:6-9.

Someone has said, *“Blessed are they who expect nothing for they will never be disappointed.”* Whoever said that certainly did not know the Bible. For no one who prays in faith will be disappointed.

The reason we receive little is because we expect little. We ask God and are surprised when He answers. *“How wonderful!”* we exclaim. *“The Lord actually responded to my prayer!”* Why be surprised by answered prayer? There is every reason to expect a reply. *“Call on Me and I will answer,”* the Lord promised, Psalm 99:8; 138:3.

A minister was visiting a farmer when a storm arose. A clap of thunder sent the farmer to his knees. He cried out, *“Oh, God, save me, save my house, save my barn, save my cattle, save my crops, save my minister, save my family, save my town.”* After the prayer, the preacher said, *“You mentioned everybody and everything.”* *“Yes,”* the farmer replied, *“I always pray big.”*

How big are our prayers? Ask for huge favors. God is willing and able to grant great blessings, Matthew 7:7,8. Our problem is usually failing to ask, James 4:2b,3.

Lord, teach me to pray,  
To make a selfless request;  
Help me to know  
Your answer is always best!

Prayer is not conquering the reluctance of God but taking hold of His willingness.



## **AGONY OF DEFEAT, Lamentations**

The Promise Land was in ruins. The holy city was in shambles. Rubble was strewn everywhere. Defeat is a bitter pill to swallow. The upper classes of society were carried off as prisoners to Babylon. The lower classes were left behind because they were incapable of leading a revolt against their new masters.

### I. Feelings Of The Left-Behind

The fall of Jerusalem was a shattering blow to people who were convinced that the house of God would protect the city. They believed the Lord would not let the temple be destroyed. That giddy optimism turned into a brooding despair.

A. Conditions During The Siege. Some of the sacred objects in the temple were scattered in the streets like smashed pottery. Those who survived lost the desire to live. Children starved to death because adults would not share their food. Those who died by the sword were the lucky ones, Lamentations 4:9-11.

B. Effects On The Conquered. The conditions were devastating. The survivors were utterly confused—trying to make sense of the situation.

1. Disbelief. Old men sat in a bewildered daze. The prophet Jeremiah—now an old man—wept till he could weep no more. Famine stalked the streets. Children died in the arms of their mothers, Lamentations 2:10-12.

2. Ridicule. People passed by and poked fun at the condition of the once proud city. Enemies sneered in fiendish delight, Lamentations 2:15-17.

3. Dismay. Mothers became cannibals. Priests were slaughtered. The conquerors had unleashed a “carnival of terror.” How could God let it happen, Lamentations 2:20-22.

C. Resolve Of The Survivors. Under the worst of conditions, the faithful hung on. The difficulties remained, Lamentations 3:1-6. The survivors felt the heat of divine wrath, Lamentations 3:7-12. Yet, in spite of the pain and suffering, they had hope, Lamentations 3:19-21. They knew their future resided in the grace of God, Lamentations 3:22-26.

### II. Attitudes Of The Exiles

Those who were carried off to Babylon found themselves aliens in a heathen land. Life was difficult. They had to start over, work hard, and overcome many obstacles. They were unwanted foreigners, the brunt of hateful bias.

A. False Hopefulness. At first, the exiles were confident that their situation would soon change. They expected to return to the Promised Land in a short time, Jeremiah 29:1,2,4-7.

B. Hopelessness. After the temple was destroyed in 586 BC, the exiles felt that God had forsaken them, Psalm 137:1-4. It was during this period of helplessness that Ezekiel and Daniel ministered to the captives.

C. True Hopefulness. Years later, when the Persian king (Cyrus) allowed Israel to return to Palestine, some availed themselves of the opportunity to return home.

The time of “wrath” must be seen from the standpoint of God. In other words, from the viewpoint of heaven, the exile had three purposes:

. First, it was punishment for the sins of Israel, II Chronicles 36:14-17. The justice of God was severe because the offence of Israel was serious.

. Second, the exile vindicated God, Ezekiel 36:22-32.

. Third, the exile was a blessing to the nations where the Jews went, Micah 5:7. The deportees introduced the pagans to monotheism and spread the hope of a coming Messiah. God knew what He was doing!

## ELECTION OF GOD

Divine election affirms that God chose Israel from among all the nations, established an exclusive relationship with her, and imposed specific obligations on her. Hence, the election of God became the underlying reason for the exile of Israel.

### I. Concept Of Choice

The idea of election is embedded in the term “choice.” The concept was first articulated in Deuteronomy (though its understanding goes back to Genesis). The use of the verb “choose” (with “Jehovah” as subject and “Israel” as object) was a longstanding conviction. It was so closely bound up in other religious understandings that its clarification in a particular word occurred only after the passing of time. That particular word was “election” or “chosen.”

### II. Choice Among Men

As with most theological terms, “election” attributes to God what happens among men. For that reason alone, it is desirable to examine the verb “choice” where humans are the subjects.

A. In The Old Testament. There are relatively few references to human choice in the Old Testament. Moses chose able men to lead, Exodus 18:25. Joshua chose soldiers for the conquest, Joshua 8:3. Israel chose her first king, I Samuel 8:18. David chose stones for his encounter with Goliath, I Samuel 17:40. David chose one of three optional punishments after his ill-advised census, II Samuel 24:12. And, Israel chose other gods, Isaiah 41:24; cf. Joshua 24:15,22; Judges 10:14. It is the latter choice of Israel that caused her to go into exile, Isaiah 66:3b,4a. The Lord chose affliction for those who delighted in sin, Proverbs 1:19-33. In other words, human choices are the measure of human character. Israel was elected to righteousness, but, when she chose unrighteousness, God punished her. Thus, her election became the basis for her affliction.

B. In The New Testament. Human “choice” appears even less in the New Testament. Mary chose the better of two alternatives, Luke 10:42. The arrogant choose seats of honor, Luke 14:7. The church in Jerusalem chose deacons, Acts 6:5. Some brethren were chosen for mission work, Acts 15:22-25. The apostle Paul was ambivalent in choosing life or death, Philippians 1:22. But the New Testament does not mention “choosing” Christianity. There were many beliefs from which to choose. Yet there is no “choose you this day” command. Perhaps, it is a no-brainer. Once we hear of Jesus, the choice is obvious.

### III. Choice Of God

As already stated, the use of the term “choice,” in regard to an act of God, does not occur until Deuteronomy (though embedded in the thinking of Israel since her beginning). For instance, Abraham was “called” by God (which assumes divine election), Genesis 12:1-5. However, Nehemiah was the first to say Abraham was “chosen,” Nehemiah 9:7.

A. Choice Of Individuals. The first reference in the Bible to divine “election” is the “choice” of Saul as king, I Samuel 10:24. David was also chosen, I Samuel 16:8-12. In the later history of Israel, references to chosen individuals involve persons in the past (who were not described as “chosen” while they were alive), such as Moses, Psalm 106:23, and Abraham, Nehemiah 9:7. As a matter of fact, Zerubbabel is the only individual—from Solomon to Jesus—who was specifically labeled “chosen” while he was alive, Haggai 2:23. Likewise, divine election is very limited in the New Testament. Jesus was chosen by God, Luke 9:35. The original twelve apostles were also chosen, John 13:18; 15:16. Peter was chosen (by his own admission) to minister to the Gentiles, Acts 15:7 (while Paul was never designated “chosen”).

B. Choice Of Groups. The divine “choice” of Israel is couched in the covenant of God with His people, Deuteronomy 7:6. The choice of Israel was grounded in the initiative of the Lord—His gracious act of selecting Israel (not because of who she was but who He was). And, though she was sent into exile, as sure as the covenant of God regarding day-and-night in nature, so Israel would be restored to the Promised Land, Jeremiah 33:23-26. For, Israel was His “chosen,” His treasured possession, Psalm 135:4. She would be settled again in her own land, Isaiah 14:1. Indeed, God delivered her from Babylonian bondage, Ezekiel 20:4. The people of God learned that “election” is a double-edged truth: a blessing or a curse (depending on the human response to being elected), Amos 3:2. So today believers in Christ are “chosen people...belonging to God!” Therefore, we must live moral lives or suffer the fate of immoral Israel, I Peter 2:19-12.

## WHAT COUNTRIES DID THE JEWS LIVE IN DURING THE EXILE?

The general term to indicate the widespread settlement of Israelites outside of Palestine was “dispersion” (or *dispora*), Ezekiel 36:19. The *dispora* refers to the “scattered ones,” Esther 3:8; Zephaniah 3:10; John 7:35; James 1:1; Peter 1:1. These scattered (or dispersed) people were the exiles, Isaiah 11:12; Nehemiah 1:9.

### I. Causes Of The Dispersion

There is hardly any time in history when all of the Hebrews lived in Palestine. There were two causes for their resettlement to other countries in Old Testament times.

A. Commerce. During the heyday of the United Kingdom (under David and Solomon), the people of Israel were sent as government administrators and private businessmen to Africa and Asia, I Kings 10:28. Many of these people settled permanently in the land of their labor.

B. War. There were numerous skirmishes where Hebrew captives were taken to foreign lands. The most notable (though not the only) dispersions were the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

### II. Extent Of The Dispersion

PERSIA: Jews had considerable influence in the Medo-Persian Empire, Esther 8:17. Esther became the wife of Xerxes, Esther 2:17. Her uncle, Mordecai, became the Prime Minister, Esther 9:3,4. Nehemiah was a cupbearer for Artaxerxes, Nehemiah 1:11d – 2:1a. Ezra was given broad power over the Trans-Jordan, Ezra 7:25,26. AFRICA: Abraham lived there for a short time, Genesis 12:10. Joseph became the Prime Minister of Egypt, Genesis 41:41-43. Large numbers of Ethiopians were converted to the Hebrew faith, Acts 8:26-28. ARABIA: There was a large colony of Israelites in Yemen (where the Queen of Sheba lived). The town of Ezion-geber was the home of the Hebrew merchant marines, I Kings 9:26.

ASIA: Israel also had commercial contact with India as early as 1000 BC, I Kings 10:22 (all items mentioned in this passage were from India). Jews were living in northern India during the time of Queen Esther, Esther 8:9. EUROPE: In the days of Queen Athaliah, Carites (from Caria or western Turkey) were used as Temple guards, II Kings 11:4. CHINA: And, finally, the Jews had contact with China through the silk trade (the “*costly garments*” or “*costly fabric*”), Ezekiel 16:10,13. In China, they were called “*the sect that removed the sinews*,” cf. Genesis 32:33. The Jews on the south coast of India (Malabar) kept in contact with 65 Israelite colonies in India, China, and Mongolia! The *dispora* included a very large number of Israelites.

## ROAD SIGNS

*“... give them warning for Me ...,” Ezekiel 3:17.*

The prophet Ezekiel was made a watchman to warn Israel to follow God. If he was faithful in delivering the warning, the prophet was innocent. If he issued the warning and the people did not heed his words, they were guilty, Ezekiel 3:16-19.

Whenever we are warned, it is a signal to pay attention. If we are warned of danger and neglect the message, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

- . WARNING -- AIR BRAKES means to stay back
- . WARNING -- WIDE LOAD means to pass with care
- . WARNING -- HIGH VOLTAGE means to avoid contact
- . WARNING -- WATER UNSAFE TO DRINK means bring your own

These signs are posted for our safety. We disregard them to our own hurt, Deuteronomy 30:15-18.

In many places, before one can get a license to drive a car, they must be able to identify these signs by their shape.

- . YIELD -- upside down, equal lateral triangle
- . SLOW -- diamond
- . SPEED LIMIT -- rectangle (higher than wide)
- . DEAD END -- diamond
- . STOP -- octagon

We are all travelers on the road to eternity. The Lord has given us warnings to protect us on this one-way-trip to heaven. The warnings are in His word, I Corinthians 4:14. The Bible is our map (or GPS), Psalm 9:7-11. We are foolish to ignore the road signs. A safe arrival, an enjoyable trip depends on following the instructions, Ezekiel 3:20,21.

Lamp to my feet whenever I stray;  
 Guide never failing day after day;  
 Leading me to my home above,  
 With wise counsel and gentle love.

Keep your Bible OPEN otherwise you will find the door of heaven CLOSED!

## LIFE IN EXILE

The exile describes the time in biblical history when the children of God were forced from Canaan to live in a foreign country: Israel went to Assyria (722 BC) and Judah went to Babylon (586 BC), Esther 2:5,6; Amos 7:17. Because the word “exile” indicates banishment from home, it occasionally refers to being away from a native habitat, II Samuel 15:19; Acts 7:27-29. Therefore, the term “exile” is employed figuratively of believers on earth (whose real home is in heaven), Hebrews 11:13.

### I. Significance Of The Exile

Though “exile” is applied to different situations, in this discussion, it refers to the banishment of the Hebrews from the land God gave them—the Promised Land or Canaan.

A. Meaning Of The Exile. The “exile” was synonymous with “*captivity*,” Ezekiel 12:11. In order to go into exile, the people of God were “*captured*,” Zechariah 14:2. Consequently, “exiles” and “captives” point to the same people, Isaiah 20:3,4; Jeremiah 48:7. They were “*cowering prisoners*,” Isaiah 51:14.

B. Life In The Exile. Though captivity was not a piece-of-cake, the comparatively lenient Babylonian policies toward their captures allowed them to form communities of their own, Ezekiel 3:15. The captives constructed houses, married, and started businesses, Jeremiah 29:4-7. Archaeologists have found manuscripts that describe a relatively comfortable life in exile. It appears that such comfort lead to many Israelites defecting from their faith to worship the gods of Babylon, Isaiah 46:1-6. The exiles who escaped to Egypt did likewise, Jeremiah 44:1-10. Notwithstanding, some exiles remained faithful. It seems that the faithful exiles had a harder time (than the unfaithful exiles) in captivity, Psalms 137:1-6; Isaiah 14:3; 42:22; 51:7,22,23.

C. Importance Of The Exile. The exile forced Israel from her home, forced Israel to clarify her faith, Psalms 89:49-51; Lamentations 5:20-22; Ezekiel 37:11-14. Jehovah was not only a God of grace but also a God of judgment, Isaiah 54:9,10. The exile was a cleansing, a renewal to obey the Lord, Ezekiel 36:26,27. The experience prepared Israel to become a witness to the nations regarding the sovereignty of God, Isaiah 43:10-13. The exile was the foundation for understanding divine judgment, a crucial prelude to Calvary.

### II. Transformation During The Exile

A remnant of Israel survived the exile. Their religion—though severely tested—remained alive. Still, some important changes occurred.

A. Among The Israelites.

1. New Name. Since the last deportees were from Judah, they were called Judites by the Babylonians. Jew is a shortened form of Judite, Ezra 4:12.

2. New Lifestyle. Most of the exiles had been rural agrarian people. In captivity, however, many of them made their living in commercial enterprises. They became outstanding businessmen.

3. New Language. Those who went into captivity spoke Hebrew. Those who returned from exile spoke Aramaic—the language of the Babylonians, Esther 8:9.

4. New Worship. The exiles were separated from the temple. Nevertheless, devout Jews gathered for prayer, praise, and preaching. These worship gatherings were the precursors of the synagogue.

5. New Literature. The exile threatened the survival of the oral traditions. It was urgent to write them down. Several books of the Old Testament were recorded during the captivity—II Samuel, I and II Kings, Ezekiel, Daniel, and a few Psalms.

6. New Theology. The Israelites who went into exile became henotheists, Deuteronomy 28:64. The Jews who returned worshipped both God and gods. Those who were not deported wanted nothing to do with them, Ezra 9:1-4.

B. Among The Pagans. Although the exile was often viewed as a punishment, the captivity also served as a witness to the pagans regarding the one, true God. The Gentile converts to the Jewish faith were called “*proselytes*” or visitors. The monotheistic beliefs of the Jews had a powerful influence on the polytheistic pagans, Isaiah 42:6,7. Jerusalem remained the spiritual home of the Jews. The synagogue was a home-away-from-home, a special place where the people of God could withstand the secularizing pressures of a hostile environment, where Gentiles were welcome to attend and to participate. It was in the neighborhood synagogues of the exile where Gentiles heard and submitted to the God of gods, Isaiah 56:1-8. The captivity of Israel was the bridge over which the news of Jehovah reached the ears of the heathen. The synagogue made the spread of the Gospel in Christian missions easier, Acts 13:13-16.



## DISCIPLINE OF GOD

In the Scriptures, discipline has two purposes: (1) instruction and (2) correction. The idea is first expressed in the training of children and later applied to the punishment of nations. Nevertheless, in both cases, the disciplinary action is a measure of the love of the disciplinarian (whether an earthly or heavenly parent).

### I. Significance Of Discipline

The words in Hebrew and in Greek for “discipline” are translated “training,” “chastisement,” “punishment,” and “instruction.” For example, in Ephesians 6:4, the King James Version uses “nurture,” the Modern Language Version says “instruct,” the Living Bible, American Standard Version, and Revised Standard Version have “discipline,” while the New International Version says “train.”

A. Discipline In The Old Testament. The context for human “discipline” in the Old Testament was twofold.

1. Family Of Man. The processes of education took place in the family. The Israelites did not believe in education without tears,” that is, they did not “spare the rod” of discipline. The father and mother were responsible for the discipline of children, Deuteronomy 21:18,19. Discipline was based on the theory that “*the rod of discipline drove folly from a child,*” Proverbs 22:15. It is obvious that discipline could be painful.

2. Family Of God. It is an easy transition from discipline of parents to discipline from God, Deuteronomy 8:5. A man, therefore, should rejoice in the chastening of God in dire adversity—for the Lord is dealing with him as a son, Job 5:17; Psalm 94:12. Such punishment is proof that the parent (God) loves His child (the believer), Proverbs 3:11,12; 13:24.

B. Discipline In The New Testament. In the New Testament, the pain of discipline is minimized while the wisdom gained from discipline is maximized, Acts 7:22; 18:25. Dire experiences are viewed as “*momentary afflictions*” which profoundly affects our spiritual walk, II Corinthians 4:7-15. Hence, discipline in the New Testament is more for instruction, Colossians 3:21, with gentleness, II Timothy 2:25, to produce repentance, II Corinthians 7:8-10; Revelation 3:19.

### II. Need For Discipline

In our contemporary world, discipline is getting a bad rap. Freedom of expression is championed. Rules are laid aside. Boundaries are considered unhealthy. We are an undisciplined people. The media calls it cool! Prisons are filled with “cool cats!”

A. Facts Of Life. The truth of the matter is no significant accomplishment is possible without discipline—whether composing music, winning a super bowl, writing a book, or finding a cure for a fatal disease. All knowledge, all advancement begins with difficulty and is achieved by sustained effort. Thus, as the Greek philosopher said, “the undisciplined life is not worth living.” Discipline explains the significance of suffering. We suffer to learn. God sent Israel into exile in order to teach them something.

B. Acts Of God. The Lord arranges circumstances so that we may learn to depend on Him. Discipline may be hard but the children of God must not be fainthearted, Hebrews 12:3-6. If the noblest and best in the world have to suffer, how dare we assume we are somehow immune to suffering, Hebrews 12:7-10. The meaning of our tears is clear to God. We must believe that discipline has a purpose, learn from it, and move on. In the hour of trial, our joy is in knowing we are children of God (and that all children are disciplined). This was the understanding of Jeremiah, Lamentations 3:1-33. This is the lesson Israel had to learn and live.

## WAS EZEKIEL MISTAKEN? EZEKIEL 26:3-14

The prophet in exile makes some broad sweeping predictions concerning Tyre:

- . Many nations would attack her, verses 3 and 5.
- . They would scrape away the rubble, verse 4.
- . Nebuchadnezzar would demolish her, verses 7 through 9.
- . Rubble would be thrown into the sea, verse 12.
- . Tyre would never be rebuilt, verse 14.

Several of the prophets before and after Ezekiel uttered the same doom over Tyre, Isaiah 23:1-3; Jeremiah 27:3-6; Amos 1:9,10; Zechariah 9:3,4. However, none of them are as specific about her destruction as Ezekiel.

The city of Tyre was located on a small island about a half-mile off shore. It was built by king Hiram (a contemporary of Solomon). The mainland settlement of Tyre was called Ushu. King Sennacherib (704-681) of Assyria destroyed Ushu. It was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Ushu still stands today. Therefore, it is likely the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Zechariah referred to Ushu.

The words of Ezekiel are another matter. For example, though Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland settlement, he did not capture the island fortress, Ezekiel 29:18. The formidable navy of Tyre withstood the troops of the Babylonian king. Nebuchadnezzar experienced years of frustration in a vain attempt to subdue the island of Tyre. Upon a careful examination of the passage in Ezekiel, it is clear that there would be a two-stage punishment of Tyre.

1. Stage One. Many nations would attack, Ezekiel 26:3,4. This certainly speaks of the mainland settlement of Ushu. Over a four hundred year period, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece battered this coastal town. Like Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 572 BC.

2. Stage Two. Nebuchadnezzar failed to take the island fortress. Therefore, the prophet describes the demise of the island city, Ezekiel 26:12. The specifics of the prophecy point to the conquest of Alexander the Great, Ezekiel 26:13,14. Alexander could not crush Tyre by sea, so he took the rubble of Ushu and made a causeway out to the island. The island city was not rebuilt. It was recently discovered 50 feet under water! The prophecy of Ezekiel is fulfilled in striking detail—first by Nebuchadnezzar and later by Alexander the Great.

Why was Tyre disciplined so severely? There are two reasons: (1) the arrogance of Tyre, Ezekiel 28:1,2, and (2) the sovereignty of God, Ezekiel 28:6-10. Today mainland Tyre is an obscure town of 6,000 inhabitants called Sur.

## ECHOES

*“The time has come, the day is near . . . like echoes in the mountains,” Ezekiel 7:7.*

The prophet was sounding the alarm, Ezekiel 7:2-4. Judah was doomed. The judgment of God was prompted by the negligence of man, Ezekiel 7:10-14.

An echo always repeats what it “hears.” Our eternal destiny reflects our temporal behavior, Ezekiel 7:23-27. We cannot fool an echo anymore than we can fool God, Galatians 6:7,8. Everything we do will be played back on the Judgment Day, II Corinthians 5:10.

What does our echo say? There is no escape. Echoes are infallible reflections of the original sound. Therefore, we should exercise extreme care in how we are building for eternity. Expert workmanship (as well as shoddy construction) will be exposed for what it is on the day of reckoning, I Corinthians 3:10-15. We can fool some people all the time, all people some of the time, but we can never fool God at anytime. So, when the end comes, what will our echo be?

Like an echo in the mountains,  
Is the harvest of our planted seeds,  
They are held in reserve for tomorrow—  
A true reflection of our present deeds.

Every day ends at sunset. Every year runs out at the end of December. Every life is concluded with a funeral. All of them vanish, never to return, Acts 17:31.

Gone—never to return—like a river;  
Gone at death is every sinner;  
Gone as yesterday to return never;  
Gone...gone...once and forever.

We are headed toward the end, the finish line. Life will be over. There will be no more opportunities, no more chances to do better, no more time to get it right. Time will end. Eternity will begin.

In time, our life began. In eternity, our life will continue. For good or bad—our life will be an echo of what we have been.

## VOICE IN THE DARKNESS, EZEKIEL 1:1 – 48:35

In the gloom of exile, Ezekiel was called to speak the message of God to the captives. Ezekiel was a priest, Ezekiel 1:3. As a young man, he was taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar in 596 BC. Ezekiel was married (though his wife died very young), Ezekiel 24:15-18. According to tradition, Ezekiel was murdered in Babylon. His tomb is near Bagdad, Iraq, on the banks of the Euphrates River.

### I. Condition Of The People (606 – 596 BC)

The prophet spoke about the children of God in Judah and in Babylon.

A. In Judah. Those who were not deported continued their wicked ways—idolatry, lewdness, oppression, sacrilege, and murder were common, Ezekiel 22:1,2,6-12. It is difficult to imagine how they could be oblivious to their sins. But, because they were not deported, they believed heaven approved of their behavior, Ezekiel 33:24. Soon, however, the wrath of God would be visited on Jerusalem. The siege of the city had begun. There was no turning back, Ezekiel 24:2,13,14.

B. In Babylon. The exiles hoped they would soon return to their beloved land. False prophets were saying to the exiles, “*Peace*,” but there would be no peace, Ezekiel 13:8-10a. Jeremiah had already sent a letter dismissing any hope of a quick return to the Holy Land, Jeremiah 29:1,4-9. The false prophets in Babylon called Jeremiah a “*madman*,” Jeremiah 29:24-28. The exiles in Babylon were confused by these claims and counterclaims. Who were they supposed to believe? God called Ezekiel to help them come to grips with reality. It was going to be a challenging assignment, Ezekiel 2:3-7.

### II. Message Of The Prophet

The method of communicating the word of God can take various forms. Ezekiel was unique in his style. He employed parables, allegories, riddles, and pantomimes. For this reason, many did not believe him, Ezekiel 20:49. He sometimes acted like a weird crackpot, a very strange duck.

A. Doom (592-586). The first prophecy of Ezekiel was to act out the fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel 4:1-3. The cause of the devastation of the holy city was idolatry, Ezekiel 6:8-10.

1. Judgment Of God. In a vision, Ezekiel was taken to Jerusalem to observe the idols in the temple, Ezekiel 8:2,3. God withdrew from Jerusalem, Ezekiel 11:22,23. The temple became an empty shell.

2. Fate Of Jerusalem. Though the prophet had spoken of the impending destruction, the exiles did not believe it, Ezekiel 12:1,2. So he dramatized the message again, Ezekiel 12:3-6. Still the exiles refused to believe. They thought the fate of Jerusalem was a long way off, Ezekiel 12:26-28. Actually the city fell four years later!

3. Justice Of Punishment. The exiles complained. Their punishment was unfair. They were suffering for the sins of their forefathers (or so they thought), Ezekiel 18:1-4. Ezekiel said, “*every person is judged on the merits of his own actions,*” cf. Ezekiel 18:20. Though the people still accused God of injustice, it was the people who were to blame for their plight, Ezekiel 18:25-29. God does not take pleasure in punishing the wicked, Ezekiel 18:30-32.

B. Hope (586–570 BC). The phrase “*then you will know that I am the Lord*” occurs 72 times in the Book of Ezekiel. That was the purpose of the doom oracles, Ezekiel 20:44. It was also the reason for the hope announcements, Ezekiel 28:25,26.

1. King Of Israel. God Himself would be their king after exile. He would care for them like a shepherd tends his sheep, Ezekiel 34:11,12,15,16. Then they would know that Jehovah was with them, Ezekiel 34:30,31.

2. Revival Of Israel. In order to show that the return of Israel to Palestine was solely the work of God, Ezekiel had a strange vision, Ezekiel 37:1,2. The dry bones represented the skeletons of an army ambushed in the desert, Ezekiel 37:9,10. The dry bones were the spiritual deadness of Israel, Ezekiel 37:11. The situation in exile (from a human standpoint) seemed hopeless. Even the prophet struggled to believe there was hope, Ezekiel 37:3. Bringing life to dead bones was surely a work of God, Ezekiel 37:4-10. Only Jehovah could revive Israel, Ezekiel 37:11-14. There was hope for the exiles. Israel (as a nation) would come to life again. God had more to do for the world through Israel.

## TALK OF GOD

Human language struggles to express its understanding of God. Since we have never seen Him, we can only use figurative speech to describe Him, Ezekiel 11:25-28.

### I. The Problem

Moses wanted to see God. The error in his request was that physical eyes cannot see spiritual beings, Exodus 33:18-23.

A. Difficulty Encountered. People often doubt the feasibility of human beings knowing God. Man can only believe. We cannot see Him like we see other people, cannot hear Him like we hear a Mozart symphony, cannot touch Him like we touch bark on a tree, and cannot taste Him like we taste chocolate cake. He is beyond the realm of human sense perception. Yet, if all talk of God is nullified because it starts with faith and proceeds toward the unknown, then all scientific research is (on the same basis) called into question! Every scientist must place his faith in the trustworthiness of human ingenuity to reach conclusions beyond his sensory impressions. Faith is not opposed to knowing. It is only opposed to seeing, II Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1. Consequently, we may know God even though we have never seen Him, Jeremiah 9:23,24; John 17:3; II Timothy 1:12.

B. Knowledge Gained. Knowledge of God is not a matter of opinion or imagination. It is a knowledge gained through a loving relationship with the Lord, I John 4:7,8. Only a lover of God can understand God. Only a believer in God can know Him. But we can know Him only in proportion to our willingness to obey Him, John 7:17; I John 2:3. The skeptic and atheist cannot know God. And the believer has (at best) a rudimentary understanding of the Lord, Romans 11:33. Such a limitation will encumber the task of knowing God with a certain amount of expected difficulty. The hardship involved—in putting the concepts of God into human speech—shows the challenge of the task and the value of an approximate success, Acts 17:26-28a.

### II. The Solution

How can we talk about God? Two ways are suggested.

A. Principle Of Analogy. God has a connection with the world because He created it. For this reason, it is legitimate to use objects within creation as analogies of God. But, in so doing, God is not reduced to the level of material objects. Rather, the comparison between God and the physical objects merely affirms there is a likeness or correspondence between them. The objects act as a signpost directing humans to God. Something in creation can be like God without being God, Matthew 7:9-11. In

other words, God is analogous (in some way but not in every way) to a caring, earthly father. Of course, analogies tend eventually to break down. They have limited application. However, analogy is useful in thinking about God. It allows us to use the vocabulary of our world to describe something that ultimately lies beyond our finite existence. Therefore, God is a “king,” a “warrior,” a “rock,” a “storm,” a “husband,” a “shepherd,” a “farmer,” a “judge,” as well as a “woman in labor.” No analogy explains completely. Each analogy clarifies an aspect of God. Taken together analogies can build a comprehensive understanding of God.

B. Use Of Accommodation. God faced the same problem in addressing humanity as a parent faces in communicating with a child. God had to condescend, to come down, to accommodate to our limited vocabulary, our meager experience, our shallow mental capacity. “Accommodation” in this context means to “adjust,” to “adapt” to the audience addressed. A good communicator accommodates his message to the limitation of his hearers (otherwise understanding is aborted). The Bible frequently uses accommodative language, Revelation 1:12-16. Does the Lord have hands, feet, mouth, and eyes? Or is this the “baby talk” of heaven, an attempt by God to accommodate to man? A case study is in order. In the sixteenth century, Copernicus published his heliocentric theory of the solar system. Up to that point, the western world had believed in a geocentric view. Yet the Bible seemingly supports the geocentric view, Joshua 10:12,13. But does the sun move? Scripture certainly says “the sun came up” and “the sun went down” over 50 times! Should these passages be taken literally? Remember, to this day, we talk about “sunrise” and “sunset.” Yet we subscribe to the heliocentric view! Is not talk of the sun moving accommodative language?

The writers of the Scriptures were commissioned to teach those who held a geocentric concept of the solar system. They adjusted their teaching to the vocabulary of their learners. The inspired authors were not making scientific statements about the universe. The Bible is not a textbook for a physics course. It is the incarnation of divine ideas into human speech. It is filled with analogy and accommodation that carries infinite truth in finite language. We do well to know the difference. In this way, we can talk of God with human words and be relevant and truthful at one and the same time.



## WHO WAS THE “RULER OF TYRE?” EZEKIEL 28:1

Specific prophecies about the future collapse of the Phoenician seaport had been given in Ezekiel 26 and 27. Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the mainland settlement called Ushu, [Ezekiel 26:6-11](#), while Alexander the Great would crush the island fortress of Tyre, [Ezekiel 26:3-5,12-14](#). A lament over the downfall of Tyre (and the resulting ruination of world trade) was compared to the sinking of a luxurious ship, [Ezekiel 27:1-9,25-32](#).

The destruction of this ancient trading center was like the ruin of every materialistic culture since that time. All luxury and wealth was stripped away. The godless rich were left with nothing but disillusion and despair. This was the picture of the collapse of Rome, [Revelation 18:11-20](#).

The attitude of a materialistic culture was described in Ezekiel 28. The ruler (or prince) of Tyre declared himself “*a god*.” Jehovah disagreed, [Ezekiel 28:2](#). The ruler was not so much a monarch—like the king of Babylon or the pharaoh of Egypt—but the CEO of a world trade center. The arrogance of the ruler of this vast mercantile enterprise is common among businessmen in the ancient and modern worlds, [Isaiah 14:13,14](#). In his folly and pride, the ruler of Tyre put himself (and his material success) above the Creator of the universe, [Ezekiel 28:3-5](#). This is a typical attitude of those who have not come to terms with the lordship of God.

Tyre had become synonymous with business skill and enterprising success in gaining material goods. It is this financial wizardry that the witless world equates with real wisdom. Such heady success led the ruler of Tyre to the folly of self-deification. Pride truly came before his fall, [Ezekiel 28:6-9](#).

The prophet describes the success of Tyre. It was, indeed, remarkable, [Ezekiel 28:12-15](#). The ruler of Tyre had made for himself a heaven on earth. But his success was his undoing, [Ezekiel 28:17-19](#).

Success, wealth, and pleasure were his certificate of ethical excellence. In other words, because his business practices brought him material gain, it was assumed his business practices were ethical. Obviously that was not true. His undoing was his wrongdoing. The same is true today.

The ruler of Tyre is not one particular person but a symbol or personification of an attitude. All the self-delusion of the rich of Tyre—whose concept of heaven rose no higher than their bank account—is representative of the folly of materialism in any age, [Ecclesiastes 2:4-11](#).

## WADDING OR SWIMMING

*“... deep enough to swim...,” Ezekiel 47:5.*

Ezekiel used symbolic language to communicate an important truth. In a dream, he saw a marvelous transformation in Palestine. The Promised Land was changed from a barren desert into a glorious garden. In other words, Israel was renewed by the life giving water of God.

The stream of water came from the temple, Ezekiel 47:1,2. As the river flowed toward the Dead Sea, it became deeper without the aid of connecting tributaries, Ezekiel 47:3-5. This was a strange vision. The angel asked the prophet, *“Do you see this?”* namely *“Do you understand the significance of what you see?”* Ezekiel 47:6a.

The river was a fresh water stream, Ezekiel 47:6b-12. Where God is present, life is renewed. The driest desert was covered with green vegetation. The salt water became fresh water teeming with living creatures. A similar vision was used to describe heaven, Revelation 22:1,2.

The river of water came from the presence of God. Its depth was adapted to believers. To the babes in the law, it was shallow for wadding. For others, it was knee deep for splashing. And, finally, for the mature in the Lord, the water was deep enough to swim. God has water for everyone (though He prefers swimmers to waders), Hebrews 6:1-3.

Only the deep water can revive a stale stream. We must become swimmers rather than remain content with wadding in the shallows. If we have not gotten into the deep water of His word, it is time to take the plunge. How can we learn to swim if we avoid the deep water?

This reminds me of the little ditty:

Mother, may I go out to swim?  
Yes, my darling dear.  
Hang your clothes on a hickory limb  
But do not the water go near!

Is that not the way many of us are. We go to church but rarely get wet in the word. We take a sip of the water of life but fail to drink deeply.

How deep are we in the word? Are we waders or swimmers?

We cannot find life by waiting for life to find us!

## VISTORIES OF HEAVEN, DANIEL

The message of Daniel is different from the other prophets. While the message of most Old Testament seers pertained to the time of their audiences, Daniel predicted the future beyond the day of his hearers, Daniel 8:26. Daniel was placed in the halls of heathen government in order to declare the temporariness of human kingdoms and the permanence of the divine kingdom. In other words, the Book of Daniel is a view of history from the balcony of heaven.

### I. Sovereignty Of God In History

Through this prophet, God demonstrated His sovereignty in six stunning victories in Babylon.

A. The Diet Of God Won Over The Food Of Heathens. Daniel refused to eat food from the table of the king, Daniel 1:8. The palace official was skeptical, Daniel 1:10. God honored the faith of Daniel by giving him the ability to interpret dreams, Daniel 1:17.

B. The Wisdom Of God Was Greater Than The Wisdom Of Pagans. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, Daniel 2:1-6. The wisest men in Babylon were baffled by it, Daniel 2:10,11. God told Daniel the dream, Daniel 2:19. So the prophet revealed the meaning of the dream (being careful to give God the credit for his wisdom), Daniel 2:26-28a. The dream told of the rise and fall of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. In the time of Rome, God would establish His eternal kingdom, Daniel 2:44.

C. The Faith Of The Jews Frustrated The Anger Of The King. Nebuchadnezzar set up an idol. Everyone was supposed to worship it, Daniel 3:1-6. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down before the idol. God spared them from the fiery furnace, Daniel 3:26-28.

D. The Sovereign Lord Allowed Nebuchadnezzar To Go Insane. The king had another dream. And, as before, the Babylonian wise men failed to interpret it, Daniel 4:4-7. Daniel did. Because of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar was going to temporarily suffer the embarrassment of going insane. However, in time, God restored his mental equilibrium, Daniel 4:34,35. God won again!

E. The Judgment Of God Delivered Babylon Into The Hands Of Persia. During a drinking party, the finger of God wrote a message on the palace wall. Again, only Daniel could interpret it. The inscription on the wall announced the demise of Babylon, Daniel 5:25-28. "*That very night*" the mighty Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, Daniel 5:30.

F. The Protection Of God Shut The Mouths Of Lions. Daniel was a good man, Daniel 6:3,4. So the jealousy of the Medes took aim at the religion of the prophet, Daniel 6:5. Daniel was condemned for praying to Jehovah. He spent the night in the company of hungry lions. The next day he emerged without a scratch, Daniel 6:19-22. His accusers did not fair as well, Daniel 6:24. God was victorious once again, Daniel 6:26,27.

## II. Sovereignty Of God In Prophecy

God lifted the curtain of history for the exiles to get a peek into the future. The message was given to Daniel in dreams and visions—a common method of communication in the Old Testament, Numbers 12:6. The visions and dreams of Daniel pertained to the rise and fall of nations from 350 BC to the time of Christ.

A. Persia Was Defeated By Greece. A he-goat (Greece) suddenly appeared out of the West. He violently crushed a ram (Persia), Daniel 8:5-7. In a lightening attack, Alexander the Great defeated the Medo-Persian Empire in 330 BC. At the death of Alexander, his vast domain was divided into four parts in 323 BC, Daniel 8:8.

B. Syria Struggled With Egypt. The four generals in the army of Alexander who divided his empire among themselves fought each other (often in the fields of Palestine), Daniel 11:5-13. Eventually Palestine came under the control of Syria who massacred Jews, gave the priesthood to the highest bidder, and stopped the temple sacrifices, Daniel 11:31,32. This sacrilege sparked the Maccabean Revolt.

C. Rome Destroyed Jerusalem. The Maccabees ruled (off and on) until Rome occupied Palestine in 63 BC. The Jews were harshly treated. The temple was desecrated again, Daniel 9:25-27. A third desecration happened in 70 AD.

D. Jehovah Delivered Israel. During the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the faithful would be delivered, Daniel 12:1. They were rescued because they listened to Jesus, Matthew 24:15-22.

Throughout all of these visions and dreams, one thing stands out: God is in control. He knew centuries before the events occurred what would happen. Nations rose and fell under the hand of God, Daniel 4:17. In no uncertain terms, He is the sovereign ruler of the universe.

## TIMELESSNESS OF GOD

In Hebrew society, “time” was a moment in which something happened, Esther 4:14. For us, time is a measurable sequence of chronological units—second, minutes, hours, days, months, and years. Consequently, in the ancient world, “eternity” was a quality of God, Revelation 1:4. To us, “eternity” is endless time (or timelessness).

### I. Biblical Concept Of Time

Time and timelessness are the canvas upon which the brush strokes of man and God are painted.

A. In Relation To Man. Humans are limited to time, bound in history. Until the Lord returns, we are imprisoned in the here and now.

1. Time As Event. In the Old Testament, “time” was not a watch for measuring history but an occasion in which to act: “*a time for waging war,*” II Samuel 11:1; “*a time to understand life,*” I Chronicles 27:32, “*a time to act,*” Psalm 119:126, or “*a time to build,*” Haggai 1:2. In other words, in the Old Testament, “point in time” and “period of time” were the same, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, while, in the western world, they are viewed differently.

2. Time As Salvation. Time is a condition of existence for all creatures, Psalm 90:12. Man is in time. God is above time. So during time, the offer of divine rescue was announced. We must respond to the offer before time runs out. Time is of decisive importance as a means of salvation. It is our opportunity to gain life beyond time. Because time is not reversible, we must not pass up our chance to take hold of eternal life now.

B. In Relation To God. The timelessness of God does not mean He has nothing to do with history. Instead, He is separate from time. He is eternal (though He interacts in time), Romans 16:25,26.

1. Acts In Time. In carrying out His plan of salvation, God picked out certain points in time. He gave each of them special significance, Isaiah 14:24-27; 46:9,10. Thus, there came into existence a history of salvation with a beginning and a goal through the appointment of God. Throughout the Old Testament, new acts of God are promised, fulfilled, and promised again, Genesis 13:1-3; Joshua 21:43-45; Jeremiah 23:1-8.

2. Lives Outside Time. God exists outside of time but reveals Himself inside of time. He has control over time because He created time. And, since He created time, He is not bound by time, II Peter 3:8. The sun, moon, and stars are the keepers of

of time, Genesis 1:14. At the end of time, they will no longer be needed. So they will be absorbed into eternity, Isaiah 60:19,20.

## II. Biblical Concept Of Eternity

The Lord is “*from everlasting to everlasting*,” Psalm 41:13. He does not have a beginning or an ending. He does not grow old, tired, or weary, Isaiah 40:28. Therefore, His name is “*I am*” (rather than “*I was*” or “*I will be*”), Exodus 3:13,14.

A. Human Questions. For eons, humans have puzzled over the timelessness of God. If God exists outside of time, how can He enter time? How can He be in time and timeless at the same time? Over the years, various solutions have been suggested. For example, eternity is imaginary time or absolute time (compared to the present which is real time or relative time). Regardless of the solutions offered, the dilemma remains: is there such a thing as timeless time? The struggle exposes our poverty of language and experience. Man is incapable of understanding eternity (in the same way fish are unable to comprehend dry land).

B. Divine Answers. Man observes the parade of time through the narrow window of earth. The Lord watches the parade of history from the rooftop of heaven. He is aware of time. He knows the tenses of time—past, present, and future—but sees them simultaneously as an eternal now.

1. God Is Eternal. He is without beginning or ending, Psalm 90:2. He is “*before all ages, now, and forevermore*,” Jude 25. Timelessness is the essence of His being. “*He was, He is, and He is the one to come*,” Revelation 1:4.

2. We Will Become Eternal. Believers have a “*hope of eternal life*,” Titus 1:1,2. Hence, they will “*receive eternal life*,” Romans 2:7, through “*righteousness*,” Romans 5:21, by “*trusting Jesus Christ*,” John 3:15. Eternal life is a “*gift*,” Romans 6:23, “*given by the Lord*,” John 10:28; 17:2; I John 5:11. Though our physical body decays, we have “*an eternal house in heaven*,” II Corinthians 5:1. God has invited us to “*eternal glory*,” I Peter 5:10. Therefore, we are encouraged to “*take hold of eternal life*,” I Timothy 6:12,19. The Scriptures were written so that “*we may know we have eternal life*,” I John 5:13. Though tentative in describing it, we are overwhelmingly assured it is ours. Now we are limited to the walls of time. Soon we will be released to a timeless eternity beyond our wildest dreams, I Corinthians 2:9.

## WHO WAS DARIUS THE MEDE? DANIEL 5:31

There is considerable confusion over who this man was. For, there is more than one Darius in ancient history. There was (1) Darius the Mede; (2) Darius the Great (later called Darius I, the cousin of Cyrus, king of Persia, [Ezra 1:1](#), and a successor to the throne after Cyrus died in 522 BC, [Ezra 4:5,24](#); [6:1](#)); (3) Darius II, son of Artaxerxes, who ruled between 423 and 404 BC, [Nehemiah 12:22](#); and (4) Darius III, who reigned from 336 till 330 BC (and who was conquered by Alexander the Great). Darius II and Darius III lived long after the time of Daniel.

The Persian Empire was ruled alternately by a Persian and a Mede. Therefore, it was technically called the Medo-Persian Empire. Darius I was a Persian. He took the throne in 522 BC (after the time of Daniel). We know this from an inscription on a gorge cliff (68 miles west of Bagdad). Darius the Mede came before Darius the Persian (also known as Darius the Great or Darius I) by 16 years, namely, Darius the Mede occupied the throne in 538 BC.

Darius the Mede was a general in the army of Cyrus. When Babylon was conquered, Cyrus had urgent matters to attend to in other parts of his realm, so he put Darius the Mede, his faithful general, on the throne, as a temporary ruler. Cyrus did this on several other occasions (as circumstances required) with other commanders. The Scriptures indicate the unusualness of Darius' accession to the throne with the words (in Hebrew) "*he received*" or "*was given*" the throne, [Daniel 5:31](#). The usual expression in such cases was "*became king*" if the throne was obtained by conquest or inheritance, [Daniel 9:1](#).

It was Darius the Mede, occupying the throne temporarily, who put Daniel in the lions den, [Daniel 6:16](#), who, after a restless night, took him out of the den of lions, [Daniel 6:17-20](#), and who sent a decree that everyone should worship Jehovah, [Daniel 6:25-27](#).

Obviously Darius the Mede was a co-regent, [Daniel 6:28](#), whose time on the throne was quite short (since there is no mention of him beyond "*the first year*" of his reign), [Daniel 9:1,2](#); [11:1](#). His temporary rule certainly turned out to have huge significance. Every Sunday School Class around the world has mentioned the name of this otherwise obscure military officer.

Life is like that! What do we want our legacy to be?

## THE TUNEFUL CITY

*“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth,” [Isaiah 49:13](#).*

Creation broke out in song when the exiles returned home, [Isaiah 49:8-10](#). The idea of nature singing is a favorite expression of Isaiah, [Isaiah 14:7,8](#). The thought is also found in the psalms, [Psalm 98:4-6](#). The return from captivity was a joyous event for the Jews.

Recently, astronomers have detected sounds emitted by the stars. Each star “sings” a different note. Together the heavens play a beautiful symphony. Perhaps, Isaiah said more than he realized.

From time to time the Bible pulls back the curtain of heaven so we can catch a glimpse of the throne room of God. Unfailingly, the scene is one of singing, [Revelation 5:13](#). Therefore, Fanny Crosby, who wrote over 500 hymns, always referred to heaven as a “Tuneful City.” She was right!

It is no wonder Christians are known for their singing. We have much to sing about. The difference between the woeful chants of pagans and the cheerful songs of believers is a case in point. When Robert Ingersoll, the famous atheist, died, his funeral notice said, *“There will be no singing.”* In contrast, the last words of Savannah Wesley, the mother of John and Charles, were, *“when I am gone, sing a hymn of praise to God.”*

Today, there are a variety of songs broadcast by the media. Much of the music is either sad or seductive. The Church is a refreshing oasis of praise. Quite a commentary on the life we live and destination toward which we walk—The Tuneful City. If we do not like to sing here, we will sure be out of place there.

I have a song that Jesus gave me  
It was sent from heaven above;  
There never was a sweeter melody,  
Because it is a song of love.

Singing is the activity of the saved in heaven; it should be the joy of believers on earth. *“I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to My God as long as I live,”* [Psalm 104:33](#). Certainly, Israel felt that way when she travelled back to the Promised Land after the exile.



## THE RETURN, EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

In his book, You Can't Go Home Again, Thomas Wolfe wrote how home is never the same once you leave. For, when you return, the home you left has changed. This was the experience of the Jews who returned to Palestine in 536 BC. They came back with high hopes and big plans, only to see them dashed on the rocks of reality.

### I. International Scene

Babylon conquered Assyria in 612 BC. The Babylonians became a powerful empire. Soon, however, the political landscape began to shift. Persia was transformed into a strong nation under Cyrus the Great (who took the throne in 559 BC). Babylon surrendered to Persia in 539 BC. When Cyrus confronted Babylon, Nabonidus, the king (who had alienated himself from his subjects) fled. Babylon fell without a whimper. Persia became a huge empire stretching from India to Egypt.

A. Cambyses. In 530 BC, Cyrus put his son on the throne (as a co-regent) and headed off to quell a rebellion on the frontier. The rebels were turned back but Cyrus was mortally wounded. Cambyses took over. He killed his brother to solidify his grip on the throne. He was not a particularly apt administrator. After conquering Egypt and putting another brother in power, he headed home. On the way, he heard that a rebel had seized his throne in Persia. When Cambyses realized all was lost, he committed suicide in 522 BC.

B. Darius I. The usurper—who successfully led the coup against Cambyses—was deposed by Darius I the following year. Through diplomacy, Darius was able to gain control of the empire. He struggled to maintain his authority because of economic inflation and political rebellion. Meanwhile the Jews were attempting to rebuild the temple in 520 BC. Because her neighbors complained to Darius, Ezra 5:8-16, Darius checked the archives and found that Cyrus had in fact authorized the rebuilding of the temple in 536 BC, Ezra 6:1-5. So Darius I told the complainers to cooperate with the Jews, Ezra 6:7-12. Likely the complainers did as they were told because Darius I marched through Palestine in 519 BC on the way to Egypt!

### II. Local Scene

When Cyrus took over Babylon in 539 BC, and formed the expansive Persian Empire, he permitted people conquered by the Babylonians to return to their homelands in 538 BC. The Jews were among those who went home in 536 BC.

A. Permission To Return. Cyrus was the “*shepherd*” of Jehovah, Isaiah 44:2. He was also the “*anointed*” of God, Isaiah 45:1. In other words, it was a pagan monarch who authorized the return of the Jewish exiles to the Promised Land,

II Chronicles 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1-4. Certainly, Cyrus was not a worshipper of Jehovah (any more than Nebuchadnezzar was a convert to the Lord). Nevertheless both were under the control of the sovereign God who used them—consciously or unconsciously—to achieve His purposes.

B. Leader Of The Return. Sheshbazzar was the original leader of the band of returning exiles. Cyrus gave Sheshbazzar all the temple treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had taken as plunder of war a half century earlier, Ezra 1:5-7. Likely, the actual preparations for the long hike home would have taken months. By the time the journey got under way, Zerubbabel had become the leader, Ezra 2:1,2. Many scholars believe Sheshbazzar had died before leaving Persia. No one knows for sure.

C. Number Of Returnees. The total number of people who came back in 536 BC was 42,360 (plus 7,337 slaves and 200 singers) or a total of 49,897, Ezra 2:64. The returnees were primarily from Judah—the more recent captives. This total was less than 2% of the number who were taken into exile. The majority were poor, since there was only one donkey for every six people, one horse for every sixty, one camel for every one hundred, and one mule for every one hundred and forty, Ezra 2:66,67. Almost one hundred years later, in the days of Nehemiah (which would have been 444 BC), Jerusalem was still sparsely populated, Nehemiah 7:4. Hence, it may be assumed, most of the first group of returnees settled in the countryside, Ezra 2:1,70; 3:1. Obviously, they were rural farmers rather than urban businessmen.

## HOPE OF GOD

Hope is eager expectation. The concept is found in both secular and spiritual contexts in the Bible. It has a wide range of application and a deep wealth of meaning. The term “hope” points to a mother lode of truth that is often missed by the casual observer. The existence of hope springs from the covenant between God and man. God has high expectations for us. We place deep trust in Him. Therefore, hope is intrinsically involved in the fabric of divine action and human response.

### I. Hope In The Old Testament

The Hebrew word for “hope” suggests actions of “*trust*,” “*endurance*,” and “*expectation*.” The noun form of the term highlights the basis of hope while the verb form accents the action of hoping.

A. In Secular Contexts. As long as man has a future, he has hope, Proverbs 23:18. Hope indicates confidence vested in someone (or something), though there are people (or things) that should not be trusted, Proverbs 26:12; 29:20; Micah 7:5. When confidence rests on finite resources, hope is doomed to futility: whether an army, Isaiah 31:1-3, wealth, Psalm 49:5-12, or idols, Psalm 115:2-8. The question is not whether hope is good or bad but whether it is based on a solid foundation. A hope that is not properly grounded will lead to disappointment, shame, and disaster, Psalm 25:1,2; Proverbs 10:28.

B. In Theological Settings. The basis of ultimate confidence is the primary issue. Throughout the Old Testament, God was “*the hope of Israel*,” Jeremiah 14:8. He alone offered a hope for the future that was dependable, Psalm 71:4,5. The Lord is a Rock that cannot be moved, Psalm 62:5-8. Thus, reliable hope was defined by its source—the sustaining power of God. In the Old Testament, hope had four attitudes: (1) a trust in Jehovah, Psalm 9:10; (2) a willingness to take refuge in Him, Psalm 16:1; (3) a confident expectation of good, Psalm 10:28; and (4) waiting patiently for Him to act, Psalm 33:20,21. Hope was a living bond of trust between Jehovah and Israel.

### II. Hope In The New Testament

Hope is a key word in the New Testament—though rarely found in the Gospels and not found in Revelation (yet, in both cases, confident expectation is just below the surface). Hope is never a feeling but an act of trust.

A. In Secular Contexts. Less than 25% of the occurrences of “hope” in the New Testament are found in a secular context. For example, a money-lender expected a profit, Luke 6:34, a farmer expected a harvest, I Corinthians 9:10. Therefore, one

could hope to make a visit, Romans 15:24; I Timothy 3:14; II John 12; III John 14. In the New Testament, the emphasis was on expectation (instead of desire) since one could lose hope even when desire remained, Acts 16:19; 27:20.

B. In Theological Settings. God is the author of hope. He is the sustaining power of hope. So, as long as the exiles put their trust in God, they could maintain a hope in returning home. Hope was the response of His people to His activity on their behalf. Therefore, hope is expectation expressed in faith, confidence, eagerness, endurance, and patience. Different New Testament writers stressed different features of this complex relationship.

1. Paul. God is the source of hope, Romans 15:13. The power of hope is conveyed through the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5:5. With Paul, hope was closely associated with confidence, Romans 5:5, with rejoicing, Romans 12:12a, with boldness, II Corinthians 3:12, and with endurance, I Thessalonians 1:3. For Paul, hope thrives during trials, II Corinthians 1:7.

2. Peter. The first letter of Peter is rightly called the epistle of "hope." Hope is a characteristic of the baptized believer, I Peter 1:3. It is firmly set on the present and the future, I Peter 1:13. Such confidence is from God, I Peter 1:21. The expectation of a Christian can be defended, I Peter 3:15. Hope is not wistful dreaming. It rests on a belief in the resurrection, Acts 24:14,15. Thus, throughout Scripture, hope fuses together the reality of divine activity with a human response to that activity: trust, eagerness, patience, endurance, and expectation in spite of the circumstances of the moment.

### WHY DIFFERENT NUMBERS, EZRA 2:3-35; NEHEMIAH 7:8-38?

There are thirty-three family units that appear in both lists of returning exiles. Of the thirty-three family units, there are fourteen units with a different number listed. Consequently, the resulting statistical totals differ. For example,

- . Ezra 2:8 (945) and Nehemiah 7:13 (845)
- . Ezra 2:14 (2,056) and Nehemiah 7:19 (2,067)
- . Ezra 2:21,22 (179) and Nehemiah 7:26 (188)
- . Ezra 2:28 (223) and Nehemiah 7:32 (123)
- . Etc.

The largest discrepancy is 1,100 between Ezra 2:12 and Nehemiah 7:17. How should we account for these inconsistencies? There are at least two explanations.

1. It is possible that everyone mentioned may have registered their names with the full intention of returning to Palestine. In the interval—between enlisting and leaving on the trip—some were prevented from going due to sickness, obstacles, or death. Likely, the original list was used by Ezra when he wrote in 450 BC (after return II in 458 BC) about return I (which occurred in 536 BC). On the other hand, Nehemiah wrote (after return III in 444 BC) regarding the tally of those who actually arrived in Judah after the long trek home. This would easily account for the discrepancies, Nehemiah 7:5.

2. Consideration should also be given to the difficulty of preserving statistics with complete accuracy. Without modern technology, records were kept on less than durable manuscripts. Moreover, numbers in the Hebrew language were made by adding dots above and below certain letters of their alphabet. These dots often smudged, worn off, or even fell off the page of the manuscript. And, as they were copied, the scribe could accidentally add or omit a dot here or there. Discrepancies due to deterioration and distraction are the two primary ways manuscript number variations occurred.

It would be interesting to know what factors figured into the discrepancies between the lists in Ezra and Nehemiah. There are probably several: (1) over excitement to register followed by the sobering reality of the rigors of the trip; (2) starting the trek but getting “cold feet” once on the trail over leaving loved ones in Persia; and, (3) economic considerations which led to a last minute revision in plans. Only the Lord knows. Sufficient to say, nearly fifty thousand returned to the Promised Land (where almost all of them had never been)!

## I AM ON MY WAY

*“Where are you going?” Zechariah 2:2.*

While riding in a strange city, I asked the driver of the car, *“Do you know here you are going?”* He had taken numerous shortcuts: down side streets, through alleys, and across parking lots. His twists and turns made no sense. I was completely confused. That is why I inquired, *“Are you sure you know how to get to our destination?”* With a reassuring smile, the driver responded, *“Absolutely!”* And, sure enough, around five more corners—turning left then right then left again—we arrived at the intended address.

Usually, when we start on a journey, we obtain the needed information and do the necessary preparation—especially if the trip is long and the stay is considerable: passport, visa, money, shots, tickets, clothes, and personal necessities.

The same is true in going toward eternity, Amos 4:11,12. It is foolish to leave our preparation for heaven to chance. We know we may meet our Maker at any moment, yet many of us are not ready. Why take such risks? Jesus warns us not to bet on there being more time to prepare, Matthew 24:42-44.

A speaker at a huge convention was late for his speaking engagement. Rushing out of the airport, he jumped into a cab and told the driver to hurry. Off they went—in a cloud of smoke accompanied by screeching tires. After several minutes of lurching, ducking, and diving, the speaker asked, *“Are we almost there?”* *“Where?”* the cabbie asked, *“All you said was hurry!”*

Sadly, too many believers are like that. They are in a hurry but they have no particular destination in mind, no specific plan for getting where they want to go, Joshua 24:15a. Still we are in the fast lane headed somewhere!

A decision must be made. To deliberately procrastinate is still a decision. The crucial question is: Where are you headed?

Carried on the rapid wing of history,  
Death will take you to your grave!  
Come, then, make your choice,  
While there is still time for Him to save.

Shoot for the moon. If you miss, you will still land among the stars!

## STARTING OVER, HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

The day the prophets had predicted (and the pious Jews had dreamed about) finally came in 536 BC. The Jews were permitted to return to Palestine. Their first major order of business was to rebuild the temple (that had been lying in ruins for 50 years). The task turned out to be quite complicated.

### I. Problems At Home

Seven months after getting home, the people assembled. The altar of burnt offering was constructed, Ezra 3:1,2. The Samaritans (who lived just north of Jerusalem) were not happy with this development. In spite of the disapproval from their neighbors, the Jews began to make regular sacrifices and offerings to God, Ezra 3:3-6.

A. Building The Temple. As Solomon had done four hundred years earlier, the Jews ordered building materials from Phoenicia, Ezra 3:7.

1. Laying The Foundation. Seven months after building the altar, the foundation of the temple was laid with great celebration, Ezra 3:10,11. They sang the hymn David had composed centuries earlier on the occasion of the ark being placed in the tent behind the royal palace.

2. Dealing With Disappointment. Their joy was not unanimous. The foundation of this second temple was half the size of the original temple (Solomon built), Ezra 3:12,13. These mixed feelings were one of the major problems addressed years later by Haggai the prophet, Haggai 2:3.

B. Harassment Of Samaritans. The disappointment (over the insignificance of the second temple) was debilitating. And the harassment of the Samaritans crippled the will of the Jews to move ahead with the temple reconstruction, Ezra 4:1-5. Since the temple rebuilding was impeded for sixteen years, God called both Haggai and Zechariah to get the people working, again.

C. Support Of Darius. Things changed when Darius I became king in 521 BC. The Samaritans appealed to him to stop the rebuilding project, Ezra 5:1-5. Darius rejected their appeal. Instead, he insisted they pay the expenses of the project. If the Samaritans disobeyed, there were dire consequences, Ezra 6:6-12.

### II. Encouragement From God

The Lord wanted His house to be built. Hence, He called up two messengers to encourage His people.

A. Haggai. While abandoning the temple reconstruction, the people busied themselves providing suitable housing for their families. In the meantime, the house of Jehovah lay in disgrace. Haggai urged the Jews to put aside their selfish interests and undertake the temple rebuilding without delay, Haggai 1:4-9. Within three weeks, the Jewish labor force picked up their tools with renewed enthusiasm. The second temple was far less elegant than the first temple (though that did not matter). God was still willing to bring His glory to this humble house, Haggai 2:6-9. Is there not a lesson in that?

B. Zechariah. Two months after Haggai began his ministry, Zechariah urged the people of Jerusalem to repent, cf. Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1. The reconstruction project had been resumed, but there was more to do. The people needed to reestablish their covenant bond with God, Zechariah 1:2-6. Three months later, the prophet had a series of visions. Among them was the vision of a completed temple, Zechariah 4:6-9. That prediction came true in 516 BC (twenty years after the foundation was laid). Again, a great celebration was held, Ezra 6:16-18. The Passover was celebrated—just like it had been done a thousand years earlier when the Hebrews left Egypt, Ezra 6:19-22.

With the completion of this celebration, a pall of silence falls over the land of Judah. There is no record in Scripture of what happened among the Jews in the Promised Land for the next fifty years.



## OBEDIENCE OF GOD

In the Old Testament, the usual Hebrew word for “*obedience*” is literally “*to hear*.” Translators are constantly faced with the problem of whether to render the word “*hear*” or “*obey*.”

### I. His Messengers

While the term in the Old Testament often referred to ordinary human-to-human interaction, it was the God-to-man relationship that provides the context for its full meaning. God revealed Himself to Israel through what He “*told*” them, Genesis 27:8. He usually spoke through chosen messengers—the prophets—though on special occasions He spoke directly to His people.

### II. His Actions

The word of God reveals what the Lord proposed to do. Sometimes it mentioned how He intended to accomplish it, namely, the action He would take. Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. God provided a ram. Moses was told to lead Israel out of Egypt. God persuaded Pharaoh (with plagues) to let them go. Jeremiah announced the judgment of God on Israel. The Lord brought the Babylonians to take vengeance on His wayward children. Obviously, God does not merely talk—He acts. He does not simply send a word of instruction—He also participates in carrying it out.

### III. His Requirements

To “*hear*” God, required a response from man. This response required three reactions:

- . Listen. A word from God always involves hearing. Humans are required to pay attention. “*He who has an ear, let him hear,*” Luke 8:8b.
- . Believe. It is good to listen. It is better to believe what is heard, Hebrews 3:7,8.
- . Obey. It is good to listen. It is better to believe. It is best to obey, Matthew 7:21; James 1:22.

To understand the ambiguity of the word “*hear*,” it is necessary to understand the full implication involved in hearing: Listen, believe, and obey. Hearing must inevitably involve doing. Otherwise the hearer is not listening, Isaiah 6:9,10. Not to respond to the word of God is equal to unbelief. The evidence for not hearing is not obeying. The Lord called those who do not listen stubborn, rebellious, and disobedient. Those who do not listen are disciplined by God, Isaiah 1:19,20.

#### IV. His Story

The history of Israel is a story of failing to hear the Lord. He spoke at Sinai, Exodus 21:1. He spoke through the prophets, Amos 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 8:4. His word was not to be ignored, Jeremiah 7:23. Down to the days of Daniel the charge was the same: “*You are not listening,*” Daniel 9:10! After the return from exile, Ezra read the “Book of the law of Moses” to all “*who could hear with understanding,*” Nehemiah 8:1,2. God is anxious for us to hear. He expects us to demonstrate our understanding in faithful obedience.

We, then, are expected to obey, Romans 6:16-18; I Peter 1:22. We have been sanctified by the Spirit for obedience, I Peter 1:2. It is one thing to claim that we are listening to God. It is quite another to demonstrate that claim, Titus 1:16. Obedience is a serious matter, a primary feature of the Judgment Day, I Peter 4:17.

### WHEN DID IT BEGIN, EZRA 3:8; 4:24; HAGGAI 1:1; 2:1,10?

The information in the various texts (above) must be put in their proper sequence and carefully examined for clues of what was happening.

. Ezra 3:8 mentions laying the foundation of the second temple “*in the second month of the second year after their arrival*” back in Jerusalem. They arrived on the site of the first temple late in 536 BC. Therefore, the laying of the foundation occurred in 535 BC. Since the Samaritans opposed the reconstruction—even sending a letter of complaint to king Cyrus—the Jews halted the project until the days of king Darius I (who began his reign in 521 BC), Ezra 4:4,5.

. Ezra 4:24 says the work was suspended until “*the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia*” (known in history as Darius I or Darius the Great) which would be 520 BC. The wealthier members of the returned exiles were busy building their houses. They made no effort to help in the temple rebuilding, Haggai 1:3,4.

. Haggai 1:1 spoke of God calling the prophet to encourage the completion of the reconstruction “*in the second year of Darius on the first day of the sixth month*” which would be in 520 BC. The people rallied to the call to action, Haggai 1:14. This new beginning (after sixteen years delay) started “*on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of king Darius.*” This was just three weeks after Haggai had started his prophetic career in 520 BC, Haggai 1:15.

. Haggai 2:1 indicates the prophet tells the workers that the “*glory*” of the second temple would surpass the “*glory*” of the first temple, Haggai 2:9. This message was delivered “*on the twenty-first day of the seventh month*” or a month after the work was restarted in 520 BC.

. Haggai 2:10 records the prophet reminding the people of the consequences incurred by the delay sixteen years earlier, Haggai 2:15-17. The remainder was issued “*on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month*” (or two months later) in 520 BC, Haggai 2:18,19.

. Ezra 6:15 states that the second temple was completed “*on the third day of the month of Adar* (which was the twelfth month) *in the sixth year of the reign of king Darius.*” This is—approximately 15 years after the reconstruction began—in 520 BC.

The data demonstrates two vital lessons: (1) when the information of Scripture is properly sorted and compared, no discrepancies are found. And (2) in spite of grave complications, the job was completed with the help of God, Zechariah 4:6.

## REMEMBER ME

*“Remember me with favor, O my God,” Nehemiah 13:31b.*

With considerable risk, Nehemiah had asked king Artaxerxes for permission to return to Jerusalem in 444 BC. He wanted to rebuild the walls, Nehemiah 2:1-5.

It was contrary to royal court etiquette to appear sad in the presence of the king. The remorse of Nehemiah was due to the disgrace of the holy city, Nehemiah 1:1-4. Nehemiah anxiously waited eight months for the right moment to voice his request. Potential negative consequences accompanied such behavior, Esther 4:11. Furthermore, the king, Artaxerxes, had already rebuffed an attempt to fortify Jerusalem, Ezra 4:11,12,17-22. Now a few years later Nehemiah wished to resume the very enterprise the king had previously vetoed. No wonder Nehemiah was reluctant.

The king granted his request, Nehemiah 2:8. The thrill of rebuilding the walls soon mellowed into the sobering reality of enormous struggle: the Samaritans issued threats and the Jews were hesitant, the work was difficult and the hardships of the project were many. The actual construction took a mere seven weeks. And the completion of the work had a positive effect, Nehemiah 6:15,16. Jerusalem became an inhabited city again. However, the people remained spiritually impoverished, Nehemiah 13:15-8.

How discouraging for Nehemiah. All his work seemed to come to nothing. Hence, he closed his book pleading for God to remember him for the good he tried to accomplish, Nehemiah 13:14,22b,29,31b.

Life is like that. We try so hard. We accomplish so little. Nevertheless, we can be sure good will eventually occur, Romans 8:28.

We stand and we ask,  
*“What has the future in store?”*  
 God responds, loud and clear,  
*“Blessings . . . more and more.”*

What form those blessings take  
 We do not yet know,  
 But blessings upon blessings  
 He surely waits to bestow.

We should weight the worth of our earthly accomplishments in light of their heavenly value.

## HANGING IN, ESTHER

The Jews who returned to Palestine and the Jews who remained in Persia were likely asking the same question: “*Where do we go from here?*” Their situations were different but their challenges were similar.

### I. Life In Persia

Persia remained the dominant world power throughout the history of Israel that is covered in the biblical text: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Malachi.

A. Xerxes. Darius I (who supported the rebuilding of the temple) died in 486 BC. He was succeeded by Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus). When he ascended the throne, Egypt rebelled. Xerxes dealt swiftly with the rebels. In 481 BC, he reorganized his army and marched to Greece. At first, the Persian troops prevailed. Then, the tide turned. Though gravely outnumbered, the Greeks successfully resisted. Xerxes went home. He left his troops in the command of his general (who subsequently lost the war). Xerxes was discredited. He spent his remaining years dallying with beautiful women (including Esther). He was eventually assassinated in 465 BC.

B. Artaxerxes. In order to gain control, Artaxerxes killed his brother (who was the eldest son of Xerxes). Artaxerxes tried to restore the credibility of the central government, to undue the alienating extravagances of his pompous father. He lowered taxes—but it was too little too late. Inflation crippled the nation. Landowners went bankrupt. Mutiny was close at hand. Greece was in political disarray. So Artaxerxes was not concerned with his western flank. Thus, he turned his attention to matters closer to home (especially the flap over Samaritan disapproval regarding the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah 6:1-8). Artaxerxes died in 424 BC (which coincides with the end of the Old Testament).

C. Esther. The book of Esther is the only biblical witness to the reign of Xerxes. It begins in the third year of Xerxes, Esther 1:1-3. Feeling proud of quelling the rebellion in Egypt, he held a lavish, six-month banquet, Esther 1:4-8. He asked his queen, Vashti, to display her beauty to the drunk dignitaries, Esther 1:10,11. She refused, Esther 1:12. Xerxes was disgraced. Vashti was deposed, Esther 1:19. A search was conducted for a new queen, Esther 2:1-4. Esther was chosen, Esther 2:17. Later, when Xerxes was humiliated in the Greek war, he blamed the Jews for his blunders, Esther 3:8,9. Esther told the king she was a Jew, Esther 7:1-4. Through cunning maneuvers, she saved the Jews. To remember this brave rescue of her people in Persia, Jews keep the Feast of Purim to this day, Esther 9:26-28.

### II. Struggles At Home

After coming back to Palestine, the Jews faced numerous spiritual challenges. Severe measures were used to correct the problems.

A. Removing The Foreigners. Some of the Jews had married pagan wives. When this was discovered, Ezra was deeply grieved, Ezra 9:1-5. He offered an eloquent prayer of confession, Ezra 9:6-15. Others joined in the prayer, Ezra 10:1,2. The perpetrators made a covenant to divorce their foreign wives, Ezra 10:3,4. In a tearful public assembly, the one hundred and twelve guilty men said “farewell” to their non-Jewish families. A very sad day! There is no nice way to undue sin. It hurts us. It hurts others. It hurts God.

B. Renewing The Covenant. Ezra read the book of the Law of Moses (the Pentateuch) to the people, Nehemiah 8:1. Because it was written in Hebrew and the people spoke Aramaic (the language of Babylon), the text was simultaneously translated—the first recorded instance of the word of God being translated from one language to another, Nehemiah 8:8. In reading the law, it was discovered that they had not been observing the Feast of Tabernacles, Nehemiah 8:13,14. The people admitted the sins of their forefathers, Nehemiah 9:32-37. And they promised to keep the Law of Moses, Nehemiah 10:28-33. These were solemn promises made in a serious effort at renewing their agreement with God.

## CHILDREN OF GOD

The phrases “children of God” and “sons of God” have almost identical meanings. Neither phrase—in both the Old and New Testament—is suggesting a biological relationship with God but a spiritual connection to Him. The plan of God was to bring “*many sons to glory*” through Jesus Christ, Hebrews 2:10. He intended to bring them into “*the glorious freedom of the children of God,*” Romans 8:20,21.

### I. Significance Of The Phrase

The difference between “*sons*” and “*children*” (if any) is the difference between a relationship and a status with God. If a case can be made for such a distinction in the New Testament, it is not found in the Old Testament anywhere. The phrases “*children of God*” and “*sons of God*” simply signify a relationship with the Lord.

### II. Examples From The Old Testament

The frequent references to the “*children*” or “*sons*” of Jehovah in the Old Testament can be categorized under three headings.

A. Biological. In ancient times, pagans often thought of God in a physical sense as the father or begetter of His children, Numbers 21:19a. Though extremely rare, this biological reference does occur in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 2:10.

B. Moral. Usually, when God is thought of as a “*Father*,” the connection is moral (not physical). In the rebellion of Israel, the Jews were called “*sons*” of God, Isaiah 1:2. However, it was only in the future, when their punishment in exile was over, that Israel would be called “*sons of the living God,*” Hosea 1:10. Likewise, in the vision of a future restoration, the Lord would be “*a father to Israel,*” Jeremiah 31:9. It was the exiles—chastened and purified—that would return home as the “*sons and daughters*” of God, Isaiah 30:1,9; Jeremiah 3:4,19.

C. Spiritual. It is equally clear that these words denote a spiritual relationship. Throughout the Old Testament, the descendants of the patriarchs were designated the “*sons and daughters of God.*” And, after the exile, those who are not of Abraham, who did not have Israelite blood, will also claim Him as their “*Father,*” Isaiah 63:16.

### III. Examples From The New Testament

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament uses the phrases “*sons of God*” and “*children of God*” in the same three ways.

A. Biological. Suffering is described as a sign of being a true son of God, Hebrews 12:5-8. Persecution is proof that believers are not illegitimate children but legitimate offspring under the caring discipline of their Father. A similar reference to a biological connection with the Lord is expressed by Jesus, Matthew 12:48-50. Later, in His joy over the disciples recognizing His deity, Christ labeled His followers "*little children*," Luke 10:21.

B. Moral. We are "*sons*" or "*children*" of God because of our moral behavior, Matthew 5:9,44,45a. We are allied with God, identified with the heavenly Father because we act like Him, Luke 6:35,36.

C. Spiritual. Though we are already sons of God, there will be a fuller confirmation of this fact in the future, I John 3:1,2. This more complete manifestation will occur when Christ returns. Jesus pioneered the way in His earthly sojourn, Hebrews 5:8,9. We will have a similar sonship when we express a similar obedience, Revelation 2:7.

To those who "*receive Jesus, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become children of God*," John 1:11,12. The apostle Paul stressed our adoption as sons, if we share in the sufferings of Christ, Romans 8:15-17; cf. Galatians 4:7. Our aim, then, is to "*become blameless and pure, children of God, without fault in a crooked and depraved generation*," Philippians 2:15.



## WAS IT RIGHT FOR ESTHER TO BE IN A BEAUTY PAGEANT?

The name of God is not found in the Book of Esther (though the providential guidance of the Lord seems obvious on every page).

Esther became queen in an unusual twist of fate. Xerxes' wife, Vashti, had been asked to display her beauty in public before government officials. She refused, [Esther 1:10-12](#). The king was embarrassed. His advisors suggested she be punished (lest other women in Persia disrespect their husbands), [Esther 1:16-18](#). In order to make Vashti an example, she was deposed. A beauty contest was arranged so Xerxes could select his next queen, [Esther 2:1-4](#). Esther was "taken" into the harem, [Esther 2:12,13](#). She won the beauty pageant, [Esther 2:17](#).

These were perilous times for the Jews in exile because the prime minister of Persia was an anti-Semitic, egotistical maniac. Because Mordecai—a Jew, a palace gatekeeper, and the adoptive father of Esther—refused to bow to the prime minister, Haman plotted to annihilate the Jewish exiles, [Esther 3:1-6](#). Mordecai asked Esther to speak to the king, [Esther 4:6-8](#). It was against the law to go uninvited to the monarch, [Esther 4:12-14](#). She went anyway, [Esther 4:15,16](#).

The beauty pageant was a prelude to the bigger story—the rescue of the Jews. This event is still remembered 2,500 years later. The Jewish community throughout the world still celebrates the Feast of Purim, [Esther 9:20-23,26](#).

It appears Esther did not volunteer to participate in the beauty contest, [Esther 2:8](#). She had no freedom to refuse. Moreover, the circumstances involved in selecting the new queen were substantially different from the Miss America pageant. Actually what Esther did was risk her life to save her people.

The beauty competition in ancient Persia can hardly be a precedent for young Christian women entering a modern day beauty contest. They differ in purpose and process. The two are like comparing apples and oranges.

The fact that Esther was part of Xerxes' harem was something over which she had no control. A despotic, dictatorial, Middle Eastern monarch did not negotiate. His word was law. His orders were absolute. She was "taken" to the palace. She made the best of her situation. Mordecai was right: "*Who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?*" [Esther 4:14b](#).

Did God have a hand in her becoming queen? I assume so! What should one make of the fact that His name does not appear in the book of Esther? Human beings maneuvered to save their skin without overt reference to God.

## THE FATAL MISTAKE: PRIDE

*"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall," Proverbs 16:18.*

So we do not steal, lie, murder, or commit adultery. Good! That is what is expected of any decent person. The laws of our country prohibit such behavior. It is our duty—demanded by God and expected by society.

When anyone boasts of their morality, I know they are guilty of (at least) one sin: pride. Pride is a monster—the root of all sin, Proverbs 8:13. It is the source of shame, Proverbs 11:2. A high-ranking military officer was entertaining a sophisticated lady at dinner. The lady was seated to the left of the general. During the meal, she asked why she was not seated on his right—which was the place of honor. The general replied, *"Those who matter do not mind while those who mind do not matter!"*

When one sings their own praises, they invariably pitch the tune too high. Indeed, the greatest fault is to be conscious of none. God knows how to deal with the proud, Job 40:11,12; Proverbs 15:25; I Peter 5:5. Therefore, we are warned against being proud, arrogant, and haughty, Proverbs 16:18.

No wonder the words *"pride"* and *"proud"* occur 40% more often than *"adultery"* and *"adulterous"* in the Bible—106 times to 70 times respectively. Pride was the first sin, I Timothy 3:6. It was the foundation of the sin in Eden, Genesis 3:5. Pride is deification of self. It wants to be in the limelight, to attract attention, to be first, to be superior. The term *"pride"* is a combination of two words: huper which means *"above"* and phaino that means to *"shine."* The proud want to *"shine above"* others. Disaster is not far away, Romans 12:3; Galatians 6:3.

So we do not steal, lie, murder, or commit adultery. Fine. Are we proud of our morality, our GPA, our looks, our abilities, our achievement, or our possessions?

Napoleon lived for the glory of this world. In his memoirs he wrote, *"I die before my time. What an abysmal gulf between my miseries and the kingdom of Christ. I marvel that the ambitions of Napoleon, Alexander the Great, and Caesar vanish into thin air while a Judean peasant captures the hearts of men and women everywhere!"*

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

None have more pride than those who think they have none, cf. Psalm 10:1-6.

## WISDOM LITERATURE, PROVERBS AND ECCLESIASTES

To be “wise” in the ancient world often revealed your occupation. The wise were royal court advisors. God gave wisdom to several individuals in the Old Testament (especially Solomon). What he (and others) said is preserved in the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Therefore, these five books are called “Wisdom Literature.” Because poetry, psalms, and proverbs were used by the “wise” to convey their ideas, these books are composed of poetry, psalms, and proverbs. Wisdom Literature deals with various problems of daily living: pain, praise, sex, wealth, employment, and the like. The material reflects the best thoughts of wise men about the most troubling issues of life on earth.

### I. Words From Man

The Wisdom Literature is intended to give us “*wisdom, instruction, understanding, and insight*,” Proverbs 1:2-6. It would be wise, then, to “*pay attention!*”

A. Sex. Is sexual appeal indecent? Is there harm in intercourse outside of marriage? How does love differ from lust?

1. Sex Appeal. It is good to find a wife, Proverbs 18:22. It is a blessing to be infatuated with your spouse, Proverbs 5:18,19. Only a fool is led astray by a prostitute, Proverbs 5:20-24.

2. Illicit Sex. Sexual promiscuity leads to death from disease, Proverbs 5:7-14, and from jealous mates, Proverbs 6:27-29,32-35. Contemporary psychology says: The damaging-wound from sex outside of marriage for her is shame and for him is a seared conscience. A one-night-stand is out of control lust (not a preparation for marriage).

B. Home. What about marriage, children, and family?

1. Wife. The wisdom literature is highly complementary of women, especially the “*virtuous wife*,” Proverbs 31:10,11. A prudent wife is a gift from God, Proverbs 19:14. On the other hand, a “*quarrelsome*” or “*contentious*” wife causes grave problems, Proverbs 21:9,19; 27:15,16. Her personality determines her worth, Proverbs 12:4. Beauty is suspect, Proverbs 31:30.

2. Children. The supreme joy of parents is good kids, Proverbs 23:24,25. Home is a school that prepares young people for real life. Hence, children should honor their parents, Proverbs 23:22; cf. “*obey*,” Ephesians 6:1,2. Only a fool ignores his obligation to respect his parents, Proverbs 20:20.

C. Employment. What is success? Is honesty the best policy? Is making money a “Christian” goal?

1. Success. The successful person is not necessarily rich, Proverbs 16:16. A good name is preferred, Proverbs 22:1. Pleasing God should precede seeking riches, Proverbs 22:4. Success takes hard work, Proverbs 10:4; 12:11; 24:30-34. Generosity always tends toward success, Proverbs 11:24-26.

2. Wealth. Riches bring power, Proverbs 22:7. The wealthy have many friends, Proverbs 14:20. Wealth gives one a “sense of security,” Proverbs 18:11, yet, in times of peril, it is righteousness that saves, Proverbs 11:4. A person can become hardened by wealth, Proverbs 18:23. It is dangerous to get rich quickly, Proverbs 13:11. Preoccupation with money can lead to dishonesty!

D. Religion. What is life? Is there a God? Is there a life beyond this life?

1. Meaning Of Life. Life is a gift to those who respect God, Proverbs 14:7; 22:4. Respect for the Lord prolongs life, Proverbs 10:27. Life is sustained by right living, Proverbs 12:28.

2. Character Of God. Fools may not think they need the Lord and the poor may think He has forgotten them, Proverbs 30:7-9, but God is supreme in wisdom, Proverbs 21:30, and is in control of all things, Proverbs 16:9; 21:1,31. He has a plan, Proverbs 16:4. He tests the heart, Proverbs 17:3.

## II. Words About God

The Wisdom Literature searches for the meaning of life. It is not found in pleasure, education, or wealth. And, though wisdom has its advantage, it does not bring lasting fulfillment, Ecclesiastes 1:12-18. Why does wisdom bring sorrow and grief? Ecclesiastes 2:14-16. Therefore, the search turns to God for the answer.

A. Be Generous. We should do good without hope of return, Ecclesiastes 11:2. The results of such benevolence is beyond our control, Ecclesiastes 11:6. Stay busy. Do good. Enjoy life, Ecclesiastes 11:8.

B. Respect God. It is wise to cultivate piety early in life, Ecclesiastes 11:9. For, the latter years are full of stressful inconveniences, Ecclesiastes 12:1-5. We should be happy, but God brings all things into judgment. Consequently, respect God and keep His commandments, Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.

## FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The word “foreknow” occurs several times in the New Testament, Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29; 11:2; I Peter 1:2. The idea of foreknowledge is pervasive throughout the Bible and inseparably related to the “election of God” and the “providence of God.”

### I. Origin Of The Term

The word “*foreknowledge*” suggests “*knowing in advance*,” II Peter 3:17. The term was originally a medical word referring to a prediction made on the basis of a diagnosis. God knows everything from the beginning of time. He alone has such knowledge, Hebrews 4:13. God has forgotten to forget. He knows all things that are actual or possible—past, present, or future, Psalms 139:1-6; Isaiah 46:9,10. He comprehends the incomprehensible, Romans 11:33,34.

### II. Foreknowledge Of God

Some would argue that, if God knows the future, He must determine the future. For, if things do not happen the way he foreknew them, His foreknowledge would be ignorance! Thus, His foreknowledge must determine the outcome. This is typical western reasoning which sees the knower and the object of knowledge—whether persons, events, things, or facts—as separate entities. In other words, westerners distinguish between subject and object of thought. If applied to God, He would know all that exists outside or separate from Himself.

A. Through Relationship. However, in the Bible, knowledge comes—not from the perception of external objects—but through personal relationship (especially in view of His knowledge of us and our knowledge of Him), Jeremiah 1:5; I Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:9. God knows because He is in relationship—visiting, demanding, judging, and blessing. He knows because He chose to be in relationship, Amos 3:2; II Timothy 2:19a. From this standpoint, the ancient world realized that God knows man intimately, Exodus 33:12; Isaiah 43:1; 45:3,4; 49:1.

B. As Omniscience. Because God knows me—even the number of hairs on my head—He knows everything. No one (or nothing) can slip beyond His knowledge. Nothing is hidden from Him. Only a fool thinks otherwise, Psalms 10:4,11; 33:13-15; 138:6; Isaiah 29:15,16; Hebrews 4:12,13. Hence, the knowledge of God is the foreknowledge of God.

### II. Foreknowledge Of God

In ancient times, God was distinguished from man by virtue of His superior

knowledge. Human knowledge is severely limited—particularly the knowledge of the future. God informed the prophets about His plans, Amos 3:7. Their announcements revealed the future actions of the Lord. Divine foreknowledge was part-and-parcel of the prophetic message.

A. In The Old Testament. The foreknowledge of God is eternal. Since He planned the future, He foreknew what would happen in the future, Isaiah 14:24-27. It is not that God makes the best of an unexpected situation, rather every situation belongs intrinsically to the foreknown purpose of God, Genesis 45:4-8. History is an unfolding of His plans, a movement of events from promise to fulfillment, Isaiah 41:21-29; 44:6-8; 48:3-8.

B. In The New Testament. The dominant theme in the New Testament is that former promises have been fulfilled, Romans 1:1,2. The task of Jesus was to carry out the foreordained divine plan, Mark 8:31; Luke 22:22. What transpired in His earthly ministry was what God had “*decided beforehand should happen*,” Acts 4:28. This does not mean the career of the Messiah was all mapped out, that Jesus merely submitted to a prearranged fate. Rather, He was “*chosen before the creation of the world but revealed at the end of these last times*” for our sake, 1 Peter 1:20. Thus, the saving activity of God, in Jesus Christ, is the expression of His eternal purpose rather than a mere accommodation to historical circumstances. When taken out of the realm of faith and put into rational human categories, the foreknowledge of God is inevitably dumbed down to concepts we think we can explain.

This marvelous omniscience does not predetermine human action. Free human behavior does not take place because it is foreseen, but is foreseen because it is to take place. Seeing an event in the future no more causes it to happen than seeing an event in the past caused it to happen. A doctor may know the inevitable consequences when the medication is not taken. God knew all things without using the processes of reasoning. His knowledge was an instantaneous knowing of everything (whereas we learn things as they unfold). Foreknowledge is our assurance of His ability to care for us, Psalm 139:17,18a; Matthew 6:8.

## IS PROVERBS 22:6 ALWAYS TRUE?

Before directly answering the question, each word within the verse should be understood.

### I. The Meaning Of The Passage

The actual meaning of the Hebrew words is important for answering the dilemma.

A. “*Train*” can signify “to dedicate,” Deuteronomy 20:5; I Kings 8:63. It carries the sense of “*training a child to be religious.*” Hence, the idea is “*to prepare a child for future spiritual responsibilities.*” The word is sometimes translated “*to educate or teach*” indicating “*instruction for adult life.*”

B. “*In the way he should go*” should be translated “*according to his way*” or “*in conformity to the requirements of life.*” The word “*way*” refers to a general custom, a pattern of behavior, Genesis 19:31. Thus, the instruction is governed by the standards of culture and the attitude of the child. In other words, each child is to be raised for divine service in light of the principles of education in the society and the particular abilities of the youngster.

C. The term “*old*” refers to “*adulthood.*”

D. And “*not turn away*” means “*to depart.*” The rod is part of the educational process, Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 23:13,14. The child needs to control his impulses. Children should not be allowed free rein (though there are limits to the use of discipline), Ephesians 6:4. Hence, parents are to apply the rod with care, Proverbs 22:15. They are not to discourage their children, Colossians 3:21.

### II. The Application Of The Principle

Like all sayings in Proverbs, this passage must be applied with caution. For instance, will everything turn out good for the righteous? Proverbs 10:3,25,30; 12:7,11; 14:11; 16:3; 19:20. No! Yet, that does not excuse a person from pursuing righteousness. In general, discipline of kids will result in responsible adults and following God will bring good. Of course, there are exceptions to those rules. Children will occasionally turn their backs on their upbringing and believers will occasionally suffer setbacks. Still training a child is a sound piece of advice. So is obeying God. Neither is intended as a surefire promise of guaranteed success. The odds, nevertheless, favor the training over against the neglect of discipline, the respect for the precepts of heaven over against the neglect of listening to God.

The Proverbs are sage advice that more times than not usually work.

## COME AND GET IT!

*"I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread," Job 23:12.*

Job was accused of atrocities against his fellowman, Job 22:5-11. In effect, Job was told his sins explained his sickness, Job 22:21-23a. Job felt he was innocent. He wanted to plead his case before the throne of God, Job 23:3-7. But, Job could not find the Almighty, Job 23:8,9. Albeit, God knew Job was innocent, Job 23:10-12.

Still life was not treating Job as innocent. He looked guilty. His friends saw him as a sinner. How was Job to explain the actions of God? Job 23:13. God is sovereign. He does what He decides to do. We cannot stop Him. In affliction, the sovereignty of God is an unsettling thought.

The earth, with its store of wonders untold,  
You, O God, skillfully created of old;  
You established it with a changeless decree,  
Firm and sure, like the surrounding sea.

So what are we to do? Job intended to respect His will, to treasure it more than his supper! Though he could not explain life, Job could trust the Creator of life.

*"Man does not live by bread alone," Matthew 4:4. Rather he lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God, Psalms 119:33-40. Notice what that word can do!*

Teach us to follow His decrees, verse 33.  
Give us understanding of His law, verse 34.  
Direct us in the path of His commands, verse 35.  
Turn our heart toward His statutes, verse 36.  
Turn our eyes away from worthless things, verse 37  
Help us fear God, verse 38  
Take away the dread we fear, verse 39  
Renew our life according to His word, verse 40

Quite a list! God will make these come true if we slow down, take time, and study His word.

Slow me down, Lord, I am going too fast,  
I cannot see my brother when he is walking past.  
I miss a lot of good things day by day,  
I do not know a blessing when it comes my way.  
Slow me down, Lord, I am going too fast.

When we are too busy to read the word of God, we are too busy to do the will of God.



## SCHOOL OF PAIN, JOB

The Book of Job wrestles with the problem of suffering (especially the suffering of the righteous). Can a person serve God when many questions of life remain unanswered? The Book of Job says, “Yes!” Humans can (and should) obey God in spite of not having all the answers. A study of Job offers a variety of reasons for the existence of suffering.

### I. Answers Of Man

Job was a good man, Job 1:1. His story begins in heaven, Job 1:6,7. Job did not know about the conversation between God and Satan. He did not know God allowed the devil to afflict him, Job 1:9-12. Job lost everything he owned. But he did not lose his faith, Job 1:20,21. Satan was not convinced, Job 2:4,5. So God allowed further suffering, Job 2:6. Though his suffering did not make sense, Job remained faithful, Job 2:9,10. His perseverance became his claim to fame, James 5:11.

A. Punishment For Sin. The friends of Job believed God punished the wicked, Job 4:7-9. Job was suffering. Therefore, Job must be wicked, Job 5:6,7. They advised him to “buck up and take his medicine,” Job 5:17. This is lousy advice for someone who is hurting. Nevertheless, the friends of Job thought they had the answer, Job 5:27. They continued to say that suffering was punishment for sin, Job 8:3,4; 11:4-6. His friends believed he was stupid, Job 11:11,12.

B. Mystery Of Life. Job recognized that what he was as a sufferer did not fit what he had been before his illness, Job 29:1-6. He struggled to understand, Job 30:16-19. He begged God to show him his sin, Job 31:35. Job defended his innocence. Why was he treated like he was guilty? Why do the righteous suffer? Job tried logic, but logic yielded no answers. So he limped about in confusion, Job 28:12-22. Only God knew the secret to his suffering, Job 28:23-28.

C. Megaphone Of God. Another friend of Job suggested an additional answer to the dilemma. He contended that God communicates with man through pain, Job 33:19,20. Suffering is the way God gets our attention. And after we survive the ordeal we become chaplains to others in pain, Job 33:26-28. Hurt is the megaphone of God, Job 33:29. He delivers the afflicted by affliction, Job 36:15. He teaches man through pain, Job 36:22. This is not the way we prefer to be taught. Yet who can tell God that He has done it wrong? Job 36:23. Suffering is His way of instructing man.

### II. Solution Of God

The silence of heaven was broken. God spoke. He seemed interested in His suffering servant. Jehovah asked Job a series of questions Job 38:4,5,8,12,16,18. Job

was left utterly speechless. He had no answers. The questions were beyond his ability to answer. Yet, God continued asking more questions, [Job 38:22,31,33,39,41; 39:1,9,10,19,20,26,27](#). Again, Job was unable to reply, [Job 40:3-5](#). He tried to interrupt—hoping the Lord would stop. Job recognized his insignificance. He was through with being questioned, [Job 40:6-8](#). How easy it is for us to blame God in order to justify ourselves!

It is interesting that nowhere in the speech of God did He answer the problem of pain. He did not even raise the subject. Instead, the majesty of the Lord completely dominated the conversation with man. There was total silence on the issue so hotly debated throughout the book of Job. Still the need of Job was met. Human logic morphed into vain mumbling when the infinite power of God dawned on the confused heart of man. Words will not take away pain. It is part of the human condition. The Lord is the answer. Is this not the best way to minister to sufferers?

Job did not need the problem of pain solved once he had met God. Answers became irrelevant, unnecessary. The real issue is the relationship of the sufferer with God.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind belief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

Christians should not expect to be kept from all pain, [John 16:33](#); [II Timothy 3:12](#). Believers have been saved from sin (not from suffering)! The confusion over the providence of God—preserving the saints in times of trouble—is due to expecting something that God never promised to give.

## DILEMMA OF GOD

The attempt to reconcile the existence of suffering with faith in a good God has been (from ancient times) a most imposing dilemma for believers. For, if God was good, He would want to abolish pain. And, if He was all-powerful, He would be able to abolish pain. But suffering still exists. Hence, it appears, God is either not good or He is not all-powerful. Notwithstanding, Christian thinkers have proposed some options to this dilemma.

### I. Answers Suggested

Before listening to the Lord, it is instructive to hear the suggestions of man.

A. A Means Of Spiritual Development. Humans possess the capacity to grow through experience. This position sees the world as an educational environment. Suffering is part of the curriculum. Its presence is necessary for humans to gain understanding. The argument is attractive. Objection is raised over lending dignity to evil by allocating a positive role to unhappy experiences. What should one make of Hiroshima, Auschwitz, or 9/11? Does not this answer encourage acquiescence to cancer, terrorism, and rape?

B. The Consequence Of Human Choice. The sorry state of the world cannot be blamed on God. What He created was “*very good*.” Human choice corrupted it. Though the facts in this position are correct, the dilemma is unsolved. Where did evil originate? Was the devil created by God? Is, then, evil not indirectly a product of divine creation? At this point, the proponents of this view become silent.

C. A Misunderstanding Of Divine Omnipotence. According to this position, God is not all-powerful. But His grace triumphs over suffering. A confidence in this ultimate victory enables believers to maintain their hope in the face of adversity. Certainly such a view is helpful in difficult times. Nevertheless, the position is flawed. It is based on the belief that God did not intend for the world to include suffering. Yet pain is everywhere. Such a view upholds divine omnipotence but calls into question divine omniscience.

### II. Truths Revealed

Though we “*walk by faith*,” there are certain clues offered in Scripture for the dilemma of suffering.

A. Part Of The Design Of Life. We may not know the cause of pain, but we know who does. Faith is not an escape from but a way to deal with suffering, 1 Peter 5:6,7.

B. Essential To A Blessing Of Faith. Suffering is not always the result of sin (any more than prosperity is always the result of righteousness). Sometimes the Lord deliberately puts us in difficult circumstances, Job 42:11. To complain about, fret over, or beg the removal of a troubling situation, leaves us resisting the will of God and missing some of His richest blessings, I Peter 5:10.

C. Appropriate To The Molding Of Character. For Job, suffering was a test of his piety. Tribulation can be introduced into our life in order to produce perseverance, Romans 5:3, dependence on God, II Corinthians 1:8,9, and maturity, James 1:3,4. A problem that does not produce an unsettling effect is not a real problem. But there is nothing too heavy (or too long) in this life if it brings us—crowned, robed, and sceptered—into the presence of God, Hebrews 12:3-11.

D. Beyond The Human Mind To Comprehend. We cannot explain suffering (nor is it a Christian responsibility to do so). Rather, we have been called to endure it (whenever it comes our way). To timidly deny the existence of trouble is a folly that flatters neither God nor man. We have been asked (as believers) to demonstrate a trust in God that is beyond our understanding. This is not a blind resignation or a cowering surrender. No! It is a glad acceptance, a firm confidence in the One who allowed the sorrow in the first place, Psalms 119:75. That is better than an explanation. It is the answer.

## WAS JOB A REAL PERSON?

There are many scholars who think the Book of Job is fiction. Why?

1. Almost the entire book is poetry (39 out of 42 chapters).
2. The confrontation of God and satan reflects pagan beliefs.
3. The forces that removed (and restored) the prosperity of Job appear unrealistic.
4. The Aramaic loan words suggest an after-the-exile date of composition.

So was there ever such a person as Job? And, if so, when and where did he live? Many scholars believe he was a fictional representative of the suffering in captivity.

In answer to the skeptics, the following remarks should be considered.

1. The book matter-of-factly states his name and location like the name and location of other real people. Compare [Job 1:1](#) with [I Samuel 1:1](#) and [Luke 1:5](#). Should not Job be accorded the same credibility as Elkannah (the father of Samuel) and Zachariah (a priest in the time of Jesus)?
2. Job is referred to as a real person with other very real people, [Ezekiel 14:14](#). If Job is not real, what about Noah and Daniel? cf. [Ezekiel 14:20](#).
3. If objection is raised over the confrontation of God and satan, does that not place doubt on the confrontation of Jesus and satan, [Matthew 4:1-11](#)? If the Bible is not trustworthy in these matters, is it a credible revelation of divine truth?
4. The linguistic argument—based on the presence of Aramaic loan words—is tenuous at best. Aramaic dates back before 2400 BC. The Book of Job was likely written during the time of Abraham (rather than after the exile). Since the setting of the story is in Uz, [Job 1:1](#), in northern Arabia, the mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew actually authenticates the narrative.
5. Wisdom literature was usually written in poetry, song, riddle, and proverb. Therefore, because most of the Book of Job is in poetry, the style of its composition is a testimony to its genuineness.

In view of these considerations, there are no solid grounds for dismissing the Book of Job as fiction. The apostle James was justified in appealing to Job (as if he were real) in his encouragement to believers to remain patient under tribulation, [James 5:11](#). Moreover, needless to say, it would have been impossible for the Lord to be merciful and compassionate to a fictional character that never existed! Job is not a hoax.

## SPITTING IN YOUR OWN FACE

*“The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament shows His handwork,”*  
Psalm 19:1.

Intelligent people believe in the existence of God, Psalm 14:1. To do otherwise, displays a tragic ignorance, a shameful stupidity. Thomas Paine, a self-proclaimed atheist, asked Benjamin Franklin what he thought of atheism. Franklin did not mince any words. “Tom,” Franklin said, “*he who spits into the wind spits in his own face.*”

Until a person submits to God and carefully reads His word, he is woefully lacking in the knowledge of God. The person may be educated and clever, a genius in science or math, but uninformed in spiritual things. Truth be known—very few atheists have ever read the whole Bible. Instead, they specialize in isolated parts and dwell on certain “supposed” contradictions.

A skeptic sat next to a Sunday school teacher at dinner. The conversation soon turned to the Scriptures. The skeptic said, “*I once was interested in reading the Bible, but gave up when I came across so many inconsistencies.*” “Really,” the Christian replied, “*what inconsistencies?*” “Well,” the skeptic answered, “*I read the story about the ark of Noah. Soon I became interested in its size, the amount of lumber required to build it, and its weight. That was quite a boat! I was impressed. Later, I read about priests carrying the ark around on their shoulders. That was preposterous. I have not read the Bible again!*”

How sad! What ignorance! The skeptic had not been careful to observe the difference between the ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant. There is a huge difference between the two, cf. I Corinthians 1:20,21.

Is there a God? The river that flows,  
The air we breathe, the tree that grows,  
The flowers, grass, and wind that blows,  
All speak of God, with one voice bestows!  
And, in eloquent display, His existence shows,  
He is there—blind fool—in all of those!

Romans 1:19-23.

There are many atheists on earth, but there will be none in hell.

Or, as Voltaire, the famous atheist said, on his deathbed: “*If God does not exist, I find it necessary to invent Him!*”

## HYMNBOOK OF ISRAEL, PSALMS

In the Psalms, we meet the faith of Israel at its most passionate intensity. The Psalms (which cover a 1000 years of Jewish history) are a transcript of the life of the Hebrew people—their unspeakable joys and inexpressible sorrows. Some of these psalms were sung on the Sabbath. The practice of singing these religious songs was carried over into the Church, Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.

### I. History Of The Psalms

There are many songs of Israel found outside of the Book of Psalms.

A. Pre-Exile Songs. The song of Moses is the oldest known psalm, (1450 BC), Exodus 15:1-18. Another ancient hymn is the song of Deborah (1300 BC), Judges 5:1-31. Hannah sang a song (1100 BC), I Samuel 2:1-10. And, the prophets composed several psalms, Isaiah 38:10-21; Jeremiah 14:7-9; and Habakkuk 3:1-19.

B. Post-Exile Songs. By the time of the exile, religious music had become a regular item of Hebrew worship, Ezekiel 40:44 (see footnote: “*choir loft*”). And a few of the psalms were written during the captivity—such as Psalm 137. When seen as a whole, it is obvious the hymns in the Book of Psalms are only a part of the religious music in Israel.

### II. Compilation Of The Psalms

Originally, the Psalms were scattered here and there. As the number multiplied, these hymns were slowly collected into local hymnbooks. There were likely several of these regional songbooks before they were gathered into a single hymnbook (as we now have them in the Bible). For example, Book I is Psalms 1-41; Book II is Psalms 42-72; Book III is Psalms 73-89; Book IV is Psalms 90-106; Book V is Psalms 107-150. And, within the smaller collections are several other collections: such as “of Korah,” Psalms 42-49; “of Asaph,” Psalms 78-83; and “Songs of Ascent,” Psalms 120-134, etc. It is worth noting that the five regional books are different lengths: 41, 31, 17, 17, and 44 songs. Psalm 53 is almost identical to Psalm 14.

A. Authors. Seventy-three psalms are attributed to David, twelve to Asaph, nine to Korah, one to Solomon, etc. Though David was called the “singer of songs,” II Samuel 23:1, Solomon composed 1005 of them, I Kings 4:32. Why was only one of his preserved? We do not know.

B. Superscriptions. Most of the psalms have (uninspired) headings—116 out of 150. Those psalms without superscriptions are called “orphan” psalms (Psalm 1). The superscriptions describe (1) the character of the psalm, such as a “maskil” or a

song of worship (Psalm 32); (2) the purpose of the psalm, such as “to shine” or “put the worshipper in a gracious frame of mind (Psalm 40); and (3) the performance of the psalm (such as “according to alamo” or female voices (Psalm 46).

C. Classifications. The songs within the hymnbook were used at different times for different reasons: (1) praise, (2) thanksgiving, (3) lament, (4) pilgrimage, (5) instruction, and (6) events surrounding the life of the king (i.e., royal psalms).

### III. Study Of The Psalms

Because there are so many psalms, we can only look at a couple of them.

A. Psalm 1. This is an “orphan” psalm. Scholars (both ancient and modern) believe it is a preface to the entire Book of Psalms.

1. Verses 1-3. The “righteous” are described negatively and positively.

2. Verses 4-6. The “wicked” are like “chaff.” They are weak and worthless, Isaiah 17:13; Hosea 13:1-3. The chaff is discarded. The “righteous” rejoice, cf. Psalm 112:1-6.

B. Psalm 111. This is an “acrostic” psalm. An acrostic was poetry that started one or more lines with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Then it started the same number of lines with the second letter, and so on through part or all of the remaining letters in the Hebrew alphabet, cf. Psalm 119 as well as Lamentations 1,2,3, and 4. Apparently, it was a memory aid.

1. Verse 1. The psalmist begins by declaring his sincerity, Psalm 9:1; 119:34.

2. Verses 2-9. The providential “works” of God are cited. He (a) provides food, v. 5; Psalms 136:25; (b) remembers agreements, v. 5; Psalms 105:8; and (c) helps in conquest, v. 6; Psalm 105:44. Indeed, what God does is “awesome,” v. 9. The word “awesome” is translated “reverend” (in the King James Version). Since it describes God, many believe it should not be used as a title for preachers. However, the Hebrew word is also applied to “an angel,” Judges 13:6, “a dream,” Ezekiel 1:22, “the ‘dreaded’ Assyrian army,” Habakkuk 1:7, and “the ‘dreaded’ judgment of God,” Malachi 4:5. A better passage for not using the word “reverend” as a title for preachers would be the words of Jesus, Matthew 23:8-12.

3. Verse 10. Since God is awesome, respect for Him is required.

The Psalms are without equal in expressing the reality, depth, and purity of religious feelings. They should be read regularly.



## PRAISE OF GOD

Praise of God is an important response to the character and activity of the Lord, Deuteronomy 10:21. Praise celebrates the uniqueness and superiority of Jehovah. Though praise is a well-intended attempt to capture the essence of God, it never fully accomplishes it, Job 37:5.

### I. Words For Praise

Praise is a pervasive activity. Therefore, it is inevitable that several words were used to describe the behavior.

A. Hallelujah. “*Hallelujah*” means “praise the Lord,” Psalm 145:1-3. Though the word can refer to human beauty, Genesis 12:15, or human wisdom, Proverbs 12:8, it usually refers to the praise of deity, Judges 16:24; Psalm 102:12.

B. Give Thanks. Thanksgiving is also part of praise. For, when one acknowledges the kindness of God, he will surely give thanks, Psalm 105:1-3; 106:1,2.

C. Sing. Singing happens in contexts of adoration toward the power and glory of the Lord, Psalm 63:3; Isaiah 12:5,6.

D. Extol. The word indicates a lavish praise or an intense feeling of elation. Hence, it expresses praise, honor, and respect for the object that is glorified, Psalm 86:12; 109:30; Isaiah 25:1; Daniel 4:37.

### II. Aspects Of Praise

Praise is a multi-faceted activity. It has six vital ingredients.

A. Object Of Praise. The object of praise is clearly the Lord. He is the only one worthy of our adoration, Psalm 18:3a.

B. Giver Of Praise. The recipients of His grace “praise the Lord.” The “saints,” Psalm 145:10, and the “righteous,” Psalm 140:13, laud His greatness. The mighty chorus of praise also includes “nature,” Psalm 96:11-13.

C. Place Of Praise. The Lord is to be extolled everywhere—from east to west, Psalm 113:3. That also includes when we are “in bed at night,” Psalm 63:5,6.

D. Reason For Praise. God deserves our adoration because He is higher than the highest. He resides above heaven and earth, Psalm 113:4,5.

E. Occasion Of Praise. Praise should be continuous—night and day—every day, 24/7, not just on Sunday, Psalm 113:2.

F. Manner Of Praise. God is glorified when the worshipper sings, prays, meditates, fasts, or gives. In other words, praise is not limited to one behavior. Whatever one does to praise God, it must be done with sincerity—in spirit and in truth. For God knows who is pretending, Matthew 23:27,28; cf. Psalm 86:12.

In Psalm 113, five of the six “aspects” of praise are mentioned. Can you identify them?

From the psalms, it is clear that praise should be natural, spontaneous, and continuous. Does this describe our life? It should!

## **DOES GOD HATE SINNERS? PSALM 5:5**

In this passage, one can imagine an evil person knocking at the gate of God—in order to be admitted as a guest—only to be met with rejection, Psalm 5:4. Why? Because arrogant, lying, bloodthirsty, deceitful men are hated by the Lord, Psalm 5:5,6. The vigor of the language is unmistakable. Likewise, we too should be firm in our stand against the attitudes and actions of sinful people.

The disgust of the Lord is reinforced in other passages, Psalm 11:5; 45:7; 101:3. God hates, abhors, detests, and despises evildoers, Malachi 1:2,3. The language is strong, straightforward, and uncompromising, Psalm 119:104; Proverbs 8:13.

Furthermore, God hates idols, Deuteronomy 16:22. He also hates hypocritical worship, Amos 5:21-23, because it is a disguise for deceptive pretenses, Isaiah 1:13-15; Zechariah 8:17. Again, we are to hate such things. Hate is the opposite of love. Hate keeps its distance. The hated are considered odious, utterly unappealing. Hatred is expressed by opposition to (and separation from) the object of disdain. Love desires relationship while hate refuses it, Deuteronomy 5:9.

From these passages, we can learn two valuable lessons.

1. God draws a line between good and evil, between good people and evil people. The Scripture describes the wicked as those who defy God and hold His moral law in contempt, II Chronicles 19:2. We are not to fellowship such folks, I Corinthians 15:33. To be close pals with the wicked leaves us open to absorbing their twisted attitudes and actions, Proverbs 22:24,25.

2. God offers grace to everyone through Jesus Christ, Isaiah 53:6. Yet, though He opposes the wicked and hates the sinner, He reaches out in compassion—in undeserved mercy—to all who have sinned, Romans 3:22-25. While God hates the unrepentant, unconverted, rebellious sinner, He still offers forgiveness through the cross—so that He can be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Christ, Romans 3:26. In other words, God is able to love those He hates. His hatred is toward sinners in their sin. His love is for sinners who repent. This is the way we, too, should have a love-hate relationship with them.

## PURIFIED BY FIRE

*“(God) will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver,” Malachi 3:3.*

Christians should not think it strange if they are called upon to suffer trials in this life, I Peter 4:12,13. Difficulties are a refining fire sent to make our faith purer. For every tear shed in the furnace of affliction, there will be a star in our crown. The joys of heaven will more than compensate for the pains on earth, II Corinthians 4:17.

In ancient times, a refiner sat at his work. It was a delicate task that required him to be close to the crucible so he could intently watch the process. When the heat was applied, it must be neither too much nor too little. And the dross had to be removed at the precise moment so there would be no loss of the precious metal.

In like manner, God will sit as a refiner controlling the heat and removing the impurities. He is not willing for anyone to perish. He does this for His own sake and for the sake of His glory, Isaiah 48:10,11a.

As a believer, we will pass through the furnace of affliction. It is inevitable. Such testing will prompt us to call on Him. And, when the dross is removed, He will proclaim that we are (at last) His, Zechariah 13:9. These experiences are not pleasant. But God controls the heat so that the impurities are removed without burning the believer. Therefore, the refining crucible should not unsettle us, I Thessalonians 3:2,3. Everyone experiences it sooner or later, I Peter 5:9.

The alchemist (in the world of yesterday) knew when the metal was pure. He could see himself mirrored on the surface of the molten mass. In the same way, only when Christ is formed in us, when we reflect His glory, will the furnace of affliction be left behind. The process of purification will make us *“eager to do what is good,”* Titus 2:14. The affliction is certain but our protection is guaranteed, Psalms 34:19.

Burn in us, fire of God,  
Burn till our hearts are pure.  
Burn till we are cleansed,  
Burn till our faith is sure.

God had one Son on earth without sin, but has no sons without suffering.

James 1:2-4.

## THE LAST WORDS OF GOD, MALACHI

The sun of divine interaction with Israel in the Old Testament was setting. God spoke one more time to His people.

The religion of the Jews had become impersonal, formal, and external (though it masqueraded as the real thing). Malachi was called to revive a dead religion. Hence, his message has much to say to our contemporary world.

### I. Social Situation

The circumstances mentioned in the Book of Malachi coincide with those that existed in Israel during the post-exilic period. The chief concerns—perverted worship and mixed marriages—parallel the challenges that faced Nehemiah.

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem (in 444 BC). Some of the exiles had returned almost 100 years earlier (in 536 BC). The temple had been rebuilt, but the city was still empty. The people had assumed—from Haggai 2:20-23 and Nehemiah 9:9,10—that Jehovah would set up His kingdom soon. However, when the Lord delayed doing so, the Hebrews became skeptical and discouraged. The people grew careless and negligent. Their worship became empty ritual. Tithes were not given. Defective animals were sacrificed. Divorce was common. Lying and cheating were widely practiced.

### II. Spiritual Condition

Malachi indicates that spiritual decline had set in. Judah was under the domination of Persia. And nature had added to their hardships: drought, blight, and locust, Malachi 3:10,11. The people had been lead to expect prosperity once the temple was rebuilt, Haggai 2:6-9; Zechariah 8:4-12. These promises had not been fulfilled. The people lost faith. The few remaining devout Jews wept before the Lord, Malachi 2:13. Most of the people were tempted to abandon their faith. Everyone seemed to doubt that God still cared, Malachi 1:2a. They had come to feel that their obedience meant nothing to Him, Malachi 2:17. So the Jews treated their religion with contempt, Malachi 1:14; 3:7-9. Adultery, perjury, cruelty, and oppression were rampant throughout the land. Marriage to pagan women was common, Malachi 1:12,13a. The religion of Israel was needing immediate renovation.

### III. Specific Message

Malachi used a courtroom style: (1) he stated an accusation and (2) he recorded the evidence (that supported the charge), Malachi 1:6,7.

A. Israel Dishonored God. The prophet denounced the priests, Malachi 2:1,2. They were offering sacrifices that the Persian governor would reject, Malachi 1:8. In other words, the pagans were more respectful of their ruler than the Jews were of their God, Malachi 1:11,12. The Lord wished the temple doors were closed, Malachi 1:10. He was going to treat His people contemptuously because they disgracefully treated Him, Malachi 2:3,9.

B. Israel Disobeyed God. The people were practicing illegal divorces and mixed marriages. They ignored their heavenly Father and forgot their earthly vows. They did not seem to care. But their actions would not go unpunished.

C. Israel Wearied God. The Lord was weary of their complaining that He was not fair, Malachi 2:17. Be assured God would bring judgment in due time, Malachi 3:1,2. The judgment would begin with the priests so that public worship could become acceptable again, Malachi 3:3,4. Then the laity would be judged, Malachi 3:5. Social and spiritual offenses would not be condoned. The millstone of divine judgment may grind slowly but it does grind accurately.

D. Israel Robbed God. The people felt that God had reneged on His promises of prosperity. However, those promises were conditional—subject to the faithfulness of Israel. So God withheld His blessing (though He spared Israel when they deserved to be destroyed). If Judah would repent, God would bless them (as He originally promised), Malachi 3:7. Their offense was a failure to pay the full tithe, Malachi 3:8-10.

E. Israel Challenged God. The faithful in Israel wondered what profit there was in obeying God. They performed their religious obligations but—despite their faithfulness—the unrighteous seemed to fare much better, Malachi 3:13-15. The prophet reaffirmed that God knew who the righteous were, Malachi 3:16-18. Certainly, on the day of the Lord, the wicked will be punished and the faithful will be blessed, Malachi 4:1-3.

Malachi reminded his audience to keep the law of God, Malachi 4:4. In order to improve the chances of this happening the Lord promised to send Elijah (prior to the Judgment Day) to encourage the people to repent, Malachi 4:5,6.

Who was this Elijah? Many thought it was the ancient prophet who would reappear, cf. Matthew 17:9-13. Actually, John the Baptist came in the power of Elijah. He was a reformer like Elijah, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, Mark 1:1-5; Matthew 11:7-15.

## REVELATION OF GOD

Revelation is a matter of divine initiative rather than human discovery. God reveals Himself—His actions, His plans, and His character. His revelation can only be received by the humble and the obedient.

### I. Meaning Of The Word

The term “revelation” means to “*uncover*,” “*disclose*,” or “*make known*.” Therefore, the word carried the sense of “*communicating a secret*,” 1 Samuel 9:15, “*speaking in the ear*,” Job 33:16, or “*bringing something to the attention*,” Ruth 4:4. A revelation “*opens the eyes*,” Numbers 22:31; Psalm 19:18. The Jewish and Christian religions are both “revealed faiths” because God made Himself known (rather than people finding Him). Though it is innate in the human spirit “*to seek after God*” and “*perhaps find Him*,” Acts 17:27, the overwhelming conclusion in Scripture is that the self-disclosure of the Lord is the only way to know the unfathomable riches of His grace, Deuteronomy 29:29; Romans 16:25-27. Since God takes the initiative, He is called “*the revealer of mysteries*,” Daniel 2:47.

### II. Nature Of The Revelation

God makes Himself known in two ways.

A. In Nature. The Bible clearly states that God is knowable through nature, Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20. The fact that pagans were not granted a more specific type of revelation is no excuse for their idolatry. For the pagans “*knew God*,” they simply refused to “*glorify Him as God*,” Romans 1:21. The Lord was not to blame. Nature repeatedly revealed the kindness of God, Acts 14:16,17.

B. In Person. It is in person (especially the person of Jesus Christ) that the revelation of God was made clearest, Luke 2:28-32. Ultimately, then, revelation is in relationship, confrontation, or fellowship (rather than communication of facts or information). From the ninth century BC onward, God “*revealed His plans*” to His servants the prophets, Amos 3:7. These revelations—that were primarily concerned with politics and morals—were ultimately focused on the grace of God in Christ Jesus, 1 Peter 1:10-12.

### III. Manner Of The Revelation

The Scriptures provide ample illustrations of divine disclosure through the interpretation of dreams, Daniel 2:31-45, and the casting of lots, Acts 1:20-26. Though authentic, these are exceptions to the usual manner of divine revelation. The most frequent and normal mode of disclosure was communication between

persons—God and man, Numbers 12:6-8.

The will of God cannot be discovered. It is made known by the Holy Spirit, I Corinthians 2:9,10. This idea underlies Pauline thought elsewhere, Ephesians 1:17. Such agrees remarkably well with the prayer of Christ: *“I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was Your good pleasure. All things have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and to those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him,”* Luke 10:21,22. This disclosure was made to “*little children,*” that is, those humble enough to receive it—His disciples.

If the Gospel, which culminated in Jesus, is the norm for divine revelation, then, Scripture, as a record of the incarnation, is a disclosure of God. Indeed, the Bible states that the written word is a medium through which the Spirit of God speaks to us today, II Timothy 3:14-17; II Peter 1:19-21.



## WHAT IS THE BEST TRANSLATION OF MALACHI 2:15?

Malachi used a very conversational style. He was discussing the grievances of God against those who were spiritually negligent in Jerusalem. In ordinary conversation, we are prone to omit words that can be implied from the context. Moreover, Hebrew verbs do not have gender endings like Greek, so it is difficult to tell the relationship between nouns and verbs in the sentences where they occur. So it is with Malachi 2:15: key words and case endings were omitted. Here are the major problems in this verse:

- . The first sentence is not a question in Hebrew.
- . The meaning must be understood in the larger context
- . The reference to the “one” is very vague.

The larger context starts in verse 10. God indicted the men of Jerusalem for divorcing their Jewish wives to marry pagan women, Malachi 2:10; cf. Exodus 34:15,16. The concern was over introducing idol worship into Israel, Malachi 2:11. God excommunicated these men. He refused to accept their sacrifices. Why? They had broken faith with their legitimate wives, Malachi 2:14.

In verse 15, who is the subject? The King James Version assumes it is the original husband and wife who became “one,” cf. Genesis 2:24. This is a possible translation (though it requires making the sentence a question). The Revised Standard Version makes the “one” those who the Lord identified as the faithful, namely, those who did not divorce their Jehovah-worshipping wives in order to marry idol-worshipping pagans. This rendering makes the “spirit” refer to the Holy Spirit who lead the covenant keeping men to act righteously.

Therefore, the second occurrence of the term “one” refers to the consummation of marriage when the “*two become one flesh*.” Why did the faithful keep their original marriage vows? So that their kids would be God-fearing children or “*godly offspring*.” This would not happen if the Israelite men married pagan women, Leviticus 21:13-15; Ezra 9:1,2, 10-15.

Therefore, the best translation of the passage is: “*No one among the faithful men married foreign wives because they had the Holy Spirit who lead them to have godly offspring. Hence, obey the Spirit and quit dealing treacherously with your first wife.*” This fits smoothly into the context. It was certainly the intention of Malachi.

Because that seems to be so, no translation is preferred over another translation. The words of Paul appear to capture the idea perfectly: II Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1.

## RISING OF THE SUN

*“ . . . the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings,” Malachi 4:2.*

The word “sun” is used literally of the “light source in the sky,” Psalm 74:16; Matthew 5:45. However, it can also refer figuratively to “judgment,” Micah 3:6; Matthew 24:29.

In Malachi, the day of the Lord is being discussed—a crisis in history when God steps into time to judge the world. For the wicked, it will be a terror, Malachi 4:1. For the righteous, it is a time of healing (from the hardships inflicted on them by the wicked), Malachi 4:2,3.

The day of the Lord will be like the rising of the sun on a foggy day. First, there is the glow of the mist and white of the fog. Then the fog begins to lift. Finally, the sun bursts through in all its intensity. The trees drip with moisture—a thousand dew drops glistening like iridescence diamonds bending the rays of the sun into tiny rainbows. The view is absolutely spectacular, cf. Revelation 10:1.

There are times in life when we are lost and confused in the fog of daily living. Then, through the mist, the Lord, as bright as the sun, shines on our heart. First, a faint glimmer of hope and, then, the warm glow of His presence. Our load is lifted. Life is good. Our joy bursts forth like the exuberant frolicking of a calf released from its stall, Malachi 4:2.

God is a sun. He will withhold nothing that is good from those who walk in “*righteousness*,” Psalm 84:11.

When the sun of righteousness rises in us, we become light reflectors. The challenge everyday is to be dew drops of color reflecting the true light that comes from above, John 8:12. Therefore, we should live as children of light, Ephesians 5:8; I Thessalonians 5:5, because we have been “*called into His wonderful light*,” I Peter 2:9.

Sun of my soul, light so clear,  
It is not night, if You are near;  
May no earth-born cloud arise,  
To hide You from my eyes.

If we let our light shine, God will put us where it can be seen.

Matthew 5:14-16.

## TIME OF SILENCE

The time between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament is like the audio being shut off while a movie is being shown. The film continues but no sound is heard. Between 400 BC and 200 BC our knowledge of developments in Palestine is nil to none. Nothing was recorded. It is a period of silence.

### I. The Political Scene

The years after Malachi and before Matthew were filled with monumental political and spiritual crises. Here are a few of them.

A. Sunset Of Persia. The Persian Empire continued to control Palestine for the next 75 years (though trouble was brewing). First, there was revolt in Egypt and, then, there was the growing threat of Greek power. The situation came to a head during the reign of Darius III (336-331 BC). When Philip of Macedon (359 -336 BC) came to power in Greece, he systematically took control of all the other Greek states. By 338 BC, he was the sole ruler of the newly formed, democratic states of Greece. Philip was assassinated in 336 BC. His son, Alexander, took the throne. The life of Alexander changed the course of history.

B. Sunrise Of Greece. Alexander (336 to 323 BC) was a military genius. In 334 BC, he invaded Asia Minor (or what we now call Turkey) and quickly gained control of the entire region. In 333 BC, he defeated the Persian army (and captured the wife and family of Darius III). Then, he moved south along the Mediterranean coast capturing Phoenicia (except for Tyre) and was welcomed with open arms by Egypt in 332 BC. From there he marched east across Iraq and Iran to the border of India. In his wake, he left behind centers of Greek learning and culture (since he required his older soldiers to retire and live in the conquered territories). The effect of his short life casts a long shadow over western civilization.

C. Trouble In Palestine. When Alexander died 323 BC, his empire was divided among his four generals. Two of them are especially germane to our story.

1. Ptolemy. Ptolemy ruled over Egypt. For a century, the Ptolemies dominated Palestine. During this time millions of Jews moved to Egypt and settled in Alexandria (located in the Nile delta).

2. Seleucius. Seleucius took control of Syria. There was constant friction between the Ptolemies and the Seleucid rulers. Invariably the battles between them took place in Palestine. The Jews were the innocent bystanders who took the brunt of the suffering. After a number of bitter conflicts, the Seleucid throne prevailed in

a battle near the Sea of Galilee in 223 BC. The Jews welcomed the Seleucid overlords. Surely they would be an improvement! The honeymoon ended in 175 BC when Antiochus Epiphanes decided that all his subjects must worship Greek gods, speak the Greek language, and follow Greek customs. This infuriated the Jews. They retaliated. Antiochus desecrated the temple, butchered priests, and slaughtered the people. A full-scale revolt ensued.

## II. The Spiritual Shift

The prophet Daniel predicted the political developments (outlined above). With hindsight, we can easily pick out the broad-brush strokes of history, Daniel 8:1-14. During the “time of silence,” the circumstances of the Jewish community in Jerusalem are clouded in mystery. However, there is significant documentation on the Jews in Egypt and Samaria.

A. In Egypt. The Jews in Egypt did not maintain the purity of the Hebrew faith. Deities (other than Jehovah) were worshipped. The animal sacrifices were modified (to avoid offending the Egyptians). The feast days—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles—were also altered or eliminated. The Hebrews in Egypt accommodated their faith to the local scene. It became a mixture, a conglomerate religion called Judeo-paganism. Nevertheless, these wayward Hebrews translated the Old Testament into Greek (around 250 BC). The Septuagint is frequently quoted in the New Testament.

B. In Samaria. When the northern ten tribes were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, many of the Jews were deported and pagans from elsewhere were imported. Racial mixing followed. A half-breed, mongrel people resulted. The Jews despised the Samaritans. These outcasts only accepted the Pentateuch. They built a temple (similar to the one in Jerusalem). The existence of these two temples was the basis of the question the woman asked at the well of Jacob, John 4:19-24. And the parable of the “Good Samaritan” has its setting in the loveless relationship between the Judean Jews and the Samaritan half-breeds, Luke 10:25-37.

The clash of cultures, the antagonism between rulers, and the accommodation for survival changed the face of the Hebrew faith. Judaism was struggling to find herself. The outcome was not always pretty. Would a faithful remnant remain (in order to greet the long awaited Messiah)? Only time would tell!

## WILL OF GOD

The term “will” indicates “*something wanted by a person—especially one with power or authority.*” Will is purpose, intention, or determination—a conscious and deliberate choice or action.

### I. Significance Of The Word

There are several terms in the Bible which suggest divine will: “*plan,*” “*decide,*” “*determine,*” “*desire,*” “*purpose,*” or “*choose.*”

A. In The Old Testament. When applied to God, the various words carry a dual understanding about the character of Jehovah.

1. Subjective Will. God is a person. Within Himself, He makes decisions, He plans to do things, He determines the course of history, Isaiah 46:10; 48:14.

2. Objective Will. God has a will. Outside Himself, He has a decree, a law, or a command, Ezra 10:11; Psalm 40:8; 103:21; 143:10. In spite of these clear references to His will—both objective and subjective—there is no indication of a western separation between mind, emotion, and volition in God. There is no speculation about the separate capacities constituting His personality. Rather the Hebrew writers merely attributed to Him what they observed in themselves. God decided (or chose) to do this or that. Those decisions were His will.

B. In The New Testament. The New Testament makes the same distinctions in the will of God, that is, His subjective will, James 4:15, and His objective will, Matthew 7:21. Biblical language—whether Hebrew or Greek—referred to what God did. Without being concerned about the components of personality, they treated God (and man) as an unanalyzed unit. There were no abstract concepts. God was described by His actions. The Scriptures predated modern psychoanalysis. To superimpose contemporary psychological distinctions on the biblical material runs a grave risk of misinterpretation.

### II. Action Of The Lord

Finite concepts are used to describe an infinite God. Human characteristics are attributed to a divine being. Such as, God marched into battle, Judges 5:4, and returned blood spattered from the battlefield, Isaiah 63:1-3! Though not literally, the truth of His decision to judge the rebellious comes through loud and clear. The language is symbolic. It cannot be otherwise.

A. Wrath Of God. The inspired writers used human analogies (which made God

look cruel and vindictive), Exodus 20:5; Joshua 7:24-26. From our point of view, His actions appear hateful. But, actually, these descriptions of God were simply couched in the only experiences the human authors had ever known. We can only think in the categories with which we are familiar.

B. Love Of God. It is also common for the Bible to assign a tender, flexible, responsiveness to the will of God, Luke 18:1-8. Yet are these not human experiences? Does God have to be pestered before He answers prayer? Does He change His mind? Can He be wearied by our persistence? Or are these merely finite expressions about His infinite care?

### III. Boundary Of His Will

The question that eventually confronts any discussion of this kind is the tension between divine will and human will.

A. Unlimited. Does human freedom set limits on the will of God? Yes! When God created man with freedom, does that automatically make God finite? No! The will of God is infinite (except when He chooses to limit Himself by allowing humans the freedom of choice). Voluntary self-limitation is different from innate limitation (or inherent weakness.)

B. Limited. Man is finite. When we attempt to override His will, the infinity of God will exert itself. To say it differently, when we fail to realize the world in which we live is regulated by His will, conflict is inevitable. The will of God and the freedom of man is not a contradiction but a challenge. The conflict is resolved by the submission of the finite will of man to the infinite will of God, Acts 2:22,23, 37-39.

The biblical descriptions of God in this discussion are anthropomorphic. They are the characteristic decisions and actions of human beings. Hence, God is likened to a soldier, judge, father, and friend as well as shepherd, storm, and lightning. In what sense are we to understand these anthropomorphic references to the will of God? They are merely symbols pointing to the reality of the Lord. The truth is not in the form of the symbol but the meaning of the symbol—like the words “hot” or “rough.” God is a personal deity. He thinks, plans, decides, and acts. Because we have not seen Him, we describe Him like ourselves because we have no other points of reference.

## IS GOD PRESENTED THE SAME IN BOTH TESTAMENTS?

It is common for people to say that the Old Testament presents God as an angry, vengeful deity, whereas the New Testament speaks of Him as a compassionate, loving Lord. Actually, the Old Testament (partly because it makes up three-fourths of the Bible) contains more verses than the New Testament on divine mercy and grace.

For example, in Deuteronomy, the overwhelming emphasis is on the faithful love of God for Israel, Deuteronomy 7:8; cf. Psalm 103:13,17; Jeremiah 31:3. Psalm 136 says "*His love endures forever*" 26 times in 26 verses. The New Testament affirms the same unfathomable love of God for those who yield to Him. For example, the Sermon on the Mount repeatedly affirms His interest in our welfare, Matthew 6:28-34; 7:7-11. And, over and over, we are told that the love of God resulted in the sacrifice of His Son for our sins, John 3:16. Beyond a doubt, God went the second mile, Romans 8:31-39.

But, at the same time, it should also be noted that the New Testament teaches the wrath of God just as strongly as the Old Testament, John 3:36; Romans 1:18; 2:5,6; II Thessalonians 1:6-9. The mention of divine wrath continues all the way to the end of the New Testament, Revelation 6:15-17. No passage in the Old Testament is more forceful in describing the judicial wrath of God than the judgment scene in the New Testament, Revelation 14:9-11. Indeed, in both the Old and the New Testament, God is called a "*consuming fire*," Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29.

The portrait of the Lord is consistent throughout the sixty-six books of the Bible. The wrath of God and the love of the Lord are "opposite sides of the same coin." As the upholder of moral law, Jehovah punishes the wicked. But He also demonstrates His love for the sinner, Romans 5:8. He is the same in both testaments. In other words, throughout Scripture, the "*kindness and severity*" of heaven is emphasized, Romans 11:22.

## DRAW NEAR TO GOD

*“... it is good for me to draw near to God,” [Psalm 73:28](#).*

In regard to salvation, God made the first move. He stooped down, He drew mankind with cords of kindness, [Hosea 11:4](#). In sanctification, we draw near to Him, [Hebrews 7:19](#). We seek an intimate friendship with the Lord.

Clearly, it is our turn to move toward Him, [Isaiah 55:6](#). He drew close to us. Now we must draw close to Him, [James 4:8a](#).

Too many believers wait passively for God to fill them with joy and strength. Christians often fail to realize that these blessings are impossible unless—through prayer, meditation, Bible study, worship, and fellowship—we draw near to God, [Hebrews 10:22a](#). The Lord is waiting for us to demonstrate our faith in Him, [Psalm 119:145-151](#). The slightest move in His direction delights His heart. He is *“not far from each one of us,”* [Acts 17:27](#).

A father was driving through dense darkness on a lonely road home. His child sitting beside him felt afraid in the eerie strangeness of the misty night. The child snuggled closer to gain a sense of security. The father—thinking the child was about to ask a question—softly asked, *“Are you okay?”* *“Yeah,”* the child replied. *“I just want to be close you!”* In that intimate moment, the hearts of father and child were warmed with the joy of being near to each other.

Such is an illustration of the Christian closeness to God. He brings me near and I draw close to Him. What a pity to draw away from the Father in heaven, [Hebrews 10:39](#). We have everything to gain and nothing to lose being near to our Maker, [Psalm 73:23-28](#).

Nearer, still nearer, while life shall last,  
Till safe in Glory my anchor is cast,  
Through endless ages, ever to be  
Nearer, my God, still nearer to Thee.

Fellowship with God is a sacred bud whose full flower will bloom in heaven.

[Psalm 145:18](#).



## MACCABEAN REVOLT

The Maccabees were a family of leaders in Judah for a short (but infamous) time (175-62 BC). The term “*Maccabeus*” is derived from the nickname of one of the leaders during this period of struggle, I Maccabees 2:4. The name Maccabeus means “hammer.” It refers to the guerilla tactics he employed in war.

Judah was sandwiched between Syria and Egypt (both of which had Greek rulers). Therefore, partly due to their geographical location and partly due to their religious beliefs, Judah became a virtual battleground against Greek infringement in their territory and in their faith. Ironically, the Jews are the only ancient culture and religion in the Middle East that survived the invasion of Hellenism.

### I. The Background

After Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, the Ptolemies (in Egypt) and the Seleucids (in Syria) went to war against each other over the control of Palestine. Though the Seleucids eventually won the war, the Jews were divided. Some favored a friendship with Egypt while others favored a relationship with Syria. It seems business dealings and family ties settled the issue. It really did not matter. For, either way, Hellenism made huge inroads into the Jewish culture and religion.

Finally, in 201 BC, a Syrian army invaded Egypt with decisive results. Egypt was forever a non-factor in Palestine after that time. A shaky peace ensued until Antiochus Epiphanes took the throne. He was ambitious to impress Rome (a rising world power). An important step in that direction was to Hellenize everybody in the area—including Judah. This was the match that ignited the Maccabean Revolt.

### II. The Battle

Antiochus Epiphanes came to Jerusalem, entered the temple, and took the gold treasures, I Maccabees 1:20-24. The Jews—regardless of their allegiance to Egypt or Syria—united against such blatant aggression. Antiochus countered with a decree that the Jews abandon their religion and worship pagan idols, I Maccabees 1:41,42. Under the threat of death, many Jews left their faith, I Maccabees 1:43-50. Those who abandoned the faith were from the upper classes. They had the most to lose. The resistance came from farmers, laborers, merchants, and the like. The family of Matthathias was among them, I Maccabees 2:12-22. Matthathias and his family fled to the mountains. The spark of revolt was now fanned into a wildfire. Their successes were legion, I Maccabees 2:45-48. When Matthathias died, his sons continued to create havoc. The Syrian rulers sent army after army to quell the uprising. And, though greatly outnumbered, the Maccabees prevailed,

I Maccabees 3:13-25. Time after time, for forty years, the Jews fought the Syrians! And, on the vast majority of occasions, Israel defeated the invaders.

### III. The Results

A people cannot experience the struggles of bloody revolt without being effected. Such is the case in the Maccabean Revolt.

A. Reestablished Peace. Evidently the futility of war and the weariness of battle drove the Syrians to seek peace. For, as it turned out, the Syrian king was unable to put down a revolt at home, so he asked his longtime enemy, the Jews, to help him, I Maccabees 11:47-52. The yoke of the pagans was finally lifted from the necks of the Jews (in 170 BC), I Maccabees 13:36-41.

B. Kept The Faith. The faith of Israel survived (which was the reason for the revolt). The temple was reclaimed and cleansed (in 165 BC), I Maccabees 4:54-56. The reenactment of this event is called Hanukkah today.

C. Lowered Morality. During the long and bitter struggle, the souls of men withered. Morality plunged to new depths, I Maccabees 9:23. The business of killing other human beings—regardless of the reason—does not nurture a compassion for others or a passion for God. The shedding of blood never creates an appetite for righteousness.

## KINGDOM OF GOD

The Jewish aspirations were expressed in the Maccabean Revolt. The will of Jehovah was embedded in the Kingdom of God. The two were very different.

### I. Significance Of The Biblical Term

The basic meaning of the word “*kingdom*” is “reign” or “rule” (rather than the realm over which a sovereign exercises his power).

A. In The Old Testament. The phrase “kingdom of God” does not occur in the Old Testament (though “kingdom of the Lord” does once, I Chronicles 28:5). The word “kingdom,” however, was frequently used in connection with God, I Chronicles 17:14; Psalm 45:6; 103:19; 145:12; Daniel 2:44; Obadiah 21. In each case, the meaning was “kingly rule” or “sovereignty.”

B. In The New Testament. The phrases “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” occur often in the New Testament, Matthew 12:28; John 3:3,5; Romans 14:17; Colossians 4:11 (and elsewhere). Other equivalent expressions (such as “His kingdom,” Matthew 6:33, “the kingdom,” Matthew 8:12, as well as “the kingdom of Christ and God,” Ephesians 5:5) are found. Again, the meaning is “kingly rule” or “sovereignty.”

### II. Influence Of The Old Testament.

Though the expression “the kingdom of God” does not occur in the Old Testament, the concept is expressed in the idea of God as king.

A. Early History. The kingship of God over Israel was viewed like a human kingship, namely the sovereignty was limited to a particular nation. Hence, to leave the land of Israel was to leave the jurisdiction of Jehovah, II Kings 5:16-18. Within a specified territory, a king was to dispense protection (from outside intruders) and justice (from inside criminals). In these ways, the sovereignty of God, in the early history of Israel, was thought to be limited to Israel. In other words, Jehovah was the God of the Hebrews.

B. Later History. The prophets proclaimed the universal sovereignty of Jehovah. They saw Him as the God of gods and Lord of lords. He ruled over Israel and over the nations, Isaiah 5:26; Jeremiah 27:5-11; Amos 9:7. Jehovah was not merely a local king. On the contrary, God called all nations into His service, Isaiah 41:1-5; 45:1-6. In this sense, then, God was a universal king who “*ruled over all*,” Psalm 103:19.

### III. Teaching Of The New Testament

By the time of Jesus, a universal kingdom of God was a widely accepted idea. It was the rule of God wherever the submission and obedience of man was found.

A. In The Ministry Of Jesus. The kingdom of God was a central theme in the teaching of Christ, Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Luke 8:1; 9:1,12. It summarized the purpose of His ministry.

1. Imminence Of The Kingdom. The Lord began His ministry declaring the nearness of the kingdom, Mark 1:14,15. So, in sending out His disciples, He instructed them to emphasize the imminence of the kingdom, Matthew 10:7. The model prayer expressed the same thought, Luke 11:2. His preaching declared “*the kingdom was at hand*,” Mark 9:1.

2. Community Of The Kingdom. The kingdom does not exist in a vacuum. The rule of God must be exercised over a community of people (otherwise there is no kingdom). Hence, people “*enter the kingdom*,” Matthew 18:3; 23:13; etc. Obedience is the key to membership, Matthew 7:21.

3. Discipline Of The Kingdom. The kingdom of God is a gift of grace offered to all who are willing to receive it. To receive it, however, means to submit in loyalty to the King, Mark 9:47. Service in the kingdom should take precedence over everything else, Luke 9:57-62. Citizens of the kingdom are single-minded.

B. In The Letters Of The Apostles. In comparison to the centrality of the kingdom in the teaching of Jesus, it is surprising how rare the term occurs in the rest of the New Testament.

1. Acts. The post resurrection teaching of Jesus highlighted the “kingdom of God,” Acts 1:3. Likewise, it was emphasized by Phillip in Samaria, Acts 8:12, and Paul in Rome, Acts 28:31.

2. Paul. In his letters, Paul described the life lived by those who submitted to the rule of God, Romans 14:17; I Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21; II Thessalonians 1:5.

Throughout the rest of the New Testament, there are scattered references to the kingdom. It is entered by birth, John 3:3-5. It cannot be shaken, Hebrews 12:28. God “*has promised it to those who love Him*,” James 2:5. It is eternal, I Peter 1:11. And it is a present experience, Revelation 1:9. This is Good News—to be accepted and to be shared—a far cry from the Maccabean concept that relied on guerrilla warfare and terrorist activity.

## WHY DO SOME NEW TESTAMENT QUOTES LOOK INACCURATE ?

The New Testament does not always reproduce the words of the Old Testament exactly. Often this is due to the differences in the Hebrew and the Greek languages. Minor adjustments were made for the sake of good communication.

### I. Conclusions Drawn

Some scholars have concluded—from the deviations of the New Testament writers—that they did not believe in verbal inspiration. Otherwise, they would have gone back to the Hebrew and made meticulous, literal translations of their own. Because they quoted from the Septuagint—which contains elements of inexactude—they had a cavalier attitude toward the inerrancy of the Scripture.

### II. Explanation Given

Certainly the New Testament writers believed the Old Testament was inspired, II Timothy 3:16,17. The explanation for their use of the Septuagint lies in one of the following reasons.

A. Missionary Cause. The use of the Septuagint was rooted in the missionary activity of the early Church.

1. Greek-Speaking Audience. The Jews of the diaspora spoke Greek. The Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew text—the only version these people could read. A literal translation from the Hebrew would have resulted in confusion.

2. Aramaic-Speaking Audience. The Jews in Palestine spoke Aramaic—a sister language to Hebrew. Therefore, the Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Hebrews did not quote from the Septuagint to avoid upsetting their Aramaic-speaking readers.

B. Hermeneutic Clarification. Occasionally a variant reading was used—a reading not found in the Hebrew or the Greek—because it was a clearer rendering of the text: Exodus 3:6 quoted in Matthew 22:32 and Psalms 110:1 quoted in Matthew 22:45. These are evidences of careful exegesis of the text.

The use of the Septuagint does not imply a neglect of truth (anymore than use of different translations today suggest a lack of respect for the Hebrew or Greek texts). All translations are attempts to communicate divine truth to a particular audience. There are no infallible translations (a fact which does not nullify the solid conviction that the Bible is inspired and free from error). Hence, when the New Testament quoted from the Septuagint, it simply implied that—for the sake of communicating truth to a particular audience—the best version for that audience was used.

## PHARISEES AND PUBLICANS

In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the contrast between them is hard to miss, Luke 18:9-14. Both went to the temple. Both intended to worship. But...

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| . The Pharisee wanted to be seen.        | . The tax collector preferred to remain hidden. |
| . He told God how good he was.           | . He could not make eye contact with heaven.    |
| . He was confident of his righteousness. | . He begged for mercy.                          |
| . He bragged about himself.              | . He spoke condescendingly about himself.       |
| . He judged the publican.                | . He condemned no one (but himself).            |
| . He was condemned by God.               | . He was accepted by God.                       |

### I. Exposure Of Pride

Pharisees were preoccupied with their own rules. And, where there were no rules, they made up some! When the word of God gave a general command, they added specific actions to clarify the command. In effect, they decided what God intended. And, when they kept their rules, they were proud of their obedience. A feeling of superiority was their trademark. Such snobbery was unattractive. Let us beware of comparing ourselves "*with those who commend themselves,*" II Corinthians 10:12.

### II. Commendation Of Humility

Humility is accepting God as the standard of right. The Pharisee was so full of himself he had no room for God. When we think we are the measure of right, we are wrong. For, "*it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God,*" Galatians 2:20. After all, if righteousness can be gained through keeping human rules, then Christ died for nothing.

The way up is down! Unless we bow before Him now, we will not sit beside Him in eternity.

God be merciful to me,  
On Your grace I plea;  
Make me pure within,  
Cleanse me from my sin.

The beginning of greatness is to be small. The increase of greatness is to be less.  
The perfection of greatness is to be nothing.

*"He who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted,"*  
Luke 18:14b.

## JEWISH RELIGIOUS PARTIES

The Maccabean Revolt gave the Jews in Palestine over eight decades of peace and freedom—between the former Greek and the future Roman dominance. The family of Mattathias, the Maccabee, formed a dynasty of kings and priests that lasted until Roman rule was forced upon Israel in 62 BC. During the 85 years of respite, tensions arose among the Jews regarding their interaction with Gentiles. Divisions ensued. Two separate religious parties sprung up. The fusses that followed seem to us to be inflexible and foolish.

### I. The Sadducees

Between 147 BC and 62 BC, there was a shift in political power in the Mediterranean world. The Roman Empire was on the rise. The Romans built their empire around an evolving blend of local self-rule, partial local autonomy, and direct rule by Roman appointees. The extent to which the Jews were part of the communities in which they lived varied according to the local conditions and the degree of tolerance. Some Jews attained positions of great prominence. Others held strictly to the Torah and cut themselves off from the power structures of the world. The Sadducees were the former group.

A. Birth Of The Sadducees. The Sadducees were the priests loyal to the Maccabean dynasty. To the Romans, the Sadducees were the legitimate leaders of the Jews in Palestine. For the most part, they were members of the social upper class who accommodated their lives to the intrusion of Roman authority. In other words, they readily interacted with Jews and Gentiles. They focused their interest in Jerusalem, did not seek an independent state for Israel, and narrowed their activity to the temple. This restricted their influence to the Holy City and its surrounding region.

B. Characteristics Of The Sadducees. The Sadducees demonstrated an uncanny ability to get along with foreign powers.

1. In Politics. The Sadducees politely tolerated the Seleucid overlords and carefully befriended the Roman politicians. They survived by compromise. They learned that opposition to superior power had limited success. In effect, they were shrewd politicians dressed in priestly robes. Their manner could be manipulative. They welded aristocratic authority over subordinates—obvious in the trial of Jesus.

2. In Religion. The Sadducees denied the resurrection, Matthew 22:23; Acts 4:1,2. The soul perished with the body. Hence, future punishment and reward were non-issues. The Sadducees also denied the existence of angels and spirits, Acts 23:8. The reason for such denials probably had to do with these doctrines not

being mentioned in the Torah. The Sadducees thought of themselves as the legitimate overseers of the temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, during their interrogation of Jesus, when Christ was charged with contemplating the destruction of the temple, the Sadducees become very concerned, Matthew 26:59-62.

## II. The Pharisees

The second religious party—in first century Palestine—was the Pharisees. They were not politicians. They were dedicated to the twofold law—the written and the oral—and the resurrection of the dead. They were extremely influential. In the small towns, they occupied a special chair in the synagogue for the authoritative teacher of the law, Matthew 23:1-3.

A. History Of The Pharisees. Although we know something about them in the ministry of Jesus, we know nothing of their origin. This is not surprising since they were non-writing scholars. The oral law was not a connected narrative but a list of rules. The Pharisees were focused on the world to come. In other words, past history was irrelevant. Yet, it is certain, the Pharisees were careful to keep the Torah, Philippians 3:5,6, as well as their “traditions,” Galatians 1:13,14. These “traditions” refer to the oral law, Mark 7:3,8,9,13. The Pharisees were considered authorities in the law, Mark 2:23-27. They relished the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogue, and the special titles given to the clergy. Jesus (and Paul) commended their scholarship but condemned their pompous attitude, Philippians 3:4b-6.

B. Teachings Of The Pharisees. Because they regularly announced their understandings, it is easy to outline their doctrinal beliefs.

1. Written Law. Unlike the Sadducees, the Pharisees accepted both the written and the oral law. Furthermore, they believed the law came through Moses, to the elders, to the prophets, and, finally, to the Pharisees. The priests were temple functionaries. The Pharisees were authoritative teachers, Luke 5:17. They believed the written law could not be changed.

2. Oral Law. The oral law was a changeable body of commentaries on the written law. When collected and written down (in the third century AD), it was called the Mishna. The oral law is presented in simple declarative sentences: “*To wash your hands...*,” “*Work is defined as...*,” etc., etc. The oral law was never attributed to God but to some anonymous Jewish sage. The teachers of the oral law frequently bolstered their instructions with quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures.



## PEOPLE OF GOD

The phrase “people of God” is one of many expressions in the Old Testament which indicate the unique relationship that existed between Jehovah and Israel, Numbers 11:29; 16:41; Judges 20:2; II Samuel 14:13; Zephaniah 2:10. The New Testament uses the expression in a similar way.

### I. Significance Of The Expression

The term “people” indicates a relationship sustained toward a group. Various types of groups can be included.

- . A religious fellowship, Genesis 17:14.
- . A family relationship, Genesis 17:16; 25:8.
- . A social connection, Numbers 5:27.
- . A cultural affinity, Ruth 1:16.

Therefore, Israel was the “possession” of God, Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:6, “servant” of God, Psalm 135:14, “son” of God, Exodus 4:22,23, or the “sheep” of God, Psalm 95:7. While the phrase “people of God” appears relatively few times, the expression “My people,” “Your people,” or “His people” occurs frequently.

### II. Use Of The Expression

The relational emphasis of the term “people” explains the frequent occurrence of the word. The Scripture from beginning to end is a book about gaining and losing a connection with the Lord.

A. In The Old Testament. The Hebrew noun am (people) comes from a root word meaning “*to include in a group*.” This is clear in the “my people” and “not my people” sayings, Hosea 2:23.

1. Gaining Relationship. This term was employed when God spoke of the descendants of Abraham whom He had chosen and with whom He was identified by means of the covenant, Exodus 3:7-10. God sealed this relationship more firmly by rescuing them from Egypt, Exodus 5:1-3. His constant protection over (and provision for) Israel was a testimony to His concern for those He called “His people,” Psalm 78:52-62; 95:7. God formed these people for Himself, Isaiah 43:21; 51:16, gave them a place to dwell, Isaiah 10:24, and blessed them, Isaiah 63:18. There was nothing impressive, Deuteronomy 7:7, or virtuous, Deuteronomy 9:5,6, about Israel that prompted Him to choose her. He did so out of grace, Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2. He remained faithful to her, Deuteronomy 4:31. However, this gracious relationship placed Israel under obligation to keep her covenant with God, Deuteronomy 4:40.

2. Losing Relationship. The covenant that blessed Israel also cursed Israel. Her relationship with God put Israel under judgment. Israel broke her agreement with God. She was unfaithful. Hence, she was rejected by heaven—no longer the people of God, Hosea 1:9; Deuteronomy 4:27; Isaiah 1:2,3; Amos 3:2.

a. Spiritual Adultery. The covenant people became “not my people.” They were destroyed due to a “lack of knowledge,” Hosea 4:6. Many people backslid. Many of them were punished, Jeremiah 15:17. Yet, God maintained a remnant, a faithful group who would be His people, Isaiah 11:11. He would redeem them, Zechariah 8:6,11. He would call them “my people,” again, Zechariah 13:9.

b. Political Fornication. Israel was a nation distinguished from other people by her devotion to Jehovah. When she chose to “mingle with the nations,” Hosea 7:8, she became like them. The people of God were caught between the great world powers—their tiny army was helpless, their land became spoil of war. War in Israel was divine judgment on Israel for her lack of trust in her Lord. The people of God trusted in political alliances. She adopted foreign gods. She lost her covenant relationship with Jehovah, Hosea 10:7-10. Spiritual disobedience and national disaster went hand in hand. Is this still not true today? Nevertheless, the faithfulness of God remained unchanged. A repentant remnant could expect a deliverance from exile (similar to the exodus from Egypt), Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 11:16-20.

B. In The New Testament. The “people of God” in the New Testament are the Church, Romans 9:25,26; II Corinthians 6:14-16; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 8:10; I Peter 2:9,10; Revelation 21:3. In other words, the Church is the true Israel, Romans 9:6; Galatians 6:16, the temple of God (with the Spirit of God living in them), I Corinthians 3:16. We gain our fellowship with God through Christ and lose our connection with Him when we turn our back on Christ. To remain His people, we must remain His faithful followers.

## SHOULD PAUL HAVE BEEN A PHARISEE?

With reference to the Law of Moses, the apostle Paul had chosen to be a Pharisee, Acts 26:5; Philippians 3:5. He was also “the son of a Pharisee,” Acts 23:6, “extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers,” Galatians 1:14.

### I. Criticized By Jesus

How could Paul be proud of being a Pharisee? Did not the Lord consider them religious snobs and spiritual peacocks? Matthew 6:2,16; 23:5-7. Did He not say they were legalistic hair splitters and pious frauds? Matthew 23:16-22. Christ called them the offspring of snakes, Matthew 23:33. He described them as scandalous hypocrites, Matthew 23:3,13,15,23,25,27,29. His displeasure was abundantly clear.

### II. Appreciated By Society

What Jesus said was true of many Pharisees. Yet there were exceptions. Some Pharisees were honest seekers. The origin of their kind was a reaction to the indifference that pervaded among the upper classes. The rich imbibed the unsavory aspects of Hellenism. The Pharisees were separatists. They had withdrawn from worldly people. They abstained from politics. They placed great stress on religious purity. The common people generally admired them.

The mistake of some Pharisees was giving equal weight to the Torah and their interpretations of the Torah. The former was called the written law. The latter was the oral law, Mark 7:9-13. The Pharisee believed that their adherence to the oral traditions would bring the Messiah and secure them a place in the kingdom.

Thus, many Pharisees became religious legalists—they were right and everyone else was wrong. Those who did not believe like them were called “the mob,” that is, the riff-raff who were ignorant of the Scriptures, John 7:45-49.

At one time, Paul bought into their narrow understanding of the Messiah and the kingdom, Acts 26:9-11. But, he saw the light on the road to Damascus. And it is the post Damascus road Pharisee that mentioned he was a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” Philippians 3:5. In short, he was not only a Jew by race but also by culture. He spoke Aramaic, Acts 21:40; 22:2, trained under a Jewish teacher, Acts 22:3 and read the Hebrew Old Testament. Those who doubted his Jewish pedigree needed to do their homework.

## FRAUDULENT ADVERTISING

*“The wise man has eyes in his head,” Ecclesiastes 2:14*

Likely we have all heard the saying, *“A jack of all trades and a master of none.”* He who knows a little about everything is as dangerous as he who does not know much of anything.

A little knowledge is risky. It is better to concentrate on one thing and do it well than to be a scatterbrain who cannot do anything at all. Paul said, *“This one thing I do,” Philippians 3:13*. He honed in on one objective. He focused his considerable talents. He entertained one goal.

This applies to some preachers and Bible class teachers, too. They announce their text. And, then, for thirty-minutes, they talk a lot without saying much. A lesson should have a point, a destination. The Scripture says to *“preach the word,” I Timothy 4:2*. And, when the time has expired, it should be obvious that the word of God has been preached!

Mike rode the merry-go-round for over an hour. He had travelled around and around for sixty-minutes but had gone nowhere! When he got off, he said, *“I feel like I have been to church!”*

A deacon often put a note on the pulpit: *“Stick to your text—and some of it will stick to us.”* How true! To announce a text and then ignore it is fraudulent advertising!

So, lest I do the same thing, let me get back to my text. *“The wise man has his eyes in his head.”* He has a clear vision of where he is headed. But *“the eyes of the fool wander to the ends of the earth,” Proverbs 17:24*. He has no idea where he is going. He moves ahead without a purpose. He makes a lot of noise but says nothing.

By the preacher perplexed;  
How shall we determine?  
*“Watch and pray”* was his text;  
*“Go to sleep!”* said his sermon!

Truth that goes everywhere gets nowhere.

So, also, is a lesson without a point. It is like a car without an engine—looks good but does not take its passengers anywhere.

## LITERARY ACTIVITY BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

Though God was silent, between the Old and New Testaments, religious materials were still being written. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are specific examples of this literary activity.

### I. Apocrypha

The Apocrypha refers to fourteen books. These books were not in the Hebrew text but were included in the Septuagint version. It was an important source of information about the history of Judaism (especially the birth of the Pharisees and the Sadducees).

A. Among The Jews. The word Apocrypha means “hidden.” It was supposed to be kept from the public. The term “Apocrypha” eventually signified “heretical.” It was banned in Judaism after 70 AD. The Jews believed the Apocrypha was actually the “sealed” scroll of Daniel 12:4. The Apocrypha itself makes similar references, II Esdras 14:1-6; cf. 12:37,38; 14:42-48. From every indication known, these “hidden” books never achieved canonical status among the Jews. In fact, after 70 AD, they were systematically destroyed. The survival of the Apocrypha is due entirely to the Christians who found them especially interesting and edifying.

B. Among Christians. The first century Christians grew up reading the Septuagint (which included the Apocrypha). There was no reason for the church to disparage it. Often early Church leaders—Polycarp, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen—quoted the Apocrypha as if it was Scripture (although there is no direct quote from the Apocrypha in the New Testament). However, the influence of the “hidden” books is easily detected. Allusions to the Apocrypha are common in the New Testament: Matthew 9:16,17 and Ecclesiastus 9:10; Matthew 11:28-30 and Ecclesiastus 51:23-26; Luke 12:16-20 and Ecclesiastus 11:18,19; Hebrews 1:1-3 and Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-27; John 10:22 and I Macabees 4:59. The Catholics included the “hidden books” in their Bible while the Protestants did not. The two opposing views remain with us to this day.

### II. Pseudepigrapha

Another set of Jewish writings—composed during the last two centuries BC—was a separate collection from the Apocrypha. These materials focused on eschatology (or the end of time). Their content is often bizarre. Seven books comprise the pseudepigrapha.

A. Reign Of God. The term pseudepigrapha means “fictitious.” Actually, these materials were written under fictitious names: Adam, Enoch, Moses, Solomon, etc.

The kingship of Jehovah is a reoccurring theme.

1. Blessedness In The Kingdom. Daniel stated when the kingdom of God would be established. The Pseudepigrapha stated what the kingdom would be like. For example, the kingdom will become “*visible*,” Henock 38:1. “*All earthly rulers will be annihilated*,” Henock 38:5. The “*chosen one of God will sit on the throne of glory*” and “*the saints will be permitted to gather around the throne*,” Henock 45:3-5. “*The earth will become the footstool of the King of kings*,” Henock 51:1.

2. Location Of The Saved. The post-exilic Jews had focused on an earthly Jerusalem. In the Pseudepigrapha, the tendency was to speak of a purified earth, a transformed cosmos, the final abode of the elect, cf. Matthew 5:5; Romans 8:19-21; II Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1,2.

B. Doom Of Sinners. The Pseudepigrapha placed the strongest possible emphasis on the action of God at the end of time. For instance, “*the King of kings is above all creatures*,” Assumption of Moses 10:1. He will “*come with His holy angels to pass judgment on everyone*,” Henock 1:9. The judgment will “*come quickly*,” Henock 104:3. The Lord will “*take control*,” Sibylline Oracles 5:348.

1. Discovering The End. Conscious of living in the last days, the writers of the Pseudepigrapha were tempted to determine when the end would come. Hence, the Pseudepigrapha divided history into periods, (similar to the four world empires of Daniel 2:37-45). Writers of the Pseudepigrapha divided history into four or seven or ten or twelve epochs. They all indicated time was running out (though no definite date was given for the coming of God, cf. Acts 1:7).

2. Experiencing The End. The conclusion of history would not pass unnoticed. “*When people are confused, you will know that the time has come for the Most High to visit the earth*,” IV Esdras 9:1-6. A time of “*stress and frightful affliction*” will occur, Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:15-22. “*Plague will follow plague, wound after wound, sadness upon sadness, evil report after evil report, sickness upon sickness, punishment on punishment, one after another—including upheaval, snow, ice, fever, cold, stiffness, disease, hardship, misery, sword, captivity, and death*,” Jubilees 23:13. Because of the confusion, few will know that the end has arrived, Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch 32:1.

This attention to fearsome detail led to anxiety. The painful end time doom overshadowed the glorious arrival of the divine kingdom. The Pseudepigrapha expressed a constant curiosity about the last day that was quite unbecoming to the people of God. The encouragement of the sovereign rule of God was hidden by the despair of the last days. A wonderful idea was undone by a bad fixation.

## WORD OF GOD

Throughout the Old Testament, the characteristic way that God made Himself known was by His word. In the New Testament, His word had the same significance. However, in time, the term “word” also became a title for Christ—the expression of God in human flesh.

### I. Connotation Of The Term

The term “word” means “to speak.” Hence, “word” signifies the articulation of an intelligible utterance, Genesis 1:3; Matthew 22:46. It also points to an oracle or announcement, Numbers 3:16; Acts 7:38.

### II. Use In The Old Testament

The term “word” was used in one of two ways: as a “revelation” or “command” from God.

A. As Revelation. The “word of the Lord” is a phrase used most frequently in the Old Testament to describe a means of revelation. For instance, God spoke and the prophets heard, Jeremiah 1:1,2; Joel 1:1; Zechariah 1:1. Furthermore, in the course of announcing “the word of the Lord,” the prophets frequently repeated the same formula (or a variation of it): “*This is what the Lord says,*” Ezekiel 23:46, or “*Hear the word of the Lord,*” Ezekiel 25:3. The Book of Malachi begins with the formula: “*An oracle—the word of the Lord to Israel,*” Malachi 1:1. When God spoke, the prophets were moved to speak, Amos 3:8. Indeed, they could not remain silent, Jeremiah 20:9. God communicated with man in the same way men communicated with one another.

B. As Command. By His spoken word, the Lord gave instructions, made His will known. The “word of the Lord” was frequently a command. The characteristic mood of His message was imperative. His word was powerful. He spoke and creation occurred, Psalms 33:6. Even now nature continues to obey His voice, Psalms 148:8; cf. Isaiah 55:10,11. Therefore, man should give heed when God speaks.

### II. Meaning In The New Testament

The significance of the term “word” in the New Testament is like that of the Old Testament. But, the “word” was also personified in Christ—a development that began much earlier. The Old Testament clearly taught that God created the world by His wisdom, Psalms 104:24; Jeremiah 10:12. In Proverbs 8:22-31, wisdom was obviously viewed as a person. Between the testaments, the Apocrypha also personalized wisdom, Wisdom of Solomon 9:1,2,9. Because God was transcendent,

He was removed from direct contact with the world. So, a heavenly intermediary bridged the gap. He was the Logos or “word of God,” Revelation 19:13 (an apparent allusion to Wisdom of Solomon 18:15,16).

A. As Revelation. Jesus of Nazareth was the Logos or “word of God” in the flesh, John 1:1-14. This statement puts into the language of the time the Christian conviction that the teachings and actions of this man was a revelation of God (different from the Old Testament prophets), Hebrews 1:1-3. Therefore, Christ is the image of God, II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; cf. Wisdom of Solomon 7:26. It is not surprising, then, to see Christ identified with wisdom, I Corinthians 1:24,30; Colossians 2:3. However, in Greek, wisdom is a feminine noun, quite unsuitable (linguistically) for a masculine title. So the adoption of Logos or the term “word” was inevitable, Colossians 1:25-27.

B. As Command. The use of “word” as a commandment in the New Testament is similar to its use in the Old Testament. As a command, the “word” or the “word of God” refers to a variety of things:

1. The Ten Commandments, Matthew 15:3-6.
2. An Old Testament passage, John 10:34-36.
3. Will of God, Romans 9:6.
4. Teaching of Jesus, Luke 5:1.
5. Christian message, Luke 8:11.

The Christian message is also described as the “*word of Christ*,” Colossians 3:16 (which may refer to the teaching of Christ or the teaching about Christ or both). The Christian message can also be described as the “*word of truth*,” Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; II Timothy 2:18 (or, with a slight variation, the “*words of this new life*,” Act 5:20).

There is a close connection between Christ and the word. At first, He was the word (or Logos), then, He was the content of the message. This is clear in the way the verb “*preach*” can have as its object “*the word*,” Romans 10:18, “*the Gospel*,” Galatians 2:2, “*Jesus*,” II Corinthians 11:4, “*Christ*,” I Corinthians 1:23, or “*Jesus Christ*,” II Corinthians 1:19. The word, then, is something living and dynamic, Hebrews 4:12. It was accompanied by manifestations of divine power, I Corinthians 2:4; Hebrews 2:4. Therefore, the “word” is called the “*power of God*,” I Corinthians 1:18. The intimate connection between Christ and the word is hardly surprising. After all, He is the Logos of God.



## WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED?

What makes the Bible believable? Lets examine the evidence.

### I. External Evidence

We are supposed to defend our faith, I Peter 3:5; Jude 3. What facts give us ample reason to champion the Bible as the inspired word of God?

A. Discoveries Of Archaeology. Many people deny the accuracy of the Bible. Archaeology says otherwise. The Book of Judges has been proven true. The reign of David and Solomon actually happened. The episode in Esther is a fact. The places Paul visited really exist. No archaeological discovery has contradicted the Bible!

B. Formation Of The Canon. By the end of the first century AD, there were over a hundred books considered by someone to be holy writ. An official list was needed. Persecution was on the rise. Heretics had their list. After careful study, the sixty-six books of our present Bible became the official documents of the faith.

C. Influence Of Christianity. The Roman Empire was converted. But the Church was from the lower classes, II Corinthians 1:26-29. Their beliefs were unpopular. Christianity was an illegal religion. Yet they “turned the world upside down.” The Bible is not a human fabrication. Otherwise, a lie became a grand blessing.

### II. Internal Evidence

The Bible speaks for itself. It stands on its own.

A. Depth Of Doctrines. God is a unique deity, Deuteronomy 4:32-35. He saves by grace through faith, Isaiah 1:18-20; Ephesians 2:8,9. No other religion says that. It could not have been borrowed. The Bible was written: by 40 people, over a span of 1500 years, without 1 contradiction. The fingerprints of God are on every page.

B. Credibility Of Authors. The writers of Scripture did not gain fame, favor or fortune. They suffered for what they wrote. They were sincere. They exposed sin in friend and foe. They succeeded. They must have had help from heaven. Surely their words were a special revelation from God.

C. Inspiration Of Scripture. The Bible is inspired, II Timothy 3:16. God breathed His message into human authors. Their words were true, I Corinthians 2:13. Their message came from God, I Corinthians 11:23; Galatians 1:12; I Peter 1:12. Otherwise, what they wrote is a joke—the epitome of arrogance. Their words were from God or they were shameless imposters. There is no middle ground.

## VERILY, VERILY

Jesus frequently emphasized the reliability of His words by saying, “*Verily, verily*” (or “*truly, truly*”) “*I say unto you,*” Matthew 18:3; John 3:3. According to the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord made that affirmation at least thirty times.

The words are actually “*Amen, amen.*” They were used (1) to affirm the acceptance of a task, I Kings 1:36; (2) to confirm a curse, Numbers 5:22; or (3) to acknowledge the praise of God, I Chronicles 16:36. Obviously, “*amen*” was not a frivolous admission, Isaiah 65:16a,b.

The word “*amen*” was also (1) a shout of approval in worship, Revelation 5:14, and (2) a sign of a completed prayer, Galatians 1:5; I Timothy 1:17. “*Amen*” means “*so be it*” or “*so shall it be.*” Christ is our “*Amen,*” II Corinthians 1:20; Revelation 3:14. He is the true and reliable One.

On a card, a believer copied, “*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my words and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life,*” John 5:24. That statement is full of assurance.

However, the saint—who wrote that card—lost her spouse. Widowhood was a crushing blow. She quit reading her “assurance card.” Her life took a tailspin. Despondence and doubt soon replaced her joy and confidence.

Her grandson came for a visit. Seeing her despair, he asked, “*Why are you so sad?*” “*I felt saved,*” she said. “*But those feelings are gone!*” The boy retrieved the “assurance card.” “*Grammy*” he said, “*the words on the card have not changed!*”

The unchanging words of God are our anchor in the storms of life, Hebrews 6:16-19a. The “*amen*” of the Lord is a lighthouse that keeps us safe and secure, I Peter 1:23. Since He said it—that settles it.

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you;  
 Verily, verily, My Amen is true.”  
 “As an unfailing promise,  
 I sincerely affirm it anew.”*

We should not insult the Lord by asking for more than His “Amen!”

## AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament was the Bible used by Jesus and the early Church. Almost without exception, the words “*Scripture*” or “*Scriptures*” in the New Testament refer to the Old Testament, John 5:39; 10:35; Acts 8:32; Galatians 3:8; II Timothy 3:16.

### I. Jesus And The Old Testament

Christ recognized the binding authority of the Old Testament. During His ministry, He clashed with the Jewish theologians over points of interpretation. But He never quarreled with them over the authority of the Old Testament.

A. His Confidence In The Old Testament. The Lord frequently appealed to the Old Testament for proof regarding His claims, Matthew 4:1-11; John 10:31-36. His confidence in the Old Testament was commensurate with the best of the Jewish authorities. These documents shaped His life, His faith, and His destiny. To Him, they were the words of the Almighty.

B. His Interpretation Of The Old Testament. Though Jesus shared an equal respect for the authority of the Old Testament, He differed sharply with the Jewish theologians over the interpretation of the Old Testament.

1. Condemned Empty Legalism. Like the prophets before Him, Christ sensed the worthlessness of routine ritual, Matthew 9:13; 12:7; Mark 7:1-13. He thoroughly reinterpreted the conclusions of His contemporaries in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21,22a, 27,28, 31,32, 33-37, etc. His confidence in the authority of the Old Testament was unassailable, Matthews 5:17-19.

2. Fulfilled Messianic Prophecy. Jesus insisted that He was the personal fulfillment of the Old Testament, Luke 4:16-21. He was a greater prophet than Moses. He made the temple obsolete, Matthew 12:6. He was the king of the Jews, Mark 15:2, the triumphant Son of Man, Mark 12:26, and the suffering servant, Mark 10:45. Truly, He fulfilled “*what had been spoken*,” Matthew 1:22; 2:15,17,23; 4:14; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9.

### II. Paul And The Old Testament

As a Jewish rabbi, Saul of Tarsus knew the Old Testament. As a Christian teacher, the apostle found his spiritual anchor in the Old Testament, II Timothy 3:16. His confidence in and interpretation of these ancient texts are no accident.

A. Depended On The Old Testament. A large percent of his ninety plus quotations from the Old Testament occur in Romans, I and II Corinthians, and Galatians. His

theological themes and arguments are drawn from the Old Testament. Paul submitted to the authority of the Scriptures. He respected their verdicts. In so doing, he set the pattern for every student of that sacred document.

B. Understood The Old Testament. Paul doggedly tried to defeat the Christian movement. He fought tooth-and-nail against Christ, Acts 7:54-58; 9:1,2. In the process of trying to annihilate Christianity, he became a Christian, Acts 9:3-6! He literally saw Christ in the Old Testament and became one of His greatest ambassadors.

1. Doctrinal Instruction. Paul grounded his teaching on the bedrock of the Old Testament: the effects of the fall of Adam and Eve, Romans 5:12-21, the universality of sin, Romans 3:10-18, the suffering of Jesus, Romans 15:3, and justification by faith, Romans 1:7; 4:1-8; 10:5-13. Clearly, the Old Testament was the centerpiece of his message.

2. Typological Teaching. The use of typology—the belief that a thing or person in the past foreshadowed a similar thing or person in the present—was a common, ancient method of teaching, Galatians 4:21-31. While employing a divine past activity to illustrate a divine present (or future) activity, Paul made frequent use of the Old Testament. Obviously, the Old Testament was authoritative to the apostle (otherwise he would not have used it).

This pattern of authority (and these principles of interpretation) can easily be applied to other New Testament writings. Laced with Old Testament quotations, Hebrews, James, and Revelation further support the claim of authority for the Old Testament.

Following the example of Jesus (who embraced the authority of the Old Testament) these New Testament writers viewed these ancient texts as inspired Scriptures. They studied them not as a dreary collection of rules but as the great drama of salvation, I Peter 1:10-12. Modern students are no less in need of that amazing story. For in it are the deeds of God and the responses of men. What was important, authoritative, and crucial to the early Church cannot be any less so today, I Corinthians 10:11.

## INERRANCY OF GOD

Those who wish to discredit the Bible point to numerous “apparent” discrepancies in the text. But, in each case, fair and reasonable explanations can be given.

### I. Differences In Time Frame

It is common for a statement to be true at one time but later appear contradictory. For example, after creation, God saw that everything was “*very good*,” Genesis 1:31. Later, the Lord was “*grieved that He had made man*,” Genesis 6:6. Unless a person realizes that there are centuries between the passages, the contradiction might seem like a problem. But the difference in time easily explains the difficulty.

### II. Differences In Authorship

Different speakers may say the same thing in different ways. For instance, God told those who ate from the tree of knowledge “*you will surely die*,” Genesis 2:17. But the devil said they “*will not surely die*,” Genesis 3:4. It is always good to check the authorship of every statement in Scripture. That will often be all that is needed to solve supposed incongruities.

### III. Differences In Purpose

Verses of Scripture may appear to contradict each other when in fact there is no inconsistency between them. Paul wrote about salvation through faith. James said salvation came through work. Both were right. Each author couched his statements in different purposes. Paul spoke of “*justification by faith*,” Romans 5:3. James wrote about “*justification by what is done*,” James 2:24. They present different—but not inconsistent—aspects of the same truth.

### IV. Differences In Arrangement

One author presents things in a strict chronological order while another author develops his material by the principle of associated ideas. For example, the Gospel of Matthew does not follow a strict historical sequence but groups together certain topics—miracles, parables, and speeches. The material in the other Gospels can appear out of order, contradictory, or antagonistic until the purpose of each author is identified and appreciated.

### V. Differences In Calculation

Time was calculated in different ways in the ancient world: either by a civil or a sacred method. Therefore, in the Jewish religious calendar, Abib was the first month

while their civil calendar started on the seventh month—a discrepancy of a half year! It follows, then, when two authors in the Bible fail to agree on the time of a given event, they may have employed different systems of calculating time. Their disagreement furnishes no proof that an error was involved.

#### VI. Differences In Idiom

The Middle East expresses itself in poetry. Metaphors and hyperboles are sprinkled throughout their conversation and composition. It is easy, then, to misjudge the expressions in the Old Testament. The Psalms are written in the language of poetry. Logic must be suspended. Dogma is scarcely involved. Since such idiom is common in the Jewish hymnbook, it is not strange that metaphors and hyperboles collide. Common sense must prevail or contradiction will occur.

#### VII. Differences In Synonyms

The Middle East frequently gives two or three names to the same person, object, or location. This alone explains many differences in the Old Testament text.

#### VIII. Differences In Meanings

In a similar vein, the same word can have different meanings. For instance, the same Hebrew term can mean “*to bless*” or “*to curse*,” “*to buy grain*” or “*to sell grain*,” and “*to know*” or “*not to know*.” When the Bible says, “*God tempted Abraham*” yet He “*tempts no man*,” we have a ready explanation for the apparent discrepancy. These differences are not the fault of divine inspiration but a quirk of human language.

#### IX. Differences In Manuscripts.

Several supposed inconsistencies occur in the Old Testament manuscripts. Unintentional copyist errors head the list. Several Hebrew letters are very similar. So it is amazing that after centuries of copying by hand that there are so few different readings. And, if one adds in the wear and tear of time, the documents are actually in remarkable condition.

#### X. Differences In Critics.

Some censor the Old Testament with a sincere concern for truth. Others object because they do not intend to agree. The majority of criticisms leveled at Scripture are either unjust or uncharitable critiques originating in the misguided prejudices and blind imaginations of the critics. The accuracy of the Bible speaks to the inerrancy of God. Nothing more needs to be said.

## WHY IS THE ACCURACY OF THE BIBLE IMPORTANT?

The Bible is without error. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. This has been the bedrock of Christian faith through the centuries until recently. Now there are voices claiming “allowable errors” in the Bible. The door is open—the flood will follow.

Without inerrancy, the word of God cannot be infallible. It is being said there are occasional mistakes in the text. Such a position is supposedly warranted (though, in a court of law, a witness is untrustworthy if an error is detected in his testimony). Christ regarded even the most controversial statements in the Hebrew text as fact.

- The Lord believed in the Adam and Eve account, Matthew 19:5. Regardless of modern scientific theory, Christ viewed Adam and Eve as real people.
- The flood of Noah is often viewed as a fabricated story. Christ referred to it as true, Matthew 24:38. The Lord predicted a future reality based on a past happening.
- It is safe to say that neither Jesus nor His apostles give the slightest hint that any errors in history or science can be found in the Old Testament. For, even to the rationalistic Sadducees, the Lord cited the words of God to Moses from the burning bush, Matthew 22:32. Our Savior drew the conclusion that God was not the God of lifeless corpses (but the Lord of living beings). Therefore, the Old Testament, according to Christ, taught the resurrection of the dead.
- Many believe feeding Israel manna in the desert for forty years is a fable. Yet Jesus thought it was true, John 6:48,49. Citing fiction to support His being “*the bread of life come down from heaven*” would hardly be convincing if it were a myth.
- Regarding His approaching death, the Lord mentioned Jonah in the belly of the fish, Matthew 12:40. He believed the Jonah story really happened. Jesus did not see the Book of Jonah as folk tale, fiction, or allegory. Neither should we.

If the Bible has mistakes, how can it be reliable? Either the Scriptures are the infallible message of God or the fallible invention of man. It cannot be inerrant and full of errors at the same time.

The Old Testament is the word of God from start to finish. Nowhere will we find a piece or part of the text uninspired. As Matthew said over and over: “*All of this took place to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophets,*” Matthew 1:22; 2:5,15,23; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9. It is a contradiction to say the Scripture is the message of God (though full of errors)! Discrepancies and inconsistencies are the fabrications of critics to undermine the authority of the inspired message.

