

Seven-Score Thoughts...

(Plus a few more, from)

Shadrach
Sackcloth
(nom-de-plume)

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*To Him be the glory,
Great things He hath taught us...
Great things he hath done¹*

¹ Fanny J. Crosby, 1875

Introduction

What better way to begin thinking about God and His Word than meditating over this extraordinary Psalm, which speaks of Creation, God's Word, and concludes with a prayer:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he hath set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hidden from the heat thereof.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Psalm 19 (KJV)

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In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth [Genesis 1:1].

We can, of course, dismiss attempts to reason with those who refuse to believe that the Bible is God's Word and will have nothing to do with it. But for those who even marginally accede that it is, the first verse of Scripture should end all speculation that has been rife over the centuries about Creation. As if the statement here in verse one is not evidence enough – how could it be any plainer – there is given follow-on, explicit, supporting dialogue in the description of God's actions in Creation.

For example, seven times Scripture says, "He created" ... heaven ... earth ... great whales ... every living creature that moveth ... man (in the image of God) ... male and female ... all His work. Eleven times it is written that God said ... *let* there be light ... *let* there be a firmament ... *let* the waters be gathered together ... *let* the dry land appear ... *let* the earth bring forth grass ... *let* there be lights in the firmament ... *let* them be for seasons to give light upon the earth ... *let* the waters bring forth the moving creature that hath life ... *let* the earth bring forth the living creature ... *let* us make man ... *let* (him) have dominion." And then following, the confirming statement; "and it was so."

Seven times it is recorded that God "made" ... the firmament ... two great lights ... beast of the earth ... the earth and the heavens ... the stars also ... every tree ... woman. Twice, He "divided" ... the light from the darkness ... the waters of the firmament from the waters above. The stars, He set "in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." And five times, the exclamation, "God saw that it was good," once, "very good." And when He finished, He "blessed" the living creatures of land and sea, and on the seventh day He rested "*from all the work which He had made.*"

Let us see; did God leave anything out? Where is the part that talks about things oozing from a primordial slime? The Bible states, "and the morning and evening were the first ... second ... third ... fourth ... fifth ... sixth ... seventh day." On what day did the "big bang" occur? Did He leave out a verse about things simply "evolving?"

Moses records the words of God as He promises salvation from the pursuing Egyptians through the Red Sea; "the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." The Egyptians got it. Surely, the first chapter of His book is enough for anyone to understand and acknowledge the same thing.

Hast Thou considered my servant Job? ... [Job 1:8].

The scene is in heaven, where the angels “came to present themselves before the Lord.” Cometh one Satan, looking for trouble, having been “to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it.” God wants to know if Satan recognizes that His man Job is “like none other in the earth, perfect and upright, fearing God, and eschewing evil.” Well, says the evil one, big deal, “hast not thou made a hedge around him ... his house ... all that he has on every side ... the work of his hands ... his substance increased ...” Who wouldn’t be “upright” with all this? Take it away and see what happens. I bet he will “curse thee to thy face.” And the events of Job’s life ensue.

Can we stop and think here for a moment? Perhaps of a scene in heaven – right now – when God might be able to say to someone we have once known and who now resides there, “consider my servant (so-and-so).” To have God Himself refer to us as His *servant*? Think about the indescribable honor to be so recognized before the host in heaven. Look here, He says, look at so-and-so. He is *My servant*. Where on earth could we imagine such recognition? In what walk of this life could we be so lauded? What could we possibly do here that would come close to such praise? Nobel Prize winner? Czar of all Russia? Olympic champion? Impossible.

Let us go one step further. Being His *servant* is one thing. Think of the scene where we will appear before Him at the Judgment Seat where our work for Him on earth will be evaluated for rewards ... and the possibility of hearing Him title us as not only “My *servant*”, but *good*. And *faithful*. Certainly the simple thought of this scene should make us want to serve Him ... use our God-given abilities and talents for His kingdom here on earth ... strive to walk with Him continually ... listen to His “still small voice.”

“Hast thou considered my servant ...?”

... **but he was a leper ... [2 Kings 5:1].**

Naaman was an important man, and he knew it. Scripture tells us that he was the “commander of the army of the King of Syria ... honorable ... a mighty man of valor.” But he was afflicted by the most dreadful disease of the times, leprosy; to be so smitten meant not only ostracism but also an untimely death.

Suddenly the great man’s life takes a turn. His wife’s maid, taken captive in one of Syria’s raids into Israel, wishes out loud that her “lord” could visit with the prophet Elisha – who would “recover” Naaman of his leprosy. The Syrian king gets into the act, sends a note to the ungodly ruler of Israel at the time who thinks the whole thing is a ruse and does nothing. But Elisha gets wind of the affair and tells the king, “send him to me.” So Naaman “came and stood at the door of the house of Elisha” with his impressive retinue of horses and chariots, servants, and the exaggerated sense of his own importance, expecting God’s prophet to consider it an honor to come out, perhaps lay healing hands on him with great pomp and be paid for his services.

Elisha doesn’t even answer the door. He sends out a “messenger” with a condescending order – the great warrior is told to turn around, head for the muddy Jordan River some 20 miles distant, take his clothes off, and jump into the water ... not just once, or twice, or even three times, but *seven* times in and out. Naaman is beside himself at the perceived insult to his person, and he becomes furious. We can imagine him saying, “He wants me to do WHAT?” He storms away, furious at the affront to his pride – such an egregious insult was perhaps even grounds for war with Israel. But his servants were not blinded by the kind of arrogant pride with which their leader was afflicted. “Wait a minute, chief,” they reasoned, “if this guy had told you to do something really tough, wouldn’t you jump at the chance?” Naaman swallows his pride, does the 20 miles, gets muddy seven times, and comes up clean, with the “flesh of a little child.”

It doesn’t pay to be proud. Who do we think we are anyway – especially in God’s sight? Naaman’s story brings out the worst in what pride can do to us – he nearly lost his opportunity to be healed. And the best part of the story ... when he swallowed it, he found that “there is no God in all the earth but in Israel ...”

... ***hast thou seen what they do in the dark?*** [***Ezekiel 8:12***].

Four times Ezekiel witnessed the likeness of the Glory of God in visions. Appointed to be God's "watchman" to His captive people, the prophet's task was to convict them of their sin and urge them to repent. In his fourth such vision, he was taken "by a lock of mine head" and transported to Jerusalem. God had repeatedly said that the coming judgment upon the city would be the result of the people's sin; now God would show His prophet the extent of their idolatry.

First, Ezekiel sees an "image of jealousy" in the entry to the house of the Lord – probably an image of Baal – more than enough to provoke God. "*Seest thou what they do?*" asks God. Next at the "door of the court," Ezekiel sees a "hole in the wall." He is told to "*dig now in the wall,*" when he does he sees a door and is told to "*go in and behold the unclean abominations they do.*" He sees a chamber set round with idolatrous pictures; all the idols of the house of Israel borrowed from the heathen nations hung on the walls, even the vilest of them, which they worshipped. Ezekiel sees 70 idolaters here – the ancients of the house of Israel who were bound by duty to restrain and punish idolatry.

"*Turn ye yet again,*" says God, "and thou shalt see even greater abominations that they do." Ezekiel is brought to the "gate of the Lord's house;" here he sees women worshipping the ancient deity Tammuz. "*Hast thou seen this?*" asks God. "*Turn ye yet again* and thou shall see greater abominations than these." Ezekiel sees in the inner court 25 men with their backs to God's altar in disrespect, worshipping the sun. "*Hast thou seen this...?*" asks God again. And then perhaps the greatest sin of all, they "put the branch to their nose," probably a ritual act associated with the worship of gods, a gross insult to God. After the tour, God tells Ezekiel that He will "deal with them in anger, with no pity." And that is, of course, what happened. When a nation turns its back on God, the result will always be the same. He will judge.

If Ezekiel came around the corner and looked through a hole in our wall, what would he see us doing?

And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee [2 Corinthians 12:9].

Paul was enthralled as no other man with the grace of God. In each of his letters contained in Scripture, he never failed to open and close with mention of God's grace.

We commonly define God's grace as the unmerited favor that God bestows upon His own. In other words, we have never done anything to deserve it, but He gives it to us anyhow.

What incredible blessings we have as a result of this grace of God:

- Through it we have forgiveness of sins: "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his *grace*" [Ephesians 1:7].
- Through it we are saved: "we believe that through the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved" [Acts 15:11].
- We are justified by it: "That being justified by His *grace*, we ... should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" [John 3:7].
- We find it at God's throne through prayer: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of *grace*, that we may obtain mercy to help in time of need" [Hebrews 4:16].
- By it we are what we are – witness Paul's words testifying that what he is he owes to God: "But by the *grace* of God I am what I am" [1 Corinthians 15:10].
- Through it we are made rich: "For ye know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ that, although He was rich, for yourselves became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" [2 Corinthians 8:9].
- By it we are called to an eternity with Christ: "But the God of all *grace* who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus ... make you perfect" [1 Peter 5:10].

Paul, suffering from his "thorn in the flesh," an undisclosed physical trauma, hears from God; never mind that, My grace is enough to carry you through whatever your hurt is. From what we read of the great apostle's life and service for Christ, we see from His life that indeed, God's grace was sufficient.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man ... [Ecclesiastes 12:13].

“Vanity of vanities,” complains Solomon over and over, as he muses about life in his backslidden condition. Throughout thirteen chapters of Scripture, the wise king seems to come to the conclusion that life is futile. There is no profit to man’s labor. Generations after generations pass, but there is no effect on the earth. The sun comes up, the sun goes down. The wind blows this way and that. Man’s eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor his ear hearing. There is nothing new under the sun. He says that he had more wisdom than “all they that have been before me in Jerusalem,” but the wisdom gave him nothing but grief, and his knowledge sorrow.

He “got” servants, great possessions, silver and gold, men singers and women singers. Whatever his eyes desired, he *got*. And when he “looked upon all the works my hands had wrought,” there was no satisfaction. It was all “vanity and vexation of spirit.” He “hated life.” He “hated all my labor,” because in the end it would just be left to someone else. He sees those who were never born better off than the living – because they would never see “the evil that is done under the sun.” He notes that just men perish in their righteousness while the rich man prolongs his life in wickedness. There is not a just man, Solomon says, that doeth good and sinneth not. He bemoans his experience with women, his downfall. “They are more bitter than death,” he says, “their hearts are snares and nets.” The race, he says, is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. It is all time and chance.

But even as a depressed Solomon contemplates the seeming futility of life, interspersed in this thesis are flashes of comfort – because deep in his soul he realizes that there is always ... God! Twice he says that man’s labor is a gift of God; one should *enjoy it!* God “hath made everything *beautiful* in His time.” He praises the greatness of God; “Consider the work of God; for who can make that straight that he hath made crooked?” And he knows that, “it shall be well with them that fear God.” Finally the “preacher” sees that the answer to life is to “fear God and keep His commandments.” Solomon concludes with a sobering thought that “God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

Our lives are a precious gift from God. They can be lived in joy, “fearing” Him.

Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? [1 Samuel 17:43].

Observe that the dog does not really enjoy what one might call an exalted reputation in Scripture, such as the eagle, the lion, and such. He is really sort of looked upon and dismissed as a low-life creature. For instance, here in 1st Samuel Goliath, when he saw David, “disdained him,” disgusted that this young upstart would so insult him as he would a *dog*. When David wished to bestow favor upon “Saul’s house,” he asked Ziba, a servant of Saul, if there was one upon whom he “may show the kindness of God.” Ziba mentioned Jonathan’s son, the lame Mephibosheth. When David told Mephibosheth “thou shalt eat bread at my table, he bowed himself and said, ‘what is thy servant that thou shouldst look upon such a dead *dog* as I?’” And as David was fleeing Absalom, one Shimei “came forth and cursed as he came, and he cast stones at David,” accusing him of “shedding the blood of the house of Saul.” But one of David’s men had enough of this, and said to David, “why should this dead *dog* curse my lord the king. Let me go over ... and take off his head.” When a weeping Elisha told Hazael that he would be king of Syria and would bring about great evil ... “unto the children of Israel,” an astonished Hazael asked the prophet, “what, is thy servant a *dog*, that he should do this great thing?” And Matthew cautions against giving “that which is holy to the *dogs* ...”

However, if we look at things in a different context, as many have and do, the lowly dog really becomes a great example of one of God’s perfect creatures. Witness such testimonies as:

You can’t buy loyalty, they say, I bought it though, the other day; you can’t buy friendships tried and true, well just the same I bought that too. I made my bid and on the spot bought love and faith and a whole lot of happiness, so all in all the purchase price was pretty small; I bought a single trusting heart that gave devotion from the start. If you think these things are not for sale, buy a brown eyed puppy with a wagging tail. Or; Near this spot are deposited the ashes of one who possessed beauty without vanity, strength without insolence, courage without ferocity, and all the virtues of man without his vices. This praise, which would be unmeaning flattery if inscribed over human ashes, is but a tribute to the memory of Boatswain, a dog. (Lord Byron)²

What an incredible Creation we are able to enjoy from God’s hand. The sea with its teeming, fascinating life, soaring mountains and green valleys, the night with its infinite number of stars ... even the unpretentious dog, of whom Sir Walter Raleigh said, “recollect that the Almighty, who gave the dog to be companion to our pleasures and toils, hath entrusted him with a nature noble and incapable of deceit ...”

² www.dogquotes.com

Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God ... [Deuteronomy 8:11].

Beware! One of those rare words that immediately call our senses to attention. *Beware* of the dog! ... the sign on the gate reads. *Beware* of high voltage! ... the sign on the fence says. *Beware* of sharks! ... warns the sign on the beach. *Beware* this! *Beware* that!

Forget the dog, the voltage, and the sharks. The real danger is what Moses here tells the nation of Israel: *beware! Do not forget God.*

It is a terrible thing to forget God. Bildad, one of Job's so-called friends, recognized the potential repercussions of forgetting God when he wrongly accused Job of doing so; "so are the paths of those who *forget* God." But Israel is the consummate example of the consequences of *forgetting* Him. They were amply warned: "when the Lord shall hath brought thee into the land ... then beware lest thou forget the Lord." And he tells them in Chapter 28 of the consequences if they did; they will serve their enemies ... they will suffer plagues ... they will be plucked from the land ... their lives "shall hang in doubt before thee." But they forgot. They "provoked him to jealousy with strange gods ... sacrificed unto devils ... and hast *forgotten* God that found thee." "In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough ... there shall be desolation ... because thou hast *forgotten* the God of thy salvation ... they have perverted their way, and they have *forgotten* the Lord their God." And every one of the warnings came true. God gave up on them and dispersed them from their land to this day.

To forget God is one thing. To be forgotten by God is yet another. The psalmist grieved because he felt that God might forget him ... "hath God forgotten to be gracious?" ... "O my God, my soul is cast down within me ... I will say unto the Lord my rock, why hath thou forgotten me." And David, in his distress, "how long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" David realized how it felt when God might forget.

So considering what it would be like to be forgotten by God, we must *remember* not to *forget* ... God.

He hangeth the earth upon nothing ... [Job 26:7].

How is something like the earth hung upon nothing? How is it that the force of gravity is just right so that we don't fall off the planet into space? How is it that we are placed on earth at such an exact distance from the sun that we neither roast nor freeze? Of course, we know why. It is because God created it that way.

Here Job precedes his "hangeth the earth" phrase by telling us that God "stretched out the earth over the empty places." Isaiah reminds us that "God the Lord ... He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; He that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; He that giveth breath unto the people upon it." Then the prophet quotes God: "Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together."

More than anyone, the Psalmist marvels at God's creation: "I give thanks unto the Lord that stretched out the earth above the waters that made great lights the sun to rule by day the moon and stars by night." And, "the works of the Lord are great He hath made His wonderful work to be remembered." And, "O Lord my God thou are very great who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be moved forever."

"Ah, Lord God", says Jeremiah, "behold Thou hast made the heaven and earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for Thee."

Amos tells us, "It is he that buildeth his stores in heaven, and hath founded his troops in the earth; he that calleth for the waters of the sea, then poureth them out upon the face of the earth; the *Lord is His Name*."

How can anyone logically question how Creation came to be and Who created it? Exodus states it unequivocally: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is." John tells us, "All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made." How is it that *even one person doesn't get it?*

The reason may be that they will not acknowledge that there is a God ... and they don't have a Savior ...

... and they crucified Him ... [Matthew 27:35].

It may appear to be a simple report of fact – Jesus was crucified. But it is infinitely more than that. It encompasses not only the mental anguish of bearing the sins of the world, but also the unspecified physical horrors that He experienced as He suffered.

First, He was scourged. The scourge was a Roman implement designed to inflict severe human punishment. It contained a handle with leather straps with jagged pieces of bone or metal embedded at the ends. Flesh was cut by each blow. 40 “stripes” were permitted; often the victim fainted or even perished. Isaiah tells us that Jesus’ “visage was marred more than any man’s.”

Scourging was only the beginning. Commentaries and medical analyses tell us that,

...death by crucifixion was one of the most cruel, shameful deaths that existed. The horror began with the victim laid on the cross, which rested flat on the ground. The hands and feet were then nailed, the cross raised, and then let fall violently into the hole dug to receive it. This resulted in convulsive shock to the victim, disjuncting the entire body. Although there was a support on the cross for the victim to “sit” upon, the nails that secured hands and feet were driven through those parts of the limbs full of nerves. Even the slightest movement brought intense pain. The pain gradually increased. There was no relaxation, no rest. The exposure of so many wounds to air caused inflammation and raging fever. The victim’s free circulation of blood was prevented, causing intense pressure in the head and other parts of the body. Death resulted from pain, exhaustion, hunger and thirst.

Isaiah tells us that He carried our sorrows; He was stricken and smitten of God, that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and, finally, “with His stripes we are healed.”

Among the civilized world today, at least, such cruel and inhuman punishment has been eliminated. Since it is not graphically portrayed, there is no way we can imagine the suffering that Jesus endured for all mankind.

God ... hath made me forget all my troubles ... [Genesis 41:51].

Joseph's problems began at an early age, when Scripture records that he brought an "evil report" of his brothers' youthful behavior to Jacob. Things went downhill from there. Jacob "loved Joseph more than all his children," and his brothers "hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him." Then Joseph dreams his dream, which was probably the proverbial straw that did the camel in: first he tells his brothers that he envisioned "your sheaves ... made obeisance to my sheaf," then, the "sun, moon and stars made obeisance to me." This added "envy" to the already inflamed emotions of the brothers, and when Jacob sent him to locate his brethren and the herds, "they conspired against him to slay him."

Joseph is cast into a pit while his brothers eat lunch. He is given a reprieve on life when the Ishmeelites appear, sold for 20 pieces of silver. Now he finds himself in slavery in Egypt, sold to one Potiphar, the captain of the guard. Nevertheless, he becomes "a prosperous man," serving in the house of "his master the Egyptian" until his fortunes change when he rejects the overtures of Potiphar's wife. He is thrown into prison "where the king's prisoners were bound." He makes the best of it; the "keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners."

Then, "it came to pass" that Pharaoh put his baker and butler in the slammer with Joseph. Both have a dream. Joseph interprets: the baker would have his head "lifted off," but the butler would be restored. Joseph pleads with the butler that "when it shall be well with thee," get me out of this place. But Joseph loses out again; the butler forgets. Until, however, two years later at the opportune time he remembers. Joseph's God-given ability to interpret dreams gets him into Pharaoh's presence, and he is "set ... over all the land of Egypt."

Ridiculed by his family, thrown into a pit to die, sold into Egypt, falsely accused of assault on Potiphar's wife, 13 years in captivity – one wouldn't blame Joseph for being bitter. But now, the "ruler over all Egypt" says, *God made me forget all that stuff.*

All of us are going to experience injustice from others, ridicule dropped upon us, possibly rejection from family or others, circumstances of life that are downright unfair, perhaps even harmful to our self. The trick is to be able to say, "God has made me forget all my troubles."

It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord ... [Lamentations 3:26].

Often it is very difficult to wait for the Lord. Abraham was one who didn't, and found himself in big trouble. God had promised the patriarch, "he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir ... look now toward heaven and tell the stars ... so shall thy seed be." But Abraham waited years and nothing happened. Finally, he decided that since God hadn't come through, he would acquiesce to Sarai's suggestion that he take her handmaid Hagar. Family trouble immediately ensued. Hagar "despised" Sarai, and Sarai took it out on Abraham.

Then we read of Lot's daughters, who, after God destroyed their home town and turned their mother into a block of salt, concluded that "there is not a man in the earth save Lot who can now continue to populate the earth." So they got Lot drunk, seduced him, and the result became the Moabites and Ammonites, the mortal enemies of God's people.

We can contrast these two incidents with that of Paul's experience where he wanted to go into Bithynia but "the Spirit suffered them not." Paul didn't head out anyway; he waited. Then comes the vision of the Macedonian man, and the great apostle proceeded "with a straight course" on his journey. The result; the Gospel was taken to the Gentiles.

Scripture repeatedly advises the "activity" of waiting upon the Lord. The psalmist counsels, "wait on the Lord, and keep His way" ... and, "rest upon the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Isaiah testifies that he "will wait upon the Lord ... and I will look for Him" ... "blessed are they that wait for Him" ... "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint." Jeremiah promises, "The Lord is good unto them that wait for him."

If we don't have a "straight course," wait.

The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench ... [1 Kings 18:38].

We can imagine Elijah here having one fine time on Mount Carmel with Ahab and his 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the groves “.... which eat at Jezebel’s table.” He knew he couldn’t lose. He had been sent by God to Ahab to convict the evil king for forsaking God’s commandments, and he began by challenging Ahab and his false prophets to a contest, sort of.

Ahab is first to put a sacrifice on his altar and have his prophets call upon Baal to consume it. The offering is “dressed”, and the farce begins. They call upon Baal all morning. They “leaped upon the altar.” Elijah wants to know if he is going to show up and begins harassing them, “either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey (out to relieve himself?), or peradventure he is sleeping.” The Baalists begin to cut themselves until “the blood gushed out.” This goes on until evening and, of course, nothing happens.

Now it is Elijah’s turn to prove to the people that he is God’s prophet, and that they should mend their idolatrous ways. He repairs the altar, digs a trench around it, and calls for a barrel of water. “Pour it on,” says the prophet. “Do it again. Do it a third time.” By this time the altar and sacrifices are drenched, the whole place is flooded and the trenches are full of water. Elijah calls upon the Lord, and the rest is history. When God’s fire toasts everything in sight, the people repent, and the false prophets are destroyed.

But alas, that is not the end of the story. When Ahab goes home and tells his wife Jezebel that her idol has been desecrated and her prophets destroyed, she puts out a contract on Elijah – she will see to it that he is dead in 24 hours. Elijah panics, flees to the wilderness, sits down under a juniper tree, and asks God to take his life. Elijah, the mighty servant of God with power to save or destroy, flees from one lone, evil woman.

Well, none of us know what we might do under the same circumstances. One thing is certain, however; we will all have our ups and downs in life. But if we just put our faith and trust in God, no one – certainly not a Jezebel – can harm us.

... the driving is like the driving of Jehu ... for he driveth furiously [2 Kings 9:20].

If there ever was a man who carried out orders with a vengeance, it was Jehu. It all began with Ahab, the most wicked of all the kings of the Northern Kingdom and his outrageously wicked wife Jezebel. Jehu had been Ahab's bodyguard, as well as the head of Israel's army under Ahab's son King Jehoram.

In the first book of the Kings, Elijah prophesied the doom of Ahab and Jezebel. One day as Jehu and the "captains of the host" were sitting around the cafe, in bursts this "young man." "I have an errand to thee, O captain," he announces, then douses Jehu's head with oil and informs him that he was to destroy the "House of Ahab."

Everyone probably thought this was a bit strange, but Jehu didn't bat an eye. He took off for Jezreel where Jehoram was licking his wounds suffered at the hands of the Syrians. When the watchman on the tower at Jezreel saw Jehu's chariot coming, Jehoram sent out a "horseman" who asked Jehu, "Is it peace?" Two horsemen later, Jehoram went out himself and asked the same question. "What peace?" said Jehu, "as long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" Jehoram turned to flee, but Jehu dropped him with one arrow. In an ironic touch, he told his servant to bury Jehoram in the field that his father Ahab had misappropriated from Naboth. Next Jehu killed Ahaziah, Judah's king, and then went after Jezebel. When he came to the city gate, there she was perched at a second story window. "Throw her down", said Jehu. When they did, horses trampled her to death, and Jehu went to lunch. All in all Jehu carried out God's order to kill Jehoram, his brother Ahaziah, Jezebel, Ahab's 70 sons, 42 relatives of Ahaziah, and all the prophets and priests of Baal.

Well, we certainly will not get such an assignment from God in this day and age. But there is certainly a lesson here; when we seek His will for our lives and we are given a ministry or service to perform for Him, we might remember the zeal of no-delay, no-nonsense, no-holds-barred, wild-driving Jehu.

Hezekiah ... spread it before the Lord ... [Isaiah 37:14b].

Hezekiah is in serious trouble. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria “came up against all the defended cities of Judah, and took them.” All the cities except Jerusalem. Now the Assyrians stand at the west side of the city about 70 yards from the Joppa Gate with a “great army.” Hezekiah sends Eliahim, the master of his household; Shebna, the scribe; and Joab, the recorder, to meet with the threatening “Rabshakeh,” the king’s cupbearer, his most trusted underling sent to lead the expedition against Jerusalem. Hezekiah had rebelled against the King of Assyria, refusing to pay tribute levied against Judah in the days of Ahab, and had also trusted in Egypt for help against the Assyrians – but to no avail. Now the Assyrians are ready to take their revenge.

Rabshakeh tells Hezekiah’s emissaries that Judah has no strength with which to withstand the Assyrians. As a matter of fact, they are mocked – they are told that Rabshakeh would give them 2,000 horses, but Judah wouldn’t be able to find men to mount them. If Judah expects help from Egypt, it will be like leaning on a “weak reed” that will break. God won’t help them either, because He was the one who sent them in the first place (an erroneous assertion). Rabshakeh spoke to the Israelites “on the wall” listening to all this, telling them not to trust Hezekiah to deliver them.

Hezekiah’s party of three is shaken to the core by all the threats. They tear their clothes and relay the “words of Rabshakeh” to Hezekiah. The king was stunned. He clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes, and sent messengers to the prophet Isaiah. In the meantime Rabshakeh finds out that the Ethiopians are on their way to fight them, and sends a follow-up note to Hezekiah trying to panic him into a quick capitulation.

This time Hezekiah did what he should have done in the first place, saving a lot of sackcloth, ashes, and worry. He “spread” the letter “before the Lord” and prayed for deliverance. That night the angel of the Lord slew 185,000 of Sennacherib’s army, and he withdrew in disgrace. Jerusalem and Hezekiah were spared.

Our nature is to try to solve our problems by ourselves. Better to remember Hezekiah, and “spread” our needs and concerns before the Lord in prayer.

Eight souls were saved by water ... [1 Peter 3:20b].

Much confusion is possible when we take a single verse of Scripture and assume a certain meaning for it without looking at the context and broad meaning from the entire Bible. Here in Peter's first epistle is a good example:

The like figure wherein even baptism doth now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."[1 Peter 3:21].

Here it may appear at first glance that baptism has something to do with salvation. But Peter is not referring to baptism as having a part in saving us; in fact, he is quick to affirm this. He calls baptism a "like figure" of that which Noah and his family went through which "saved" them. He is again quick to add that baptism does not put away *the filth of the flesh*; it neither forgives sin nor does it cleanse. He emphasizes that, that which *does* save us is that of which baptism is a *figure*, that being the *death and resurrection of Christ*. One commentator puts it thus:

*Baptism itself is a figure. It is not the figure that saves us, for baptism does not put away the filth of the flesh. How then are we saved? It is by that of which baptism is a figure, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The article of baptism is a witness, a kind of declaration before God and men for the sake of conscience. If I am brought to realize that I as a man in the flesh have been crucified with Christ, then I want to literally identify myself with Him in death and resurrection. This I declare in baptism. Baptism is only a figure. There is nothing vital about it. It will not give you life.*³

*Water did not save Noah, the ark did!*⁴

More than 150 New Testament verses teach that salvation comes by faith alone. God's Word does not contradict itself. Getting it right is a matter of putting things in context and harmony with all of Scripture. Only then will we reach a full understanding of what God teaches us through His Word.

³ Westwood, *Peter's Epistles* (The Bible Treasury Hour, Glendale CA: 1953) p. 122.

⁴ Steven Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone; An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*, 4th ed. (Amarillo, TX: Westcliff Press, 2010) p.149.

... *we do not well* ... [2 Kings 7:9].

Inside the gates of the city of Samaria, things are desperate. The city has been besieged by the Syrian King Benhadad. There is a great famine. The people have not only stooped to eating the unclean donkey, but have dropped to the lowest level of mankind, eating their own children, a tragedy of unparalleled proportion. Meanwhile, just outside the gate – banned from the city because of their disease – sit four lepers, suffering the same effects of starvation brought on by the siege. Assessing their dismal situation, they make a decision: rather than die a slow death of starvation, they will give themselves up to the Syrians even though doing so may mean death as well.

They advance stealthily into the Syrian camp, and *behold!* They find that it has been emptied. They are unaware, of course, that God has rescued Samaria through a miracle, as Elisha, within the city, had prophesied. The four are at once ecstatic – they find enormous supplies of food and treasure abandoned by the enemy. They “went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried there silver, gold, and raiment ... and came again and entered into another tent, and carried there also.” They gorge themselves, take treasure and hide it.

Then a strange thing happens: they are taken over by their consciences. They have a duty to their fellow Samaritans to tell them of their find. They report to the city gatekeeper. They *do the right thing*.

The Bible gives us other examples of those who did the right thing. When Esther got the news from Mordecai that Haman plotted to destroy her people, she resigned herself to her fate, “If I perish, I perish,” she said, and at great risk to her life interceded with the king. Saul repeatedly tried to kill David, but David, having two opportunities to slay the king, refrained from doing so. Joseph’s brothers left him in a pit to die, yet 20 years later he forgave them. When Josiah became king of Judah, he “*did that which was right* in the sight of the Lord,” and destroyed Judah’s idols. Boaz fulfilled his redeemer-kinsman responsibilities and married Ruth. The slave Onesimus left his master Philemon, but later became converted and was of great help to Paul, but the great apostle does the right thing; he lets him go and asks Philemon to “receive him.”

Whether standing for what is right, forgiving, whether fulfilling our responsibilities, whether ... whatever. We can *do the right thing*.

Lot ... pitched his tent toward Sodom ... [Genesis 13:12].

The Bible is truly an incredible Book. It gives us a multitude of examples of situations that we can draw from for guidance in our own lives. Here we have a believer – so Peter, who calls him “just Lot ... that righteous man dwelling among them” (the Sodomites). Peter also says Lot’s “righteous soul was vexed ... with their unlawful deeds.” So Scripture leaves little doubt that Lot was justified before God.

Yet from the time we meet him, Lot certainly appears to be in a seriously backslidden condition. It begins when his and Abraham’s servants argue about insufficient land for their flocks. Abraham tells Lot that he can pick the land on the left or on the right, and he will take what remains. Lot’s slippery slide begins. He chooses “all the plain of Jordan,” and “dwelled in the cities of the plain, and *pitched his tent toward Sodom.*” Scripture sets the stage for Lot’s future: “But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners.” Not a problem for Lot. A short time later, it is noteworthy to observe that now, Scripture says that Lot’s tent is no longer pitched *toward* Sodom, he is living *in* Sodom.

After having been taken prisoner and subsequently freed by Abraham, Lot is not only still residing in Sodom – as a matter of fact, here we have him sitting “in the gate of the city.” The “gate” was where important business was taken care of, and quite possibly, Lot may have by now been an important resident, perhaps even a judge. God now decides to destroy the city. Coming down the street are God’s “angels,” sent to execute His judgment. Lot invites them to his home. They refuse, but later recant. After Lot feeds them, things get ugly. The “men of the city” surround his house, and demand homosexual sex with his guests. Lot tries to talk them out of it, and incredibly, *offers his two daughters* to them instead! After continued agitation by the mob, the angels blind them, ending the threat.

But there is even more sad evidence of Lot’s spiritual condition. The angels tell him that Sodom is to be destroyed, and that he should warn his sons-in-law to flee. When he does, he “seemed as one who mocked” – his testimony was so bad they didn’t believe him! Then, when “the morning arose,” the angels “hastened Lot,” as in “get out of this place.” But Lot *lingered* – he didn’t want to leave! He had to be dragged out of town. Then he gets drunk, and incestual relations with his own daughters follow.

Most of us cringe at all this ... and would say whoa! I wouldn’t do any of that stuff. Perhaps not. But here, yet again, Scripture gives us an intensely appalling example of how far it is possible to slide if we symbolically “pitch our tent toward Sodom.”

... the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever ...
[Revelation 14:11].

The “promo” for The American Express Card urges, “*Don’t leave home without it.*” Noted on a church marquee recently, “*Jesus. Don’t leave earth without Him.*”

Leaving this planet ... this life, without having trusted Jesus to take away ones sin will be an existence that no one, if they understand what it will really be like, will want to experience. Dr. Steven Waterhouse gathers the verses together from all Scripture to describe the *abode of the lost*. Inclusive, they paint a terrifying picture. They include:

- Separation from God: Matthew 7:23 (“*I never knew you*”); 2 Thessalonians 1:9 (“*Everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord*”).
- Denial, shame: Daniel 12:2 (“*many of those who sleep will awake ... to everlasting shame ...*”); Matthew 10:33 (“*I will deny before my Father*”); Mark 8:38 ... (“*him shall also the Son of man be ashamed*”).
- Unending worms, unending condition of rottenness and pain: Isaiah 66:24 (“*their worm shall not die neither shall their fire be quenched*”); Mark 9:48 (“*where their worm dieth not ...*”).
- Darkness, terror, panic, isolation: Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30 (“*... cast into outer darkness*”); Jude 13 (“*...to whom the blackness of darkness is reserved forever*”).
- Weeping, gnashing of teeth: Matthew 25:30, 22:13; Luke 13:28 (“*there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*”).
- Torment: Revelation 14:10, 20:10 (“*... shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever*”).
- Brimstone, producing noxious fumes bringing gagging, choking, suffocation: Revelation 14:10 (“*... shall be tormented with fire and brimstone ...*”).
- Death, specifically the second death, eternal separation from God, unending death: Revelation 20:14 (“*...this is the second death*”), 21:8 (“*shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death*”).
- Fire, unquenchable fire, everlasting fire, fury of fire: Matthew 13:42, 50 (“*... his angels shall gather ... them that do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire*”); Mark 9:48 (“*... where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched ...*”).⁵

It is an unperceivable thought that many will suffer such an eternal existence. Christ has paid the price for sin; those who fail to trust in Him are in great danger. God’s holiness requires Him to judge sin. And hell is the place reserved for those who will suffer His judgment.

⁵ Steven Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone; An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*, 4th ed. (Amarillo TX: Westcliff Press, 2010) pp. 538-541.

For he is the minister of God to thee for good ... [Romans 13:4].

Shadrach's maternal grandfather came from the old country. He was not really interested in politics, rather in his love of God and the care and nurture of His saints. But there was one politician that really got under his skin. Deep. He was the mayor of the city, but not "Mr. Mayor" to Gramp. He was "dat misserable Davey Lawrence." We never knew exactly why the Mayor so rankled him. But we always assumed that in spite of his unflattering appraisal of the mayor, underneath it all he still recognized that even "misserable Davey" was one of God's ministers.

Politicians seem to carry the lowest public approval ratings of any sector on the planet. It is well to understand, however, that God is in charge, and each one of these is His *minister*, placed in authority to accomplish His purposes. We have ample Scriptural basis commanding us to "submit" to the leaders of our nation, regardless of our politics; unless, of course, such leaders demand actions contrary to the Word of God. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, is unmistakably specific:

Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained by God ... for rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil ... for he is the minister of God to thee for good ... wherefore ye must needs be subject ... for conscious sake ... for this cause pay ye tribute also, for they are God's ministers...

The Great Apostle tells Timothy:

I exhort therefore that ... prayer, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for ... all that are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceable life ... for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

And Titus:

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities, and powers, to obey magistrates ...

Every politician, leader, head of government, good, bad, or indifferent, is an agent in God's will of purpose; a will that is just that, *it will be done*. Whatever we might think about one of "dose misserable" politicians, whoever it is, Scripture tells us he or she is God's minister ... for our good ... and most of all, to fulfill His purposes.

Thou man of God, the king hath said, “come down” [2 Kings 1:9].

It was the wrong thing to say. Twice. King Ahaziah had tumbled through a lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and he was in bad shape. But instead of calling upon God, he ignored Him, and sent messengers to inquire of the god Baal-zebub – the *god of flies*; later know as Beel-zebul, *lord of the dunghill*! Flies? Dung? Instead of Jehovah? Mercy!

Such an affront to the God of Israel would not stand, and the “angel of the Lord” sends a flash to the prophet Elijah telling him to intercept the king’s envoy. Elijah’s words to the king’s envoy are convicting: “Is it not because there is not a God in Israel that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub?” asks Elijah, who then follows up with the prophecy of Ahaziah’s impending death.

When the messengers return without counsel from the idol god, Ahaziah demands an explanation. The reply: “An hairy man girt with a girdle of leather told us that you shall surely die.” Ahaziah knows well this “hairy man,” and dispatches one of his captains of fifty with his fifty to haul in Elijah. The captain is surly, disrespectful, and arrogant: “The king hath said, come down,” he demands with a haughty smirk. God will not tolerate such disrespect, and Elijah calls for fire from heaven, which promptly toasts the captain and his fifty. When Ahaziah finds out about this, he sends another captain with his fifty. This captain has not learned from the first, and his arrogance brings him and his fifty the same fate. The third captain with his fifty sent by Ahaziah finally gets it; he addresses the prophet with the reverence due to the Lord, “O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants be precious in thy sight.” This captain and his fifty survive, Elijah goes peaceably to Ahaziah, and delivers the king’s death sentence in person.

There is a great lesson from this event: man is to respect, revere and fear God. He will not tolerate the substitution of idols - whatever form they take - for worship of Himself. The psalmist tells us that “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him.” Further, “the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.” We are to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

Well, we don’t have any Elijahs walking the earth today bringing fire from heaven. No matter. God still merits reverence.

... Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ... [Esther 4:14].

King Ahasuerus' right hand man, Haman, has a burning desire to eradicate the Jews, fueled by his intense hatred of Mordecai, Esther's cousin and guardian. Unfortunately, Haman did not have a critical piece of knowledge that would have given him second thoughts; that God will never permit His people to be wiped off the face of the earth. This particular story is almost comedic in nature as it shows God's protection of Esther, Mordecai, and the Jewish people.

Haman has been "advanced" by King Ahasuerus, his "seat set up above all the princes that were with him." Everybody respected and bowed to Haman – except Mordecai. Haman's pride couldn't take it. Every time he endured Mordecai's insolence in refusing to honor him, his fury became more uncontrollable. He decides to get the king to sign an edict to destroy the Jews. Mordecai hears of the edict, douses himself in dust and ashes, and begins carrying on in the streets.

Queen Esther hears about this, and wants to know what is going on. Mordecai tells her: the Jews are to be destroyed! She alone can save her people through intercession with the king. At first she says this is impossible. But then she recants, "if I perish, I perish." She talks the king into having a banquet, just her, the king, and ... Haman! Haman is ecstatic. It is a great honor. But that night Ahasuerus cannot sleep, and he calls for his chronicles to be read. It has been recorded that once Mordecai saved the king's life, and he wants to know what honor has Mordecai received for this service. Nothing, is the answer. Haman is summoned, and the king wants to know what should be done. Haman assumes it is he who will receive these honors, and suggests royal apparel, the king's horse, and a parade. Good, says the king, *bestow it upon Mordecai!* Haman's troubles begin to snowball. At the banquet Esther begs the king for her life and that of her people. *What in the world!* says the king. We are to be destroyed, she says. By whom, asks the king? *By Haman!*, says Esther. The king is furious. He storms from the room. When he returns Haman is on Esther's bed! Haman is taken out and hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Neither Haman, Hitler, nor the latest threat to the nation of Israel is going to succeed in destroying God's People. *God's promises to Abraham in Genesis are unconditional and eternal – the Jewish people will have an eternal possession of their land through Christ's Kingdom on earth (the Millennium).*⁶ Scripture is full of references to these promises. They are as certain as if they had already happened.

⁶ Steven Waterhouse, *Not By Bread Alone; An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*, 4th ed. (Amarillo TX: Westcliff Press, 2010) p. 472.

... lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me saying, "Mine own hand saved me" [Judges 7:2].

Gideon was the sixth in the line of judges sent to Israel by God to rescue His people from their enemies. Israel repeatedly fell into sin and disobedience – God would allow enemies to “destroy the increase of the earth, the land, and leave the nation impoverished.” In this case, the enemy was the Midianites.

God called Gideon a “mighty man of valor.” Gideon wanted to know “why, if the Lord is with us, has all this befallen us?” God said that Gideon would “smite the Midianites as one man.” Gideon wanted a sign; God gave him two. Gideon was convinced. He “rose up early” and drafted an army of 32,000 to take on the Midianites, the Ammonites, and all the children of the east – a horde like grasshoppers – with camels without number, as the sand by the seaside. But God began chopping away at Gideon’s force of 32,000. Before he knew it, God’s mighty man of valor was looking at a skeleton army of but 300 men. *Three Hundred* against a horde resembling grasshoppers, not to mention enough camels to darken the landscape for as far as one could see!

We might wonder, what in the world is God doing here? But the text is clear. He knew that if the odds weren’t totally lopsided against Israel that His people – after He had yet again rescued them from their enemies – would come away full of themselves, bragging of a personal victory, failing to understand that they had been spared by God Himself.

What an application for us, especially when we consider the greatest gift ever given – Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. So many think they should “earn” their salvation. They want to “walk the aisle,” or “invite Jesus into their hearts,” or repent of everything imaginable, when all that is required is that we accept His death on the cross as payment for our sin and believe that He has taken it away. How ridiculous to think that one can “pay” or reimburse God for such a gift. It is just so easy to think that “mine own hand hath saved me.”

How frustrated He must feel!

I cast it into the fire, and out came this calf! [Exodus 32:24].

Come on Aaron, you can't be serious. Here he is telling Moses that while he was on Mt. Sinai, the people "wot not what is become of him" and demanded of Aaron that he "make us gods which shall go before us." Never mind that just the other day they had heard the words of God for hours, "thou shalt have no other gods before me ... thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ... thou shalt not bow down thyself to them."

Nor did it end at Sinai. Throughout the Old Testament we find consistent evidence of Israel's idolatry. Solomon built "a high place for Chemosh ... likewise did he for all his strange wives ... and sacrificed unto their gods." Jeroboam "made him calves of gold ... and said ... behold thy gods O Israel, which brought thee ... out of Egypt." Judah "did evil ... provoked God to jealousy ... built them high places and images, and groves in every high hill." Ezekiel refers nearly 40 times to the gross idolatry of God's people: "with all their idols ... they are mad upon their idols." Hosea tells us that "Ephraim is joined to idols." Finally God gives up on his people and sends them into captivity, Israel to Assyrian captivity in 722 BC, Judah to Babylon in 586.

Well, we might say, all this worship of idols happened thousands of years ago. But we need to be reminded of the definition of an idol – it is any person, activity or thing devotedly or excessively admired – and in our context idolatry is anything that draws us away from God, anything that we substitute for God, anything that we treasure, long for, covet, more than God. Paul tells us to "mortify your members ... and covetousness, which is idolatry." He tells the Corinthians that "an idol is nothing in the world," and that "there is none other than God," and to "flee from idolatry." He reasons, "what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; wherefore come ye out from among them and be separate ... touch not the unclean thing."

So what do we covet? Fame? Wealth? Health? Some Lord's Day activity that keeps us from worship? Some other personage? John has an afterthought worth noting as he concludes his first Epistle ... "little children, keep yourselves from idols."

How long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind? [Job 8:2].

In a matter of minutes Job has lost all that he had; all his livestock stolen, all his servants murdered, all his children dead. Now he is covered with “sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.” He sits in ashes, scraping himself with a broken piece of pottery. His wife tells him he has bad breath. She says, “curse God and die.”

Over the horizon come Job’s “friends,” Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They have come to “comfort him.” When they see him they are shocked. They do not recognize him. They tear their clothes, cover themselves in ashes, and sit in silence for a whole week.

But then these three turn on Job with an unsympathetic vengeance. They make the instant judgment that Job is being punished for his sin. Eliphaz tells him he was reaping what he had sown. He was not innocent. He was not righteous. He had been sowing iniquity – he had committed more than seven sins or he would not be suffering judgment. Bildad is downright caustic. He calls Job a windbag; God is judging you, Job, and your children died because of their sin. He accuses Job of forgetting God and that if he were pure and upright God would hear him. Zophar comes right out and calls Job a liar and tells him that God knows his wickedness. And then here comes the bystanding young smart-aleck Elihu; he can’t wait to join the avalanche, telling Job that he is keeping company with “workers of iniquity,” he is seeking to hide his sins from God, and that the fact that God deals with the wicked proves that Job himself is wicked.

Well, as the saying goes, with friends like these, who needs enemies? These four just didn’t get it. They leaped to the conclusion that God was judging Job, and was punishing him accordingly. And God lets them know it too; He tells Eliphaz that His “wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath ... my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly.”

Matthew and Luke both remind us, “judge not, that ye be not judged.”

... ***shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*** [Genesis 18:12].

The scene here is Abraham and Sarai hosting the Son of God together with the two angels who will proceed later to destroy Sodom. Sarah overhears God's promises that she will have a child, and she is amused by the whole thing. Notice here how she referred to her husband. She acknowledges him as *my lord*. Peter picks up on this as he lays out the Christian relationship of wives to husbands, "even as Sarai obeyed Abraham, calling him *lord*."

Today, to great misfortune, many have rejected the gender roles that God has specifically set forth in His Word. Unfortunately, God's Word is becoming more and more irrelevant and if society continues to pursue this course, it cannot benefit by the counsel He has set forth and all sorts of familial and societal problems will increase. Aggressive bites such as "you've come a long way, baby," and "you go girl!" are examples of the mantras of the day, inferring that women can take control – perhaps even in the home. But God has told us that this is not how He planned it; his gender roles define the husband as the *head of the wife*, as Christ is the *head of the church*. Today's women may chafe under this instruction, but it is plain in Scripture.

There is, of course, another side to this issue. Peter gives ample address to wives, but as the husband and wife are equal in God's sight he gives perhaps even greater admonition to husbands. He tells them to "dwell with them according to knowledge." No where else is this word *dwell* used in the New Testament. It implies living with ones wife in companionship, fellowship and oneness. He tells men to give honor to their wives, and defines the couple as "heirs together." He warns of serious consequences of doing otherwise: "that your prayers be not hindered," that is, if men neglect their responsibilities to their wives the consequences can be the same as those of other sins.

God didn't write His Book to be a manual of restrictions. Every instruction is given *for* our benefit, and certainly *not for* our difficulty ... or rebellion.

For He spake, and it was done ... [Psalm 33:9].

Consider the process by which the natural vanilla bean is brought to fruition. The story goes back to 1517, when the Spanish explorer Cortez came to Mexico. He got a taste of vanilla and decided to take some of the plant on which the vanilla pods grew, an orchid, back to Spain, so he could have some at home. But when they tried to grow it, the vanilla pods did not materialize. 300 years went by, until another Spaniard returned in 1836. Sitting on a patio sipping his coffee one morning in the village of Papantla, he observed a little bee, the *milopina* bee as we know it now, flying into the orchid and pollinating the flower. Soon, the vanilla bean formed. Viola! From this observation, of course, came artificial pollination, and now the world enjoys vanilla. It has been subsequently determined that the bee exists only in Papantla, the flower of this plant blooms only in spring - for only one day - in the morning. It closes about 30 minutes after it has been pollinated.⁷

Here is yet another example of God's wonders of creation that never cease to amaze. God created the vanilla plant, opened it but once a year, created the *milopina* bee for the specific purpose of pollinating this one plant, put the bee in this one spot in Mexico, and engineered the pollination and growth process that brings us the vanilla bean. How did the bee get to the one place where the plant grew? How did it know how to open the septum and pollinate it at the exact time? Well, of course, it is because God engineered and created all things.

To doubt the fact that God created the heavens and earth and all therein is tantamount to slapping Him in the face. How would we feel if we had, for instance, put together a work of art, or a simple vase of beautiful flowers, and had someone tell us well, that just came together, you didn't have anything to do with it? It is a terrible thing to insult the Creator.

Perhaps there will be judgment for those who continue to dishonor God thusly, insisting that all His wonders simply "evolved" from a big bang (since when has order come from an explosion?). In his *"Life and Letters,"* of 1887, Darwin said, *"Often a cold shudder has run through me, and I have asked myself whether I may not have devoted myself to a fantasy ..."* Sadly, he should have heeded his cold shudder. He knows now he was wrong. He knows now there is a Creator.

The problem is, his work on earth continues to mock God. He can't be a happy camper.

⁷ See DVD, *Incredible Creatures that Defy Evolution III*, Exploration Films.com, Reel Productions 2004.

***Thou art the man!* [2 Samuel 12:7].**

David is *the king*. One evening he is walking on his roof. He looks down and sees Bathsheba bathing. Not only was she bathing, she was very beautiful. This is the king, right? He can have whatever he wants. He “sent messengers and took her”. Having taken her, he sent her back home. Unfortunately, soon after, she advised David that “I am with child.”

David’s sin begins to snowball. He tells Bathsheba’s husband Uriah to go home from his military duties, even sends “a mess of meat” along. Uriah exhibits more character and honor than the king himself. He will not go home; he will not enjoy such comforts while the rest of the troops sleep in the field. David’s next move is to get Uriah drunk. But the loyal servant still refuses to go home. Desperate, David signs Uriah’s death warrant, sending a note to his field commander Joab to put him in the front lines where he is certain to be killed. And who delivers the sentence to Joab? Uriah! It works. Uriah is killed. David’s sin is covered.

Or is it? Of course it isn’t. We are admonished, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” The phrase implies not that our sins will remain dormant or under wraps, rather they remain *active* – they will ... *come after us!* It is exactly what happened to David. He may have soothed his worry about disclosure, but he was not reckoning on God.

God sends Nathan to confront David with a parable. As the king listens to the story about the rich man taking the poor man’s pet lamb, David’s anger is “greatly kindled.” By the time Nathan finishes the story, he is ready to kill the rich man. Then comes Nathan’s bombshell. *Thou art the man!* David’s mind, now in full-forward fury, has to shift in an instant to full-reverse guilt. One cannot imagine the shock.

Unconfessed sin will find us out. We must always be aware of our human “old-nature” tendency toward sin. When we sin, God is there waiting for us to confess it, restoring fellowship with Him. Then He forgets it. Forgetting on God’s part may suggest He may have a weakness. Not so. God *chooses to forget* our sin. Then it is buried forever.

God is more anxious to forgive us than we are wont to transgress.

But ... [1 Kings 11:1a].

Solomon. Son of David and Bathsheba. We know him, perhaps colloquially, as the wisest man who ever lived. When David died, Solomon's "kingdom was established greatly." When the Lord appeared to him in a dream, He asked the new king "What shall I give thee?" Solomon confessed that he was but "a little child" that did not know "how to go out or come in: Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people" was all he asked for. His "speech pleased the Lord." Not only did he receive wisdom from God, he was blessed with "exceeding knowledge, largeness of heart," riches, and honor.

He authored some 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. God enabled him to speak of all things in nature. Men – and the Queen of Sheba – came from all the nations of the earth to hear and see him. God chose him to build His temple – a magnificent structure – that took seven years to complete. Two full chapters of Scripture are devoted to the details of this incredible project. When it was completed, Solomon "stood before the altar of the Lord ... and spread his hands toward heaven." What follows is one of the most wonderful prayers of the Bible. Solomon completed ten building projects; in addition to the temple there was Megiddo, the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, and others. He amassed incalculable supplies of gold. He gathered chariots and horsemen, made silver in Jerusalem to be as stones, had horses brought from Egypt. He sat on an ivory throne. He "exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches." "All the earth sought to Solomon, to hear this wisdom that God had put in his heart."

And suddenly, Scripture turns on one word: *but*. Against God's specific instructions against liaison with "strange women", Solomon instead takes hundreds of wives and concubines, and the text sadly records that "his wives turned away his heart." He "did evil in the sight of the Lord." He "sacrificed unto his wives' gods." He built high places for idols. Sadly, God pronounced sentence: "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee." It was the end of Solomon, and the end of his kingdom.

The lesson here is obvious. "Strange women" is but an empirical representation of any thing that can turn one away from God. Satan has an inexhaustible arsenal of such things. Prayer and the diligent study of God's Word will help fend the devil off ...

... let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head ...[2 Samuel 16:9].

Scripture tells us that eye has not seen, nor ear heard neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. What a day to look forward to. What a journey it will be as the angels escort believers through the first and second heavens and into the third. How immeasurable the thought of meeting ... *Jesus!* “We can only imagine” ... a song goes ... well, one may not even be able to imagine. There too will be loved ones who have trusted in Christ and gone before. What reunions those. And the *things* – the things never heard, never seen, never entered hearts.

But think for a moment about the others there will be to meet. How about the great apostle himself, Paul? What about his conversion experience and the great light? Or Moses. What was it really like on Mount Sinai when he saw the “backside” of God? Or Simon the Cyrene, and what it was like to bear the Savior’s cross. Or Jeremiah, and his great lamentation over the dying city of Jerusalem. Or Elijah, whisked into heaven by a whirlwind. How about Noah – what was it like building the ark when no one had ever even heard of rain? What about Balaam – what was he thinking when his donkey actually began talking to him?

How about seeking out a guy by the name of Abishai. Abishai was one of David’s mighty men, ready at the drop of a hat to defend his master. When David and his men found Saul – who had tried to kill David numerous times - Abishai was ready to take matters into his own hand and eliminate the threat. He routed the Ammonites after they had insulted David’s men by cutting off half their beards. And here in the Second Book of Samuel, as the “dead dog” Shimei throws insults, rocks, and dust at the fleeing David, well, no one is going to do that to my master; he wants to remove Shimei’s head. What a guy.

Heaven. All the redeemed will be there. It will be forever, and there will be time to talk to everyone – Paul, Moses, Simon, Jeremiah – *everybody*.

O Lord I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant ... so I prayed to the God of Heaven ... think upon me, my God ... therefore, O God, strengthen my hand ... [Nehemiah 1:11, 2:4, 5:19, 6:9].

Nehemiah was the king's most trusted agent – his cupbearer. One day, as he “was in Shushan Palace, Hanani, one of my brethren, came.” Nehemiah wants to know “concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.” The news is not good. The “remnant that was left ... are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and the gates burned...” Nehemiah is in great sorrow: he “sat down and wept.”

But Nehemiah didn't sit on his sorrow. He was a man of prayer. He prayed that God would put it in the heart of the king to give him favor. When the king wanted to know why Nehemiah was so sad and what he wanted, Nehemiah whispered a quick word to God. When Sanballat and Tobias fomented unrest threatening construction of the wall, Nehemiah asked God to “turn their reproach on their own head.” When Sanballat, Tobias, the Arabians, the Ammonites and Ashdodites made noises about “fighting against Jerusalem,” Nehemiah said, “We made our prayer unto our God.” When Sanballat threatened to falsely accuse him of rebellion against Persia, Nehemiah admitted that they “made us afraid,” but then promptly asked God to “strengthen his hands.” After he served as governor for 12 years he returned to Persia, where he remained for an undisclosed time. When once again he returned to Judah to be governor, he discovered the treachery of the priest Eliashib, commanded separation from foreigners, and implemented other disciplines. Three times Nehemiah asked God to “remember me” as he went about his responsibilities.

Nehemiah was master of the “short prayer.” Such reminds us that we ought not to think that we must bend God's ear – or those of others, for that matter, with long winded, well-worded dissertations. Nehemiah reminds us also that God is accessible any time, any place, to listen to a “whispered” petition or thanksgiving that we might have. In the morning, before we begin our day, or as we lay down to rest in the night, it wouldn't be a bad idea to think of Nehemiah, and how God is waiting to hear from us.

... and the Lord called unto Moses and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation saying ... [Leviticus 1:1].

What follows here is the Book of Leviticus, a litany of instructions and laws from God for His people Israel to follow. There were laws for sacrifices; burnt offerings with the attendant 15 commands. Peace offerings; 14 commands. Meat offerings; 17 commands. Trespass offerings; six commands. Sin offerings; 25 commands. Distinctions between offerings made for priests and those of the common people. "Most holy" offerings. Thanksgiving offerings, vow offerings, voluntary offerings. Laws against eating fat and blood. Heave offerings. Laws about who could eat the offerings. Ages and sexes of the animals to be offered. Events that had to take place at the door of the tabernacle. Instructions for washing feet, clothes, sacrifices, hands, bodies.

And the meticulous procedures for the high priest on the Day of Atonement: ... *the High Priest cleansed himself ... donned his gorgeous robes of office ... burned the morning incense, made the morning sacrifice, attended to the trimming of the lamps on the lampstand ... sacrificed a bullock and seven lambs and one ram ... walked into the Holy of Holies to burn incense. It was laid down that he must not stay too long "lest he put Israel in terror." When he came out of the Holy of Holies he took the basin of bullock's blood and returned ... sprinkled the blood seven times up and seven times down ... came out, killed the goat marked for Jehovah ... reentered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled again ... came out and mingled blood of bullock and goat and seven times sprinkled the horns of the altar of the incense and the altar itself ... laid his hands on the scapegoat ... confessed his own sin and the sin of the people ... sacrificed first a kid of the goats for the sins of the people, then made the evening sacrifice, then sacrificed the already prepared parts of the bullock and goat ... once again, entered the Holy of Holies for the 4th time ... then burned the evening offering of incense, trimmed the lamps on the golden lampstand ...*⁸

Is anybody tired here? One cannot imagine trying to keep up with the stringent schedule and the idiosyncrasies of all these offerings. Ever wonder how long it took a priest to learn all this? Think about the terror experienced by the High Priest as he entered the Holy of Holies! One procedural slip and he was ... history!

Wonder no more. God has taken care of all this with the Perfect Sacrifice. That perfect, substitutionary sacrifice is Jesus. Where all these sacrifices only covered the sin of Israel, Christ put sin permanently away from the believer. He nailed it all to the tree.

⁸ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957) p. 110.

I have fought a good fight ... [2 Timothy 4:7a].

There was never a man like Paul. No one suffered for the gospel as he did. As he wrote to the Corinthians – five times he received 40 stripes save one. Three times beaten with rods. Stoned and left for dead. Shipwrecked three times. In perils of water, from robbers, from his own countrymen, from the heathen, in cities, in the wilderness, on the sea, among false brethren. Weary, in pain, hunger and thirst, cold, even in nakedness. Plagued all his life by an unrevealed “thorn in the flesh.” Followed everywhere by the Judaizers who finally declared they would fast until he was dead.

Through all this the great apostle pressed on, bringing the gospel to Pisidian Antioch – Iconium – Lystra – Derbe – Macedonia – Philippi – Thessalonika – Berea – Corinth – the list goes on. He has filled the canon with letters to Timothy, Titus, Philemon, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians, the Galatians, the Colossians, the Corinthians – and the great theological treatise to the Romans.

Merrill F. Unger gives a stunning synopsis of Paul’s character. “...here we see ... that generosity which looked for no other reward than to ‘preach the glad tidings of Christ without charge’ ... that scrupulous fear of evil appearance which ‘would not eat any man’s bread for naught, but wrought with labor and travail night and day that he might not be chargeable’ ... that grief for the sins of others which moved him to tears when he spoke of the enemies of the cross of Christ ... that noble freedom of jealousy with which he speaks of those who, out of rivalry to himself preach Christ even of envy and strife ... that intense sympathy in the joys and sorrows of his converts which could say, even to the rebellious Corinthians, ‘ye are in our hearts’ ...”⁹

And finally, here in his second letter to Timothy, this great man gives us an insight to his peace of mind as he knows that his life is nearly over. There is some sadness and loneliness in his words as in his dark, cold prison he recalls Demas’ desertion and as he longs for Timothy’s presence. Nevertheless he does not waver from his thoughts of his immediate future where God, the “righteous judge” has “laid up” for him a “Crown of Righteousness.”

This same Crown of Righteousness is promised, so said this remarkable man, to all those who hold fast to a “love of His appearing.” May God help us all, like Paul, to “keep the faith” and “fight the good fight”; so that when our course is finished we will have the same peace of mind as the great apostle.

⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 17th printing (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971) p. 838.

... that I might learn thy statutes ... [Psalm 119:71].

Shadrach's father was a mechanical engineer of the first degree. He designed turbines, superchargers, engines, or anything that resembled things that made other things move. He would sit hours on end, with us looking on from time to time wondering what he was thinking; all the time we knew he was putting something together in that analytical, steel-trap mind of his.

Unfortunately, Shadrach inherited none of these particular genes of his father. When time came to pass on to an institute of higher learning, he made an ill-advised decision to undertake the curriculum of engineering. Twice in the span of ten years he made attempts to master this discipline, to no avail. Once, he remembers, an instructor of an electrical engineering course would begin on the left of the room; fill eight sections of blackboard with information, all the time talking about what he was writing. Shadrach tried to write, he tried to listen, but could neither fathom what was behind the writing or the lecturing. To this day, he still doesn't know what the man was talking about.

Such, however, is not the case with learning from God's Book. His Spirit has given us this perfect writ of Scripture that anyone can understand.

Among other things, the Bible tells us **what** to learn:

... that they may *learn to fear me* all the days that they shall live (Deuteronomy 4:10) ... that I might *learn thy statutes* (Psalm 119:71) ...

We are told **who** to learn from:

... hearken unto *Me*, I will teach you (Psalm 34:11) ... O God *thou hast taught me* from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works (Psalm 71:17) ... I am *the Lord God* which teacheth thee (Isaiah 49:17).

And we are told **what** we learn from Him:

... He that teacheth *knowledge*, shall He not know? (Psalm 94:10).

No frustration about deciphering what's written on the blackboard, or what some "instructor" might be expounding upon. God has given us innate understanding to perceive what He is telling us through His Word. It doesn't require an engineer's mind to understand it. All it requires is diligent study on our part.

The Spirit will do the rest.

... ***his knees smote one against another ... [Daniel 5:6].***

King Belshazzar was in the midst of a “great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousands;” in other words, he was throwing a drunken ball. But then he made a big mistake; he called for the sacred vessels from the House of God in Jerusalem that his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had brought back to Babylon. The king, his princes, his wives, his concubines, all drank from the holy vessels. Such desecration of these holy things would not stand in God’s sight, and so began Belshazzar’s nightmare and subsequent demise.

Amidst the revelry comes forth – inexplicably and terrifyingly - the fingers of a man’s hand! A death-like silence falls over the great hall and all those present. *The fingers begin to write upon the wall!* It is the very hand of God. Shock envelopes the king and his guests. Scripture records the king’s fear and terror. His face grows pale. His mind becomes addled. His entire body grows weak from head to foot. *His knees knock together!* He screams a cry of distress; he wants his astrologers, the Chaldeans, and his soothsayers. He demands of them an explanation, and promises great reward to the one who can sort this out. But none of them can, and the king’s panic increases, so much that his “lords were terrified.”

Belshazzar’s grandmother tries to soothe the king; she knows someone who can explain the handwriting on the wall. Daniel is summoned; the king explains that all his wise men and astrologers cannot give him an explanation, and if he, Daniel, can, he will make him “third ruler in the kingdom.” Daniel tells Belshazzar to keep his rewards; he will interpret the incident without them. He tells the king that he had failed to learn from his grandfather that the “most high God rules in the kingdom of men.” Then he pronounces sentence upon Belshazzar. He is found wanting. His kingdom was finished and would be given to his enemies. That same night, Belshazzar is slain.

God may sit by for a time. But in the end, He will not be mocked. People today may scoff at His Word. They may ignore it as irrelevant. They may even decide that *God Himself* is irrelevant.

Not a good idea.

... as her soul was departing ... it took flight... [Genesis 35:18].

It is likely that every human being has, at one time, wondered, “where am I after I die?” Do we just lay in the grave accumulating dust and wait until God puts believers back together again and they arrive in heaven, or, infinitely worse, unbelievers rise to find themselves at the Great White Throne facing God for judgment to the Lake of Fire?

First things first: the Bible teaches that we are both flesh and spirit; one is mortal, one is immortal. Jesus Himself defines this for us: speaking to the apostles He said, “*fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.*” In other words, there is an inward man, and an outward man. To Nicodemus He said, “*that which is born of flesh is flesh, that which is born of spirit is spirit.*” One part physical, one part spiritual.

Next, Scripture certifies the fact that upon death, the soul and body are *separated* – death equals separation. The passage here in Genesis refers to the death of Rachel as she gives birth to Benjamin; “her soul was departing ... it took flight.” Later in the same chapter Isaac’s death is recorded, “Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and (his soul) was gathered unto his people.” Paul tells us that, “to be absent with the body is to be present with the Lord.” And Solomon, in his Ecclesiastes, explains: “then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to the God who gave it.” Jesus Himself told the thief on the cross, “today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

It is also important to note that Scripture states clearly that the souls of the departed are *conscious*. Luke verifies this clearly in his narrative of the “certain beggar named Lazarus,” who “died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom,” and the “certain rich man, who also died and was buried.” The latter, “being in torment in Hades, saw Abraham far off, and Lazarus in his bosom ... and cried and said ... send Lazarus that he may dip his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.” His body had been buried. His soul was in conscious torment.

The distinction, then: the **body** goes to the grave, awaiting resurrection. As to the **soul**, so Matthew - the rich man’s soul is in hell, and Lazarus rests in “Abraham’s bosom,” heaven. The difference is Jesus. When those who have trusted in Him die, they are with Christ. Those who have failed to trust Him are in constant torment ... awaiting final, terrible judgment at the Great White Throne.

... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God ... [Matthew 19:24].

It is so easy to take a verse from the Bible and get the context out of whack. Some would have us believe that according to Jesus' words, there has to be a *special miracle* applied exclusively to the rich before they can be saved, that having money somehow blinds men to the gospel. The fact is that *everyone* is blinded to the gospel; it is not limited to the rich. This *special miracle*, if we want to call the gift of salvation thusly, is available to all mankind; it is not simply for the rich. And what is rich anyhow? How much money? Billions? Enough to get by? Just a little more? So to limit this text to a special address to the so-called "rich" misses the point.

Jesus did not say it was impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. Zacchaeus was one of the richest men in Jericho, yet he found the way. Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man. Nicodemus must have been very wealthy, for he brought spices to anoint the dead body of Jesus, worth a king's ransom.¹⁰

On face value, of course, no one can "pass through the eye of a needle." This statement must be recognized for what it is: a Jewish proverb common in Jewish writings:

The camel was the largest animal which the Jews knew ... sometimes in walled cities there were two gates ... the great main gate through which all trade and traffic moved, and beside it often a little low and narrow gate. When the great main gate was closed the only way into the city was through the little gate, through which even a man could hardly pass erect. Sometimes that little gate was called the Needle's Eye."¹¹

So where is the problem here? It is that,

Riches encourage a false independence ... if a man is well-supplied with this world's goods ... he comes to think that he can do well without God ... Riches shackle a man to this earth ... If everything a man desires is contained within this world ... he never thinks of another world and of a hereafter.¹²

The point is, a total devotion to *anything* - riches, work, possessions, or whatever, can obscure one's vision of God. It can either cloud the need for a Savior, or hinder fellowship with the Father.

¹⁰ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957) p. 241.

¹¹ Ibid p. 239.

¹² Ibid pp. 240-41.

I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes [Job 42:6].

Job, suffering great physical anguish from the boils, great mental anguish from his “friends” and great emotional anguish from the sense that God had deserted him, begins to feel that he wants his day in court with God to challenge the Creator for what he thinks is the unfair and unjustified cause of his abject misery. He defends his character, innocence, and integrity; and wishes, even demands, a trial. Perhaps he thinks he can prove God wrong.

But all of a sudden the Lord appears out of the whirlwind. What follows sets Job back on his heels – it is a barrage of convicting questions from God that stuns the suffering Job. Where was he when God laid the foundations of the earth? Who laid the cornerstone? Who laid the measures of it? Whereupon are the foundations of the earth fastened? Who shut up the sea with doors? Who made the clouds? Who commanded the morning and caused the dayspring to know his place? Have you, Job, entered into the springs of the sea and walked in search of its depth? Have you perceived the breadth of the earth? Where does light dwell? Where is the place of darkness? Where does snow come from? Or hail? By what way is the light parted that scatters the wind from the earth? Who divides the course for overflowing water to run, or makes way for thunder? Who causes it to rain to satisfy the desolate earth? Does rain have a father? Or the dew? Or the frost? Can you control the movement of the heavenly bodies? Can you make it rain? Or lightning?

God is only getting warm. Next comes more than a score of questions about the animal kingdom. Can Job provide for the appetites of the lion? Can he catch the crocodile with a hook ... will this fearsome beast speak soft words to him? Does he determine the gestation periods of creatures? Who gave strength to the horse? Or wings to peacocks? Or feathers to the ostrich? Does the hawk fly by Job’s wisdom? Or the eagle?

It is too much for Job. We can sense him saying ... enough! “Behold, I am vile,” he confesses. But God is still not finished. Twenty more questions follow, until Job is brought to his knees. Finally, he says, “Mine eye seeth thee.”

This is where we need to be; sensing the greatness of God and rejoicing that He loved us enough to save us by sending His Son to die for our sin.

Nebuchadnezzar ... did eat grass as oxen ... [Daniel 4:33].

The great king of Babylon, fresh from being convinced of the greatness of God in preserving Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego from the fire, was “at rest in mine house, flourishing in my place.” But then comes the dream. He sees a tree of “great height, reaching into heaven.” He sees “an holy one come down from heaven,” who “cried aloud ... hew down the tree ... leave the stump ... and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth.” Nebuchadnezzar calls for all his wise men, but they cannot interpret the dream. Enter Daniel. God’s man explains that “It is thou, O king, that are grown and become strong,” the tree in the dream. He tells Nebuchadnezzar that he is the one who will be eating grass until he realizes that, “the most high ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.”

A year passes. One day Nebuchadnezzar is walking in the “palace of the kingdom of Babylon.” He is full of pride as he exults that he is master of all he surveys. “Is not this the great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?” No sooner were the words out of his mouth than “there fell a voice from heaven saying, ‘thy kingdom is departed from thee.’” The king was reduced to eating grass. His hairs grew like eagle’s feathers, and his nails like bird’s claws. For seven years he lives as a beast in the field.

Finally, “At the end of the days,” says the king, “I, Nebuchnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned to me.” Nebuchadnezzar had learned his lesson. His testimony is remarkable:

“I blessed the Most High and I praised and honored Him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His Kingdom from generation to generation. None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, what doest Thou? I praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, and all His works and truth, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

The Proverbs tell us that pride comes before destruction. It will get us every time.

... **go – take thee a wife of whoredoms [Hosea 1:2b].**

Can we imagine in this day to be made to deliberately seek out a wife that we knew was going to be adulterous? Such was the fate of Hosea. Here certainly would be an assignment well beyond the call of duty – but Hosea was working for God – and the task was one of which there was no greater – to prophesy to all Israel through an actual human circumstance the degree to which they had strayed from their God.

Hosea's prophecies to God's disobedient people were terrifying. When his first son was born God told him to name him Jezreel, meaning that He would *scatter Israel* to all lands. When the second child, a daughter, was born, God named her Loruhamah – He would have *no more mercy* on His people. A third child – Loammi, meant “not my people” – God would *refuse to be their God*. After she bore Hosea three children, Gomer abandoned the prophet and her family and returned to her former lovers. Hosea is then told by God to go again and love his wife – and then to buy her back for a portion of valuable barley and 15 shekels of silver, the redemption price of a slave, all illustrating how God continued to love Israel even after she had left Him to worship other gods.

Hosea shows no resentment in this entire traumatic experience. Surely he loved Gomer. Surely his heart was broken when she rejected him for an adulterous existence. Surely he experienced humiliation of having to “buy” her back. Yet it is obvious that the prophet recognized his experience as much more than the grief of his own emotions and life. Hosea was part of God's eternal work, and he was an indispensable part of it.

Today, of course, we will never be called upon to be a Hosea. But perhaps this provides one a lesson to seek out God's will, and if it involves sacrifice at Hosea's level, one can be excited about it, because there will be rewards to be paid in That Day.

Knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed? [Exodus 10:7].

His servants got the message long before Pharaoh had to accept the fact that his kingdom was being destroyed by degrees. The entire nightmare of the plagues sent by God upon Egypt – perhaps lasting as much as nine months – reads like a bad dream. First the Nile is turned into blood – Pharaoh is not impressed. Next came the frogs, squishing under foot, in the homes, everywhere! At first the king says Israel can go if the frogs disappear, but later reneges. Next come the gnats, then flies, the death of all the cattle, the boils, the hail, the locusts, followed by terrifying darkness covering the land. Finally there is the devastating death of every firstborn child in the land.

Several times the text tells us that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. This bears some thought.

God does not actively interfere to harden the heart of anyone ... a special inference of God involving a supernatural hardening of Pharaoh's heart is not to be thought of. If men "do not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gives them up to a reprobate mind." If they sin against the light he withdraws the light ...this seems to be the "hardening of the heart" here intended – not an abnormal and miraculous interference with the soul of Pharaoh ...¹³

There are several things to notice about this hardening. First, it was always in reference to letting Israel go, not believing or obeying what God said in reference to salvation ... perhaps the greatest error concerns the nature of hardening in general. When a brick, a piece of clay is hardened, it has already assumed its final shape. The hardening hardens it, not forms it.¹⁴

Pharaoh's heart was already hardened. Knowing this condition, God used him for His own purposes, illustrating His love for His people and His eternal will for Israel under His covenantal agreement with them.

One is, perhaps, left to wonder about Pharaoh. After the hail destroyed everything, he told Moses, "I have sinned this time, the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." And his last words following the death of the firstborn, "bless me also."

A hard heart toward God is not a good idea: better to believe that He sent His Son to die for us and then "retain God in ones knowledge," thus assuring that we aren't *given up to a reprobate mind!*

¹³ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary, Exodus* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, vol. I, 1950) p. 103.

¹⁴ Lawrence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, 4th ed. (Pensacola: Vance Publications, 2007) p. 327.

I have seen a woman ... get her for me [Judges 14:2].

Isn't that just like Samson. He sees a Philistine woman in Timnath and he demands that his parents "get her for me to wife." Never mind she is not an Israelite, never mind he doesn't know anything about her, never mind she is "not of the Lord." Just the impetuous, "get her."

Next we read of his putting a riddle to his thirty companions at the wedding. He bets them they cannot guess it, yet subsequently reveals the answer himself through his bride, so he loses. Then in order to pay the bet, he takes off for Askelon, slaughters 30 and takes the spoils to pay up. Then he doesn't go to collect his wife until "after the wheat harvest" – and finds that her father gave her to his "friend." This brings on new fury, so he lights up 300 fox's tails and burns the Philistines' corn, vineyards and olives.

Now he has made the Philistines furious, and they decide to take vengeance on Samson's bride and her father, and they burn them to death. Now it is Samson's turn, so he went out and "smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter." The ante is raised again; the Philistines come up to Judah to find out what is going on, and the men of Judah want to know from Samson what he is up to. Samson's flippant answer is that they did it to me, and I'm doing it to them. The Judeans tell him they are going to tie him up and turn him over to the Philistines; when they do, Samson simply breaks the cords and slaughters another 1,000 Philistines.

Finally, of course, Samson falls prey to Delilah – he "told her all his heart," and "she called for a man and caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head." The Philistines put out his eyes, take him to Gaza, and "he did grind in the prison house." However, God still wins the final round; Samson "called upon the Lord ... just this once, let me be avenged." God hears, and "all the lords and people" died as Samson collapsed the pillars of the hall.

Out of all this we can possibly gather that God can use anyone, even an impetuous Samson. Perhaps one should try, however, not to make God work so hard ...

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God ... [1 Timothy 1:17].

Four of God's attributes are packed into this one verse by Paul.

First, He is the King *eternal*, called by Isaiah, "wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father." Jeremiah says He is the true God, the living God, and an everlasting King. Habakkuk echoes His eternity, "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord?" And the Psalmist, "even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

He is *immortal*, or, as the dictionary explains, not liable to decay, everlasting, perpetual. The same Greek word here, *apthartos*, is used for incorruptible – that which will not dissolve or disintegrate. And we can recall that if **He** is immortal, so too are **our spirits**, as Peter tells us, "the hidden man of the heart ... that which is incorruptible." Or as Paul says, "the dead shall be raised incorruptible."

He is *invisible*, so John, "no man hath seen God at any time." There is no image of Him that would tend to diminish our perception of Him. Paul further verifies, speaking to the Colossians of Christ, the "image of the invisible God." Yet He is everywhere present – "whither," says the Psalmist, "shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me ..." God tells Jeremiah, "Can any hide in secret places that I shall not see Him?" In the Book of the Acts, Luke tells us that "He be not far from any one of us."

He is indeed the "only wise God." Says Paul to the Romans, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" Job calls Him "wise in heart, and mighty in strength." With this *wisdom* comes knowledge; the Psalmist admits, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me." The writer of the Proverbs says that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," and that, "by His knowledge the depths are broken up."

He is the great "I am." He is omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, immortal, invisible, wise. Jude provides a suitable benediction: "*To the only wise God, our Savior, be glory, and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*"

And they sang as it were a new song ... [Revelation 14:3].

There are many references to songs in Scripture. In the first song of Israel, Moses and the children of Israel sang unto the Lord on the occasion of the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. "The Lord is my strength and *song*, and he is become my salvation; he is my God ... I will exalt him ... thy right hand, O Lord is become glorious in power ... Who is like unto thee, O Lord ... Glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders ... the Lord shall reign forever and ever."

When God delivered David out of the hand of his enemies, the psalmist "spoke unto the Lord the words of this *song* ... The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer ... in thee will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my hightower and my refuge, my Savior. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies."

In his "song" recorded in Deuteronomy, Moses charged Joshua with the responsibility of leading the people into the Promised Land. He "spoke in the ears of all the congregation ... his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."

Isaiah writes, "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my *song*." The psalmist says, "With my *song* I will praise thee ... And the Lord ... brought me up also out of an horrible pit, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new *song* in my mouth ... and ... in the night his *song* will be with me."

In the book of Job, Elihu ascribes to "God my maker, who giveth *songs* in the night."

And finally, in that indescribable scene of praise to the Lamb in heaven, when all the redeemed are gathered around the throne, Scripture tells us, "they sung a new *song*."

Through the ages, music genres have run the gamut. But in heaven, all that will be forgotten. The redeemed will all sing a *new song*.

All everywhere should repent ... [Acts 17:30].

Repent! Possibly the most misunderstood word in the entire Bible. Visions come to the mind of a character walking around wearing a sandwich board or carrying a sign on a big stick upon which the word is emblazoned; or perhaps the image of the fiery preacher on a seedy street corner shouting the word. So what is the problem here? What does this word actually mean?

The misunderstanding comes when the word is applied erroneously to salvation. Some insist that one, perhaps a drug addict let us say, must get rid of (repent of) his habit (or sin) before he can come to Christ. *But this is impossible for the poor wretch. He knows he cannot fully forsake his sin, or even honestly promise to forsake it. He may wish he could, but the fact is he cannot, and he knows it. That is why he needs a Savior!*

¹⁵ Others insist that one must totally turn from everything wrong, or have great sorrow for it (but nowhere in the Bible is an unbeliever urged to feel sorrow for his sin before he can come to Christ for salvation) and make himself acceptable to God before He would save. *Have we ever heard a doctor tell one to get rid of ones disease so that when the germs are gone he will accept him as a patient? It is the same as if Christ would be saying, "when you stop your sinning, I will save you."*¹⁶ Cleaning oneself up or trying to put away all sin before Christ will save is not the way it works. In Luke 11:24-26 we have a parable which speaks of a man who gets rid of an "unclean spirit," goes home and "finds his house in order", but then takes on "seven more spirits more wicked." *Note that when he got rid of the first demon, he "swept and put in order" his house. He had turned from some sin, but he was still empty inside – then some other demons came.*¹⁷

Repentance in the right context is simple. We are told to repent, as Peter tells us, "The Lord ... not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." There are basically two Greek words that apply to saving repentance: they mean to "*change ones mind, to reconsider, to think differently.*" So what an unsaved person must do is *change* the mind (repent) about anything that stands in the way of his coming to faith and belief in Christ.¹⁸ This will vary with each person. Does one believe works will save him? *Repent!* Is one an atheist? *Repent!* Does one think trying to quit his sin by himself will save him? *Repent!* Change the mind. Jesus wants us to come to Him in simple faith and trust ... "just as I am, without one plea ..."

¹⁵ Steven Waterhouse, *Not By Bread Alone; An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*, 4th ed. (Amarillo, TX: Westcliff Press, 2010) p. 140.

¹⁶ Richard A. Seymour, *All About Repentance* 2nd ed. (Lagrange, WY: Integrity Press, 2007) p.36.

¹⁷ Ibid. 66.

¹⁸ Waterhouse, 139.

Jonah rose up to flee ... From the presence of God ... [Jonah 1:3].

It is the start of the disobedient prophet's troubles. God has a mission for him to go and warn the Assyrians that "their wickedness has come up before me." Jonah will have none of it – he heads straight for the port of Joppa, buys a ticket and heads for Tarshish – some think a city on the Atlantic side of Spain! But no sooner had the boat cleared the harbor than God sent a raging storm upon the sea.

The ship's crew is terrified and begins to throw everything overboard. It doesn't bother Jonah; he is taking a nap below. The shipmaster wakes him up – and it is determined that the prophet is the cause of their dire predicament. Jonah says just throw me overboard, but the conscience of the crew would not let them, and they furiously try to row the boat ashore. This doesn't work either.

Finally the crew reluctantly drops Jonah into the sea. God sends the whale – and after three days and nights sloshing around in the whale's belly, Jonah finally tells God that he "will pay all that I have vowed." The great fish disgorges Jonah, and he winds up on the beach where he hears God say once more, "arise, go unto Nineveh." This time he goes, gives God's message, and behold! *All* the Assyrians repent.

We would think that Jonah would be beside himself at the result of his preaching. He is not. He is disgusted that the hated enemy was spared by God. He goes off in a huff, builds himself a "booth" and sits down to see what will happen next. He is depressed. He wants to die. God gives him a shade tree. Jonah loves it. Then God wilts his tree, and he wants to die again. His last words to God are an indignant, "I do well to be angry."

What do we do with Jonah? Who would want to "flee from the presence of God?" What sort of prophet would be so depressed to the degree of wanting to die after his message had saved an *entire city* of 120,000? How is it that the text tells us he grieved over the loss of his "gourd" tree, yet would have God refuse to spare all these people – men, women, children, and even animals? We don't know.

We do know, however, that God loves everyone, even our enemies, and if we ever get the chance to tell a few about the Gospel – *what about one* – we should jump at the chance.

... **put that to my account** ... [*Philemon v. 18*].

Philemon is master to the slave Onesimus, who had run away, ending up in Rome and finding Paul, who subsequently led him to saving faith in Christ. But the great apostle could not continue to harbor a runaway slave. Onesimus must return to his master. Even so, there is danger for Onesimus – runaway slaves could be crucified for desertion.

Paul's extremely personal intercession on behalf of Onesimus is a masterpiece of persuasion. He uses more than a dozen arguments which, when taken together make it impossible for Philemon to resist the great apostle's plea for acceptance of his former slave.

- ☐ Paul appeals to Philemon's basic "good." He tells him he makes "mention of him always in his prayers."
- ☐ He says he knows of Philemon's "love and faith" toward Christ and all the saints, and that it brings him "great joy."
- ☐ He lets Philemon know that Onesimus, "whom I have sent to you, him, this one is my heart."
- ☐ He evokes consideration for his age, and reminds Philemon of his suffering in confinement.
- ☐ "You owe me your very self," says Paul; perhaps he was the instrument of Philemon's conversion.
- ☐ He offers to pay any debt owed by Onesimus, and concludes with the hint of a visit in the near future that would, without saying so, verify Philemon's obedience.

How could Philemon refuse such a plea on behalf of the great apostle himself? What a special, gentle effort on the part of this great man to elicit Philemon's cooperation in accepting the slave who had offended him - supported by love of and faith in Christ and transferred to a simple slave – but a slave who was now their equal in Him.

The bond between the apostle and Philemon was that kind of unity which draws fellow workers in the gospel to each other.¹⁹ As Paul tells the Galatians, "*ye are one in Christ Jesus*, and to the Corinthians, "*all the members of that one body, being many, are one body.*"

There's this special bond among God's children ... and only those who belong to Him know what it is like to experience it.

¹⁹ Walvoord and Zuck, *The New Testament Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983) p.773.

... come up hither, and I will show thee things that must be hereafter ... [Revelation 4:1].

The scene is heaven, and preparations are being made for Christ's Second Coming to regain control of the earth. John sees a vision of a door opened in heaven; he is invited to "come up here," and he is transported there "in the spirit." He hears a voice that sounds like a trumpet. He sees a "throne in the heavens" and somehow he senses that he is seeing God himself – an appearance likened to the flashing brilliance of precious stones. He sees a majestic rainbow surrounding the throne; lightnings, voices and thunders coming from it, seven torches of fire, and in front of the throne a glassy sea. He sees a scene of universal worship of "Him that sat upon the throne" – four living creatures and four and twenty elders casting their crowns before the throne. These ascribe glory, and honor, and power, and thanks to God, whom they acknowledge as Creator.

John sees God holding a scroll in His right hand. It is symbolic of the title deed to the earth; and he weeps as he sees that no one is able to open the scroll that would bring redemption to the world. But then he sees a *Lamb*; it is Christ, and Christ takes the scroll.

Then begins the most incredibly tumultuous scene of praise that John could imagine. He sees and hears a great symphony of worship coming in waves. The four and twenty elders sing a "new song." He hears the "voice of many angels" – an innumerable host – on every side of the throne, ascribing to Christ power, and riches, and wisdom, and blessing, and strength, and honor, and glory. John watches spellbound at this great outpouring of praise for the Lamb. Then he sees "four living ones" – representative of the redeemed, now glorified in heaven – full of eyes, one as a lion, one as a young ox, one as like a man, and the last a flying eagle – who say to the lamb "Thou redeemest us to God by thy blood." These have no rest day and night saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

The hymn says, "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be." John's vision is a glimpse of the incredible experience of worship that believers will be a part of in *That Day*. The apostle wrote it down it as best he could, and it is not impossible to imagine even here and now the scene that he describes.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness [Lamentations 3:22-23].

Words from the weeping prophet. Faithfulness was one of Jeremiah's hallmarks. The son of Hilkiah – some think the very same Hilkiah that found the book of the Law – his uncle Shallum the husband of Huldah the prophetess, Jeremiah had an absolutely thankless calling of God. Describing Jeremiah's woeful existence, G. Campbell Morgan quotes a Dr. Streane in Streane's *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, quoting in turn Lord Macaulay:²⁰

"It is difficult to conceive any situation more painful than that of a great man, condemned to watch the lingering agony of an exhausted country, to tend to it during the alternate fits of stupefaction and raving which precede its dissolution, and to see the symptoms of vitality disappear one by one, till nothing is left but coldness, darkness, and corruption."

Yet here as he grieves over Jerusalem in his lamentations, seeing first hand the unbelievable results of the siege of his beloved city, he can yet say, "Therefore, will I hope in Him, because of the Lord's great faithfulness." Jeremiah was faithful, as he recognized his God was also faithful.

The Scriptures are full of the verity of God's faithfulness. The psalmist tells us that His "*faithfulness* reaches into the clouds," and says that He has "declared His *faithfulness* as thy salvation," and that "with my mouth will I make known Thy *faithfulness* to all generations." He says that "it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord to show forth his lovingkindness in the morning and His *faithfulness* every night." In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul testifies that God is faithful – He "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able." The great apostle tells the Thessalonians, "The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil." The author to the letter to the Hebrews urges his readers to "hold forth the profession of our faith, for He is faithful."

"Faithful" means steady in affection, reliable, trusted. Faithfulness is one of God's infinite attributes. It has been made known to all generations and will continue to be so. Our hope is in Him because of it.

²⁰ G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah*, reprint (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming H Revell Co., 1969) p. 9.

... ***thy sins are forgiven ... [Luke 7:48].***

Where would we be without God's forgiveness? Someone has ventured that God is more anxious to forgive us than we are wont to sin. Given our propensity to fall into even the slightest transgression and God's absolute hatred of sin, that is quite a thought.

We are given ample demonstration of His forgiveness in Scripture. Here in Luke's Gospel we have the story of "a woman of the city, which was a sinner." We do not have to ponder the phrase long to understand what it implies. Knowing that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's home, she brought a vessel full of ointment, stood behind Him weeping, washed His feet with her tears, wiped them with "the hairs of her head," kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Jesus knew this woman, knew her sin, and knew her heart. "Thy faith hath saved thee," He said. "Her sins, which are many, are *forgiven*."

Luke further tells us of the incident whereby a few industrious men, seeing no way to get their friend to Jesus because of the crowd, climbed onto the roof and lowered him through the ceiling. Once again, Jesus, "seeing their faith ... thy sins are *forgiven* thee."

And how can we fail to recall Paul's experience on the road to Damascus as he testifies to his conversion before King Agrippa. Here he tells the king that God had "appeared to him for a purpose, to make him a minister, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God that they may receive *forgiveness* of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Paul goes on in his letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, tying redemption to God's *forgiveness*: "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the *forgiveness* of sins according to the riches of His grace."

The psalmist tells us that "blessed is he whose transgression is *forgiven*, whose sin is covered." And he praises God for His forgiveness: "For thou, O Lord are good, and ready to *forgive*."

God stands ready to forgive at any time. His promise is plainly stated in John's first epistle: "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to *forgive* our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

***Wherein have we?* [Malachi 1:6-7, 2:17, 3:8].**

Everyone in childhood – at some time – has shown some degree of significant vocal disrespect to a parent. There is a somewhat repugnant slang word assigned to such disrespect. It is “sass.” The dictionary calls it, “impudent or unrespectful backtalk.”

And here among the Jewish exiles - having returned to the land, the temple rebuilt, the altar set up, sacrifices offered, feasts and fasts observed – all with perfect outward form and ritual, there is *sass*. God knows their hearts, and through Malachi reveals the real attitude and spiritual condition of His people. And with every accusation from God that reveals their condition there comes in response immediate, insolent reaction: *they sass God*.

□ “I have loved you,” saith the Lord. And the impudent reply, “*Wherein* hast thou loved us?”

□ “Ye have despised the Lord,” and they say, “*Wherein* have we despised Him?”

□ “Ye have polluted My altar.” And the brazen answer, “*Wherein* have we polluted Thine altar?”

“Ye have wearied Me.” And the impertinent retort, “*Wherein* have we wearied thee?”

□ “Return to Me,” and they say, “*Wherein* shall we return?”

□ “Ye have robbed Me.” And the in-your-face response, “*Wherein* have we robbed Thee?”

□ And lastly, “Ye have spoken against Me.” And the final, *sassy* reply, “*Wherein* have we spoken against Thee?”

They just didn’t get it. Their ritual was correct and proper. They were following all the rules. But their lives, their character, their inward nature, their whole hearts were out of communion with God, and they didn’t even know it.

Has our worship become a ritual? Is our church attendance “filling a block?” Are our Bibles gathering dust? Would we, if confronted by God with our spiritual condition say, “Wherein have we?”

Would we *sass* God?

And lead us not into temptation [Matthew 6:13].

Everyone who was ever born has his own weakness to one or more temptations. And by the same token, everyone who is faced with his temptation has a choice; one can yield to it, or one can flee from it.

One thing has to be made clear right away, and that is God does not “lead us into temptation.” “Lead” here should not be misleading. This is a prayer against being brought into the fullness of temptation, to rescue us when it does confront us. The one who does tempt us is clearly defined in Scripture. It is, of course, Satan. Matthew tells us about the “tempter” coming to Jesus. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “lest by some means the tempter have tempted you.” James is specific in telling us that temptation does not come from God, “Let no man say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted of God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man; but every man is tempted when he is *turned away by his own lust*, and enticed.” We are warned about “tempting” temptation: Jesus said, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” And again to His disciples, “And when He was at the place, He said to them, pray that ye enter not into temptation.”

Scripture gives great comfort and encouragement in resisting temptation; it tells us that “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.” Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “There hath no temptation taken you but such is common to man; but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

Finally, James tells us that there is great profit enduring temptation: “Brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience ... and blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life ...”

The best way to handle temptation when it rears up is to stop on a dime, get nine cents change, and *choose* not to succumb to it.

Ye have not passed this way before ... [Joshua 3:4].

The date on the tear-off calendar with the accompanying comment on this passage of Scripture was January 2nd. Shadrach will never forget the day, nor has he ever forgotten the verse. It was the day his life forever changed – the virtually instantaneous shock of transition from uncomplicated, comfortable, independent civilian existence, to the stark rigors of military pilot training. Gone was peace. Gone was relaxation. Gone was quiet. All replaced by constant yelling. Constant berating. Eating “square meals.” Discipline for the smallest infraction of or digression from a multitude of rules. Down at 9pm. Shocked awake to screaming at 4am. Every day. Hours of physical exertion in the blowing sand and dust of Texas beyond what Shadrach had ever been exposed to. One thing was for certain, he certainly had not passed this way before ...

And here Joshua passes on this revelation to the people of Israel. Considering what they went through from this event forward - their entrance into the Promised Land to far into the future – it was the understatement of the ages. Not even Joshua knew what lay ahead; all he knew was that God had talked to him; Moses is dead, you are in charge. “Arise,” God commands, “go over this Jordan ... unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.” And the crossing wasn’t any small event either; God’s general just didn’t say, alright everybody, wade across. This was a very big deal. “Sanctify yourselves,” he said, “for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” The ark led the way, he made them stand still for more words, the waters “stood still,” and on the other side there was a commemoration of the crossing. God had told Joshua, there shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life.” Joshua took it to the bank.

When we get up in the morning, we have no idea what the day will bring. The idea is, as John says, “abide in Him.” As the Psalmist says, “put your trust in the Lord.” As the great apostle said, “be careful for nothing ...”

So should it be with the believer. When we think about *having not passed this way before*, we can take comfort. God is in charge.

... ***they uncovered the roof ... [Mark 2:4].***

The circumstances surrounding Jesus' healing of the paralytic here in Mark's gospel provide a lesson in what men can and will do to bring someone to the Savior. Here we have the Lord in a "house" with "many gathered together," where there was "no room" for anybody else. This house is filled to overflow. There are people on the outside looking in. All the parking meters are taken and the sidewalks are shoulder to shoulder with the curious. There is no way to get close to this place. This is the hottest ticket in town.

Coming down the street are these four guys carrying their buddy on a stretcher. They have heard about Jesus, and they are determined to get their friend an audience. They see the crowd. At first glance it is obvious they are not going to get even close to the door one by one, let alone the four of them with a stretcher. But they have taken a vested interest in their friend's life. They didn't just drop by his house and leave flowers or a get-well card. We can visualize them standing in the street wondering, what are we going to do? One of them says, "Let's get him on the roof." We can picture them maneuvering the stretcher up a ladder or staircase – it is no mean task. On the roof there is an opening to below where Jesus is, but it is nowhere near big enough. *They dismantle the ceiling* until it is. Imagine what the people below are thinking as the plaster begins to fall on them.²¹ What about the man who owns the house? *What are you people doing to my roof!*

Scripture tells us that their efforts were rewarded. After seeing Jesus, the man "arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all."

These four had a burden for their friend. They probably all took off work to take him to see Jesus. They refused to be intimidated by people or obstacles. They were going to do whatever it took to get him to the Savior. They knew it would be worth it. They got together and said, "let's just do it." And they did.

We all know someone who needs to meet the Savior. It probably won't require demolishing a ceiling ...

²¹ Westcliff Bible Church tapes, 8-16-2009

I am that I am ... [Exodus 3:14].

Moses got the call one day as he was herding sheep near Mt. Horeb. Now 80 years old, for all we know he looked forward to a life of obscurity on the back side of the desert with his family. But, of course, we know that his life was about to change. As he is going about tending his sheep he is startled by something incredible; it is a bush, burning but not being consumed by the fire. *What in the world!* Then he hears, "Moses, Moses." *It is ... God!* God tells him to take off his shoes. Why, for heaven's sake. *Because he is standing on holy ground.* God speaks to His future leader about the plight of His people in Egypt, and then Moses gets the astonishing news: he is God's choice to lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land!

Moses tries very hard to convince God that he is not the one to take on this job. God tells him, don't give it a second thought, I will empower you to do miracles, and just for emphasis He promptly gives Moses' mind another spin – He turns his rod into a snake! "Pick it up," says God. We can imagine Moses ... very gingerly, obeying ... and when he does, the rod is restored. "Put your hand to your chest." When he does, it becomes leprous! "Put it back," says God. It is restored clean. Finally a desperate Moses goes too far and tells God to send someone else. It doesn't work.

The burning bush, the experience of hearing God's voice, the snake, the leprous hand, the incredible burden of leading the people thrust upon Moses – would be enough to put anyone's mind into a frenzy. But there was another perhaps more mind-boggling aspect of this experience; Moses wants to know what in the world he should say to the whole nation of Israel when he comes around telling them he had been tapped to lead them out of Egypt – and they want to know, well, who told him he was supposed to do this. God says, just tell them "I am that I am." What? *I am that I am?* What does that mean?

Hereupon lies the very definition of God Himself. He just, simply, ***is*** – the infinite God, the uncaused first cause, the Creator of the universe. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. He is beyond understanding. And He loves us with an infinite love.

It is not unlike the mathematical definition of infinity: one divided by zero. Our minds cannot fathom it.

... And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread his hands toward heaven ... [1 Kings 8:22].

Here we have certainly one of the most wonderful prayers of the Bible, as Solomon asks God's blessing on the new temple – seven years in the building. His “hands spread toward heaven,” the king praises God,

“There is no God like thee. In heaven above, or on earth beneath ... Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee ... hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant ... And when thou hearest, forgive ...”

We are hard-pressed to imagine a more humble, completely yielded, totally devoted prayer, than that recorded here.

But Solomon's prayer was only the beginning: “When Solomon had made an end of praying ... he arose ... from kneeling on his knees ... he blessed all the congregation of Israel, saying,

‘Blessed be the Lord ... There hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us: that he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments ... And let these my words, wherein I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant ... As the matter may require: that all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day.’ ”

Wouldn't it be something if the leader of our nation would recite this blessing to the people sometime? Perhaps each New Year's Day? Or just once?

... ***be not discouraged*** ... [*Deuteronomy 1:21*].

Shadrach was discouraged. The light, small, “piper cub” airplane simply would not behave when he tried to put it down on the grass runway. He had barely begun, and he could sense that he was a few steps from being “washed out” of pilot training. But Shadrach’s instructor wasn’t ready to give up on one of his students. He decided to try something else; he took Shadrach to the municipal airport – where the runway was paved – to see what would happen. For some strange reason the difference was like night and day, and Shadrach got to continue, avoiding great disappointment.

Well, everyone will endure times when one feels like quitting. And wouldn’t you know ... of course ... the Bible, for our edification and understanding, gives us examples of people who went through ordeals and came out the other end to the good. Take Elijah, for instance. Fresh from his wipeout of Ahab and his prophets he gets a flash from Jezebel that there is a contract out on him and in 24 hours he will be history. He goes off into the desert, sits down, and tells God he is finished. But after a little food he gets a new assignment from God. Then we have Hagar, who, having been banished from Abraham and her home, wandered into the wilderness, ran out of water, put her child “a good way off” so she could not see him die, and wept. But God comes to her and tells her to “fear not,” He had heard the child’s voice. And we have the leper Naaman, who, upon being told by Elisha to do 20 miles and douse himself in the Jordan seven times, was ready to chuck it all; but instead decided to try it, and was healed.

The description of the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land is full of the discouragement of God’s people. On the way “from mount Hor by way of the Red Sea ... the soul of the people was much discouraged.” They “murmured” against Moses about water at Marah, food in the wilderness of Sin, about the giants in the Promised Land, and about the death of the rebel Korah. Here, however, the discouragement became disbelief, and it cost them entry to the Promised Land.

We might wonder if discouragement was the emotion that Jesus felt when in the Garden of Gethsemane He “began to be exceeding sorrowful and very heavy ... My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death ... and fell on His face ... and prayed.” Through His sorrow and perhaps discouragement, nevertheless, the result became salvation for all who believe ... He paid for the sins of the world on the cross.

Discouragement will always be on the horizon. Perseverance and obedience through trials, while seeking God, will always bring a good result.

I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt ... [Genesis 45:4].

Joseph is “the man.” Pharaoh had made him so; “thou shalt be over my house and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou ... see, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.” The king put his ring on Joseph’s hand, put a gold chain around his neck, and made him “to ride in the second chariot which he had.”

There is a famine in the land, and Jacob learns there is corn in Egypt. He sends Joseph’s brothers – all but Benjamin – to buy food. They meet Joseph, surely an imposing figure having been so exalted by Pharaoh. They do not recognize Joseph, but “the man” recognizes his brethren, who sold him into slavery years ago, and immediately accuses them of spying.

From here on it is an exercise in intimidation, all designed to ascertain whether there is genuine repentance by the brothers. Joseph accuses them of being spies and puts them in prison. He agrees to give them food, but demands that Simeon be held as hostage while they take the food back to Canaan, and adds that they must return, and they must bring Benjamin with them.

Before they depart Joseph surreptitiously fills their sacks with money. When the brothers return home and discover the “plant,” it fuels their fear of “the man” because they could be accused of theft when they return to Egypt. Jacob is despondent, but yields, allowing Benjamin to return with his brothers to obtain more food from Joseph. Arriving in Egypt again, the problem with the money is solved by Joseph’s steward, who explains, the “God of your fathers” gave them “treasure.” He allows Simeon to rejoin them.

Joseph is emotional when he sees Benjamin, but he is not yet finished with his brothers. When they leave for Canaan with food, Joseph puts his silver cup in Benjamin’s sack – and sends his servant after them to accuse them of stealing it. The brothers are indignant; they impose a death sentence upon themselves if the cup is found. It is – in Benjamin’s sack! “What is this deed you have done?” asks Joseph. The brothers are devastated, to say the least. Judah volunteers slavery to atone for their supposed theft. Then Joseph, convinced of their repentance, reveals himself; “*I am your brother.*” One cannot imagine the overwhelming emotion as all is forgiven and the family is reunited. It is the perfect example of forgiveness on Joseph’s part.

When one forgives, the forgiver and the forgiven are blessed.

***Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth ...
[Ephesians 4:29].***

Ah, the tongue! Here Paul goes on to urge that whatever we say should be *edifying*. Would that we could put the great apostle's admonition into consistent behavior.

On a positive note, Solomon tells us in one of his proverbs that, "a wholesome tongue is a tree of life," and that "the tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright." The psalmist speaks caution, "Lord, who shall abide in thy holy will? He that backbiteth not with his tongue." "Keep thy tongue from evil," he says, "and thy lips from speaking guile." He also tells us that our "tongue shall speak of God's righteousness and praise all the day long." And he beseeches God to "deliver my soul from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue."

But alas, the Psalmist also tells the other side of what the tongue can be: "O mighty man, thy tongue deviseth mischiefs, like a sharp razor, deceitfully." And again, Solomon; "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." The prophets also weigh in on the consequences of an unruly tongue. Isaiah said that Jerusalem and Judah fell "because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord." Jeremiah accused the Judeans of deceiving "every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth. They have taught their tongues to speak lies."

James had much to say about the tongue. First, he warned, "if any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue ... this man's religion is in vain." Secondly, he defines the tongue as "a little member, and boasteth great things; behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth." He calls the tongue "a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among all members as that it defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the course of nature." No man, says James, can tame the tongue. "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

These are harsh words indeed, and when we add to them God's input, "*These six things doth the Lord hate, yea seven are an abomination to Him a lying tongue*" the picture becomes even more alarming.

Think *edifying*. It may require biting the tongue ...

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all [Psalm 34:19].

No one knew the afflictions of the righteous like David, the author of this Psalm. Most of these were self-inflicted, precipitated when “from the rooftop he saw a woman washing herself: and the woman was very beautiful ... and David sent and inquired after the woman.”

David’s great sin with Bathsheba reaped havoc on the king and Israel as well. He faced war all his days. There was rebellion in his own house. His son Absalom “stole the hearts of the men of Israel,” which led to desertion by David’s own people, betrayal by his friends, and banishment from his own country and kingdom. He experienced the murder of one of his sons by another son, the shame of incest-rape of Tamar by her half-brother, the indignity of his wives forced to commit adultery, and finally the death of Absalom. But in spite of all that he suffered as a result of his sin, David never lost his love for God and never ceased to praise Him. “How excellent is thy name in all the earth,” he says. “O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek thee ... Thy lovingkindness is better than life ...”

Hopefully, our lives will not be as negatively eventful as was David’s; nevertheless when we do suffer the inevitable sorrows and setbacks, we have much encouragement and guidance from Scripture:

Peter tells us to, “Cast all our care upon Him, for He careth for you.” Jesus Himself encourages us to “Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The psalmist reminds us that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Paul advised the Philippians to “Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth understanding will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The great apostle heard it from God Himself, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” So it is with each believer.

... the Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy ... [Numbers 14:18].

The dictionary defines mercy as, “compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, or the discretionary power of a judge to pardon.” That certainly fits with the concept of God’s mercy toward us. Mercy is presented in Scripture in several contexts. The psalmist urges, “Praise the Lord, for his *mercy* endureth forever. This same sentence is the last phrase of each of the 26 verses of Psalm 138. David uses the same phrase upon the return of the ark to Jerusalem: “*O give thanks unto the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever ...*” So said also Jehoshaphat’s singers, just prior to the Lord’s defeat of Ammon, Moab, and Edom ... and so said the remnant returning from Babylon upon the laying of the cornerstone of the temple, recorded in Ezra. Micah testifies to this mercy: “Who is a God like thee, that pardoneth mightily ... He retained not his anger forever because he delighteth in *mercy*.” Nehemiah called upon the Lord to “remember me ... And spare me according to the greatness of thy *mercy*.”

But there is also a terrifying cry for *mercy* uttered by the rich man from the confines of hell: “Father Abraham, have *mercy* on me and send Lazarus that he may dip his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.” Man can avoid such a horrifying and futile plea, for in another context the Bible tells us of God’s great mercy toward sinners. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “God, who is rich in *mercy*, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins.” And to Titus the apostle explains, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his *mercy* he saved us.” Peter sums up the believer’s eternal status; “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant *mercy* hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” And finally, the author of the Hebrews invites the redeemed to “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain *mercy*, and find grace to help in time of need.”

God delights in bestowing His mercy upon us. Through it, He saves. It is always available at His throne. So the Psalmist: *praise Him. Give thanks to Him. His mercy endureth forever.*

Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee ... [Psalm 119:11].

There is but one theme of this – appropriately the longest chapter on the Bible. That theme is the Word of God. It seems that God wrote this part of Scripture with a special interest, emphasis, and purpose to let us know how *important* it is to understand how *important* is it that we reverence and obey it.

This chapter is complex and unique – likely on purpose - in its structure:

It is divided into 22 sections of eight verses; in the first section each verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*, then *beth*, the second, then *gimel*, and so on through the 22 letters of the alphabet. There are at least eight different synonyms recorded for God's Word used interchangeably, and it is noteworthy that each of the synonyms used appears at least once in all but three of the 176 verses. And each has its own distinct meaning:

Law: that which rules, guides, directs. A rule on conduct.

Testimonies: That which bears witness to.

Precepts: That which is entrusted to us.

Statutes: That which is engraved; prescribes the way to be taken.

Commandments: That which is ordained.

Judgments: That which has legal sanction.

Word, Way: That inner word of God which man hears through written or spoken word.²²

The psalmist expresses delight, love, obedience, meditation, and rejoicing - in each variant of His Word ...

*Open mine eyes, that I might behold wondrous things out of thy **Law**.*

*Thy **Testimonies** have I taken as an heritage forever.*

*Through Thy **Precepts** I get understanding.*

*I have inclined my heart to perform thy **Statutes** always.*

*Thou through Thy **Commandments** hast made me wise.*

*I will not depart from Thy **Judgments** ... Thy judgments are good.*

*Thy **Word** is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

What an incredible Book He has given us. What an extraordinary Chapter is Psalm 119. Wilbur Wilberforce, the British politician who took on the cause of abolition in the 18th Century, wrote in his diary amidst the turmoil of a political crisis in 1819, "Walked from Hyde Park Common repeating the 119th Psalm in great comfort." Little wonder.

²²Spence and Excell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns, 1950) p. 123ff.

And God created great whales ... [Genesis 1:21].

Overseas years ago, Shadrach received an obligatory invitation to dinner from some aviation executives of a foreign nation. Local – color that foreign – delicacies were served. The fare was exotic, totally alien, and like nothing Shadrach had seen, heard of, or tasted. He recalls, however, there was but one dish in which he was able to indulge, without hazarding great nausea. It was the cuttlefish.

Now, the cuttlefish is a far cry from the “great whales” of Genesis Chapter One. Yet here is another of God’s incredible miracles of Creation.

The cuttlefish is caught for food in the Mediterranean, East Asia, and elsewhere. It is one amazing creature:

The cuttlefish is able to camouflage itself in a range of environments ... it is able to change color spectacularly when excited, flashing rapidly from yellow to red-orange or blue-green ... it has three hearts – one for each set of gills, and one for the rest of the body ... it has eight sucker-lined arms and two prehensile tentacles which can be withdrawn into pouches under the eyes ... it has a complex propulsion and buoyancy system (like that used in submarines) ... it propels itself using a series of spurts, drawing water into a compression chamber which it squeezes to get water out a funnel under the head ... direction changes can be made by swiveling the nozzle of this funnel ... narrowing the funnel controls speed.²³

The cuttlefish uses its camouflage to hunt and sneak up on its prey. When it gets close enough it opens its eight arms and shoots out two long feeding tentacles. On the end of each is a pad covered in suckers that pulls prey toward its beak.²⁴

Changes colors in seconds? Three hearts? Opens eight arms and shoots? Nozzles? Funnels? Jet engine propulsion? A submarine buoyancy system? All in one living creature?

What an incredible engineering design! What an incredible Creator we have!

²³ <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v19/i2/cuttlefish.asp>

²⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/cuttlefish>

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? [Hebrews 2:6].

Here from Dr. Jones, a masterful treatise on the gulf between God and man, while at the same time illustrating His love for mankind, in that He is “mindful of him” ...

By creation indeed, man is the workmanship of God, the image of God Almighty; yet for all that, he was taken out of the ground. He is but a piece of earth; since the fall he is a mass of sin; though he be regenerate, and by faith ingrafted into Christ, yet still he hath sin in him, and must die. Therefore what is this man, that Thou shouldest pour out so many blessings on him? That the sun, moon, and stars should give him light? That the birds of the air, fishes of the sea, the beasts of the field should be his meat? That he should walk as a king on earth? *Especially* that Thou shouldest send Thy only Son to die for him, make him a member of His body, and provide an everlasting kingdom for him in the life to come? What is vile, wretched, sinful corrupted man, that Thou shouldest be so far mindful of him? Protect him with the yield of Thy favors from all dangers? That Thou shouldest vouchsafe him Thy Word and sacraments? That Thou shouldest give him Thy Holy Spirit to help him to pray, and to comfort him in all miseries? We should not be like the peacock spreading forth our golden feathers, and say within ourselves, “What goodly men be we!” We ought to think basely of ourselves – what are we that God should regard us? What are we miserable wretches, that God Almighty should do anything for us? We are the less than the least of all His mercies. Yet we are wont to vaunt of ourselves, do ye not know who I am? Dost thou not consider to whom thou speakest? Yes, very well. I speak to dust and ashes. Let no high conceit of ourselves enter into our minds. Let us think basely of ourselves, What am I O Lord that Thou shouldest give me the last thing in the world? A drop of drink, a crust of bread, a hole to hide my head in, especially that Thou shouldest give me Thy only Son, and together with Him all things that be good? What is any man in the world? Art thou a rich man? God can puff away thy riches and make thee poor. Art thou a wise man? God can take away thy senses and make thee a fool. Art thou a beautiful man? God can send the pox and many diseases to take away thy beauty. Art thou a strong man? God can send sickness and make thee weak. Art thou a gentleman, a knight, a lord? Yet thy breath is in God’s hand. This night he can take away thy soul from thee, and what art thou then? Therefore let us have a humble opinion of ourselves, let us cast down ourselves at God’s feet, and say, “what are we, O Lord, that thou art mindful of us, that thou so graciously visiteth us, especially with Thy everlasting mercies in Christ Jesus.” (W. Jones, D.D.)²⁵

²⁵ Joseph S. Excel, ed., *The Biblical Illustrator*, Hebrews, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1956) p.111.

The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom ... [Luke 16:22].

Believers have reason to believe that their soul's trip to heaven is going to be one unbelievable journey. We have ample scriptural evidence that a redeemed soul, departing this life, enters into the presence of God. Paul tells the Corinthians that he is, "willing rather to be absent from the body, and ... present with the Lord," and to the Philippians, "having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." In John's Book of the Revelation, the apostle speaks of souls seen "under the altar," symbolic of the redeemed's salvation under the blood of Christ. These are observed to be not only *conscious* but also *speaking* – conclusive evidence that the believer's soul and body are separated at death and that the soul is conscious in heaven.

After Christ's resurrection, the term, "Abraham's Bosom" is called the "third heaven." Although Paul mentioned it only in passing, his brief spiritual presence there certainly made an impression on him, having heard "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." It is John who gives us an inkling of the indescribable beauty of the place where believers will be taken, escorted by the angels through the first heaven (our atmosphere), through the second heaven (the innumerable galaxies), and into the third - into the very presence of God.

John's view of this majestic abode (think heaven) must have been magnificent beyond belief. Every shade and tint of color reflecting from God's light shining from within. Blue flecked with gold, emerald green, white with layers of brown and red, fiery red, gold and green, violet, purple, each layer upon layer extending around the four sides of the city. And the gates, twelve of them, each made of a huge pearl (see Revelation 21:18-21).

Imagine. To be whisked through the unimaginable beauty of billions of galaxies, then to arrive in God's presence. It is no wonder that Paul would have a "desire to depart," when he had "finished his course." The passing of a believer simply means he has a ticket for the *ride of his* (new) *life*.

Thy brother came with subtlety and hath taken away thy blessing ... [Genesis 27:35].

Rebekah is a conniver. She favors Jacob, and she is going to see that he gets the patriarchal blessing. Jacob had reservations about the ruse, but his mother told him that if it failed, “upon me be thy curse.” Of course, it did work, and much to the dismay of both Isaac and Esau, Jacob became the head of the family. Esau swears he will kill his brother, and Rebekah has to send Jacob off to Laban. She never saw him again.

On the outskirts of Haran, Jacob runs into Rachel, and it is love at first sight. Laban welcomes Jacob, suggests he work for him and asks what remuneration he might expect. Jacob doesn’t bat an eye; he wants Rachel for his wife. Sly Laban shows the first signs of treachery, and “what goes around comes around” for Jacob is beginning to take form. Laban tells Jacob “it is better that I give her to thee than that I should give her to another man,” certainly not a promise by any stretch. Jacob does his time for Rachel, and the marriage is on.

But the morning after the ceremony, Jacob wakes up to the surprise of his life; *it is Leah in his bed!* He angrily confronts Laban, but the best he can negotiate is another wife - Rachel - for another seven years work.

Twenty years pass, and he fathers eleven children by his two wives and their two handmaidens, the beginning of the 12 tribes of Israel. He then leaves for home – but in the back of his mind there is always ... Esau. On the way he sends servants with a message and 550 animals as a peace offering for his estranged brother. His servants return – there is not so much as a word from Esau. *Esau is coming all right, with an army of 400!* To Jacob’s relief, however, when Esau sees him he runs to embrace him, and all is well.

Well, Isaac’s family could have saved themselves a lot of worry and grief, because right out front, Rebekah was told by God that He was going to choose Jacob to be the one to fulfill His sovereign will of purpose for His people Israel, not Esau. Her scheming was all for naught.

Here is absolute evidence that God’s will of purpose is just that, absolute. It will all culminate one day in the return of His Son for His Church – all those who have put their faith in Christ..

Almost thou persuadest me ... [Acts 26:28].

Paul had returned to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey. He had brought material gifts for the Church. But instead of a warm welcome, the great apostle – full of “the things that God wrought” – is figuratively hit in the face with a bucket of cold water. The Jewish converts bring charges against him to the effect that he is encouraging them to forsake their ancestral faith – “forsaking Moses.” He faces an angry, dust-throwing, garment-tearing mob, and is rescued only by one Claudius Lyceus, the chief Roman official in Jerusalem. The Roman brings Paul before the Sanhedrin, where he is ordered slapped by Ananias, the chief justice. He is confined to the temple prison by Lyceus for his protection. Forty Jews vow to kill him.

Claudius sends Paul to Felix, the Roman governor at Caesarea. The vengeance-mad Ananias leads a delegation – including their lawyer Tertullus – to Caesarea. There is a trial before Felix, who decides to defer judgment, holding Paul instead – the house arrest lasts for two years while Felix waits for a bribe from Paul. Violence breaks out in Caesarea between the Jews and the Greeks, and Felix’s wanton slaughter of the Jews results in a report to Rome. Felix is history, and Festus replaces him. The Jews want Paul to be sent to Jerusalem for trial, and Festus wants to know if Paul will agree. The great apostle knows that he would never arrive alive. He exercises his right as a Roman citizen to appeal directly to Rome and announces, “I appeal to Caesar.”

Into the intrigue involving Paul, Festus, and the Jews, comes the petty, Roman-tolerated King Agrippa, son of the king who had killed James. The scene is set. Amidst the great pomp of the trial, there is Agrippa, his sister/wife Bernice, the Roman procurator Festus, both Roman and Jewish leaders, captains-in-command – and the unassuming tent-maker in chains. Paul presents the gospel to all assembled. Festus interrupts, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.” Agrippa listens.

“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?” is the direct challenge of the gospel to the king by Paul. What follows is one of the saddest statements of all Scripture. The king is here witnessed to by the greatest of all God’s messengers. It is a golden opportunity, unmistakably clear. The king’s tragic reply is, *“Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian.”*

It is an eternally fateful decision to fail to heed the Gospel. Almost won’t get it ...

***... before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee ...
[Jeremiah 1:5].***

But for the specific call of God “even before” he was born, Jeremiah may well have considered himself and his life to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Such, of course, is not the case - the prophet, along with John the Baptist, Samuel, Samson, Paul ... and Jesus - were all “set apart” to God from birth. Jeremiah in his humility said, “Ah, Lord God, I cannot speak, for I am a child.” But he did speak. He fulfilled God’s calling for a lifetime of a terrible physical and mental existence.

Called the “weeping prophet” because of his characteristic expression of grief for the apostate condition of his people, Jeremiah was given the unhappy task of ministering to Judah in its death throes at the end of its existence in the land. Jeremiah witnessed their terrible idolatry and immorality and tried to bring about their repentance, but to no avail.

For his efforts the prophet saw his counsel from God ignored by Judah’s kings, suffered constant derision and ridicule, was beaten and put in stocks, threatened with death, saw his written works destroyed, was imprisoned in cisterns and dungeons, and accused of treason. He was forbidden by God to marry and have children. No miracles were performed to make his ministry more justifiable. He stood by, having no choice but to watch the last of God’s chosen people brutally defeated, their city destroyed, and himself taken in disgrace to captivity. Jeremiah’s grief lasted probably to his death, as he was forced to accompany the last, pitiful remnant into Egypt, where it is assumed that he died, according to Jewish legend, by stoning.

Certainly, Jeremiah’s eternal reward is great. And though most believers will not be called upon by God to labor under such extreme circumstances, all have been given talents, and, it follows, tasks to complete for God.

Such faithfulness brings rewards, perhaps like that which Jeremiah is enjoying.

Why ...? [Habakkuk 1:3].

Habakkuk is in a dither. He is a prophet, a well educated, sensitive man, living in Judah during the reign of the ungodly, evil King Jehoiakim amidst the rampant idolatry, corruption, and violence among God's people. Why, he wonders, does he have to see all this injustice? Why does God tolerate all this evil? Why is He so indifferent? Why is He so insensitive? How long is all this going to go on? Why doesn't He *do something*?

Habakkuk takes his complaint to God – and God's answer is I **am** doing something. But when the prophet finds out what it is God has in mind he is even more bewildered as God drops a bombshell on him. Judah, he is told, is going to be punished by Babylon – the Chaldeans.

Habakkuk can't believe it. The savage Chaldeans, the most pitiless, barbaric, and fierce people on the planet, have been tapped by God to punish Judah. Babylon was a law unto itself, "swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk." Their "hordes advance like a desert wind, they gather prisoners like sand ... they sweep past like the wind." Surely God would not use a people even less righteous than the Judeans themselves to destroy the nation?

Here God passes on a great spiritual truth to His prophet. He explains to him that "the just shall live by his faith;" that even though the wicked may prosper for their "season" and the fact that God is in control may not necessarily be clear or fulfilled, He will deal with the wicked in His appointed time. God reminded Habakkuk that He was anything but indifferent to evil, and that he was "in His holy temple," and that "all the earth should keep silence before him." In other words, "Habakkuk, live your life by faith, knowing that I am in charge."

Just like Habakkuk, we see ample evil in all forms prospering throughout the earth, and sometimes wonder if God might be indifferent to it. He is not. He is in His holy temple, observing, directing, controlling. And in *That Day* He will make all things right.

... who shall separate us from the love of God ... [Romans 8:35].

Perhaps Paul's exclamation regarding the eternality of God's love and His salvation through faith in Christ's work on the cross bringing forgiveness of sins has to be the most comforting in Scripture. The Bible is full of assurance that once we have trusted Christ to remove all our sin we can have that supreme confidence that no one, nothing – "tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, life, death, angels, principalities, powers, height, depth – nor any other creature – can separate us from His love which is in Christ Jesus." That, one should think, should cover it.

When we trust in Christ – upon whom our sins are then imputed, *His righteousness* is credited to our account. God now sees us as "in Christ;" we are declared *legally just*. It is *Christ's righteousness*, not ours, therefore, that forms the basis of our continued eternal standing with God. It follows then, that since Christ's righteousness is *eternal*, so it is with our salvation. One might ask, when is Christ going to lose His righteousness? Well, never. And neither, of course, will the believer.²⁶

Scripture is full of this assurance: John's Gospel tells us, "I give unto thee *eternal* life ... no man is able to pluck them out of the father's hand." And, "He shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you *forever* [John 14:16-17]. Paul uses the analogy of "sealing:" to the Ephesians he says, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* to the day of redemption." And, "... having also believed, ye were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance." Paul to the Corinthians: "who also *sealed* us, and gives us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." To the Romans, "There is therefore now *no condemnation* to those who are in Christ Jesus." Paul anticipated that there would be some who would say that since we are eternally saved, that gives us license to sin. "God forbid," said the great apostle repeatedly. The old sin nature will yet plague the believer, but God stands ready to forgive. Our fellowship with Him as *Father* may be broken, but never our eternal status with Him as *Judge*.

There just shouldn't be any confusion or angst here. We might lose our car keys, our sense of direction, even our lives. But *never* our salvation. Once one has trusted in Christ's death on the cross to pay for ones sin, the (now) believer is become legally justified, sealed to the "Day of Redemption," eternally secure. Eternal means, "lasting forever, always existing, permanent, unending, going on without existing." *Eternal means eternal*. When one trusts Him, he is *sealed* until he sees Him face-to-face.

²⁶ (See Steven Waterhouse, *Blessed Assurance, A Defense of the Doctrine of Eternal Security*, 2nd ed. (Amarillo TX: Westcliff Press, 2004) pp.3-5.

... **be not afraid** ... [Luke 12:4].

There are nearly 200 references to the word *afraid* in Scripture. Nebuchadnezzar “saw a dream which made me *afraid*.” With the disobedient Jonah sleeping in the hold during the storm, the mariners were *exceedingly afraid*. Haman was “*afraid* before the king” – for good reason – he was about to swing from the yardarm he had erected for Mordecai. Saul was “*afraid* of David.” David was “*afraid* of the Lord that day,” when he witnessed the death of Uzzah for touching the ark. Job was “*afraid* of all my sorrows.” The children of Israel, gathered at Mizpah were “*afraid* of the Philistines.” When he heard that Herod’s son Archelaus was ruling in Judea, Joseph was *afraid* to go there with Mary, and wound up in Nazareth. Paul told the Romans that they must obey governments and if they “did that which was evil, they should be *afraid*.” And on the road to Damascus as the “great light round about” Paul shone, “they that were with me were *afraid*.”

But just as there are scores of incidents of fear recorded, so there are equal examples of exhortations to **not** be afraid. The writer to the Hebrews advises that “the Lord is my helper, in God will I put my trust, I will not be *afraid* what man can do unto me.”

Luke quotes Jesus telling His disciples to “be not afraid of them that kill the body.” After all, once the body is killed, there is nothing else they can do. What one really needs to fear is God Himself, who can and does do infinitely more – He has the “power to cast into hell.” Jesus continues, “take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat ... what ye shall put on.” He draws on nature – God feeds the ravens, doesn’t He? They don’t sow or reap, they don’t have barns – but God still takes care of them. Aren’t we of greater value than the ravens? And, “consider the lilies,” He says, they toil not, they spin not, but Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. So if God clothes the lily – and the grass – “how much more will he clothe you?” He reminds us that the nations of the world seek after material things, such as the example of the rich man whose trust in his riches and full barns and his “eat, drink and be merry” attitude did him no good. Instead, the answer to all of this is to “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you ... it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”

And in the human realm, while the nation was in the dark days of World War II, the president of the United States proclaimed, “We have nothing to fear ... but fear itself.”

“The Lord is my salvation,” the psalmist says, “the strength of my life, I will not be *afraid*.”

In the last days, perilous times shall come ... [2 Timothy 3:1].

"This know also," says Paul, as here he unleashes a nightmarish description of the nature of man in the "last days." These "last days" constitute the waning times of God's dispensation of grace, as He pleads with the lost to come to Christ. In this time, says the great apostle, there will be "lovers of selves" – exclusive of any regard for anyone else. They will be "covetous" – looking at what they *would* have rather than what they *do* have. "Boasters, proud, blasphemers," using their hearts and tongues that God gave them for His praise to curse the One who blesses them. "Unthankful, without natural affection" – exhibiting the lack of love and caring for others. "Truce-breakers, false accusers, unholy, disobedient to parents, fierce, traitors, heady, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power" – an unnatural appearance of piety with no outward manifestation of it in their lives.

Paul goes on in the next chapter to warn that men "will not endure sound doctrine." They will endure only "teachers" that will avoid biblical doctrine; they will not tolerate having their consciences convicted of sin. They will have "itching ears," wanting only entertainment, leaving church feeling good about themselves – assuming they attend.

Sound like today? Well, of course, only God knows when these last days will arrive. To be sure, there have been blasphemers, false accusers, and lovers of pleasure since the beginning of time.

So what do we do with all this kind of behavior of mankind in our own times? Someone has paraphrased, "where sin abounds, the more our grace should abound." Paul exhorts believers to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," and to "walk worthy of the Lord being fruitful in every good work."

We do not have a schedule for the "last days," nor do we know when Christ will return. All we know is Scripture tells us that He has promised that He is coming again. And in the meantime, as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ..."

...so be ye holy, for I am holy ... ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy ... [1 Peter 1:16, Genesis 19:12].

The Bible defines many things as “holy.” Among them, land, a nation, a mountain, prophets, Name, angels, covenant, Scriptures, a kiss, the priesthood, the temple, ground, heaven, and many others. “Holiness,” defined, can be called dedicated or devoted to the service of God, the church, or religion; spiritual, pure. Nevertheless, the benchmark of holiness is the character of God Himself. It is illustrated by Isaiah, as he refers to the creatures in God’s presence that cover their faces and cry, “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

Moses was not allowed to see God because of His pure holiness. Holiness is the pure separation from evil. Job explained it; “far be it from God, that He should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity.” John said Christ was manifested to take away our sin; for “in Him is no sin.” The author of the Book of Hebrews calls Him “Holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” God, then, is the standard for holiness, for He is infinitely holy.

So where does this leave us? Ideally, somewhat like Isaiah, who confesses, “Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips ...” The prophet realized that God’s holiness allowed him to see and recognize his own unholiness. When one comes to this realization and measures his or her own unholiness against God’s holiness, it is obvious that sin needs to be dealt with. One comes to the Cross, and trusts Christ to take it away.

And what then? Scripture is full of admonition for believers to “be holy.” James suggests we keep ourselves “unspotted from the world.” Paul urges us to let our “conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.” He reminded Timothy that God “hath saved us, and called us with an *holy* calling ... according to His own purpose and grace.” To the Romans the great apostle challenged, “present your bodies a living sacrifice, *holy*, acceptable unto God.” And finally, Peter, giving perhaps the most challenging encouragement; “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all *holy* conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting into the coming of the day of the Lord.”

Certainly one will never come close to God’s benchmark of holiness. Perhaps just the perception of it may inspire to be “holy, acceptable unto God.”

Pride goeth before destruction ... [Proverbs 16:18].

Elsewhere in the Proverbs we learn that “when pride cometh, there cometh shame ...” and that “a man’s pride shall bring him low.” Scripture gives examples where pride brings destruction. There is Nebuchadnezzar, for instance, who one day “walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.” Full of pride, he exclaimed, “is this not the great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?” Scripture wastes no time in announcing the hasty fall of Nebuchadnezzar; it happened to him while “the word was in the king’s mouth” – his kingdom was departed from him.

Yet another prime example is that of King Herod Agrippa, whose demise was as swift as Nebuchadnezzar’s. After condemning his jailers in Judea because of Peter’s escape he went to Caesarea, where he appeared on his throne in “great pomp,” lording it over folk from Tyre and Sidon who were groveling before him over a disagreement. After making an “oration” Agrippa allowed himself to be worshipped as a god, hearing the people say, “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” And, “immediately the angel of the Lord smote him.” The historian Josephus tells us that he fell into the deepest sorrow, a severe pain also arose in his bowels, and he died after five days of illness.

There is, however, an instance where one man overcame his pride and came out a “new” man; it was Naaman, who, with all his pomp and circumstance descended upon Elisha, only to be given a demeaning instruction to dip himself in the muddy Jordan River to cure his leprosy. Fortunately, Naaman swallowed his pride and did as Elisha instructed.

Proverbs additionally warns us that God hates a “proud look,” and that pride is an abomination to Him. Pride may be the devil’s easiest tool to use against us. It is so easy for us to be proud of ourselves. It would be well for us to remember the One who “made himself of no reputation ... took on the form of a servant ... humbled himself ... and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

For I am fearfully and wonderfully made: [Psalm 139:14].

Recently a baby girl was born into Shadrach's family weighing but one pound and six ounces. Medical science has come to the point where this little one not only survived, but was, a few months later, what we would call a "normal baby." She is ... *a life!*" Scientific journals tell us that the body of this "life" will now develop more than 600 muscles and more than 200 separate bones, within which will be a manufacturing system producing blood cells. Her heart will pump more than 5,000 quarts of blood – every day. Her nervous system will move nearly 350 feet per second, carrying messages to and from the brain. Her ear will be capable of sensory response to sound where pressure at the ear drum is no greater than two ten-thousandths of a millionth of barometric pressure. This pressure will move the eardrum about one-hundred-millionth of an inch, a dimension about one-hundredth width of a hydrogen molecule, the tiniest of all known molecules.

Yet another incredible example of God's creative miracles is blood clotting. It is so commonplace that we do not give it much thought. Biochemical analysis, however, shows that it is a very complex, intricately woven system of a score of interdependent protein parts ...

... about 2 or 3 percent of the protein in blood plasma consists of a protein complex called fibrinogen ... fibrinogen is a complex of six protein chains ... normally fibrinogen is dissolved in plasma, floating around, until a cut causes bleeding. Then another protein, thrombin, sets in motion the final step of a controlled process ... thrombin consists in the inactive form, prothrombin. Because prothrombin cannot cleave fibrinogen to fibrin, a protein called Stuart factor cleaves prothrombin turning it into active thrombin that can cleave fibrinogen to fibrin to form the blood clot ... But it turns out that another protein, accelerin, is needed to increase the activity of Stuart factor ... the two cleave prothrombin fast enough to do good.²⁷

Does anyone but a scholar in biology understand this? Can it be anything other than gobbledegook to us? Can we ... those of us with just ordinary, reasonable intelligence ... even perceive how something like this *actually works*? Well, no, until we remember that God is the author of it all.

When we next cut a finger, listen to a voice, or think, perhaps it will remind us of how great a Creator we have. We may not remember one hundred-millionth of an inch, or accelerin ... prothrombin ... thrombin ... enzymes ... fibrin, or Stuart factor, but we can marvel how truly fearfully and wonderfully He made us.

²⁷ Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Touchstone, 1996) pp. 79ff.

... ***freely ye have, freely give ... [Matthew 10:8].***

One of the characteristic ethics of the Christian life – that which should distinguish the believer from others – is that of giving. As a matter of fact, it was Jesus' demand that we should never turn away from those who ask, and perhaps some of the loveliest language of Scripture is found in the recital of the Jewish law of giving found in the Book of Deuteronomy:

“And if there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of the gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother. But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth ... thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him; because for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, ‘Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.’ ”

Certainly one of the preeminent examples of giving of oneself in complete trust in God to provide is that of one George Muller:

Muller wrote frequently about the stewardship of money and the non-reliance on earthy riches. His personal income from unsolicited gifts (he refused any kind of salary) was more than 2,000 pounds in 1870, but he retained only 300 for himself and his family; the rest he gave away. He never asked any person (except God) for anything. Muller began in 1836 housing orphans in Britain; in his lifetime he cared for 10,024 orphans. Many times he received unsolicited food donations only hours before they were needed; on one well documented occasion they gave thanks for breakfast while all the children were sitting at the table, even though there was no food in the house. As they finished praying, the baker knocked on the door with sufficient bread to feed everyone.²⁸

Jesus echoed Moses' words in His Sermon on the Mount, “give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.” And Paul tells of divine blessings as he writes to the Corinthians, “... every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

Someone has said, it is not what we give; it is what we have left over ...

²⁸ Wikipedia, George Ferdinand Muller (September 28, 1805 – March 10, 1898).

... and it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah ... [Genesis 29:25].

If it were not for God's sovereign will in her life, Leah might be considered one of the sadder characters of the Bible. Here we find her having to take the brunt of her father Laban's trickery of Jacob. She is veiled by her father, sent to Jacob's dark bed chamber, and in the morning light she awakes to the fury of the man she has just spent the night with, having given herself in official marriage.

Jacob may have been in shock upon the morning's discovery, but Leah had to feel an equal degree of shame and humiliation. She had no say in the deception. Obviously Laban wanted to marry her off at the first opportunity. She obeyed her father, knowing the consequences. She knew all along that Jacob loved her sister Rachel. She knew that throughout her life she would be Jacob's "second best." Whereas sisters are meant to be best friends Leah felt the jealousy and anger of Rachel when the Lord "saw that Leah was hated" – less loved. But in His infinite sovereignty, God "opened her womb," and she gave birth to six sons – Reuben, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulon, Levi, and Judah.

Even though Leah's tender heart may have been saddened when her affection for Jacob went unanswered, she nonetheless recognized that her fruitfulness was a special mark of God's favor. When Reuben was born, she named him "behold a son" – the Lord has looked on my affliction. Next, Simeon, "answer" – she had prayed and been given an answer. And Levi, - "union," the reconciler. And the most significant, Judah – "praised," for this son was the very ancestor of the Savior. We may well wonder if Leah was not God's choice for Jacob after all.

Probably one of the most comforting aspects of life is knowing that one can choose to follow God's will for his or her life. Circumstances may not be all that pleasurable, but confidence in His purposes can overshadow everything.

There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets ... [Daniel 2:28].

Throughout Scripture we are told of many instances wherein God worked through dreams. He appeared to Solomon to inquire “what I shall give thee?” He told Laban that he had better not do harm to Jacob after he caught up with his fleeing son-in-law. In a dream He informed Joseph that he should “fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.” In Genesis we find Pharaoh in a deep funk because he could find no one who could tell him what his dream about the cows and ears of corn meant.

Here we have King Nebuchadnezzar - and his dream about the great image - in a similar quandary as was Pharaoh. This case was especially challenging because the king couldn’t even remember what he had dreamed about! His “wise men” were faced with an impossible task – how could they interpret something without even a hint of what the king dreamed? Nebuchadnezzar is “angry and very furious”, and “commanded to destroy all the wise men in Babylon.”

Daniel falls into the group marked for extinction, but knows nothing of it until the king’s captain, Arioch, comes to arrest him. “Why the hasty decree?” ... what’s the hurry? asks Daniel – and somehow wrangles an interview with Nebuchadnezzar. He buys some time and turns the whole thing over to God. God reveals “the secret” of the king’s dream about the great image to him, and Daniel records the great prophecy of “things that were to come to pass in the latter days.” Daniel becomes “ruler over the province, and chief over all the wise men of Babylon.”

Well, the days of interpreting dreams are over, but God’s timely use of His faithful remnant will always exist. And as Paul admonished Timothy, “be faithful in and out of season.” In other words, we must prepare ourselves through the diligent study of His Word so that as we stand in the wings schooled in the knowledge of His doctrines, we are prepared for God’s call when it comes.

Like Joseph and Daniel.

Thou hast done foolishly, for thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God ... [1 Samuel 13:13].

Saul might be considered a train wreck from the very beginning. He was not God's choice for a king for Israel; but the people had demanded one and He gave them Saul.

The Bible is big on obedience and disobedience. Unfortunately, Saul succumbed to the latter thrice, and it brought about his downfall and death. First, he was at Gilgal with the "distressed" people of Israel, waiting for the Philistines to attack. Samuel had said he would show in seven days, and when the prophet was not on time, Saul "forced himself" to offer a burnt offering, an act expressly forbidden by God.

Then, because the Amalekites had attacked Israel during The Exodus, God told Saul to utterly destroy them and all they possessed. Instead, Saul brought back the best of Amalekite possessions and their king. Samuel shows up in the morning and is advised by Saul that "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But Samuel wants to know "what meaneth the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen?" It is more disobedience, and Samuel tells Saul, because he has neglected the word of the Lord, the "Lord rejecteth thee."

Lastly, camped at Mt. Gilboa with "all Israel," Saul, seeing the Philistines amassed against him, "was greatly afraid" and decided to consult the witch of Endor, a "woman that hath a familiar spirit" – one who consulted the dead to determine the future. Such was strictly forbidden by the Law. The witch, not recognizing Saul, brought up ... *Samuel!* ... terrifying everybody at the séance. Samuel delivers the news that not only will the king be "delivered unto the hand of the Philistines," but that "thou and thy sons will be with me." It is all over for Saul.

Disobedience is serious; just how serious is the reminder by Paul to the Romans, "For *by one man's disobedience* (that, of course, being Adam) many were made sinners." Conversely the great apostle urges the opposite – obedience – as he writes to the Corinthians, "... casting down ... every high thing that exacteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thing to the *obedience* of Christ, and having a readiness to revenge all *disobedience*." And, there are rewards for *obedience*; consider God's words to Abraham, "and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast *obeyed* My voice."

And of course, we have the infinite example of obedience ever before us, as Paul reminds the Philippians of Jesus; who "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

He appointed the moon for seasons ... [Psalm 104:19].

One of God's endless miracles of Creation is the movement of the tides, governed by the earth's moon. As it is in any tidal body of water on the earth, the times of high and low tides are discernable by man.

For many years, Shadrach lived on an inland river from the Atlantic Ocean. One of the more pleasant pastimes of living on the water was watching the porpoise swim by the dock – always in pairs, gracefully gliding in and out of the surface of the water. They appeared only near high tide. If they were to be seen, then, it was necessary to be aware of the times of these tides. For this information the local newspaper could be consulted, in which were given not only the times of high tide at the mouth of the river at the ocean, but also upstream – *right at Shadrach's dock!*

High tide at ... well ... Shadrach's dock, for instance, "will be at 9:48am." Not "about" 9:45am, or "about" 9:50am. 9:48. Set your watch by it. Look for the porpoise. God has made it that way. His Creation runs on an exact schedule. It is His presence that makes it so. We take it for granted; we consult the paper, and we don't stop to realize why it is so.

The Bible reminds us frequently of this kind of universal management by God. Solomon tells us, "The sun ariseth and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continuously, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. And the rivers run into the sea, and the sea is not full." The Psalmist marvels, "He causeth the vapor to ascend from the ends of the earth, he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures," and, "He watereth the hills from his chambers ... he sendeth the springs unto the valleys." And Job; "He saith to the sun, be thou on the earth, likewise to the small rain, to the great rain ... out of the south cometh the whirlwind, and cold out of the north."

"Look for these graceful creatures today somewhere near high tide, which will occur at 9:48am and at 8:46pm." Not between *this* and *that* time. Not *about* some other time.

How marvelous is God's presence in His Creation. When we feel the wind, see the rain or snow, or observe a tidal river ... and perhaps the graceful porpoise ... we should be reminded not only of His greatness, but of His presence in our midst.

For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire ... [Deuteronomy 4:24].

Fire is mentioned frequently in Scripture. For example, the *destructive* force of God's fire destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah – they suffered “the vengeance of eternal fire.” When Korah and his cronies provoked the Lord, “there came out a fire from the Lord” and consumed the 250 that offered incense. In Elijah's tête-à-tête with Ahab and his false prophets, “the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.” When Israel's King Ahaziah sent a “captain of 50” to round up Elijah, “there came down fire from heaven and consumed him and his fifty” ... twice! And Nahum's prophecy tells of God's fury “poured out like fire” upon Ninevah.

Alternatively, there are instances of the *benevolence* of God's fire. He led Israel, going “before them by night in a pillar of fire.” When Solomon made an end of “his great prayer of dedication of the temple and made offerings to the Lord, fire came down from heaven and consumed the offerings.” When God selected Gideon to serve His people as judge, Gideon needed a little nudge, so “the angel of the Lord” arranged a “fire out of the rock,” leaving no doubt that God would be with His mighty man of valor.

But Scripture also tells us that the Lord God “is a consuming fire.” Daniel likens Christ's eyes as “lamps of fire,” John, “as a flame of fire,” each referring to His fire of final *judgment* upon those who refuse the free, infinite gift of God's Son as payment for their individual sin. Matthew gives a terrifying reference to judgment; “those on the left hand, depart from me ... into everlasting fire.” Said Paul to the Thessalonians, “When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” it will be “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God.” And in terrible finality in John's vision of the Revelation, “whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire.”

God's fire can be a blessing. But we must ever be admonished with Malachi's words, “Who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth. For he is like a refiner's *fire* ...” and those who refuse Him will be “tormented with *fire* and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”

It will be an unimaginable, eternal horror.

... a woman of the city ... stood behind Him weeping and began to wash His feet with her tears ... [Luke 7:37-38].

Tears are a function of our emotions. Scripture gives us a broad overview of how tears reflect the inward-most feelings of man. In Psalm Six David, for instance, “waters his couch with tears” as he pleads with God to relieve him of his sufferings. In Psalm 39 he asks God to “hold not thy peace at my tears,” to end God’s chastening for his sin and “treat him no longer as a stranger.” Psalm 80 describes the tragic spiritual failure of Israel, that within their oppressive captivity God is feeding them with “the bread of tears.” In Ecclesiastes, the preacher “considered” all the “oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter.” Jeremiah – the “weeping prophet” – spoke repeatedly of his great grief at Judah’s captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem: “Mine eye shall ... run down with tears O that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep for the destruction of the daughter of my people.” Ezekiel would have shed tears when God took away his wife, but God said, “Neither shalt thou mourn or weep, neither shall thy tears run down.” And perhaps we have an instance of “crocodile tears” where the prophet Malachi accuses the people of hypocritically “covering the altar of the Lord with tears.”

In the New Testament we have the instance of a man who appears to be at the end of his rope, as Jesus exorcises the demon from his son: he says, with *tears*, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” And what a touching description of worship Luke gives us here: the “woman of the city, which was a sinner,” crying *tears* of great emotion as she “brought an alabaster box of ointment ... and began to wash Jesus’ feet with her *tears*.” Paul suffered what might be called tears of frustration as well as sorrow and suffering, as he served God “with all humility of mind and with many *tears*.” And the great apostle exhibited the virtues of a tender-hearted pastor as Luke records that for three years he “ceased not to warn everyone night and day with *tears*.” Even Jesus, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, “offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and *tears* unto Him that was able to save Him from death.”

Tears of suffering, tears of sadness, tears shed in great times of trial, frustration and grief, perhaps even of joy. But it does not end here. Scripture also brings us to the day when believers will no longer shed tears – for John tells us that “the Lamb, that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes ...”

... of whom are *Phygellus* and *Hermogenes* ... [2 Timothy 1:15] ...

Who are these guys? We know about Habakkuk, Obadiah, and probably Job's three so-called friends; Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. But *Phygellus*? *Hermogenes*? Well, unfortunately, these two characters have been, along with others, identified in Scripture for all to see and recognize in a negative sense. Not, of course, to the degree of the devil himself, but still in a shameful context - even if it is of less significance.

Paul enters into the Holy Record the names of those who deserted or otherwise failed him: "*Demas*, who hath forsaken me;" "*Alexander* the coppersmith did me much harm;" *Phygellus* and *Hermogenes* "turned away from me." And how can we neglect to mention the two bickering women, *Euodius* and *Syntychē*, whom Paul admonishes to "be of the same mind." Know anybody who named their daughters after these two?

However, there are also the other obscure that have had their names recorded forever in God's Word in a favorable light. In the Old Testament we find David charging Solomon to "show kindness unto the sons of *Barzillai*," a man who, when David was fleeing Absalom, brought provisions to the king. Or how about the guy who rescued Jeremiah from death in the cistern, remember *Ebedmelech*, the Ethiopian, the king's slave who lifted Jeremiah out with "rotten rags and cords?" And in the New Testament we have *Onesiphorus*, for example, master of the slave Philemon, who "oft refreshed" Paul. John records in his third epistle that "*Demetrius* (not to be confused with the Demetrius who incited the mob against Paul) hath good report of all men," and testifies of one *Gaius*, who he noted was "walking in the truth."

Well, of course, we won't have our names so widely read as these characters. But - right now - there is a record being made of believer's works - and one day that record will be read to each as God evaluates works done in His Name in this life. If Christians are diligent in serving Him, perhaps works of wood, hay and stubble won't create too hot a fire.

Rather one might hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant..."

And Hilkiah the high priest said, "I have found the book of the law ..." [2 Kings 22:8].

Josiah was Judah's 16th king. He was but eight years old when he began his reign, assuming the throne from his father Amon. As a result of the leadership of Josiah's grandfather Manasseh, as well as his father Amon, Judah was a nation in total disobedience of God. Manasseh, "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," later repented and "took away the strange gods," but it had no effect on the people. When Manasseh died, Amon took over, and Scripture records that he "also did that which was evil ... and trespassed more and more than Manasseh." By the time Josiah took Judah's throne, the nation was in full idolatrous rebellion.

When Josiah was 16, he "began to seek after the God of David." When he was 20, he began to "purge Judah and Jerusalem from idols and idolatry." He broke down, cut down, broke in pieces, made dust of, and burnt the idols. When he was 26 the young king began to "repair the house of the Lord." It was then that Hilkiah the priest "found a book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses."

Josiah was stunned when the Law was read to him. He perceived at once that the wrath of God would fall upon his people "because our fathers have not kept the law of the Lord." He "made a covenant before the Lord." He "caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it." He made all that were present to serve the Lord their God. And all his days they "departed not from following the Lord."

Things are no different today from what they were thousands of years ago in Josiah's time. When God's Word is "found," it brings repentance and a sincere desire to follow Him and His precepts. Without it nations and peoples fall into idolatry - in whatever form - and destruction is sure to follow.

And the Lord took me as I followed the flock ... and said unto me, go ... [Amos 7:15].

It is worth noting from Scripture that when God picks a man to do His work, he picks a busy one:

Here we have Amos busy with his flocks as God tells him to go and prophesy to Israel that they “shall surely go into captivity.”

Moses was busy with his father-in-law’s flocks on the back side of the desert when God appeared to him out of the burning bush to tell him that he was the one who was going to lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

Gideon was busy threshing wheat by the winepress so that it could be saved from the Midianites who were stealing Israel’s stock and robbing them of their food, making it necessary to hide it in caves, when God told him to “go in this thy might, and save Israel from the Midianites.”

When Samuel came looking for a king for Israel, David’s seven brothers were paraded before the prophet, while David was off busily tending the sheep.

When God called Elisha to carry on Elijah’s ministry, Elisha was “plowing with twelve yoke,” a task demanding considerable strength and skill.

And finally, Jesus, “walking by the sea of Galilee,” saw Peter and Andrew busy fishing. “Going on from thence, He saw James and John, mending their nets,” and called all four.

Amos, Moses, Gideon, David, Elisha, Peter, Andrew, James and John – all busy when they were called. The adage goes, “if you want a job done, give it to a busy man.” As Zechariah admonishes, “let your hands be busy.” Paul challenged the Thessalonians, “we beseech you brethren, that ye ... work with your hands.” Solomon tells us that, “the fool foldeth his hands together ...”

God is always waiting to use those who are busy seeking His will.

“Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... I see four men loose”... [Daniel 3:24b, 25a].

Here, three young Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego, whom Nebuchadnezzar has “set over the affairs of Babylon,” were tattled on by “certain Chaldeans.” The three Jews, they reported, did not serve the heathen gods, nor did they worship the great image that the King had set up in the plains of Diva with great fanfare. Nebuchadnezzar, exhibiting haste and anger, was “full of fury;” even the “form of his visage was changed” against the three rebellious young men. He didn’t think about it long either. He fired up the furnace seven times hotter than normal – losing a few of his furnace-stokers in the process – then had his “mighty men” bind the victims in full clothing and drop them into the inferno. Well, he probably thought, that should do it. But he was in for a shock. When he looked into the furnace expecting ashes, he saw not only the three walking around, but ... *four!* And one of the four, he was made to perceive by God, was “of the form like the Son of God.” The three were saved through the fire.

Let us consider for a moment an illustration – possibly a poor one. Noted on a recent visit to the local animal shelter, cowering all by himself in the far corner of a large cage, was this diminutive, frightened puppy with the standard, clock-ticking-away 72-hour death sentence hanging over his head. His eyes said, “*what about me?*” He was adopted on the spot. One week later an outbreak of distemper invaded the facility and all the animals had to be destroyed. This little fellow is known now as, well ... Shadrach! - he had been saved, symbolically, from the “fire.”

This is, of course, a distant and perhaps even inappropriate analogy, and infinitely removed from human circumstance. Nevertheless, we are saved from an eternal, literal fire when we trust in the Lord Jesus to take our sin away through our belief that He died for us and rose from the dead.

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked from the fiery furnace Nebuchadnezzar “promoted them in the province of Babylon.” When one puts his faith in Christ, he receives a “promotion” as well. It is to eternal life.

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you? [Galatians 3:1].

Paul is unhappy with the Galatians. How come, he wants to know, is it that “ye are so soon removed from me that called you unto the grace of God into another gospel?” He had given them the gospel of grace, and they had fallen prey to the Judaizers, who came along and convinced them that grace wasn’t enough, they had to also obey the Law - and not only that, convinced them that keeping the Law would make them perfect. In other words, works were involved.

The great apostle fired on them with both barrels. “Let me ask you,” he says, “did you receive the spirit by the works of the Law or by hearing of faith?” “Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by flesh?” No man, he said, “is justified by the Law in the sight of God.” “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law.” Paul wants to know, “after that ye have known God” ... why are they turning to the “weak and beggarly elements” that put them back into “bondage.” “Stand fast!” thunders the great apostle, “in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” and don’t get tangled up with the Law again.

Alas, we have the same problem today. There are, to be generous, well-meaning people running around writing books and telling others all kinds of ways to be saved, none of which are supported in Scripture. Some would have us believe that we must repent of all our sin before we can even think about being saved. Impossible! Ask Jesus into your heart, says one. Pray this prayer says another. Come forward and confess your sin. Give your heart to Jesus. Make Jesus Lord of your life. Confess Jesus publicly. Be baptized to be saved.

No wonder the lost are confused. No wonder even some believers question their salvation. No wonder some just give up. *Works on our part are not involved.* Paul has words for those who “pervert the gospel.” Of those who preach any other gospel, he says, “let them be accursed.” Strong words indeed.

The gospel is simple: *Christ died for sin and rose from the dead.* One believes in the finished work of Christ on the Cross and accepts it personally. It results in eternal life.

Go, tell thy lord, Elijah is here ... [1 Kings 18:8].

Here we have one, Obadiah – not the author of the book – this one is the governor of the evil Ahab and Jezebel’s house – who “feared the Lord greatly.” So what is he doing in Ahab’s employ?

Actually, the Bible gives several examples of godly men and women being placed in responsible positions in pagan - or at least secular - households or kingdoms:

Recall Joseph, directed by Pharaoh, “Thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled.” The result, of course, was great favor shown Joseph’s family.

Esther, chosen by the Persian king to be his queen, was used by God in this foreign land to preserve His people.

Nehemiah served as “cupbearer” to King Artaxerxes, a designation and title that implied a position of great responsibility.

God gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams, who then did so for Nebuchadnezzar, and the king made Daniel a great man, ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief of all the governors. The result in this case was a testimony from Nebuchadnezzar to the witness of Daniel, “if a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods and Lord of kings.” There is also the example of the “little maid,” brought away captive by the Syrians to serve in Naaman’s household, instrumental in leading the great man to Elisha.

But here in Obadiah’s situation things are a bit dicier. While Ahab’s wife Jezebel is on the warpath killing all God’s prophets, Obadiah is hiding them, fifty at a time, and feeding them to boot. And Elijah appears and tells Obadiah to go and tell Ahab that the prophet is in Israel - after Ahab had been looking high and low for him. Obadiah is certain that Ahab will think he is lying and will kill him. But he agrees after Elijah promises to appear before sundown. Obadiah is more than just God’s man in Ahab’s household. He put his faith to work at the risk of his life, just as had Esther.

One never knows where he or she may be planted to be used for God’s work.

As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him ... [Colossians 2:6].

Paul is just getting warmed up here. His letter to the Colossians is packed full of what Christians *should* do. It's a very tall order. Here in verse six he exhorts his readers to walk as becoming their position as redeemed in Christ. He tells them to:

... beware of those who "beguile with enticing words."

... be rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith ... abounding therein with thanksgiving.

... live dead to the world. If they be "risen with Christ," they should "seek those things that are above," and, set their affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

... mortify their members: "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications" are to be "put off."

What is more, he adds:

... No lying to one another.

... Put on the "new man."

... Forbear one another. Forgive one another.

... Put on divine love.

... Let the peace of God rule in the heart.

... Be thankful.

... "Let the word of God dwell in you richly."

... Teach and admonish one another with grace in the heart of the Lord.

... Walk in wisdom ... Redeem the time ... Continue in prayer.

And, finally, "whatever ye do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father of Him ... knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Jesus Christ."

It might not be a bad idea to read Paul's letter each morning.

***Let us go up and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it ...
[Numbers 13:30].***

Israel is poised to enter the Promised Land. God is clearly ready for His people to possess their inheritance. From Moses' reference to the incident in Deuteronomy Chapter One it appears that God approved a mission – apparently the desire of the people – to first have a preliminary look at the land. Twelve “spies” are selected to check it out. Caleb is one of them.

The expedition takes 40 days. The “spies” see that the land is exceedingly populous; there is evidence of highly developed civilization. They saw Hebron and the cave containing the remains of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah. They return. The report is concise. The land flows with milk and honey, nevertheless, the people are strong and dwell in walled cities. They saw the “children of Anak” there. Giants!

A negative pall hovers over the crowd. But Caleb is a get-it-done guy. He stands up and tells the people, “We can do this!” But the other spies are going to have their say, and they are doubters. “We are not able to go up against the people.” The land “eateth up its inhabitants.” There we saw the giants that made us seem as *grasshoppers*!

The people wept that night. They murmured against Moses and Aaron. “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt ... were it not better for us to return to Egypt?” Caleb and Joshua try again; “If the Lord delight in us He will bring us into the land ... rebel ye not against the Lord.”

It doesn't work. They consider stoning Caleb. It is all over. God condemns Israel to another 40 years wandering in the desert for their unbelief. All the grown generation dies without seeing the Promised Land – except for Caleb and Joshua.

God calls Caleb His “servant.” There is no greater expression of God's approval. Later, after the land has been conquered and the inheritance of these lands is being parceled, Caleb steps up at age 85 and says, “I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me,” and tells Joshua that he wants Hebron. With God's help, he will take out those giants.

Caleb had faith in God and His promises. Unbelief was never an option.

... **and then have fallen away ... [Hebrews 6:6].**

In the 1960's there was, in the body of a popular television program called "Hee Haw," a segment in which two of the performers would comedically commiserate at length over their great calamities, then end the tome by moaning loudly in unison, "gloom, despair, agony on me."

The author of the book of Hebrews writes, *in the case of those who have been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift ... and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.* A pastor tells of a former co-worker who was nearly suicidal over having been told that these verses meant that even though he was a Christian, if he "fell," or, he assumed, sinned ... just once, (he knew he "fell" *every day*), he would lose his salvation and never get it back.²⁹ Gloom, despair, agony! Add misery. And grief!

Wait a minute. Does this make sense? If one trusts in Christ as Savior, and he sins just once more in his lifetime, he is then doomed? This is crazy. Christians cannot and do not lead sinless lives forever after they are redeemed. Taking Scripture out of context – like this – is about the same as diagnosing a pain oneself and coming to a dreaded conclusion before consulting a physician for an accurate diagnosis. When we run into a passage like this it has to be reconciled with the rest of Scripture instead of leaping to such a Scripturally-illiterate misinterpretation.

The passage has nothing to do with loss of salvation; Thousands say, this is a "hard text to understand." No, it isn't. It is disarmingly clear when the writer's comments are taken in context. Simply put, all he is doing here is telling the Jewish converts that if they leave the church (i.e., fall away), deserting the New-Covenant beliefs to which they have been converted (i.e., tasted of the heavenly gift), and go back to the synagogue with its rituals, sacrifices and so forth, there is nothing else he can say to change their minds (renew to repentance – repent, change their minds), and talk them into coming back to the church. This conclusion is led up to in the first five chapters of the book, wherein the author tells them that Jesus is better: better than prophets, angels, Moses, the Old Covenant, everything. *The argument of the whole book is that he is trying to convince them not to go back to the temple and its Old Covenant dispensation. And here he is simply saying that if they decide to leave, there is nothing he can do to change their mind.*³⁰ It's no different today. If people decide to leave the church, worship, and fellowship, nobody can change their minds.

Mercy! Avoid the *pain, misery, and agony ...*

²⁹ Dr. Steven Waterhouse, *Westcliff Bible Church Tapes*, Amarillo TX, March 4, 2008.

³⁰ Ibid.

For what is your life? It is even a vapor ... [James 4:14].

It may have been the darkest night Shadrach had ever seen, but in the shelter of the warm cockpit, it was, well, relatively cozy ...

At 1,000 feet above the ground, the engine backfired and quit. With landing gear and flaps extended, the aircraft began to drop like a rock. Over open country, there was nothing to see below, no lights, no highways, and no houses. Just pitch black. There was no place to go, only down. There was nothing to hear but silence, punctuated by the voice of the air traffic controller urgently warning that the turn to final approach had been overshot. There was nothing to do but frantically jockey the throttle to try to get the windmilling engine to restart. At 300 feet above the ground, it began to sputter, and eventually caught. Shadrach lived to see another sunrise.

Everyone is, perhaps not as forcefully as in the isolated case described above, reminded from time to time that life is on a time line. Eventually, as the saying goes, “we all have to go sometime.” Here James reminds us “whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” Solomon said that we should “boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” The Psalmist reminds us, we are “soon cut off and we fly away.”

With this in mind, it behooves one to be prepared for when ones time comes. Perhaps the Boy Scouts express it best in their motto: “Be Prepared.” This organization is devoted to training and preparing young men and boys for life on this earth, emphasizing character, citizenship, and personal fitness. But there is another life ahead for which every human being must prepare: the difference is, wherein this physical life is temporal (*it is appointed unto men once to die*, Hebrews 9:27), the spiritual life is eternal. The physical is a ... *vapor*. The spiritual is ... *forever*. The preparation, if we choose to so call it, involves the decision each person must make about his or her sin and God’s gift of His Son to pay for it. One either accepts the gift and trusts in Christ ... becomes *prepared* ... or rejects it, and is forever ... *unprepared*.

When our engines backfire and quit, we need to be prepared...

What have I done to thee that thou hast smitten me these three times? [Numbers 22:28].

Balaam was the son of a king of Edom. He lived beyond the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia, and gained a reputation for being able to prophesy and to levy a curse or blessing upon people. His fame had spread far and wide.

One day Balaam gets a call from Balak, the king of Moab. The Israelites were giving him fits, “licking up all that are around us,” and “encroaching on the plains of Moab.” Balak was fed up and wanted to do something about this thorn in his side, and he was willing to pay handsomely for someone to give him a hand. He sent his “elders of Moab and Midian” with a down payment for Balaam’s services. When the offer was tendered to him to curse Israel for a price, to his credit Baalam first hesitated; he wanted to see what God had to say about this. God, as expected – and what Balaam should have known – told him not to go, which Balaam dutifully passed on to Balak’s emissaries. Not a problem for Balak; he simply ups the ante with promises of great honor and greater riches. Balaam begins to waver. He tells Barak’s emissaries that God would not allow it, but instead of sending them away, he invites them to wait overnight to see if God would change His mind. Knowing that Baalam was going to go anyway, God allows him to proceed, but told him that he was not to curse Israel. Baalam, already knowing the direct will of God – not to go – now secures God’s permissive and secondary will.

Balaam saddles his donkey and takes off on the 20-day journey to Moab, excited about the prospect of riches and fame. God is angry with him. And even though He allows Balaam to go, He now commences His program to work through him. On the road, the “angel of the Lord” blocks Balaam’s path. He is blinded, but his donkey isn’t, and seeing the sword in the angel’s hand, takes off for the field. Then the animal crushes Balaam’s leg against a wall, and finally just sits down, each time taking a few lashes from Balaam. At last Balaam’s eyes are open; he sees what his donkey sees – the angel with the sword – and acknowledges his sin. Now God can work with him. Instead of cursing His people, Baalam blesses them and proceeds to issue seven prophecies. Balak is livid, frustrated and defeated. He tells Baalam to go home.

God has a perfect, primary will for every believer’s life. Second best is just that; second best.

And Jephthah made a vow unto the Lord ... [Judges 11:30].

Jephthah appears in that period of time between Israel's conquest of Canaan and the rise of Samuel, the period of the judges, wherein the nation alternated between periods of disobedience and deliverance from their oppressors by God. His story is both strange and sad.

Jephthah was one of God's "deliverers," sent to rescue His people during these times. His beginnings were troubling. The son of a harlot, he had been deprived of any inheritance, fled Gilead, and took up residence presumably in a border town near Ammon, Israel's enemy. There he is compelled to take up a life of guerilla warfare, living in the desert, a leader of misfits and castoffs like himself. Nevertheless, he maintains his worship of Jehovah, and he remains true to the traditions of Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel fears attack by the Ammonites. Where before Jephthah was considered an outcast by the elders of Israel, he now becomes their man of the hour. "Come," they say, "be our captain that we may fight with the children of Ammon." He wonders why the sudden change in their appraisal of his suitability, but his patriotism compels him to accept. He assures himself that the Lord is with him. He holds a negotiating tête-à-tête with the Ammonites to try to avoid conflict. It doesn't work. The battle is on.

But somewhere along the way Jephthah makes a big mistake. He makes a strange, rash vow that if God gives him victory, whoever comes from his home to greet him on return "shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." That one turns out to be his only daughter. Expositors differ on the fate of Jephthah's daughter; some insist that she was indeed offered as a human sacrifice, others no, that such an offering could not be presented to God, rather she was condemned to dying unmarried, a terrible prospect for a Hebrew woman.

What are we to make of this sad story? Obviously nothing as unseemly as this is going to even be thought of today. For us, however, it can be seen as a matter of choices; just as Jephthah had no one to blame but himself for his single impetuous act, so we through some similar act of ungodliness, sin of self-willed folly, or gross disobedience of God's commandments can bring about a harvest of bitter fruits that lasts for the rest of our lives.

Paul's words to the Galatians apply here: "*for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ...*"

How can these things be? [John 3:9].

Nicodemus is standing in the crowd, attracted by the signs and wonders that Jesus had wrought. He is a Pharisee, which means he is a rabbi. According to the Pharisees, to be born a Jew was enough for entrance into the kingdom. This man is no simple bystander. He is a “ruler of the Jews,” a member of the Sanhedrin. He is representative of the aristocratic, well-intentioned-but-unenlightened Judean of the day. He is respectful; “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles ... except God be with him.”

Jesus addresses Nicodemus: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus’ head begins to spin. “How can a man be born again when he is old?” His brain cannot make this work. “Can he enter the second time in his mother’s womb?” He knows, as a Pharisee, several ways to be “born again:” when a Jewish boy is bar-mitzvahed at 13, when he is married, ordained as a rabbi, becomes the dean of a rabbinical school – they were said to be born again. But when he is old?

Jesus presses on: “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Now Nicodemus is really perplexed, because being born of water was a Jewish expression for physical birth, and to be born physically as a Jew was sufficient for entrance to the kingdom. But Jesus is telling him that one must be born *both* physically and spiritually. He made it clear to Nicodemus that simply being a Jew did not qualify; he, each Jew, each human being, must be *born again*, not only “of water”, but also of the Spirit. What follows in the text is one of the most well known verses of Scripture, John 3:16.

It is probable that Nicodemus became a believer, for later in John’s Gospel we find that he joined Joseph of Arimathaea in preparing Jesus’ body for burial, bringing “an hundred-pound weight of spices.”

It was true of Nicodemus, and it is true of every individual who has ever been “born of water.” As John says, “ye must be born again.”

These things I have written to you ... so that you may know that you have eternal life [1 John 5:13].

The night before Shadrach reported to his new assignment of managing the largest military air traffic control facility on the planet, there occurred a system error that resulted in the near-collision of two airlines over the Pacific Ocean with 525 souls on board. Unfortunately, it was not an isolated event. The facility was unique, unlike any other. The concept of operations was untried. The equipment was at best, operable. Many of the controllers were inexperienced. Every military service used it, along with 42 airlines from 17 countries. Every imaginable current aircraft, even the latest most sophisticated and secret, requiring special attention in flight. It was a challenge. Possibly more accurately – a nightmare.

Each night Shadrach went to bed agonizing and arose troubled. One morning at 4am he awoke in a cold sweat. The doctor sat back and said there was nothing wrong. In frustration, he wanted to know where Shadrach worked. When he was told, he slid a bottle of tranquilizers across the desk. Shadrach felt really good for the next few days.

But there are those who experience cold sweats of infinitely more critical experience, that of wondering about their eternal fate ...

A while back I had one of those moments of self-awareness ... and suddenly the question hit me: ... what if you are not one of the redeemed? What if your destiny is not heaven after all, but hell?" Let me tell you that I was flooded in my body with a chill that went from my head to the bottom of my spine. I was terrified. I tried to grab hold of myself ... my sins came pouring into my mind and the more I looked at myself, the worse I felt. I thought, "maybe it's really true. Maybe I'm not saved after all."³¹

Here in his first epistle John tells us that Christ died for us; once we believe, we have eternal life. Then he says ... over and over; *know* – be *assured* of eternal life. No cold sweats. No, “maybe I’m not saved after all.” And above all, no ... “maybe I’m not one of the redeemed.”

If one reads John’s first epistle, believes that Jesus died for sin and that He rose again and appropriates that fact ... one can avoid this kind of traumatic thinking and know there is a bright future. God wants us to live convinced ... and assured.

Take a tranquilizer!

³¹ See *What Love is This?* (Bend OR: The Berean Call, 2006) p. 486.

... ***He rose again the third day ... [1 Corinthians 15:4].***

For just a moment let us set aside Scripture's account of Christ's resurrection and address the secular suppositions of disbelief or doubt. Some may say well, the disciples stole the body. *Wait a minute.* They rolled a massive stone away without the guards noticing? Some may say well, the guards were asleep. *Wait a minute.* If they were asleep how could they know what happened? And not likely, since Roman soldiers caught sleeping on duty were liable to be put to death. Some say the disciples went to the wrong tomb. *Wait a minute.* If that were so Jesus' body would still have been in the first tomb and would have been produced by His enemies. Some say Jesus did not actually die on the cross, rather He "swooned," and later regained strength, claiming to rise again. *Wait a minute.* Pilate's soldiers certified that he was in fact dead.³² *And wait another minute.* If He didn't die at this time, when and how did He die? Consider also, the tomb had to be empty; else Jesus' enemies would certainly have produced His body to disprove a resurrection.

All these suppositions are just that - supposition. Scripture leaves no doubt about Christ's death and resurrection. Matthew tells of the "angel of the Lord" with countenance like "lightning" who told "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" that, "Jesus ... was crucified," and that "He is risen from the dead." Mark calls the angel "a young man" who verifies, "He is risen." Paul also verifies His resurrection to the Corinthians, "Christ died for our sins ... He was buried ... and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Then the great apostle provides concrete evidence of Christ's resurrection summarizing the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus; "he was seen of (Peter), then of the twelve: after that he was seen of above 500 brethren at once ... after that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles." The collective evidences equal the irrefutable conclusion. *He is risen.*

What does all this mean to the Christian? Among other things, it means believer's bodies will also be raised, as John quotes Jesus, "Because I live, ye shall live." It means He is God, as Paul told the Romans, "He was declared the Son of God ... by the *resurrection*." As such, He is always our intercessor, as the author to the Hebrews wrote, "He always lives to make intercession." And it means because He is alive, He will come again: "This Jesus ... will come in just the same way as ye have seen him go into heaven."

He is alive. He is God. He is our intercessor, and He is coming again.

³² Steven Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone*, 4th ed. (Amarillo, TX: Westcliff Press, 2010) p. 96.

... every man did that which was right in his own eyes ... [Judges 21:25].

Spanning the time between Israel's conquest of Canaan and the rise of Samuel, the Book of the Judges describes the repeated disobedience of the nation against God. They drifted into idolatry, fell into the hands of their enemies, were rescued repeatedly by God, only to repeat the cycle.

It all began following the death of Joshua – “and all that generation also gathered unto their fathers ... then there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord.” It opens with a description of their behavior – repeated again and again – “the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.” First, they served Baal, and “the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of the Mesopotamians.” This lasted for eight years until God mercifully sent the first of their “deliverers,” Othniel. Peace followed for 40 years. But *again*, they “did evil in the sight of the Lord,” and they served the king of Moab 18 years. *Again* God had mercy on them, and sent Ehud to rescue them. Peace followed for 80 years. *Again* comes the idolatry, and God “sold them into the hand of Jabin,” king of Canaan, for 20 years. *Again* comes God's mercy in the person of Deborah, then *again* peace for 40 years. *Again* comes evil, and “the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years.” *Again* God delivers them, and it is peace once more for 80 years. No sooner than Jair, the latest “deliverer” dies, comes the evil *again*, serving “Baalim, Ashteroth, the gods of Syria, and Zidon, and Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the Philistines, and forsook the Lord and served not Him.” Eighteen years pass, and they “cry unto the Lord.” But God has had enough, and tells them, “go, cry unto the gods which you have chosen.” They show repentance, and a forgiving God rescues yet *again* with Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon – 31 years of peace. But wouldn't you know it? Comes idolatry *again*, followed by 40 years under the Philistines until Samson came along. They never learned.

Well, what are we to learn from all this? We might dwell on the fact that indeed, as the last verse of the Book of Judges tells us, every man does that which is right in his own eyes. Better, perhaps, to recognize two of God's attributes. First, He hates sin; His anger is *hot* against it, as is recorded here. He is holy and just, He cannot tolerate it, and He must deal with it, as He did repeatedly with Israel. Equally, and secondly, is His infinite mercy toward his people. When they cried out, He heard them, and rescued them time and again.

For our part though, John reminds us; “If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” It will restore us to fellowship with the Father, as it did here with His people. *Again and again.*

The Lord, he that hath created the heavens ... [Isaiah 42:5].

Someone has penned this extraordinary appraisal of God's Creation from an engineering perspective:

"Let us study this sublime illustration. Look at the daily rotation of this globe, and imagine the power necessary to maintain this rotation. Suppose we see what God's oath of day and night means when represented by steam mechanics. Let us build our engine and run this revolving globe awhile by steam power. The earth is not a flat fly-wheel set upon its edge, but a massive sphere, 8000 miles in diameter. So, by the ratio of size of shaft to size of paddle-wheel on a large steamboat, the earth must be slung on a steel shaft about 250 miles in diameter and 10,000 miles long. It must be driven by an engine whose cylinder should measure 1200 miles bore and 2000 miles stroke, having a piston-rod 100 miles thick and 2500 miles long, working by a connection rod 3000 miles long on a crank of 1000 miles arm with a wrist 200 miles long and 50 miles thick. The piston of this engine will make but one revolution daily; but to do that it will travel 4000 miles, at an average velocity of nearly three miles a minute. The working capacity of this engine will be about fourteen thousand million (14,000,000,000) horse-power. It must be controlled by an automatic governor of infallible accuracy, and supplied with inexhaustible fuel and oil; and so run on, day and night, never starting a bolt nor heating a journal, nor wearing out a box, age after age. The iron-bed-frame for this machine must be 10,000 miles square and 4,000 miles high, and not tremble a hair under the stroke that drives the equatorial rim of this fly wheel globe up to a steady velocity of seventeen and one-half miles a minute, twenty times the velocity of a lightning express train! Who'll take the contract to build and run this engine? The vast mass must fly through space in the earth's orbit around the sun, with a velocity of more than 1100 miles a minute. The Armstrong 100-ton steel rifle sends its 2000-pound steel projectile at the rate of 1600 feet per second clean through a solid wrought-iron plate 22 inches thick. But God fires this globe, 8000 miles in diameter, through space with 60.5 times the velocity of the monster projectile, and 2000 times that of an express train at 34 miles per hour. And our engine that gives it its day-and-night rotation must fly with it at that speed, and never lose a stroke! And these are very slow among the velocities of the starry worlds. And yet these velocities only represent what God does every moment by the abiding force of that first impulse He gave to this silent spinning globe when He shot it from His creating hand like a top from a child's finger!"³³

Yet there are still those who question the existence of God and the fact of His Creation. As Shakespeare has Puck say in Act III, Scene II of his *Midsummer's Night Dream*, "What fools these mortals be!"

³³ Author Unknown

... and he wist not that the Lord had departed from him ...
[Judges 16:20].

Ah, another lesson from Samson. The strongest man who ever lived, he is sometimes called. Certainly his exploits speak for themselves; smiting the Philistines, killing the lion, ripping gates, posts and all of the city of Gaza as he departed.

But as we all know, Samson fell. It all begins with, “he loved a woman in the valley of Sorah whose name was Delilah.” Bribed by the “lords of the Philistines” with a handsome sum, this temptress sets about to “see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him.”

This woman is relentless. But more than her obsessive commitment to her task (for which she was being handsomely reimbursed) is to be observed here. It is Samson recklessly toying with her. With each reply to her prying questions he comes closer and closer to revealing his secret. First, it is the “seven green withs that have not been dried.” Then it is “new ropes that were never occupied.” Then, instead of stopping the game, Samson gets very close to the flame; “if they weave the seven locks of my head.” This brings him but one step to disaster when Delilah coos, “How canst thou say, I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?” And the man capitulates, telling Delilah that if his hair is cut he would be weak “like any other man.”

The psalmist warns us about slipping into sin and evil, comparing the blessedness of the righteous man who obeys God with the sure destruction of the ungodly. The way is progressive. The author says, first, they *walk* in the counsel of ungodliness, then they *stand* in the way of open sin, and finally they *sit* in the seat of the scornful. It is not unlike what happened to Samson.

Satan is a sly devil. He is the prince of the power of this earth, for now. He roams about like a roaring lion.

The word is, *flee*.

Then shall He say to them ... depart from Me ... into everlasting fire ... into everlasting punishment ... [Matthew 25:41b, 46a].

What a truly devastating sentence of judgment are these words of Jesus. There are those who say that God is a God of love, that He would never consign those that He has created to such an eternal existence as hell. But the Bible gives more than enough evidence that there is such a place. Furthermore, it plainly states that those who reject His Son will be condemned to that place forever.

Hell is not something to be taken lightly, joked about, or be the subject of flippant comments. Occasionally one will hear someone say that they have “Alzheimer’s” when they forget something. But those who have a loved one suffering with the disease do not jest. To them it is real. It is the same with hell. Hell will not be a place of raucous camaraderie, unrestrained pleasures of sin or drunken orgies. Among other descriptions, the Bible calls hell black, outer darkness (*maybe those in the Lake of Fire are blind!*)³⁴ ... weeping ... gnashing of teeth ... unending, gnawing worms ... shame ... torment ... fire ... and burning brimstone producing noxious fumes. It explains that bodies in that place will not be destroyed by the elements; rather these bodies will be *able to withstand the ravages while continually enduring the suffering*. It will last ... *forever*. It describes those in this place as being “away from the presence of God.” One cannot imagine the terror of realizing that God’s presence is no longer to be found – *forever*. Think about that. God is gone ... *forever*.

Those who think sinners can come to Christ after death, those who think that God is such a God of love that hell will be closed and all will be saved, those who think that all will be saved regardless of religious beliefs, those who think that given time all will turn to God and then be in God’s presence, those who think that instead of eternal conscious punishment this punishment will run out and they will be annihilated ... are not paying attention to what God Himself tells us in His Word.

Hell is a real place. It is not a joke. There won’t be any parties. And it is certain that those who reject Christ will be there. Suffering beyond imagination. Time will not exist; no yesterday, no tomorrow, no next year, no birthdays, no April Fool’s Day. Just ... simply ... *forever*.

Yet, God **is** a God of love. He has sent His Son to die for the sins of all. Each person’s sin must be individually paid for; either by one’s acceptance of Christ’s death on the cross – or – if this free gift is rejected, it is paid for by the individual in eternal hell.

³⁴ Steven Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone, An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*, 4th ed. (Amarillo, TX: Westcliff Press, 2010) p. 539.

... and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God ...[Ephesians 4:30].

Grief. *Mental suffering or distress ... to suffer disappointment ... sharp sorrow.*

Grief is before us frequently in Scripture. Esau's marriages to Hittite women "were a *grief* of mind unto Isaac and Rebecca." When God told Samuel that He was sorry He set up Samuel to be king, "it *grieved* Samuel and he cried to the Lord all night." When Sarah told Abraham to "cast out the bondservant and her son" because Hagar's son was mocking Isaac, the "thing was very *grievous* in Abraham's sight." When David returned to Ziklag to find that the Amalekites had burned his city and taken his men's wives and children captive, "the soul of all the people were *grieved*" to the point of thinking about stoning David. And in his third prayer of distress in Psalm Six, David gives a poignant description of his distress, "Mine eye is consumed with *grief* ... because of all of mine enemies."

When Esther found out the reason for Mordecai carrying on in the streets wrapped up in sackcloth and doused in ashes was that Haman intended to destroy the Jews, she was "exceedingly *grieved*." So moved at the degree of Job's *grief* were Job's friends that they "tore their clothes and "sprinkled dust on their heads." The Egyptians knew exactly what grief was when the plagues hit them, "there came a *grievous* swarm of flies ... there shall be a very *grievous* murrain on their livestock ... and there was fire, mingled with the hail, very *grievous*."

We can get the point here; there are various causes for grief. But we also see that Members of the Holy Trinity can also experience grief. When God "saw that the wickedness of man was great, it *grieved* Him in His heart." And Paul verifies that the Spirit indeed can be grieved as he admonishes here to the Ephesians, "*grieve* not the Spirit."

And how do we avoid doing that? Paul says, "put away lying ... let not the sun go down on your wrath ... steal no more ... be not partakers with the children of disobedience ... be ye followers of God ... walk in love," and so forth.

Christ has already "borne our grief" by dying on the cross. Heeding Paul's words will avoid causing grief to the Spirit, and thus to Christ Himself.

But we see Jesus ... crowned in glory and honor ... [Hebrews 2:9].

It took a load of suffering before Jesus arrived at the position described here by the writer to the Hebrews. Isaiah tells of the agonizing nature of Christ's suffering. Over and over the prophet records poignant phrases which describe the agony Jesus experienced as He bore the sins of mankind on the Cross:

"He was acquainted with grief ... despised and rejected of men ... a man of sorrows ... the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all ... he was oppressed, and he was afflicted ... cut off out of the land of the living ... he poured out his soul unto death ... he bare the sins of many ... was numbered with the transgressors ... it pleased the Lord to bruise him."

All this in spite of the fact that "he had done no violence ... neither was there any deceit in his mouth."

The psalmist, in graphic terms, tells of His agony on the cross:

"they gaped upon me with their mouths ... I may tell all my bones ... all my bones are out of joint ... my heart is like wax ... my strength is dried up ... my tongue clingeth to my jaws ... dogs have encompassed me ... they pierced my hands and my feet ... I am poured out like water."

But, of course, having died for our sins, he rose again, and after a time of revelation to many on earth, "He was taken up." Luke verifies his exalted position from that time on; "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior ... to give forgiveness of sins." The great apostle Paul sums it up: "Wherefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him a Name that is above every name: that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

He suffered, died, rose again, appeared to many, was "taken up," and now reigns exalted on high, making intercession for believers.

And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people ... [Exodus 12:33].

And no wonder, having just suffered through God's ten plagues. They were ... *urgent!* They wanted the Israelites gone, *right now!* Just the sound of the word gives us a sense of, well, *urgency*. As in get on with it! Hurry up! Do it, now!

So it should be with ones life and with the work that God has given talent and time to carry out. Isaiah tells us, "seek ye the Lord when he may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near." After all, Scripture reminds us that our time is limited. The psalmist tells us that "(God) hast made my days as a handbreath, and mine age as nothing before thee." James admonishes,

"Go to now, ye that say today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away."

And Peter tells us; *"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flowers thereof falleth away."*

And from Paul: *"the night is far spent, the day is at hand ... see that ye walk circumspectly ... redeeming the time."*

There is also a somber note to urgency, for John, in his Book of the Revelation tells of the door on time closing. In the parenthetical description of "another angel standing with his right foot upon the sea and his left foot upon the earth," he says that the angel "lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by Him that liveth forever and ever, who created heaven ... that *there should be time no longer ...*"

So, for now; walk circumspectly, seek the Lord, serve him with a perfect heart, and "seek ye first the kingdom of God." And be ... *urgent*.

Let thy garments be always white ... [Ecclesiastes 9:8].

Here is advice from Solomon as he urges us to enjoy the blessings God has given, adding, “go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart.”

White garments, white apparel, white raiment, white robes ... are of special significance in the Bible. In 2 Chronicles, as Solomon dedicates the temple to the Lord with a great prayer and just before the glory of God appeared, we find that the Levites “which were of the singers” were “arrayed in *white* linen.” In Daniel’s first vision of the four beasts, he saw God the Father ... “the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was *white* as snow.” When the “angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it,” the Bible tells us that his “raiment was *white* as snow.” When Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary came on the third day to anoint the body of Jesus, “they saw a young man ... clothed in a long *white* garment.” Luke records the day when Jesus took Peter, John and James “into a mountain to pray, and as he prayed ... his raiment was *white* and glistening.” And Matthew records Jesus’ transfiguration, (he) “was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was *white* as the light.”

If we fast-forward to the future, we find Christ promising believers, those that “overcome,” heavenly garments of *white*. He tells the church at Sardis that those “which have not defiled their garments, they shall walk with me in *white*.” At the same time he counsels the Laodicean church to “buy of me ... *white* raiment that thou mayest be clothed ... and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.”

Then in heaven we see the four and twenty elders sitting clothed in *white* raiment. We read that “these are they which came out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes.” It is a “great multitude ... before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in *white* robes.” Then we are given a vision of the marriage of the Lamb, as the church “hath made herself ready ... and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and *white*.” And the climax of it all from John, “And I saw heaven opened and behold a *white* horse and he that sat upon it was called Faithful and True ... and the armies which were in heaven follow him upon *white* horses, clothed in fine linen, *white* and clean ...

Color the believer’s attire in That Day ... *white*!

And next to them repaired Meremoth, the son of Urijah, the son of Koz ... [Nehemiah 3:4].

Every once in a while there appears a narrative in Scripture of which one may wonder *why is this in here?* For example, the identification in the Book of Nehemiah of the builders of the wall of Jerusalem ... “the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build ... and next to them repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths ... the valley gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah ... after them repaired Zadok, the son of Immer ... after him repaired Shemaiah, the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate ... after him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith’s son ... on and on in roll-call fashion for 32 verses; more than 75 proper names, forever included in holy writ.

Perhaps the reason for these 32 verses may have something to do with the fact that each believer has been assigned talent and task by God for work in His kingdom here on earth. Paul suggests this to the Romans; “having then gifts differing according to the grace that he gives to us” ... and to the Corinthians, “there are diversities of gifts.” At the same time, it is well to remember that regarding one’s task, there is a window of opportunity to accomplish God’s purpose. One must not fail to take advantage of this window; if this happens God will give the task to someone else. God’s work **will** be done; if we fail to be prepared and respond the result will be loss of rewards. John expresses the urgency of jumping through this window of opportunity: “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work.”

It is prudent also to recall Solomon’s admonition, “For God shall bring every good work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” Paul told the Corinthians, “every man’s work shall be manifest, for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed of fire: the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”

One of the great blessings of Scripture is written by the author of the Book of Hebrews: “Now the God of peace ... make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.”

With such encouragement, perhaps one day it will be recorded of us in heaven that, “next to him repaired ...”

Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman [Acts 22:26b].

Claudius Lysias is in a quandary. He is the commander of the Roman troops in Jerusalem, and he has his hands full with the conflict between Paul and a mob of “some Asian Jews.” Civil disobedience is not tolerated by Rome, and it is up to him to see to it that things do not get out of hand. When these Jews saw Paul in the temple they “stirred up all the people,” accused him of “teaching men everywhere against the Law,” and of the capital offense of bringing a gentile into the inner courts of the temple. They dragged him from the premises and threatened to kill him, and word came to Claudius that “all Jerusalem was in an uproar.”

Lysias immediately sent his men to rescue Paul from the mob, put him in chains, and led him off to the Roman garrison for protection. He has no idea who Paul is, does not understand Hebrew, and demands to know what Paul had done. Some in the mob yell one accusation, some another. As Paul was being led away, he spoke to Lysias in Greek, asking him for permission to address the mob, which the apostle does, *in Hebrew*. Lysias is still in the dark, the mob reacts violently to Paul’s words, throwing dust in the air, tearing clothes, and screaming that “it is not fit that he should live.” Lysias is back to square one.

But Claudius is a man of action, and he decides that he will get to the bottom of this. He orders Paul scourged to find out what he might be guilty of. But while his men were tying Paul up, the great apostle mentions that he is a Roman, knowing that “it was unlawful to scourge a Roman who had not been condemned.” The centurion cautions Lysias, wait a minute boss, “take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman,” and Paul is spared punishment.

Just as Paul’s Roman citizenship saved him from punishment, so the believer is saved from judgment. When one trusts in Christ as Savior, no power can harm him. He is a citizen of heaven! He is sealed “unto the day of redemption.”

... **they are without excuse** ... [*Romans 1:20*].

Some wonder how God is going to – in the end – manage to be fair and just to each and every human being that ever lived. What about people of the jungles who have never heard the Gospel? What about people who have lived in teeming cities of millions who have never heard the Good News? Paul explains it in his letter to the Romans, “*Because that which may be known of God is **manifest in them**. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are **clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.*” And John adds: *And when He (the Holy Spirit) is come, he will reprove the **world** of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment* (John 16:8). Here William Barclay explains: “What is it that gives a man a sense of sin? ...it is the influence of the Holy Spirit in a man’s heart ... what convinces men that Jesus is the Son of God? ... it is the Holy Spirit that convinces men of the sheer righteousness of Christ .. what confronts a man with the certainty of judgment? What makes men feel certain that judgment lies ahead? That is the work of the Holy Spirit.”³⁵

There really is no excuse. We not only have John’s description of the innate work of the Spirit, we also have visible evidence of God’s presence in Creation. For instance, we can look up and see unnumerable stars. Man has searched the heavens and now suspects that the universe is - as far as is now determinable – infinite. One hundred billion galaxies of all shapes and sizes, each with billions of stars, perhaps 3,000 visible in the night sky. Telescopes and satellites have returned images of indescribably brilliant colors from deep space. In our own atmosphere there exist more than 9,000 species of bird flying about ... cormorants, eagles, geese, puffins, *leaf-nosed bats*! If we look around us we see majestic mountains ... scores of varieties of trees bearing fruit ... rivers, the sight of which breathes power ... nearly a million varieties of insects, not to mention mammals, mollusks, reptiles. If we look into the depths of the great oceans, there are 20,000 species of fishes ranging from one-half inch to *sixty feet*! Sailfish, featherbacks, giant whales, mudskippers, *sea cucumbers*!

What is it with man, endlessly trying to figure out “where we came from?” Why don’t we just look up, down, and all around, and accept God’s Word that He created all this? He has given us an inexhaustible array of evidence – above, around and below – of His eternal existence.

The psalmist describes those who will in the end be the ones without excuse, *the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God*.

³⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956) pp. 224-226

... ***watch ye therefore ... [Mark 13:35].***

The words come in Jesus' admonishment that no one knows when He will return for His redeemed. He uses as an illustration, the "Son of Man is as a man taking a long journey." The man leaves his house in the care of his "servants to every man his work," and instructs his "porter," the keeper of the door, to "watch," and that things must be ready when he returns, warning all that the time of his return is indefinite. In such a scenario, watchfulness requires devoted effort; the housekeeper must keep things spic and span for days, even years – never tiring of the apparent futility of doing so for no immediate reason. The porter must never tire of watching interminably for months on end – never deserting his post out of boredom.

The Greek word for "watch," *gregareo*, means to "take heed lest through remissiveness and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one." There are, of course, examples of "watching" in Scripture which serve to illustrate the point which Jesus made. As Nehemiah and the Jews were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, when "all the wall was good together unto the half thereof," and Sanballat saw that the "breaches began to be stopped," Nehemiah's nemesis was "very wroth." When he threatened to attack, Nehemiah "set a *watch* against them night and day." Ezra, preparing for the return to Jerusalem, appointed twelve "treasurers" to be responsible for the gold, silver, and vessels for the temple as the people set out on the four-month trip. "*Watch ye*," said Ezra, "and keep them until ye weigh them before the chief priests" upon delivery to the house of God. Paul admonishes the Corinthians to "*watch ye*" and to "stand fast in the faith."

"Watching" in the Bible implies an active ... *activity!* Someone has put the context of watching for Jesus' return into a thought-provoking perspective: *do the things you would want to be doing ... say the things you would want to be saying ... be in the places you would want to be found ... when Jesus comes.*

... ***And I saw a great white throne ... [Revelation 20:11].***

There is going to be terrible news to the ears of those who find themselves standing before “him that sat on (the Great White Throne) from whose face the earth and heaven fled away.” This is the place where and the time when the seas have given up the dead, and where “death and hell” have delivered up for final judgment those who have died without trusting in the saving power of Christ. Here is where these find that their names are not written in the “Lamb’s Book of Life.” It is the time and place where the condemned receive the worst possible news imaginable. It is the sentence to eternity in the indescribably horrendous *Lake of Fire*.

One might try to absorb the impact of such news in the context of everyday existence. In this life, we are all subject to hearing a variety of tragic news. Parents may be sleeping soundly when the call comes that a child has been killed in an accident. The doctor orders a biopsy; the wait seems interminable – then the news of the result is received – there is terminal malignancy. A family waits in the hospital for the surgeon to bring the news of the operation – it has been unsuccessful, and there is no hope of recovery. A family is holding on to survival by a thread, and one day the breadwinner is suddenly summoned for a meeting with his superior, and the news is termination of employment; his only source of income for his family has disappeared.

In every case in this lifetime, the days filled with sadness go on for the parents, the families, the loved ones. The losses are sustained with wrenching sorrow and suffering for perhaps lifetimes. But they are not *eternal* losses. Here in John’s account, however, for those who have rejected God’s Son it is the beginning of an *eternity* of suffering the likes of which are unimaginable horror. The news is couched in Jesus’ words from Matthew, “*depart from me ... into everlasting fire ...*” It is news that no one can imagine hearing. Yet, the words will be heard, and the tragic part of it is they will understand that God is being absolutely fair, that they are without excuse, because He had given His Son as a sacrifice for their sin and they rejected Him.

But there is a silver lining available ... those who believe that Christ died for their sins and rose again will never hear such news. They will not be found standing before the Great White Throne.

... ***He hath given of us His Spirit ... [1 John 4:13].***

In his benediction to the Corinthians, Paul comments, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you.”

It is well to examine this “communion of the Holy Spirit:”

First of all, John tells us that the Spirit “reproves,” or *convicts* “the world of sin.” Also, Paul, speaking as “minister to the Gentiles,” tells of “offering up the Gentiles” as “acceptable, being *sanctified* by the Holy Spirit.” And to the Corinthians he wrote, “for by one Spirit we are all *baptized* into one body;” to Titus, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of *regeneration and renewing* of the Holy Spirit.”

There are other ministrations of the Spirit. He *dwells* in us; “ye are the temple of God ... the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.” According to Jesus, the “Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost ... shall *teach* you all things.” He also “helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit *maketh intercession* for us ...” According to Paul, He gives us strength – “that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be *strengthened* with might by the Spirit in the inner man” – and *hope*, “now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that ye may abound in *hope* through the power of the Holy Ghost.”

The Great Apostle further instructs the Corinthians, “now we have received ... the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God ... which the Holy Ghost *teacheth*. And, most comforting, “in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.”

He convicts, sanctifies, baptizes, renews, dwells, teaches, seals ... there are many more listed in Scripture. But it also states that He can be *grieved* and *quenched*. With all the positive blessings from the Spirit, why would one ever think of doing that?

Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence ... [3 John 9].

The Bible doesn't mince words, nor does it avoid the warts. Here John lets us know that unfortunately, there are those within the church who cause discord among the brethren. Here in his third epistle the apostle sprays this troublemaker with specific examples of his unruly behavior, leaving no doubt as to the man's character and his effect on the harmony within the church. He "loveth to have the preeminence:" he is proud. He "receiveth us not:" he is inhospitable and rebellious to apostolic authority, "prating against us with malicious deeds." He "casteth the brother out of the church:" he is despotic and exclusive. This guy is a first-class cause of discord, unrest, and worst of all, ungodliness – perhaps even evil - within the assembly.

John is not the only one who tells us of infamous personalities. Paul tells Timothy to "fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected ... among those are Hymenaeus and Alexander." Of course, there are other examples of villains in Scripture, one example being the "Edomite," Doeg, who squealed on David when he sought help from Abimelech the priest, resulting in the slaughter of not only Abimelech, but 85 other priests - as well as the murder of the entire village of Nob. However, a Diotrephes among the congregation spreads the discord in a wider sense than even the catastrophic damage done by a Doeg. Unfortunately, for the time being the devil is in charge. He always has to have his antichrist ready for the Day of the Lord, the timing of which he is totally in the dark, and he always seems to have a Diotrephes available to disrupt the church.

Paul suggests alternative behavior; "be ye kind to one another," he says, "tenderhearted, forgiving one another." He tells the Ephesians to "walk worthy ... with all ... meekness, with longsuffering forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." He advises the Corinthians, "there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for another." It's a whole lot more pleasant to read Paul's suggestions than it is to consider the behavior of a Diotrephes.

Well, it is too late, of course, to have our behavior, good or bad, recorded in Scripture, but God's pen is continually keeping records in heaven. One day the contents will be discussed with each believer at the Judgment Seat. One would not want to be confronted with the record of a Hymenaeus, an Alexander, or a ... Diotrephes.

A great panic from the Lord will fall upon them ... [Zechariah 14:13].

The day was beautiful, without a cloud in the sky, but shortly after reaching altitude, Shadrach's co-pilot announced in a panicked voice; "the controls are frozen!" He was right. The yoke would not budge. The fight against panic was on, and Shadrach's first thought was how they were going to get an uncontrollable airplane back to earth in one piece.

Of the co-pilots who flew from time to time with Shadrach, there was none like ... well, we will call him Claude. One of Claude's bizarre idiosyncrasies was that he could not sit still and enjoy the ride; he was always in motion, checking this, adjusting that, moving around, dispensing nervous energy everywhere. This particular day Claude's energetic leg inadvertently nudged the autopilot lever on, rendering the controls unmovable.

Panic is never a good thing; as references to it in Scripture testify. For example, Jeremiah, watching as Jerusalem is destroyed, describes how all their "enemies have opened their mouths against us ... *panic* and pitfall have befallen us." And there is little doubt that Belshazzar was in a state of panic as he suddenly saw the fingers writing on the wall: his "face went white, his mind was "troubled," and his *knees knocked together!*

Here Zechariah tells us that, "In That Day ... a great panic from the Lord will fall upon" (the world's armies assembled at Armageddon who had already begun to plunder and ravish Jerusalem): here the prophet is referring to the Second Coming of Jesus; and amidst this "great *panic* from the Lord" the antichrist's forces are effortlessly destroyed by the "Rider on the white horse, called Faithful and True." (Revelation 19:11).

When That Day comes, Scripture tells us that believers will be around to see this panic unfold, as John tells us, "And the armies which are in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following him on white horses ... (Revelation 19:14), and Paul, also: "at the coming of our Lord Jesus **with** all His saints (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

In That Day, the panic will be in the devil's cockpit ...

This do ye in remembrance of Me ... [1 Corinthians 11:24, 25].

The Corinthians were, well, “corinthianizing.” And the Great Apostle is not happy with them. Early on in his first letter Paul says he has heard that, “there are contentions among you.” “Ye are yet carnal,” he tells them, “for whereas there is among you envying, strife and divisions.” There was even sexual sin going on, and Paul noted that they had not exercised discipline, rather were “puffed up” about it. “I warn you,” he says, “shall I come unto you with a rod?” The Corinthians were also taking each other to court, and Paul condemns them for it; “Dare any of you go to law before the unjust, not before the saints?” “Ye do wrong,” he said. Then amidst all this, Paul turns to the Corinthians’ conduct at the Lord’s Supper, one of the two sacraments of the Church.

This most precious expression of worship for believers was instituted by the Lord Himself, as Paul reminds, “*the Lord took bread, and when he had given thanks, he break it and said, ‘take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.’ After this same manner he took the cup ... saying ... ‘this do ye as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.’*” The Corinthians conduct in this most sacred remembrance brought Paul’s condemnation, “I praise you not.”

*This occasion should have been the remembrance of a preeminently selfless act, Christ’s death on behalf of others. Instead, the Corinthians had turned the memorial of selflessness into an experience of selfishness, and had made a rite of unity a riotous disunity.*³⁶

The gathering of His saints in communion around the Lord’s Table should be one of reverence, of quiet reflection on the cross, and of self-examination. Minds should be focused on the infinite love of Christ in the breaking of His body, representative of the breaking of the bread, and the shedding of His blood, signified by the drinking of the cup. And as Paul reminded the Corinthians, partakers should at the same time “examine ourselves,” to insure that they are “fit” to share in the elements, searching hearts for unconfessed sin, full of grateful affection for his spotless life and His infinite love wherein He gave himself.

Do this in remembrance of me. It is the command of the Savior Himself.

³⁶ Walvoord and Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 2004) p. 531.

... a name that is above every name ... [Philippians 2:9].

What's in a name? Well, everyone and everything has one. It is, of course, how we identify things and people. Without names, nothing would mean anything. People, for instance, are identifiable thorough a name – perhaps a first, middle and last – unless, of course, we include nicknames, aliases, or kings with a pedigree. Likewise, things are identifiable by one title unless, of course, we get into technical or scientific identifications.

Yet there is One who is called by many names. This, One, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is given names, He is known by descriptive titles, and is referred to in synonyms more than fifty times in Scripture. Jesus is worshipped as *King of kings and Lord of lords* by John, when the Lord will return to claim possession of the earth. He is the "*Lamb of God*, which taketh away the sin of the world." He is the *Holy One of God* from whom, writes John, "We have an anointing." He is worshipped in heaven in John's vision of the Revelation, wherein the four living creatures cry "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God *Almighty*," and called Lord *Almighty* by Paul as he comforts the Corinthians, assuring them that "He will be a *Father* to you."

Synonyms of Christ frequent Scripture. John says he is the *true light*, which lighteth every man ... the writer to the Hebrews describes Him as the "hope we have as an *anchor* of the soul, both sure and steadfast." The psalmist describes him as his *rock and fortress*. Elsewhere He is the *door*, the *true vine*, the *living water*, the *bread of life*.

But most importantly, He is *Savior*, and *Redeemer*. The writer to the Hebrews calls Him the *author and finisher of our faith*. To Martha, Jesus said, "I am the *way, the truth, and the life*." John tells us that in the believer's daily life "we have an *advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ," and in his first letter to Timothy, Paul comforts with the fact that we have a "*mediator* between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." And in that well-known passage from the Psalmist, "The Lord is my *shepherd*, I shall not want."

While people and things have but one name, Christ is called or known by scores of names, each having a profound individual meaning to believers.

I will not destroy for ten's sake ... [Genesis 18:32].

Abraham is beside himself. The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are so great that they are “crying out to heaven,” and the Lord tells the patriarch that “because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now.” There is no doubt in Abraham’s mind that judgment is about to fall upon the two cities. He couldn’t believe his ears. The other two “angels” went toward Sodom, but Abraham “stood yet before the Lord,” trying to understand why this catastrophe was coming. “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” he asks ... “Wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? ... shall not the Judge of the earth do right?” Well, for fifty righteous, God says, He will spare the city. Abraham is still aghast: how about for 45? How about 40? How about 30? Twenty? The Lord concedes, “I will not destroy it for twenty’s sake.” Abraham pushes his luck, “Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once,” and he pleads for ten. God consents.

Other examples of the great longsuffering of God are recorded in Scripture. Moses, as he entreats God to spare a disobedient Israel reminds God that He is “*longsuffering*, and of great mercy.” The psalmist tells us that “Thou, O God, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, and *longsuffering*.” Peter writes, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promises ... but is *longsuffering* toward us-ward, not willing that any should perish” ...

As we know, God did not find Abraham’s ten righteous, and Sodom and Gomorrah are history. There surely is a limit to His longsuffering today, as there was when Abraham reasoned with Him. As we see the tragedy of abortion continue unabated with approval of the courts of the land; as we see man disdaining the fact of creation of the universe by God, and as we see support of His people Israel waning in the light of threats for its destruction, we can be certain that God’s longsuffering is being severely tested. *Societies that do not follow God’s design suffer and ultimately fall. Marriages that are not functioning around God’s protocol are troubled, and many, many are destroyed Men and women who seek “alternative lifestyles” are not at peace – they are angry, hostile, and ostracized. The growing gay and lesbian movements are essentially efforts to distort reproductive design created by God and to blur the distinction that are so obviously built into mankind. God’s laws can be broken and God’s judgment resisted, but the consequences are severe and the emotive results, bitter.*³⁷

It well may not be long before God’s longsuffering runs out, and “That Day” is at hand. Man had better be ready.

³⁷ Dr. Henry Morris III, *Acts and Facts*, vol. 42, no. 4 April 2103, p.7

... **so they did** ... [*Joshua 6:2*].

Here we have the city of Jericho, only about eight or nine acres or so, “straitly shut up by the children of Israel.” The Bible says, “none went out and none came in,” because the place was surrounded. It was probably pretty uncomfortable inside the walls, perhaps even scary, seeing that they were under a siege of sorts, watching what was going on outside the city. It was going to get a lot more uncomfortable. Had they known that their destruction was due in a week, they would have been panicked.

God had already told Joshua that his foray against the city would be over before it started. If that were so, we might think, why go through all the bizarre preliminaries? God directed a parade, complete with a band, with a specific order of procession. First, the “armed men” to clear the way, passing on “before the ark of the Lord.” Next in line, seven priests, “before the ark.” In their hands, “trumpets of ram’s horns,” which they were to sound continuously – seven priests blowing seven trumpets for seven days. The people followed the ark in total silence, as Joshua commanded them; “thou shall not make any sound with your voice, neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth.”

Once a day for six days this eccentric activity went on. On the seventh day, it was around the city seven times, then the trumpet blast, then the shout, and Jericho was history. This whole “military” action would have appeared useless, even one that would have invited attack from a sudden surge from the city. No battering rams, no ladders, no “engines,” just this strange procession stalking the walls. But the people did as God commanded. They obeyed. The Bible simply says, “*so they did.*”

Obedience. The very word moves our minds to rebellion. From the time we are able to understand what it implies, we seem to have an instant revulsion to it. The thought is, “who are you to tell me what to do?” Yet here in God’s Word we have an example of perfect obedience. Why God, if you have already given us this city, do we have to put together this curious parade and carry on for seven days? *Why don’t You just let me go in there and wipe the place out?* The answer is because God said so. They were to obey.

God has written commandments that provide guidance for life. Obedience is always the best option.

What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you? [1 Corinthians 6:19].

Paul is not pulling punches here. This is serious stuff. He is telling us that we have a basic, fundamental, obligatory responsibility to take care of ourselves. So that we feel good? No. So that we live long? No. The issue is, our bodies are the *temple of the Holy Spirit* – which “*dwells in us*,” which the believer has “*of God*,” and we are “*not our own*.” If we are not our own, therefore, here Paul says we – and our bodies – *belong to God Himself*.

The common mantra of those who choose to neglect their health in various ways seems to be that they have a right to do what they want with their “bodies.” No, they don’t. The Bible gives censorious examples of those who are considered, for instance, *gluttons*. Deuteronomy condemns the “stubborn and rebellious” son, “who will not obey our voice,” and calls him a “glutton and a drunkard.” Proverbs forecasts the future of gluttons and drunkards; “they shall come to poverty.” The life-threatening hazards of nicotine, for instance, are well documented; yet even believers continue to use the drug. They may say it’s my life. But is it? *If*, ... and it is certain that *when* ... they are gone, what about those loved ones they leave - wife, husband, children, or grandchildren they will never see, and vice-versa?

There is yet another matter to consider, that of believers being stumblingblocks to unbelievers, or possibly those believers new in the faith. What sort of a witness is one who neglects to take care of oneself? Paul is specific: “take heed lest by any means the liberty of yours becomes a stumblingblock to those who are weak.” We should note here especially that he is speaking of being a stumblingblock to *believers*. If we can cause this to *believers*, what must be the testimony to the *world*?

Like to pig out? Remember that disgusting word, “glutton.” A nicotine habit? Think of the loved ones. A little wine “for the stomach’s sake?” Well, possibly, but remember the Great Apostle’s words, “be ye not drunk with wine.”

Our bodies belong to God. We are responsible for taking care of them.

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh ... [Psalm 2:4].

This may well be the most sobering phrase in all Scripture. The psalmist is talking about the “kings of the earth” who “set themselves ... against the Lord.” Spurgeon calls the first three verses of this Psalm a “description of the hatred of human nature against the Christ of God ...”

*... the heathen raging, roaring like the sea ... deep seeded hate, for they set themselves resolutely to withstand the Prince of Peace ... What doth God say? ... Mark the quiet dignity of the Omnipotent One and the contempt which pours upon the princes and their raging people. He has not taken the trouble to rise up and do battle with them – He despises them, He knows how absurd, how futile are their efforts against him - He therefore laughs at them.*³⁸

Joseph Parker, D.D., observes that there is a short distance between the derision of God and His judgments ...

*“Every insult offered to this holiness is avenged ... first, laughter, as a proof of the utter impossibility of injuriously afflicting the standards and purposes of God; after laughter must come the judgment, which shows how awful a thing it is to defy the wrath of righteousness ... for a period He may be amused ... such opposition may suddenly be displaced by judgment and vengeance.”*³⁹

Setting oneself against the Lord is not a wise thing to do; witness Korah and his cronies, who gathered themselves against Moses and Aaron and were swallowed up along with their “houses and all their goods.” And witness those who surely mocked Noah and thus God; “all the flesh died that moved upon the earth.”

Scripture tells us that unbelievable destruction is coming upon unbelieving man. John in his Revelation speaks of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments falling upon humanity and the earth during the Great Tribulation – death, disease, poisoned waters, unprecedented earthquakes, darkness over the earth, incineration of grass and trees ...

So for now, God laughs at those who scoff at Him. But the time is coming when His judgment will fall. There will not be anything funny about it.

³⁸ C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984) p. 12.

³⁹ Joseph S. Excel, ed., *The Biblical Illustrator*, Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956) p. 35.

***Hear ye me Asa, the Lord is with you while ye be with Him ...
[2 Chronicles 15:2].***

Asa was Judah's third king following Rehoboam and Abijah. He was a rarity; one of only a handful of whom it is recorded, did "that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord." Scripture tells us that "for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law." There was "no peace," and "God did vex the people with all adversity."

Hearing the words to this effect from the prophet Oded, King Asa "took courage." In today's words, he got after it in a big way. He "took away the altars of the strange gods." He "broke down the images." He commanded Judah to "seek the Lord their God ... to do the law and the commandments." He "took away the high places and images out of all the cities of Judah." He "sought the Lord." He "renewed the altar of the Lord that was before the porch." He "removed" his mother the queen because she made an idol in a grove; he "cut it down, stamped it out, and burned it."

When Ethiopia came against him with a "thousand thousand," Asa "Cried unto the Lord ... help us ... for we rest on thee ... O Lord thou art our God, let not man prevail against thee." Because many from the Northern Kingdom of Israel saw that God was with Asa, "they fell to him out of Israel in abundance," and entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God with all their heart." For 35 years – excluding the battle with the Ethiopians – there was "no more war."

But then Asa lost it. The king of Israel, Baasha, "came up against Judah," and instead of relying on God, Asa sent silver and gold to the Syrian king Benhadad and asked him to take care of Baasha. Benhadad obliged. But Asa had made a big mistake relying on Syria, and "Hanani the seer" shows up to tell him about it. Asa doesn't want to hear it. He is no longer in tune with God. He throws Hanani in prison. In the 39th year of his reign he contracts a "great disease in his feet," and the sick king "sought not the Lord, but to the physicians." He died the next year.

What is it that, when the evidence is so great that God is faithful, makes us seek help instead from a "Syria?" The psalmist is forever telling us that, The Lord hast not forsaken them that seek thee ... the Lord will receive every prayer ... the Lord will hear when I call ..."

Perhaps it is that when things are going so good ... we don't think we need Him ...

Behold thy gods, O Israel ... [1 Kings 12:28].

Here is a consummate example of the fact that our deeds live after us. The son of an official under Solomon, Jeroboam was given charge of the fortifications and public works in Jerusalem. But he stirred up dissent against the government over forced labor and taxation. Walking one day in Jerusalem, he was confronted by the prophet Ahijah, who tore his mantle into twelve pieces and gave Jeroboam ten, thus prophesying that the kingdom would be split and Jeroboam would be head of ten tribes. He becomes the first king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam's meeting with Ahijah should have made him realize that he was God's instrument in Israel. But he failed to put his trust in the Lord, which materialized almost immediately in his fear that, "if these people," – [the ten tribes separated from Judah that he was now king of] – "go up to do sacrifice at Jerusalem," – [that which God had ordained that there should be one sanctuary for the whole nation] – "then shall the heart of this people turn again ... and they shall kill me." To assuage his fear Jeroboam "made two calves of gold," and told Israel, "it is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." The calves were meant to be tokens of the Divine presence. Bad move. God had decreed, "Thou shalt not make any graven image."

But Jeroboam did not stop there. The sons of Aaron alone were to offer sacrifice. But Jeroboam himself "offered upon the altar ... and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places he had made" and "made priests of the lowest of the people." And as if that weren't enough, he changed the date of the Feast of Tabernacles, originally fixed by God Himself. God told him, "thou hast done evil above all that were before thee ... thou hast gone and made thee other gods ... and hast cast me behind thy back."

Jeroboam's great and comprehensive sin reverberated throughout the Northern Kingdom for some 250 years and affected the reigns of 15 of Israel's kings: Nadab, Jeroboam's son, "did evil ... and walked in the ways of his father" ... "Zimri ... sinned ... in walking in the way of Jeroboam" ... Omri ... "walked in all the way of Jeroboam ... and in his sin ... to provoke the Lord to anger." Ahab, "did evil ... as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sin of Jeroboam." And on and on. Such national sin was the cause of God's eventual scattering of the people.

Not trusting God is foolish. Adopting doctrine that is not according to Scripture is foolish. Going our own way is foolish. Jeroboam's name became identified with all three. He probably would like to start over.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ... [Hebrews 2:3].

Most think the author to the Book of Hebrews is writing to Hebrew Christians. Some perhaps may assume otherwise, and in that case, this warning can be thought to be directed to unbelievers – the lost will not escape judgment if they ignore this *great salvation* God has provided to all through the sacrifice of His Son.

If we then choose to assume that the warning here is directed to Hebrew Christians, we might ask what the author has in mind in this passage. His readers are already believers, so what sense does it make to warn them not to neglect something that they already have? The answer is most logically found by recognizing the process of salvation as three distinct phases: *justification*, *sanctification*, and *glorification*. The author's audience is a *justified* one – they are believers – therefore, the meaning here must then apply to the latter two phases of this “great salvation:” *sanctification* - that continuing process of *growing* in that salvation - and *glorification*, the *consummation* of that great salvation or the bestowing of rewards at the Judgment Seat.

So what is the author getting at by warning of neglecting this great salvation?” It is well that they have taken advantage of redemption ... *justification* - but what now? Do they simply accept having been redeemed, return to Judaism and the Law? Paul says that's not the way it is: “for the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ hath made me *free* from the Law of sin and death.” Paul continues – for application to us - “What shall we say then, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

Hershel Hobbs explains it: the author's fervent desire is the same for his Hebrew friends as it is for us today ...

“He wants them to move from where they are in their Christian experience” (*justified*) “to where God wills them to be” (*into the next phases - sanctification, leading to glorification*). “God has called them for a purpose, and they are to fulfill that purpose.”⁴⁰

So is the application for each believer. Each has been redeemed. Each has been given a gift and talent. Each has the opportunity to fulfill God's will in their lives - *sanctification*. Each has a reward waiting for him in glory - *glorification*. Neglect is not an option.

⁴⁰ See Hershel H. Hobbs, *Hebrews*, reprint ed. Broadman Press (Fincastle VA: Scripture Truth, 1993) p. 7.

We are fools for Christ's sake ... [1 Corinthians 4:10].

The Bible has much to say about fools and foolishness. In his letter to the Romans, Paul comes down hard on those who fail to realize “that which may be known of God ... and who are without excuse,” and “for this cause ... God gave them over to a reprobate mind ... professing themselves to be wise, they become *fools*.”

The Book of Proverbs tells us all we really need to know about fools. They “hate knowledge.” They “die for want of wisdom.” Their “hearts are in the house of mirth.” Wisdom is too high for them. We are counseled to “go from the presence of a foolish man.” The author tells us that a foolish son is both “grief” and “a calamity to his father.”

Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, says that fools “walk in darkness.” Even Jesus: when the Pharisees “marveled” that He had not washed (ceremoniously) before eating, the Lord called them fools for their hypocrisy. And when, following His resurrection, Christ rebuked those who doubted that He had risen; he called them “foolish, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken.” In the parable of the rich man, whose ground brought forth plentifully, and who decided to “pull down his barns and build greater ... and to eat, drink and be merry,” God told him, “thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.”

It is easy to get the message here; Scripture tells us that foolishness and folly are to be avoided, and we should avoid the pitfalls that would qualify us as fools.

But wait! Here in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he is saying that we should be ... *fools*! In order to bring the gospel to the lost, he and the apostles are willing to be *fools for Christ's sake*, and not only that, but also weak, despised, suffering persecution, depraved, the offscouring of all things, made a spectacle unto the world.

If one is to be a fool, let it be for Christ's sake like Paul, if that is what it takes to try to get across the so-called “foolishness of the cross to them that perish ...”

If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise ... [Mark 14:31].

Of all Jesus' apostles, it can certainly be argued that Peter lived the most eventful life. Each segment or event recorded in Scripture involving him seems to be remarkable. A fisherman in business with his brother Andrew on the Sea of Tiberius, Peter received the call to follow Jesus on the Sea of Galilee. Soon thereafter he saw the Lord heal his wife's mother. He witnessed the raising of Jarius' daughter. He walked on the surface of the sea with Jesus. When Jesus foretold His disciples of His coming sufferings, Peter "rebuked Him, 'Be it far from thee, Lord,' " bringing the familiar, "Get thee behind me, Satan," from Jesus. Along with James and John, Peter was a witness to Jesus' transfiguration. At Gethsemane, when Judas came with troops to apprehend Christ, the ever-impulsive Peter took out his sword and lopped off the ear of a servant of the high priest, again bringing rebuke from Jesus.

After Jesus' Ascension, Peter preached a sermon at Pentecost through which some 3,000 were saved. He healed the paralytic Aeneas. He raised Tabatha from the dead. People flocked to him, pleading that "at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." He rebuked Simon the sorcerer, who tried to buy the gift of laying on of hands. He preached a sermon on salvation by faith recorded in Acts 10 resulting in the salvation and baptism, among many others, the Gentile Cornelius. There is more. All in all, it is a very impressive resume of an extraordinary man.

But we cannot escape the one event over which Peter "wept bitterly." Jesus had said that "before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." Peter vehemently denied it, but after Jesus' arrest, Peter followed behind to Caiaphas' palace. In the court, a "damsel" said she had seen him with Jesus. I don't know what you're talking about, said Peter. Then another, "this fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." Not so, says Peter. And a third, when charged with being one of the disciples, "I knoweth not the Man."

Ah, if only Peter could take this incident off his resume. And would we ever want to keep it off ours, as a part of our testimony for Christ. We would certainly want to avoid "weeping bitterly" in this life, but think of standing before Him and having to admit that we had at some time demonstrated to the world that we "knoweth not the Man."

Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore, get wisdom ... [Proverbs 4:7].

"Give me now wisdom," asked Solomon of God, "and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this Thy people that is so great." It would seem that Solomon already possessed significant wisdom for him to ask only this of God. We might wonder if God may well have been a little surprised along with His pleasure at Solomon's humble and sole request. Anyway, we know that He was pleased, and "granted unto" Solomon "wisdom and knowledge."

God gave a lot of print to the subject of wisdom in His Book. First of all, it is of great value:

The price of wisdom is above rubies - Job 28:18
How much better is it to get wisdom than gold - Proverbs 16:16
Wisdom is better than strength Eccl. 9:16
Wisdom is profitable to direct Eccl. 10:10
A man of understanding hath wisdom - Proverbs 10:23
... better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it - Proverbs 8:11
Happy is the man who findeth wisdom - Proverbs 3:13
... wisdom exceedeth folly as far as light exceedeth darkness - Eccl. 2:13
wisdom giveth life to them that have it - Eccl. 7:12

We are even told where wisdom is to be found: "The Lord giveth *wisdom*, out of His mouth come understanding and knowledge ..." "Thou desireth truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part Thou shall make me to know *wisdom* ..." Paul tells us, "but of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us *wisdom*," and by James, "if any of you lack *wisdom* let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and it shall be given thee, but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

Paul was enamored with God's wisdom: "O the depths of the riches both of the *wisdom* and knowledge of God." And perhaps it would be well to differentiate between the wisdom that comes from God, and "fleshly wisdom," that of the world: Paul, again, "the *wisdom* of this world is foolishness with God," and referring to those who think they are worldly-wise, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness."

So it seems that God thinks that it is important for us to have wisdom that comes from above: "Get wisdom!" He says, "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom!" All we have to do is ask.

...whom the Lord knew face-to-face ... [Deuteronomy 34:10].

Moses probably suspected that when God relieved him from tending Jethro's sheep and assigned him the task of leading Israel that his future was not going to be a cakewalk. Right out of the box he is told that when he launches his task of leading the people out of Egypt ... Pharaoh "shall not hearken unto you." Moses, of course, obeys; the plagues and miracles follow, then the fun starts. He finds himself coming out of the dry bottom of the Red Sea as the head of a wandering nation, smack in the middle of the desert. Moses and Israel sing a "song unto the Lord" and Miriam and "all the women" have a big dance. But then things get dicey.

What follows for Moses has to have been a nightmare. The people "murmur" against him continually. First it is at Marah, no water. Then, "why did you bring us out here to die?" Then it's no water again at Rephidim. Then he endures the jealousy of Miriam and Aaron. In the wilderness of Sin between Elim and Sinai, they "murmured" against Moses and Aaron; "would God that we had died in the land of Egypt." Then Korah and "250 princes of the assembly" rise up against him. When judgment fell, the people told Moses, "ye have killed the people of the Lord." Then there was Aaron and the golden calf, the unbelief and 40 more years of wandering all over the place, up and down Mt. Sinai again and again. Four times he has to talk God out of destroying the whole nation. Then interspersed among all this, there were the accusations ...

They accuse him of "lifting himself above the congregation of the Lord." He has brought them "up *out of* a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness." He hadn't brought them *into* a land of milk and honey at all, nor "given us an inheritance of field and vineyards." He hadn't kept any of his promises. And finally, back at Kadesh, Moses has had it; he strikes the rock for water instead of talking to it as God commanded. It costs him entrance into the Promised Land.

But wait! Moses is called the "servant of God" some 17 times in Scripture. And here at the end of his life, it is said of him that, "there arose not a prophet in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew *face-to-face!*"

When we meet Moses in heaven, will he say well, it was all worth it? The answer will be oh yes. God knew me ... face-to-face.

We will have to wait. But in That Day, we will know Him face-to-face, just like Moses.

Have ye understood these things? ... He that hath ears let him hear ... [Matthew 13:51].

Jesus' ministry on earth was, as we might describe it today, multi-tasked. First, He established His authenticity; "A greater than Jonas is here ... A greater than Solomon is here." His purpose on earth was made clear from the beginning; "Even as the Son of man came ... to minister and to give His life a ransom for many."

His *divinity* was there for all to see. His *activities* were there for all to see. He taught in parables – Scripture records but thirty, with scope and purpose for each one. Parables of the wicked husbandman, describing the guilt and rejection of Israel; of the leaven, the inward working of evil in the kingdom; of the lost sheep, and the lost piece of money, and the prodigal son – all telling of His love for sinners; of the rich man and Lazarus where unbelief is punished and faith rewarded.⁴¹ And there is also the frightening conclusion to the parable of the ten virgins; "Five were wise, five foolish ... and at midnight there was a cry, the bridegroom cometh ... they that were ready went in unto him to the marriage and the door was shut ... afterward came the other (those who were unprepared) virgins saying, Lord, open unto us. But he answered, I know you not."

He performed miracles. He healed ten men with leprosy. A man born blind. Paralyzed men. Crippled people. Twenty in all – and these are the only ones recorded. He calmed storms, walked on water, fed 4,000, then 5,000. He raised Jairus' daughter, the widow's son, and Lazarus. He gave explicit warnings; "so shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from the just and shall cast them into the furnace of fire." There were fearful rejections of those who would not hear: "let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind and if the blind lead the blind, then both shall fall into the ditch ... the people draped nigh unto me with their mouths ... and with their lips, but their heart is far from me ... he did not mighty works there because of their unbelief ... woe unto you hypocrites ... blind ... ye fools ... ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Those who heard should have recognized the consequences of rejecting Him.

Patient explanations. Parables. Miracles. Warnings. Invitations: "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." They didn't hear. They never got it. They crucified him. Many today aren't getting it either. They are busy with their activities, possessions, careers, families. Church is an afterthought. Their Bibles are gathering dust – if they own one. God isn't on their list. They just aren't interested.

⁴¹ Merrill T. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966) pp. 825-26.

... behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son ... Jesus was born in Bethlehem ... [Isaiah 7:14, Matthews 2:1].

Dan Hayden, in his book, “Did God write the Bible?” writes,

In the Old Testament more than three hundred passages refer to no less than sixty-one specific details of the Messiah’s coming as a man in humility and sacrifice. They speak of His birth, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection as the Savior of the world. Although these Messianic prophecies were written more than five centuries prior to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, He fulfilled them exactly as predicted.⁴²

What is so great about the Bible is that when it says something we can be assured that it is absolutely trustworthy. The preeminent example of this, of course, is prophecy. As Mr. Hayden enumerates, Isaiah foresees that Christ would be born of a virgin. That he would speak in parables. That he would be crucified between two thieves. He would be silent before His accusers. He would be buried in a rich man’s tomb. The **fulfillment** of each is recorded by Matthew.

Zechariah’s prophecy foretells of Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem; “Rejoice greatly ... behold thy king cometh unto thee ... having salvation ... and entry on an ass.” Matthew records the event in his 21st Chapter. Zechariah also said that Judas’ 30 pieces of silver – the betrayal money – would be used to buy the potter’s field and Matthew again records the fulfillment; “the chief priests took the silver pieces ... and bought with them the potter’s field to bury strangers in.”

The psalmist prophesied that Christ would rise from the dead and that “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken” – and John verifies: “they braked not his legs ... these things were done that Scripture may be fulfilled.” The psalmist also said that He would ascend to glory, and Paul tells the Ephesians, “now that He ascended.”

Scores of Messianic prophecies were fulfilled - and duly recorded - regarding Jesus’ First Coming. But Scripture doesn’t stop there. *There is more!* The Bible foretells of Messianic prophecies that are to be fulfilled in His Second Coming.

With all this recorded evidence of past fulfillment, is there any doubt that God will see to it that the prophecies of the future will happen just as they have been written?

⁴² Dan Hayden, *Did God Write the Bible?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007) pp. 66-67.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord ... [Joshua 24:15].

Here we have the great story of a man who followed God to the letter. Before he left on his appointed mission to conquer the Promised Land, Joshua received encouragement from God: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee ... be not afraid ... I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee ... observe to do according to all the Law ... that thou mayest prosper ..." At every turn he took God at His word. When the strange figure of the "Captain of the Lord's Host" appears with bizarre instructions for the supernatural attack on Jericho, Joshua doesn't ask questions. When the people are repulsed at Ai, he prays, finds out that Achan is guilty of taking Jericho spoils, punishes him and goes on to take the city. Even when he was bamboozled by the Gibeonites, he was careful to keep Israel's word not to kill them, thus staying God's hand of discipline. The kings of southern Palestine got together to attack him, but Joshua got help from God with a hailstorm, bringing about immense slaughter.

Having dispatched the enemies in the south, Joshua turned north, where some 15 kings had gathered in conspiracy against him; but the Lord assured him, "tomorrow ... will I deliver them up slain before all Israel." Thirty-three kings were killed by Joshua, "and all the cities of those kings ... did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them." Joshua "did unto them as the Lord bade him ... Joshua took the whole land, and ... gave it to an inheritance unto Israel."

Here some may wonder at God's terrible judgment upon the Canaanites. But we are reminded of the nature of these people:

The Canaanites ... were remarkable for their atrocious cruelty that stamped all the ceremonies of their worship, and the precepts of their religion. No other people rivaled them in their mixture of bloodshed and debauchery with which they sought to honor the deity. As the celebrated Cruizer has said, "terror was the inherent principle of the religion, all its rites were bloodstained, and all its ceremonies were surrounded by bloody images."⁴³

At the end of his life this great leader tells the people, "ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done ... keep and do all that is written in the book of the Law ... cleave unto the Lord your God ... fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and truth."

It is a formula for certain contentment.

⁴³ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excel, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950) vol. 3, Introduction to Joshua, p. xxvi.

... when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God ... [2 Chronicles 33:12].

Manasseh should have taken a lesson from his father, King Hezekiah. When Sennacherib threatened Jerusalem, “Hezekiah the king and the prophet Isaiah ... prayed and cried to heaven,” and God dispatched the dreaded Assyrians. But Manasseh was a different breed of king. Merrill Unger describes in concise detail this evil man’s reign:

He became in time a determined and fanatical idolater ... took delight in introducing the superstitions of every country. The high places were restored, the groves replanted, the altars of Baal and Astarte rebuilt, and the sun, moon, and all the host of heaven were worshipped. The gods of Ammon, Moab, and of Edom were zealously worshipped everywhere. Babylonian and Egyptian paganism was rife; incense and offerings rose on the roofs of the houses to the fabled deities of the heights; wizards practiced their enchantments ... and the valley of Hinnom was once more disgraced by the hideous statue of Moloch, to whom parents offered up their children as burnt sacrifices. In the very temple of the Lord stood an image of Astarte ... fuller particulars are preserved by Josephus, who says that executions took place every day ... according to rabbinical tradition Isaiah was sawn asunder by order of Manasseh ...⁴⁴

Scripture tells us that “the Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken.” So here come the Assyrians again, this time brought upon them by God. They catch Manasseh “among the thorns,” and carry him off to Babylon.

But while this man, who had brought so much evil to Judah for 55 years, languishes in captivity, he repents, seeks the Lord, humbling himself “greatly,” praying until God hears him and finally, “Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.”

So many valuable lessons here from the Bible. First, Manasseh knew better, because he had a godly father. Secondly, when one strays, no matter how far, God is willing to forgive if one repents of sin, humbles himself and realizes that, as Manasseh did, that “the Lord, He is God.” Perhaps however, one should just remember Manasseh’s father’s act when threatened by Assyria, and “Spread it before the Lord,” before the trouble appears.

⁴⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* 17th printing (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971) p. 689.

Fret not ... [Psalm 37:1].

We get in our Fords, Chevys, Toyotas, or whatever, buckle up, start the engine, and go. So it is with our automobiles. We don't think about it. But not so with an airplane. There are scores of items to be *checked* before the machine takes to the air, and the *checking* continues until the destination - that would be parking - is reached. *Check, check, check*. It's all done with a *checklist*. Every airplane has its own. *Checklists* prevent forgetting a critical item, and insure that things are done in order. Omitting an item can, as they say, ruin ones whole day.

Shadrach learned this the hard way. One dark night he took off ... and behold! ... *no lights on the instruments*. No light in the cockpit. For a few exciting seconds, no one knew if the airplane was right side up, ninety degrees off level or upside down. The *checklist* was not followed: a critical item - *Pilot's flight instrument lights, check* - had not been ... *checked*.

Well, if we look in the Bible we can find checklists too. Here we have one in Psalm 37, written by an aging David. Although the psalmist is here addressing the seeming dilemma of why the wicked prosper and why the righteous sometimes find themselves in distress, his poem contains a *checklist* of instructions to avoid worry, stress, and angst. David begins with the cardinal admonition, "Trust in the Lord." He follows with a brace of other advice, designed to encourage the most discouraged:

Do Good
Delight thyself also in the Lord
Commit thy way unto the Lord
Rest in the Lord
Cease from anger and forsake wrath
A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of the wicked
The Lord knoweth the days of the upright
The steps of a good man are pondered by the Lord
The Lord upholdeth him (the good man) in his hand
The Lord forsaketh not His saints
Wait on the Lord
Depart from evil
The Lord is the strength of the righteous
He is ever merciful

Commit, delight, rest, wait. He knoweth, upholdeth, is our strength. Follow David's checklist. There is little reason to fret.

Jehoshaphat ... set himself to seek the Lord ... God gave him rest round about [2 Chronicles 20:3, 30].

Here we have Judah's King Jehoshaphat in a pickle. He had just generated a second revival among the people ... "brought them back unto the Lord God of their fathers," and had set judges throughout the land admonishing them to "take heed what ye do. For you judge not for man but for the Lord." "Deal courageously," he told the people, and the Lord shall be with the good." Life among God's people was good.

But here come Judah's mortal enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites and their allies to do battle against them, even after they had refrained from attacking them. "There cometh a great multitude from the sea," Jehoshaphat's intelligence informs him, and the king's immediate reaction was fear. But in the same breath he "set himself to seek the Lord." He gathered all Judah "to ask help of the Lord," and offered an immediate, earnest prayer to God. "Art not thou God in Heaven? Is there not power and might that none is able to withstand thee?" We don't know what to do with this "great company that cometh against us... but our eyes are upon thee." Jehoshaphat told the people, "believe in the Lord your God." He appointed singers "to say, praise the Lord; for His mercy endureth forever." And all Judah "stood before the Lord."

And God, as He always does, answered. The "Spirit of the Lord" in the person of the Levite Jahaziel tells the people, "Be not afraid or dismayed ... this battle is not yours, but the Lord's ... ye shall not have to fight ... the Lord will be with you ... be still and see the salvation of the Lord." God proceeds to "set ambushments against Moab, Ammon, and mount Seir," turned the invaders upon themselves, they slaughter each other, "they were dead bodies fallen to the earth and none escaped." The Judeans never lifted a finger, and "were three days ingathering the spoil it was so much." They "blessed the Lord" in the valley of Berachah, and Jehoshaphat's realm was "quiet, for his God gave him rest round about."

What great, simple examples of this good advice from Scripture we have in just this one incident: "Our eyes are upon thee ... ask help of the Lord ... the battle is not ours but the Lord's ... the Lord will be with us ... He will give rest round about."

Something for every-day-put-into-practice and cause our "enemies" to turn on themselves...

Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the Lake of Fire [Revelation 20:15].

Those who find themselves in this arena, standing before God the Judge at the Great White Throne will realize that is *too late* for them. They will suddenly perceive that they are doomed, and that there will be no reprieve. ... they now face eternity in everlasting torment.

When Shadrach was occupied with flying airplanes for a time, there were monthly “flying safety” meetings to attend. These served to remind pilots of the many aspects of the hazards of flight and how to avoid them: bad weather, complacency, reports of accidents in aircraft which they were flying at the time with particular attention to the cause of these mishaps, emergency procedures, and in general, paying attention to the business at hand, which was, of course, safety.

One of the hazards of flying in high altitude, high performance aircraft is “hypoxia.” Hypoxia in aviation can occur when the flow of oxygen from the aircraft’s oxygen supply system to the pilot’s mask is impeded. There are training means employed for pilots to experience this problem – one such is an “altitude chamber,” wherein the pilot is artificially subjected to high altitude where supplemental oxygen is needed. In this “chamber,” his oxygen supply is withdrawn and he then experiences the symptoms – these vary from pilot to pilot - of hypoxia. The intent is to allow the pilot to recognize his symptoms, so that if they occur in flight he can take action to prevent disaster.

Shadrach will never forget an incident in which hypoxia had occurred was briefed at one of these meetings. The entire episode was recorded. It began with an urgent call from a pilot who reported that his wingman was flying erratically. He suspected hypoxia. The audible recording then began as this pilot tried to talk his friend down. He called him by name, “Tom, turn left.” “Good.” “Now level off.” “You are doing fine.” “Now lower the nose.” “That’s it.” But as his friend’s aircraft neared the ground, the commands became more urgent, then frantic: Tom! Pull up! Pull UP! PULL UP! Then the resigned, tragic announcement to the ground, “*Too late ... too late ... too late.*” No one in the room made a sound for a very long time.

One day for the lost it will be too late. God’s dispensation of grace will end. If only we had a recording of the words that will be heard at the Great White Throne. Words to play back to the lost ... “*too late ... too late ... too late ...*”

For who he did foreknow, he also did predestinate ... [Romans 8:29].

Herein lies a theological argument that will never end. The assumption is made by some that God's sovereignty – in the question of man's eternal destiny – is absolutely, well, absolute. Consider John Calvin: "*Scripture clearly proves ... that God by His eternal and immutable counsel determined ... those whom it was His pleasure one day to admit to salvation, (the elect, or saved) and those whom, on the other hand, it was His pleasure to doom to destruction*" (the reprobate, or the lost).⁴⁵ Or, *God foreknew what the end of man was to be ... because he preordained by decree*.⁴⁶ In other words, man has absolutely no voice in the matter. His fate is already in concrete.

There is great, great danger here. What if one, after digesting Calvin's theology, decides well, if I don't have any say, and God has already decided my fate "from the foundations of the earth" (see Ephesians 1:4), then there is nothing I can do. And that is exactly what he does. Nothing. And he dies in his sin. Now God, in His infinite foreknowledge, knew the man would do this. But it is essential to understand here that God's *foreknowledge* does not mean that God *foreordained* it. *Foreordination* signifies *prescience* - *knowledge* - **not** pre-election.⁴⁷

Think a minute. Why would God do such a thing? How could He expect man to worship Him – as man was born to do ... or for that matter, believe that Christ died for his sin ... given that there is a very real chance he is already condemned? Why have churches? Why the Bible? Why anything? What is the use of telling people about the gospel? How would one go about it ... "well, you can believe, but it may not do you any good in the end!" Why should they even care, if their fate has already been predestined? No where in the Bible does it say God *predestinated* this one to be saved and that one lost. *Predestination* simply means that in That Day all the *redeemed* shall become like the Lord Jesus.⁴⁸ It has absolutely nothing to do with salvation.

How about we let Peter settle this? In his second epistle he says, "...there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring damnable heresies, even **denying the Lord that bought them**, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." *Can it be clearer?* ... Christ bought **those who deny Him**. He died for all. Not for only "the elect."

God has blessed us with common sense. We know to come in out of the rain and not to step in front of a Mack truck. It is very simple: we are *elect because we are saved*, not *saved because we are elect*.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, III: xxi, 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, xxiii, 7.

⁴⁷ M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. III, (Hendrickson Pub., 1984) p.95.

⁴⁸ H.A. Ironside, *Full Assurance* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1937). pp. 93-94.

He will be our guide, even unto death ... [Psalm 48:14].

One of the epic sea battles of the Second World War was that of the sinking of the German battleship Bismarck. Sailing out of the Baltic Sea in May of 1941, this behemoth, along with the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen headed into the North Atlantic Ocean to do mayhem to Allied shipping. Tracked and subsequently confronted by the British, the Bismarck blew the British battle cruiser "Hood" out of the water, taking with it 1,415 souls. The cry from England was "Sink the Bismarck," and the entire British Home Fleet dedicated itself to this end. When other ships of the fleet finally located the German ship, it was decided that because of the Bismarck's awesome firepower, obsolete torpedo planes would be sent to the attack. One lucky shot struck the Bismarck's steering mechanism, jamming both rudders, causing the loss of its guidance system. The immense vessel could now only proceed in a circle, and she was doomed.

Of course, it is unnecessary to note that ships must have rudders to steer them on their courses, and without them they cannot maintain a course and subsequently never get to where they set out to go. But it is equally true that believers need what we might call a rudder. Example Philip's experience with the Ethiopian, as "he ran thither to him, and heard him reading the prophet Esaias, and said, understandeth what thou readest? And he said, how can I, *except some man shall guide me?*"

So where does this guidance, or rudder, come from? John quotes Jesus, as He announces the fellowship of the Spirit available to all believers: "Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth, is come, *he will guide you* into all truth ... and he will show you things to come ... He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

The psalmist knew he needed this guidance: "In thee O Lord do I put my trust: let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me. For thou art my rock and fortress: therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and *guide me*. And he was confident that it was always available to him: "For this God is our God for ever and ever, He *will be our guide* even unto death."

Guidance comes from God through prayer and the diligent study of His Word. Without it, one may be running in circles, like the Bismarck.

His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness ... [2 Peter 1:3].

Peter here goes on to say three distinct things: first, we have been given “great and precious promises.” Secondly, we have been made “partakers of the Divine nature.” And lastly, we have “escaped the world’s corruption through lust.” With all this having been given to us, he says that we have a specific responsibility, a natural conduct as believers to give all diligence to other characteristics of the Christian faith. First, Peter assumes that believers have foundational faith in Christ, but then he provides a load of things to add on to this foundation: to **faith**, he says, add ...

Virtue: (*Moral excellence; conformity of ones life and conduct to ethical principles*) ... Knowledge: (*acquaintance with facts, truths, principles* - Peter’s idea, of course, with God’s Word): ... Temperance: (*moderation or self-restraint*) ... Patience; (*quiet perseverance, even tempered, bearing provocation without complaint*) ... Godliness: (*conforming to the laws and wishes of God, devout, pious*) ... Kindness: (*of a good or benevolent nature, indulgent, helpful*) ... Charity (*the greatest of all Christian graces*).

Then comes the apostle’s pop quiz. Are these things in you? Yes? Then the result in that we will be “neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus.” No? Well, “he that lacketh these things is blind, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.”

Peter says further that, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” This implies *responsibility* resting upon the “elect”⁴⁹ In other words, once one has trusted Christ as Savior (he is now “elect”) one ... must realize that calling and election, and bring its solemn responsibilities to bear upon daily life, to live as God’s men called unto God’s church.⁵⁰ *Ekloge*... election, is used of God’s selection of men for special missions or attainments. “Election does not mean here that God predestined a definite number of mankind to eternal life and the rest to eternal damnation.”⁵¹ It is a term that implies post-salvation availability to and assignment of service by God.”

Peter has given believers something to think about. Perhaps each day.

⁴⁹ See Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This?* (Bend OR: The Berean Call, 2006) p. 285.

⁵⁰ B. C. Caffin *The Pulpit Commentary, Second Epistle of Peter*, reprinted (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) p. 4.

⁵¹ See Marvin R Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1924) IV:16.

Adonijah ... caught hold on the horns of the altar ... [1 Kings 1:50].

Adonijah thought he was in the catbird's seat. His brothers, Amnon, Absalom, and probably Chileab were all dead. His father David is on his death bed. Well, he tells himself, I am the oldest surviving son, so "I will be king." Scripture gives a little background on Adonijah, which sheds light on his actions. He was a spoiled brat. A handsome one at that, which enhanced the people's attraction to him.

Adonijah prepares for his coup. He throws a feast for his supporters, among whom are Joab, David's commander in chief – but not all that loyal to David - Abiathar the priest, who has forsaken David for Adonijah, and all the important people in the government. Notably absent: Nathan the prophet, Benaiah and David's mighty men, and Solomon. Of course.

Seeing what is going on in the suburbs, Nathan goes to see Bathsheba. Have you heard that Adonijah is now making serious moves to be king, and does David know about this? Remember, he says, that David had promised that Solomon would reign after his death. The prophet gives a little nudge ... if she doesn't do something, right now, her life might be in danger. Bathsheba talks to David. The king remembers. He calls for Zadok the priest, Nathan, and Benaiah. They put Solomon on a donkey, the trumpet is blown, Solomon is anointed by Zadok and Nathan, and the people shout "Long live King Solomon."

Joab, with Adonijah about a half-mile down the road, wonders, "Wherefore is this noise of the city?" They find out soon enough. Adonijah's guests scatter to the winds to avoid being accused of treason, and Adonijah panics. He flees for the temple and grabs the horns of the altar, a symbol of refuge, throwing himself on the mercy of Solomon. Solomon spares him. For now.

The "horns of the altar" might be thought of as having distant significance to us, possibly as being symbolic of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on the cross for all sinners. By "grasping the horns," Adonijah was spared. By believing that we are sinners in need of forgiveness to be saved, and trusting in Him having paid for our sins, we too are spared ... and then some ... we have eternal life.

We don't have to look for horns to hang onto.

... ***honor the Lord with thy substance ... [Proverbs 3:9].***

We have in Scripture occasions of dishonesty, even murder, among family members, and among brothers in particular. Take for example Jacob and Esau. Jacob had no problem with his mother's scheme of stealing the blessing from Esau. Surely he knew better, yet, he let the ruse go to fruition. Then we have David's family ... Absalom hated Amnon because he had forced his sister Tamar. Absalom waited two years to have Amnon murdered by his servants. And of course, there is the most infamous example of all sibling rivalries, Cain and Abel.

Shadrach grew up with his brother, younger by 18 months with, of course, the usual sibling quarrels, skirmishes, and bickering. Yet all that is history and lost in the years, and now Shadrach looks upon him with a deep sense of pride; and the reason is that he was true to the Lord to the letter. He followed God, he obeyed His commandments (probably most of them anyhow), and he was faithful to God's calling. He became a gifted speaker and teacher of the Word; he even preached the wedding of his 6th son. Shadrach was impressed with that one. He became a gifted singer, he sang at his 2nd son's wedding in the Duke University chapel. Shadrach was *really* impressed with that one.

Shadrach remembers one statement which his brother said influenced him most; while in his youth he lived for a time with our elderly Aunt and Uncle in Philadelphia. One day, he said, Aunt Sadie took him aside and told him solemnly, urgently, "honor God in your life." He said he never forgot that. And he did just that. And now he and his wife, up in years just like Shadrach, can look back on a life of obedience to the Lord, a life blessed by more than a score of grandchildren.

There is no greater lesson one can give to young people than to honor God; such is not passed on by words, or lectures, or advice, or admonition, or counsel, or discipline, or "words to the wise," or anything like that. What it *is*, is the *visible* living example of a life lived in honor of the Lord. Such an example is the most impressive and credible evidence of the result of following God's will throughout ones life.

When one is young, it is impossible to look too far into the future. It takes devoted faith and trust in God to honor Him. But the rewards, both here and the hereafter, are worth striving for. Solomon has it right, "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh*" ... (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

... **they will reverence my son ... [Matthew 21:37].**

Here we have a very sad story. It is Jesus' parable of the vineyard. If we consider the circumstances we will arrive at one of the most heartrending texts in Scripture; a father, having honest intentions, sending his son to face murderous men, suffering the great grief of his loss. The statement alone breathes sadness, because we know the result. This father, the "entrepreneur," "planted a vineyard ... hedged it round about ... built a tower ..." Then he hired "husbandmen" to manage his crop. When he sent his "servants" to collect the bounty of his crop these criminals beat up one, killed another, and stoned a third. The owner sent more servants; they suffered the same fate. Then the owner thought, "If I send my son, they will respect him," Not so. When they saw the son, they said, "Let us kill him." We are reminded of another related incident; that of when Joseph's brothers showed Jacob Joseph's coat drenched in blood, Jacob "tore his clothes, mourned for many days ... refusing to be comforted."

The parable, of course, sets forth the sin and ruin of the Jewish nation. The vineyard is the Jewish nation; God kept them under His special protection; sent His servants whom they abused (think Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel), and finally, He sent His Son. *God was not wearied out with the husbandmen's cruelty and violence. Each step of their wickedness and obstinacy was met with renewed mercy ... He condescended to speak in human language, as hoping for a good result from his last effort for man's salvation ... He, as it were, puts aside his foreknowledge and gives hope to man's free will.*⁵² *Never did grace appear more gracious than in sending the Son. This was done last of all ... for if nothing else would work upon them, surely this would*⁵³

There is, of course, a parallel here, for when Pilate asked, "for what shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all said unto him, let him be crucified." Where Scripture gives us the two wrenching visions of the entrepreneur's and Jacob's grief, one perhaps can imagine in some degree the human sorrow over the loss of a son. But the ultimate degree of grief ... God's sending his only son to die for the sin of the whole world ... is unimaginable. As God is infinite in His love for lost man, so must have been His sorrow as He watched the death of His only Son.

This vision is one every sinner must see and perceive; the great love of God and the infinite sorrow He suffered in giving His Son to die, giving the lost the opportunity to believe and accept this sacrifice for his sin.

⁵² Spence and Excell eds. *The Pulpit Commentary* vol.15, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) vol II pp. 324-25.

⁵³ Matthew Henry *Commentary of the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960) p. 1313.

Write the things which shall take place ... [Revelation 1:19].

Over the years in his study of the doctrines contained in Scripture, Shadrach has realized that there have arisen over the centuries different interpretations of the contents of God's Word, and in some cases these differences have become fairly significant. Whoa! How can this be? Unfortunately, it is true. Take John's Book of Revelation for instance. Essential to the understanding of this book is the resolution of the method by which it is interpreted. What complicates the process is the existence of different interpretations of what John was told to write (Revelation 1:19). For instance ...

There is the **allegorical** (or non-literal) premise), in that the Book has been by and large already fulfilled, and is just a symbolic presentation of God's ultimate victory over evil, and has no relation to actual events. This means, of course, that the Book contains no revelation whatsoever from God, and has nothing to say about future events.

There is the **preterist** (past) interpretation, that the book is a symbolic picture of early conflicts of the church with Judaism and paganism that have all been fulfilled in the early history of the church. This would mean it is not prophetic, eliminating any possibility of future significance of the Book.

There is the **historical** approach – that the book simply sets forth the entire history of the church age. But the problem here is that as many as 50 interpretations of the contents evolve, each dependent upon the time in which the interpreter lives.

The fourth view, called **futurist**, holds that most of the Book is yet to be fulfilled; that most of it is prophecy. It is so designated five times within its pages. John opens it referring to "things that must shortly come to pass," and closes with "things that must shortly be done." In more than 400 references to the Old Testament, it deals with the same prophetic references to God's future programs as do the Old Testament prophets, that is, God's judgments, the Day of The Lord, and the Coming of Christ. It would appear feasible, then, that the purpose of the Book is to reveal events that must take place just prior to, during, and after the Second Coming of Christ.

Well, everybody has their own opinion and interpretation, it profits no one to argue about the details, and one day God will clear it all up. Nevertheless, above all, it should be remembered that God has given us this Book for a purpose; He wants us to understand it. It behooves each believer to diligently study, so that this understanding will follow.

... **but not before God** ... [*Romans 4:2*].

Here in but four words, among many other references in the Bible, we have positive evidence that no one is saved by works. The Great Apostle levels anyone who thinks works are going to save him. The example he uses is Abraham. If Abraham had been saved (justified) by works, Paul said he would have had something to crow about ... “justified by some sort of glory,” But wait! He says that works won’t cut it with God. It might look good on the patriarch’s resume, but ... *not before God!* In the case of justification, God isn’t interested in our “filthy rags,” as Isaiah testifies, “we are all as an unclean thing, our righteousness are as filthy rags.” *Filthy*, according to Webster: foul ... disgustingly and completely dirty ... vile ... obscene ... offensive. And when one has the gall to offer works for salvation, God says, it’s not going to wash with Me.

Elsewhere, the Bible goes on and on about this. That is how important it is. Paul continues here in verse 3, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness ... to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness ... God imputeth righteousness *without works*.” To the Ephesians, he says, “for by grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves (i.e., don’t bother to work for it) it is the gift of God, *not of works* lest any man should boast.”

Salvation and works are like oil and water. They just do not mix. Paul says, “if salvation is by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace. Otherwise works is no more works.” It is like the geometric theorem: a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. It is that simple and that absolute.

Some, even the largest denominations and theologies on the planet, think and proclaim that works are needed to be saved. Some think baptism saves us. Some think sacraments or keeping rituals will get them to heaven. Some imply that “perseverance” will acquire and maintain salvation. Such insolence flies in the face of God Himself. It is an incredibly arrogant insult to Him. Who are we to think that we can offer ... filthy rags ... vile, obscene, offensive *works* ... to God to pay for our salvation when He has given His only Son to die for us. *Filthy rags* instead of His Son? How He must look on in sorrow when His infinite sacrifice is rejected and instead something ... obscene ... is offered.

Works are a good thing – once we have trusted in Christ to take away our sin. They are expected of the believer. But oil (grace?) and water (works?) do not mix. Salvation is a free gift. It cost God His only Son.

O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord ... [Ezekiel 37:4].

The old spiritual says, “Ezekiel cried, dem dry bones ... O hear the word of the Lord ... the foot bone connected to the leg bone, the leg bone connected to the knee bone ... dem bones dem bones gonna walk around ... O hear the word of the Lord ...” and so on ...

Here we read that the hand of the Lord “was upon” Ezekiel, and had set him down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. “Son of man, asked God, can these bones live?” Well I sure don’t know, said the prophet. God then speaks to the bones: I “will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.” Ezekiel was then told to “prophesy unto the bones,” and there was a noise, a “shaking,” and the bones came together ... “the sinews and the flesh came upon them and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.”

Then we are told in no uncertain terms who these bones represent. God says they are “the whole house of Israel.” He promises that He is going to “bring them unto the land of Israel,” and that He will “place you into your own land.” God then tells Ezekiel to take two sticks, one for Judah, one for Israel, symbolizing that both divisions of the kingdom *will again become one nation “as before the division in the days of Rehoboam and Jeroboam”* ... He will “make them one stick” ... will take the children “from among the heathen whither they have gone, and will gather them into the land” ... will make them one nation. It should be noted here that this hasn’t happened since Solomon, after whom Israel became two nations. There is no doubt that this prophecy is yet to be fulfilled.

This is but one Scriptural verification of God’s will of purpose for His people Israel in That Day. Today, as That Day approaches, the bullseye of the planet’s politics and strife – the location of the most polarized peoples on earth, is Israel. The world’s eye strays seldom from the Jewish state.

Zechariah says of the future, “in those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

Those who think that God is finished with His people aren’t tying together what the Bible refers to in so many texts. Isaiah’s prophecy says: “*For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their land*” It is a foundational, absolute truth; God **will** gather His people together again, and Christ **will** return to reign upon the earth from Jerusalem for 1,000 years.

And all those who have trusted in Him will be there to enjoy.

What hast thou here? [Isaiah 22:15].

It only takes a short passage from Scripture to teach us a lesson. Here we are told briefly of one Shebna, who, as we might say today, had gotten too big for his britches. Shebna was a high official under King Hezekiah, perhaps second only to the king. A man of wealth, he is here rebuked by Isaiah for his pride and arrogance; particularly for the ornate and conspicuously monumental rock-hewn sepulcher he was building for himself. Isaiah seems to have had trouble with Shebna before; it appears he had ignored the prophet's warnings about alliance with idolatrous Egypt.⁵⁴ So now he is brought down from his high perch, courtesy of God's prophet.

There are other examples in Scripture of men who got carried away with their perceived importance. Consider one King Herod, who, one day "arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne and made an oration." Hailed by the people shouting, "it is the voice of a god, and not of a man," Herod thought this was pretty cool, said nothing to squelch the misunderstanding, was struck down by an angel and died after five days of a miserable illness. Then we have a brief reference to one Theudas (Acts 5:36), of whom we know little, only that he boasted "himself to be somebody" and ended up dying with 400 of his men.

We can contrast all this with Paul on his first missionary journey. When the inhabitants of the Roman colony Lystra witnessed the healing of the crippled man by the Apostle, they assumed that their gods Mercury and Jupiter had returned in the persons of Paul and Barnabus. Paul said whoa! to this proposed deification; he and Barnabus "rent their clothes" and ran among the people crying, "we are men like you!"

God is big on humility. Eliphaz told Job, "He shall save the humble." James tells us, "He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble." The Psalmist reminds, "He forgets not the cry of the humble." Peter says "all of you be subject to one another and be clothed in humility."

It might be a good idea to think of Shebna, Herod and ... Paul - the next time we get the idea that we are the cat's meow.

⁵⁴ See Pfeiffer, Vos, Rea, eds., *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1975) p. 1567.

... please let me make a test once more with the fleece ... [Judges 6:39].

Gideon was God's "mighty warrior, chosen to give Israel relief from the Midianites, who lurked in the "mountains and the caves and the strongholds," pouncing on the Israelites from time to time taking their food, livestock, and leaving them "destitute."

One day Gideon is beating out the wheat in the wine press to try to save it from the ravaging Midianites and he sees the "angel of the Lord" sitting under an oak tree. "The Lord is with you," says the angel. I'm not so sure about that, says Gideon; if that is true how come we have been abandoned to these thieving Midianites? Gideon is given an order that shocks him: "Go and deliver Israel from Midian." What? How am I going to do that? Don't give it a second thought, says the Lord, I will be with you.

Gideon is a doubter. He wants a sign; "show me a sign that it is Thou that speakest to me." Wait right here, he says, I'll be back with an offering. When he returns, the angel tells him to lay out the offering and pour the "broth" on it. Gideon obeys. The angel "put out the end of the rod that was in his hand," brought fire out of the rock, and toasted the whole thing. Gideon is convinced. He is then told to tear down an idolatrous "grove," which he does, and the Midianites are ready to string him up.

And here they come, the "Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east" amassing themselves in the valley of Jezreel; Gideon in turn assembles his own force to face them. But then he begins to get shaky again, and he wants another sign. This one is complicated; he puts a fleece of wool on the floor and wants God to wet only the fleece, not the floor. God does so. But Gideon is still uneasy; he says, please don't be mad at me, but can you please now just wet the floor and leave the fleece dry. God does. And as we know, God is with Gideon, the Midianites are dispatched, and Israel is spared.

When we are seeking God's will, it probably is not a bad idea to "put out some fleece." It might be in the form of going ahead with a first step wherein we have a good idea that it just may be God's will that we do something. If He then "wets the fleece," or gives us a reasonably "straight course" in which to proceed, then we can have reasonable confidence that we are in His will.

One might not want to try God as much as did Gideon ...

... **Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone [James 2:17].**

On the surface, it seems that James is telling us that if we don't have works, our faith is invalid. This assumption, of course, is itself invalid.

It may appear that James' apparent suggestion of justification by works might be contradictory to Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone. Such is not the case. Paul contemplates man before conversion, says by grace he is saved, and then ascribes to spiritual works that result from this faith. On the other hand, James views man *after* salvation, his faith *subsequently* producing works. Commentators provide clear explanation of this issue:

*It is right to say that James has no part in the popular discussion as to whether man is saved by faith or works ... He never questions that faith is the instrument of salvation, but insists that if faith is real it will manifest itself in works.*⁵⁵

*This passage refers to those who say they have faith and that works are not necessary in Christian living. It does not say they have real and active faith, but they say that they have. James is not referring to initial justifying faith, but to the demonstration of Christian faith among men. Christianity demands of its fullness good works to all men.*⁵⁶

*How was Abraham justified before God? It was when, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." But when he went to Mt. Moriah, and there by faith offered his son upon the altar, he was justified by works before men, as he made manifest the reality of his profession of confidence in God.*⁵⁷

Rahab is another example. She believed that the "God of Israel was the living and true God," and she put her faith to work by risking her life to hide Joshua's spies and helping them to escape. She exhibited true faith by her works – her faith was not dead.

God went to a lot of trouble to give us a Book that, taken in its whole, is in complete harmony. He intended for it to be studied in context. He never intended for us hang a theology on one or a few verses. When we avoid this error, we will, as Paul Harvey used to say, know "the rest of the story."

⁵⁵ Charles R. Eerdman, *The General Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) pp. 33ff.

⁵⁶ Finis Jennings Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville GA: Dake Bible Sales, 1961) p. 261.

⁵⁷ H.A. Ironside, *Notes on James and Peter* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947) p. 31.

If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses ... [Matthew 6:15].

During the second 1960 Presidential Debate, then President Jimmy Carter was giving challenger Ronald Reagan a very hard time repeatedly misrepresenting the latter's stands on numerous issues. Finally, when again Carter misstated Reagan's alleged plans to cut Medicare, Mr. Reagan, in great – and ingenious as it turned out – frustration, countered with, “Now, there you go again.” The simple sentence became an instant favorite with the Media, and the moment became arguably one that contributed to Mr. Carter's defeat.

Well, if we allow ourselves to fall into the trap of a biblical-illiterate interpretation of Matthew's statement here, we may sigh as well, “here we go again.” For instance, one may read this and immediately jump to the nervous conclusion that if they are offended by another and steadfastly refuse to forgive them for their wrongdoing – they are either doomed or are in danger of losing their salvation.

Such angst is really unnecessary. Dr. Steven Waterhouse explains:

... Christ is teaching that those believers who hold unforgiving grudges against others will not obtain forgiveness from God in his role as father. God has already forgiven believers in His role as Judge by virtue of faith in Christ. Yet if a believer absolutely refuses to forgive another who requests it, that believer will in turn remain unforgiven in the sense that he is not in fellowship with God. Fellowship with God the Father is conditioned upon forgiving those who sincerely request it. However, salvation is conditioned upon faith alone.⁵⁸

When Peter asked Jesus, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him. Till seven times? The answer came, “I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven.” Indeed, we need to be forgiving. But there is no need to fret about imagined consequences. One is forgiven by God the Judge through faith in His Son. Through this forgiveness one has eternal life. As Father, He wants His children to forgive others ... such will preclude loss of fellowship with Him, and avoid the angst.

⁵⁸ Steven Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone; An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine*, 4th ed. (Amarillo TX: Westcliff Press, 2010) p. 158.

We cannot stand before thee because of this ... [Ezra 9:15.]

The Jews had been in captivity for 70 years when the Babylonian king Cyrus permitted Zerubbabel to take some 42,000 back to Jerusalem. Another 70 or 80 years later King Artaxerxes, who evidently believed in the existence and power of God, sends Ezra back to Jerusalem with the second group of exiles “to inquire according to the care of thy God.”

Ezra’s pedigree was one of renown. He was a member of the high priest family, a descendant of Phineas, grandson of Aaron. He introduces himself as “the son (probably the great-great-grandson) of Seraiah” –the chief priest at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the grandson of Hilkiah, who was Josiah’s high priest. Ezra was a “ready scribe in the law of Moses;” he “sought the law of the Lord.” Moreover, “he prepared his heart to **do it**.” His task when he returned to Jerusalem was to teach the people “the ceremonial and moral principles of the Law.”

Shortly after Ezra sets up shop, the “princes,” the civil leaders of the Jews, pay him a visit. Ezra listens in horror as they tell him that in direct violation of God’s law distinctly forbidding intermarriage among the people they had intermarried with the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, even with the evil Canaanites. This resulted in idolatry being brought into their very homes by these spouses. And “chief among” the violators were the “princes and rulers, even the sons and nephews of the chief priest.” These Jews, members of a “kingdom of priests,” a holy nation, set apart by God to be a separate – “a peculiar people,” were in the process of destroying His purpose for them.

Ezra is devastated. Never had he suspected this of God’s people. He “sat down, astonished.” He tore both his outer and inner garments, and in an extremely rare act, literally tore the hair from his head and his beard. He sat until the “evening sacrifice,” when he finally “arose from my heaviness.” He then “fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God.” What follows is one of the most earnest prayers of confession found in Scripture. “O my God,” he prays, “I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee ... we cannot stand before thee ...”

Just as the Jews were God’s chosen people, set aside by Him to be separate from the idolatrous nations, so those today who have trusted in Christ as Savior are to be separate from the world. In this context, *separation* doesn’t mean not living in the same town, it doesn’t mean not doing business with others, it doesn’t mean not associating with ones neighbors. What it does mean is that the believer’s life must be void of participating in worldly things – he must be above the world, not participate in it, be *separate* from it. His testimony must be there for all to see that he has been set apart, a person of “holy calling,” possessing an “inheritance ... forever,” a citizen of heaven.

God forbid! [Romans 6:18].

One, albeit erroneous, interpretation of the common, manufactured phrase, “once saved, always saved” is that once one believes in the saving power of Christ, he can continue on with his life doing whatsoever he pleases, with no perception of the great gift he has received, exhibiting the blasé behavioral attitude that “I’m protected for eternity, I may still do as I wish.” Or, as the mantra of that theoretical philosopher Alfred E. Newman says: “What, me worry?”

The Bible verifies the fact that indeed, once one is saved, he is eternally saved. However, to use the phrase to imply that just because one has trusted Christ as Savior he has ongoing license to continue a worldly, perhaps sinful lifestyle is without foundation. Paul decries such: *Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid!*

Let us consider an analogy. Visualize a homeless person – not of his own choosing – one through no fault of his own is now without shelter, sustenance, food, and in need of medical care. He is totally helpless. And let us say that someone appears and helps him; this benefactor arranges for employment for the one in need, shelters him, advances a stipend for his survival, and provides for his health care. He literally “saves” this person. What is more, it is explicitly understood that the man is and will continue to be unable to repay the debt. Nor will the benefactor accept repayment. It is set in stone; an absolutely free gift.

Now. Is this man going to accept this largesse and then turn on his benefactor? Is he going to speak derogatorily of him? Is he going to be anything but eternally grateful? Is he going to try to offer some sort of insulting repayment when he knows there is no way this magnanimous gift could be, or would expect to be, repaid? We would certainly not assume so. His motivation is going to be to do everything in his power to demonstrate that he is worthy of the benevolence.

Despite the gulf between God’s gift of salvation and the example above, the principle is the same. God’s gift of eternal life is free. By the same token, the recipient of this free gift will be of such mind and spirit that he will certainly be careful to honor Him and not grieve Him.

“Once saved, always saved?” Yes. To go on living like a heathen reprobate failing to honor God in ones life? No. The true believer will reverence the infinite love of Christ. His life has changed. He knows that he has been forgiven. He knows that he has eternal life. His instinct now is to serve God. He may slip occasionally, which God will forgive upon confession, but he is not going to continue in his “old” life.

And the most important lesson here is, *He is not going to want to.*

I am become a tinkling cymbal ... it profiteth me nothing ... nothing ... (1 Corinthians 13:1)

This may be the most challenging, convicting chapter in all Scripture. What Paul says is that no matter what we do, if we “have not love” it is all for naught. Henry Drummond⁵⁹ paints a sobering picture: ... “the withholding of love is the negative of the Spirit of Christ ... that He suggested nothing in all our thoughts, that He inspired nothing in all our lives ... it means that *I lived for myself, I thought for myself, for myself and none beside, Just as if Jesus never lived, As if he had never died ...*”

Mr. Drummond goes on to explain that if one loves, he will “unconsciously fulfill the whole law. Take any of the commandments. ‘Thou shalt have no god before me.’ If a man love God you will not require to tell him that. ‘Take not His Name in vain.’ Would he ever dream of taking His name in vain if he loved Him? ‘Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.’ Would he not be too glad to have one day in seven to dedicate more exclusively to the object of his affection? It would be preposterous to tell him not to kill; you could only insult him if you suggested that he should not steal – how could he steal from those he loved?”

Mr. Drummond continues, “how then are we to have this transcendent living whole conveyed to our souls?” He then moves to an interpretation of 1 John 4:19: “*We love because he first loved us.*” We **love**, not ... we **love him** ... look at that word *because* ... *because* he first loved us. The effect follows that we love him, we love all men ... love begets love ... we love others, we love everybody, we love our enemies, *because* he first loved us. Our heart is slowly changed. Contemplate the love of Christ, and you will love. Stand before that mirror, reflect Christ’s character, and you will be changed in no other way. You cannot love to order. You can only look at the lovely object ... and grow in likeness to it ... look at the great sacrifice as he laid down himself, all through life, and upon the cross ... and you must love him. And loving him, you must become like him. Love itself cannot be defined. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself. Get these ingredients into your life. You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in a spirit of love.”

Sounding like a tinkling cymbal at the Judgment Seat, where believer’s works will be evaluated? Not something to look forward to. Think love.

⁵⁹ See Warren Wiersbe, *Treasury of the World’s Great Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1977) pp. 178-186.

... wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah ... [Ezra 4:6].

It had been 200 hundred years since the Northern Kingdom had been taken into captivity; the southern (Judah/Benjamin), 70 years, when “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus King of Persia.” The king said that God had “charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem.” Cyrus made a “proclamation,” freeing every Israelite to return home. He even put it in writing.

All of a sudden the Jews were free to restore their nation. The returning remnant included some 42,000 “congregation,” 7,337 servants, 200 “singers.” More than 8,000 horses, mules, asses and camels. A man called Zerubbabel was the leader. Back in the Promised Land of old they “dwelt in their cities ... gathered themselves as one man in Jerusalem ... builded the altar, offered burnt offerings ... morning and evening.” They kept the feast of tabernacles and all “the set feasts of the Lord.” Worship according to the Law of Moses was restored.

In the “second year” the Jews “set forward the work of the house of the Lord.” The foundation of the temple was laid with great celebration and praise. Then the trouble started. The Samaritans – “the adversaries of Judah,” got wind of the Jews’ intent to build the temple. They are a sneaky bunch; they tell the Jews “let us build with you: for we seek your God as you do.” Zerubbabel doesn’t go for the ruse and tells them bluntly, “ye have nothing to do with us.” But then the “people of the land” hired “counselors” to harass the Jews. They frightened them. It worked. Nothing else was done on the temple for some 15 years.

Enter prophets Haggai and Zechariah, whose urging got the project underway again. But no sooner had it begun than they were challenged by the Persian governor of the province, Tatnai. “Who told you you could do this” said Tatnai, who promptly fired off a note to King Darius to check the Jews’ claim that Cyrus authorized it. Darius researched it, found it valid, and sternly admonished Tatnai that he had better “let the work of this house alone.” What’s more, he directed Tatnai to pay for the project out of his funds. And even more, if anybody interfered, they would be impaled on a beam from their own house! The temple was completed; 21 years after the work first began in 536.

Here in this brief Book of Ezra we are given a portrait of the roaring of Satan like a lion – but also the protection of God. Wherever God’s work is in progress, Satan will be roaring about to destroy it. But God is in His work as well, and through a commitment to Him and sometimes-necessary dogged determination, we can be used of Him to do whatever He has set aside for us – just as He was with Zerubbabel and the returning remnant.

But he who endures to the end shall be saved ... [Matthew 24:13].

Many years ago Shadrach had a black lab. Poor old Mutt loved to chase his tail, but of course he never quite succeeded in catching it. No matter how many times or how long he tried, he always came up about an inch short. Recalling Mutt's futile effort reminds Shadrach of those infected with the "perseverance" virus; those who fret that if they don't constantly "endure to the end" (whatever that means), they will lose their salvation, or worse, assume that they never had it in the first place. All this angst is really unnecessary. Dr. Charlie Bing explains:

"This passage is often used to argue that only those who continue in faith and good works to the end of their lives will receive salvation or prove they were saved. It cannot be understood properly apart from the context. It is clear that Matthew is speaking about conditions in the time of Israel's great Tribulation (v. 21) immediately before Jesus Christ returns. In that time of great sorrow, the Jews will be hated and some will be killed by the other nations (v. 9), betrayed by their own countrymen (v. 10), deceived by false prophets (v. 11), and experience lawlessness and a lack of natural affection (v. 12). After verse 13, Jesus' prophecy conveys the details that actually describe His coming (vv. 14ff). This is a prophecy that relates to the end time in the Tribulation period. That the end of one's life is not addressed here is clear by how the "end" is used throughout the passage. Beginning with the disciples' question about the "end of the age" in verse 3, Jesus gives information about that end mentioning it in verses 6 and 14. It is clear Jesus refers to the end of the Tribulation period that will come upon the whole earth. Though many in Israel will be killed, those who endure these perils to the end of the Tribulation will be delivered ("saved") from their enemies, who are the nations which hate them. This is simply an occasion when the word "saved" refers to deliverance from danger, **not** deliverance from hell. Indeed, hell is not mentioned in the passage and would be out of place. This "last-minute rescue" of the remnant of Israel by Jesus Christ is a prophesied biblical event (Zech. 12:2-9; Rom. 11:26). The endurance spoken of in verse 13 refers to persisting in faith through the severe suffering and persecutions of **that period** (vv. 10-12). Some Israelites will be martyred but those who live to the end will see a glorious "salvation." Israel's history is a story of God's grace. Matthew 24:13 is a special promise about the end-time remnant of Israel who persist in faith through the great Tribulation and live to experience this great deliverance. Like Israel, we who are saved by God's grace are kept saved by grace, and will be glorified ultimately and finally by His grace; not because we deserve it or *persevere*, but because that is God's promise to all who believe. This passage should never be used to teach a doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints. The context does not permit it, and the doctrine itself is flawed. *If perseverance is necessary to prove salvation, then perseverance is necessary to have salvation. This is in addition to one's initial faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. Salvation would be by faith plus one's performance (perseverance), which contradicts the nature of God's free grace.*"⁶⁰

As they say, that dog won't hunt. And he'll never catch his tail either.

⁶⁰ Charlie Bing, *Grace Notes*, #61, (Burleson TX, Grace Life Ministries, 2013).

My soul is full of troubles ... I am afflicted ... [Psalms 88:3, 88:15].

Throughout the Psalms we find David frequently in distress. But overshadowing all these times we see that he never fails to express his total dependence upon and admiration of God. Examples:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear [46:1,2].

Be still, and know that I am God [46:10].

I have set the Lord always before me; I shall not be moved [16:8].

The Lord is my light and salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? [27:1].

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee [55:12].

Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation [68:19].

Who in heaven can be compared with the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? [89:6].

Because thou hast made the Lord ... thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee ... for he shall give his angels charge over thee in all thy ways [91:9-11].

I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help ... my help cometh from the Lord [121:1].

Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold ... thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even then shall thy hand lead me [139:7-10].

Praise ye the Lord. Praise him in his sanctuary; praise him in the firmament of his power ... for his mighty acts ... according to his excellent greatness ... let everything that hath breath praise the Lord [150:1, 2].

It is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God [73:28].

O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men. For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness [107:8-9].

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer [19:14].

We might think of many of the Psalms as “David pouring out his heart to God.” Not a bad idea.

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content [Philippians 4:11].

Little wonder that the great apostle is content, with all the spiritual blessings he was – and all believers are – privy to. To the Corinthians he reminds of God’s promise that “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Christ, he tells the Colossians, “is our life.” To the Ephesians, “we are fellowheirs” and “partakers of His promise in Christ.” He assures the Philippians that “God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory.”

Scripture is full of the blessings from God that are meant for our contentment. We are not only God’s “people,” we are His “portion.” If we sin, “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ,” making possible confession and restoration of fellowship with Him. Jude’s great benediction comforts us with the assurance that he is “able to keep us from falling.” Moses writes in the Book of Deuteronomy that “the eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” The psalmist says that Christ is our shield ... rock ... fortress ... deliverer ... strength, and he “puts gladness into” our hearts. The writer to the Hebrews urges, “be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” And in possibly the most familiar poem, the psalmist reminds us that He is ... Shepherd ... who giveth green pastures, still waters, restoration of soul, and comfort with “goodness and mercy all the days of his life.”

So. God is our God, he is our life, he supplies all our needs, he keeps us from falling, underneath are His everlasting arms, and he will never leave us nor forsake us. And it is all because of His infinite unchanging grace, mercy, faithfulness, forgiveness, lovingkindness and longsuffering. And because first and foremost, He sent his son to die for our sins, all of which have been paid for on the Cross.

So are we content? As the great apostle says, “think on these things.” Contentment will surely follow.

... it will not be forgiven ... [Matthew 12:31].

Therefore I say unto you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come (Matthew 12:31-32).

Is this the *unforgivable sin*? John tell us that,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness 1 John 1:9

So is there really such a thing as a sin that God will not forgive?

What we have here is a *tete-a-tete* between Jesus and the Pharisees, wherein following His healing of a demon-possessed man, this august group saw the miracle happen – how could they miss it - but then accused Jesus of doing so “only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.” And Jesus tells them OK guys, you saw it with your own eyes, and you think I am a fake. And He goes on to say here is the one thing you will not be forgiven for; that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Well, first of all no one today can commit this so-called unpardonable sin in the context of this incident, because, of course, it is no longer possible to actually witness Jesus performing miracles and come to the conclusion that He is doing so through the power of Satan. However, “blasphemy” here, “*is to resist the Spirit’s convicting work, and so not to see ones sin, therefore rending the person unable to experience forgiveness and ultimately eternal life ... to resist the insight brought by the Spirit, who is the revealer of Truth, is to put oneself deliberately outside the orbit of God’s revelation.*”⁶¹

So technically, we can’t commit the “unpardonable sin” today. However. The modern parallel to the Pharisee’s rejection of Christ is to resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit to trust in Jesus as Savior. This rejection is not the “unpardonable sin” during ones lifetime - there is still time to trust in Him - but it ends up being unpardonable if one passes through life with the attitude that I don’t need Him, I don’t need to trust Him. At life’s end, it indeed becomes the unpardonable sin.⁶²

So now is the time to realize one is a sinner, believe that he died for ones sin, trust Him to having paid for it on the Cross. Then the *unpardonable* - future, becomes *pardoned* - present ... *and* future.

⁶¹ Margin notes, FCA: *The Athlete’s Bible*, (Nashville, Serendipity Publishers, 2008).

⁶² Westcliff Bible Church tapes, 4-21-13.

God commended his love toward us ... [Romans 5:8].

Scripture is full of reminders of God's infinite love. John's epistles give example: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God:"

The sons of God!

And, "Hereby we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." Think of it:

He died for us!

Further, this love was manifested toward us, "because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins."

He paid for our sin to God's satisfaction!

Paul provides us with probably the most comforting aspect of God's love – its steadfastness: "Who shall separate us from the love of God?"

We are saved for eternity!

The great apostle refers to "His great love wherewith he loved us ... he hath raised us together and made us sit in heavenly places."

We have a home in heaven!

John also reminds us of the reciprocity of love that believers have for God: "In this is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). And Peter, "whom having not seen, ye *love*." Moses admonished Israel – good for us as well, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." And again, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but ... to *love* him." And finally, the great reward, spoken of so eloquently by Paul to the Corinthians, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that *love* him."

A benediction is in order from John on this, the greatest of all subjects: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and the Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen ..."

The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God ... [Ezekiel 1:1].

Scripture speaks of six men who saw the heavens opened.

Ezekiel's experience was remarkable. He saw multiple images of God's glory. A 42-fold description of the cherubim. A five-fold description of God.

Nathanael's vision was in the form of Jesus' first prophecy that promised that the disciple would see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

Stephen, just prior to being stoned to death, saw "the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Peter "saw heaven opened" and a "great white sheet knit at the corners" being "let down to the earth" containing all sorts of wildlife. It was God's way of telling him to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

In John's Book of the Revelation it is recorded that the apostle experienced this phenomenon three times. He saw a "door opened," and a voice told him to come up, that he would be shown the "things that must be hereafter," introducing to him the prophecies of the future. Secondly, he saw the temple of God opened in heaven and saw the ark. Lastly, John saw heaven opened and Christ seated on a white horse, His eyes as a flame of fire, followed by the armies of heaven riding on white horses.

Finally, as Jesus was baptized, He saw the heavens opened and the "Spirit like a dove" descended upon Him.

One day the heavens will open for all those who have put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. The vision will not be of a dove, or cherubim, or a great white sheet, or white horses. *They will see Jesus.*

... and cast their crowns before the throne ... [Revelation 4:10].

The scene is John's great vision of heaven during the great outpouring of praise to God, "him that sat upon the throne." In casting their crowns before God's throne, the "four and twenty elders" – those representative of the Church in heaven, having received their crowns of glory – worship and acknowledge the divine attributes of God, testifying that, but for His grace and salvation there would be no victory over sin and death.

Scripture speaks of the different crowns that can be earned by believers. There is the *crown of rejoicing* noted in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians; it is gained by winning souls, as the great apostle tells the Thessalonians that they are his hope, his glory, his crown of rejoicing – "even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming." Peter speaks of the *crown of glory*, won by "feeding the flock:" "shepherd the flock which is among you serving as overseers, willingly ... not for gain ... being examples ... and when the great Shepherd appears, you will receive a *crown of glory*."

In John's letter to the church at Smyrna there is given a *crown of life* for those who suffered for Christ's sake: "be faithful unto death and I will give you the *crown of life*." James also speaks of this particular crown, reminding us that "blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the *crown of life*, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul urges his readers to press on steadfastly in the Christian race: "but one receives the prize ... we do it for an *incorruptible crown*." And again, in his second letter to Timothy, he says, "finally there is laid up for me the *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give me on that day, and not to me only, but to all who have loved his appearing."

John tells us to "hold fast, that no man take thy crown." When we stand before the "righteous Judge" at the Judgment Seat - where all believers will appear to have their works judged - will we have earned one or more of these crowns to "cast at His feet?" Or will we have nothing to offer him, He who wore the *crown of thorns* for us?

Even so come, Lord Jesus ... [Revelation 22:20].

The little word, *come*, is found in Scripture literally thousands of times. It is, for example, an invitation to come for cleansing from sin, as Isaiah writes, “*come* now, let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” And the general invitation from Christ in John’s Revelation, “the Spirit and Bride say, *come*, and let him that heareth say, *come* ... and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Then there are great invitations for the believer who can come for rest, as Matthew records Christ’s invitation, “*come* unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” We are invited by the writer to the Hebrews to “*come* boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and grace to help in time of need.” At the same time the believer is urged to follow Christ in Christian service, as Matthew again quotes Jesus, “if any man *come* after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

There are also invitations to worship, profusely recorded by the psalmist: “*Come* ye children, hearken unto me ... *come*, behold the work of the Lord ... *come* and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul ... O *come* let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise ... let us *come* before his presence with thanksgiving ... O *come* let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.

And surely one of the most awesome invitations to come was experienced by John as he records in his book of the Revelation of Christ; “I looked, and behold a door was open in heaven, and the first voice I heard ... which said, ‘*come* up hither and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.’”

One day, all believers will receive the invitation to “*come* up hither” to join their Savior. He has told us, “surely I *come* quickly.” The believer’s hope is embodied in John’s reply which closes God’s Word: “Even so, *come*, Lord Jesus ...”

To his thoughts, Shadrach would like to add a few, well, “zingers.”

God answers prayer, but we don't get everything we want. He knows better.

The Bible is 100% inspired true. Don't pay attention to those who quibble about a passage here and there. Their arguments are without sound basis.

God created the universe. Period. The concept of evolution with its primordial slime, big bang, and billions of years is total nonsense. God doesn't appreciate it. And it messes up people's brains.⁶³ And while we're on the subject, the universe is probably infinite; if it weren't, we might begin to think He is finite.

God hates sin. He is absolutely holy, and He will punish for it if it is unforgiven. But He loves us with an infinite love (infinity, think one divided by zero). It is that great. So great that He has given us an out – He sent His Son to die for our sin.

There is a hell. There really is. Believe it.⁶⁴

We can't work for our salvation. Works will not save us. God calls them filthy rags. God doesn't like filthy rags any more than we do. We are saved by faith alone; we believe that Christ died for our sin and rose from the dead. All the other “methods” won't get it. And God doesn't appreciate seeing other “methods” being put in people's heads either, like works ... and “perseverance.”

And while we're on the subject, once we believe, we don't “lose” this salvation. This theology is not only not Scriptural, it is also nonsense. Don't listen to nonsense, and better, don't worry about it. Believe, trust Christ to take away your sin, then go on living like you know you have eternal life. You do.

And by the way, God didn't pick and choose “from the foundation of the earth” who would go to heaven and who won't.”⁶⁵ This is serious, non-Scriptural nonsense, but there are many who will try to sell it to you. Don't buy into it.

God has given us not just ten, but more than 50 other commandments to live life by. Life will be a lot easier if we do. “In keeping them is great reward.”

And be really careful about thinking God is finished with His people Israel. In the “end” they are going to be around big-time. Remember what he told Abraham about blessing those that bless them and cursing those that curse them. God always means what He says.

Finally, Jesus is coming again. Look for Him.

⁶³ See resources from www.icr.org for exhaustive proof.

⁶⁴ For a convincing argument see Waterhouse, *Not By Bread Alone; An Outlined Guide to Bible Doctrine* 4th ed. (Amarillo, TX: Westcliff Press 2010) pp. 530-543.

⁶⁵ See Laurence Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola FL: Vance Publications 1999) pp. 34-35, 355-360.

Shadrach's Appendix

Well, Shadrach thought he had come to the end of his thoughts for now. But while thinking about the “end,” he came to the conclusion that in theological terms “the end” is something worth a little more consideration,⁶⁶ especially among Christians, all of whom are looking forward to Jesus coming again. Of course, Jesus’ came the first time to die for sinners. The good news is that He will return - someday.

The study of the end times must begin with a determination of how Scripture is to be interpreted with respect to the last days. Are the passages in Daniel, Revelation, Ezekiel, and other books that may point to end time events to be interpreted literally, or are they to be viewed as non-literal, allegorical, historical, and so forth? This decision is the fork in the road upon which how one views the end times. It not only determines circumstances surrounding the last days and the events of Christ’s Second Coming, but most importantly, the future of God’s people Israel. One fork leads to a determination that the passages of Daniel, Revelation, Ezekiel and other books prophesy the end times events such as the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Millennium, etc. literally, and believe that God will again restore His people in the land.

The other fork ... has, well, two forks, both of which think nearly every Scriptural reference to these end time events is to be considered non-literal, allegorized, historicized, or whatever. One of these two forks leads to a belief that a spiritual form of the kingdom now exists, that from the ascension of Christ in the first century until His second coming both good and evil will increase, that when Christ returns the end of the world will occur with a general resurrection and general judgment and that God will not restore His people. The second fork along this path tends to posit that Christ’s kingdom is now being extended throughout the world and a majority will be converted resulting in a Christianization of the world’s society, that the current age is the Millennium, which is not necessarily 1,000 years, that after Christianity has dominated the world for a long time, Christ will return, that there will be no need of a cataclysmic return of Christ to impose righteousness.

After looking at all sides of this question - Shadrach just has to agree that Scripture must be taken literally, and that any passage that describes and potentially prophesies such events as the Rapture, the Tribulation, Christ’s 1,000 year reign on earth, and especially God’s restoration of His people, must be viewed as future events to be literally fulfilled unless there are solid reasons for taking them in another sense that, well, kind of stretches the imagination to interpret them realistically. It is a fact that overwhelming numbers of prophecies

⁶⁶ Extracts from the following have been taken in composing this appendix: Lightner, *The Last Days Handbook* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1990; Waterhouse, *Not by Bread Alone* 4th ed. (Amarillo TX: Westcliff Press) 2006. Clouse, Hosack and Pierard, *The New Millennium Manual* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books) 1999. Hitchcock, *The Complete Book of Prophecy* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House Publishers Inc.) 1999. Walvoord, *Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton IL: Victor Books) 1990. Robert C. Clouse ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium, Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books) 1995. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press) 1996. Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton IL: Victor Books) 1992. Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Daniel* (Glenside PA: Rev. Charles Larkin Estate) 1929. Oliver B. Greene, *Daniel* (Greenville SC: The Gospel House) 1964. Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Handbook*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press) 1984.

in Scripture have already been fulfilled – to list them (some have) would require pages and pages. For example, more than 100 prophecies in Daniel's book alone have already been fulfilled. It stands to reason that, because all these prophecies have come to pass, how can one disregard the probability that the others, such as those included in Daniel's book and others that point to a Rapture, a Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ, the restoration of Israel, and the Millennium will be fulfilled as well?

Perhaps a strange illustration will help. Consider all the passages which just may, which just could, refer to the events of the end times, such as those mentioned above, from all the different books of Scripture - Revelation, Genesis, Thessalonians, Ezekiel, the Psalms, Micah, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos et al. Say we try to allegorize or spiritualize, historicize etc., some or all of these. Think of them stuffed say, into a full wine skin, and there is a leak, representing one of these passages, and we "plug" – allegorize, this "leak," consider the next one as already have happened in history sometime, define it as non-literal, and so on, but when we "plug" one, the next appears, and the next, and yet another, until we don't know which one to allegorize, which one to consider history, which one to apply in a literal or non-literal sense, or whatever. But alas, then the others seep out of the skin and that categorization that we just made on the last "leak" doesn't jive with the one we allegorized and ... whoa! We can't keep a log on all of it. Shadrach's mind is reeling!

Consider: have 100 pound hailstones ever hit the earth (Revelation 16:21)? Can we allegorize Christ coming on the clouds of the sky ... as His angels gather His "elect from the four winds" (Matthew 24:30-31)? When in history has the mount of Olives been split in the middle (Zechariah 14:4)? In what incredible disaster have one-fourth of the people on the earth been destroyed (Revelation 6:8)? Can we "spiritualize" the stars falling from the skies" (Matthew 24:29)? When was Israel surrounded (Ezekiel 38) by the armies of all the nations (not just those few adjacent)? If all this hasn't happened (and it hasn't), it is unreasonable to try to paint it another color by assuming it has already been fulfilled, allegorizing, or historicizing it. These methods of interpretation fail to correlate all the above quoted books of prophecy as a whole, and leave details without adequate explanation. Shadrach doesn't think God meant His book to be that way.

And the thing that becomes obvious is, if we take the sheer number of texts from all these books and interpret each literally, they all dovetail to reveal a clear and harmonious picture of end time events ... "*these things that must shortly come to pass*" [Revelation 1:1].

Well, for what it's worth, here is Shadrach's option, proceeding down the "fork of literalism."

The Seventy Weeks

□ The Overview of the end times is given in the book of Daniel, specifically, in the prophecy of the "seventy weeks" (Daniel 9:24-27). Daniel's extraordinary prophecy of the 70 weeks contains the entire history of the Jewish nation from the end of the Babylonian captivity until "the end," its consummation in the 1,000 year covenantal kingdom under Christ. As such, this prophecy gives us a time line for future events; the Rapture, the Tribulation, Christ's Second Coming, and the Millennium.

First, Daniel is told that God's program for His people would be consummated in 70 "weeks" or 490 years (verse 24). The 490 years is divided into three parts (see

verse 25); seven “weeks” (49 years); 62 “weeks” (threescore and two weeks, 434 years); and the last, the 70th “week,” seven years. The 490 years begin *“from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem”* (verse 25), which occurred in 444BC. In verse 25, Daniel is told the *“street shall be built again, and the wall.”* This was fulfilled in the 50 years after the building of the wall. The next 62 “weeks,” 434 years, follow until (see verse 26) *“after threescore and two weeks shall the Messiah be cut off”* (Christ’s death). The elapse of these 69 weeks advances time to AD33, the date generally agreed upon as the time of the crucifixion.

This brings us to the end of the 69th week. Note that Christ was crucified (cut off) after the seven and the 62 “sevens,” (total 69 weeks) not in the 70th “seven.” This means that there is an interval between the 69th and the 70th “sevens.” Christ’s crucifixion falls into that interval right after His triumphal entry, which concluded the 69th “week.” Jesus’ death and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 are two major events that occur between the end of the 69th week and the beginning of the 70th. Thus, there has to be this break between the 69th and the 70th week, because if the 70th followed the 69th concurrently, there would be no time in which to consider the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70.

This interval was anticipated by Christ when He prophesied the establishment of the church (*upon this rock I will build My church... Matthew 16:18*). This necessitated the setting aside of Israel for a season in order that His new program for the church might be instituted. He predicted this setting aside of the Jewish nation (*...the kingdom shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof... Matthew 21:43*). The present age, then, is the interval between the 69th and the 70th “seven,” the church age in which we are now living.

□□□ **The Rapture:** At the end of this “church age” will come the “Rapture,” preceding immediately the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy of the final seven-year period before Christ’s Second Coming. Christ will descend from heaven to resurrect (rapture) the bodies of departed believers and transform the bodies of living believers into His presence in an instant and then escort them to heaven to live with Him forever (this is not the Second Coming of Christ). Although the word “rapture” is not mentioned in the Bible, the concept is clearly present. The words, “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 translate from a Greek word that means “to snatch, to seize suddenly, or to transport from one place to another.” The Rapture refers to Christ’s coming in the clouds for His saints before the Tribulation, as opposed to His (Second) Coming with His saints at the end of the Tribulation.

“...the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ... and the dead in Christ will rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord ... [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17].

...behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed ... [1 Corinthians 15:51-52].

□□□ **The Tribulation:** With all believers taken from the earth, the next event on God’s calendar ensues, Daniel’s 70th week, the Tribulation, which will be a period of unparalleled suffering and destruction upon the earth. Jesus referred

to this time when He told His disciples ... *for then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, nor ever shall ...* [Matthew 24:21, see also Mark 13:19 and Luke 21:23b]. Jeremiah also mentioned this time ... *Alas, for that day is great, there is none like it, and it is the time of Jacob's trouble* [Jeremiah 30:78]. It is also mentioned in Daniel: *Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people will arise. And there will be a time of distress (tribulation) such as has never occurred since there was a nation until that time ...* [Daniel 12:1].

Here is when the colossal scenes of Revelation, starting with Chapter 6 and through Chapter 10 begin to ensue; they will be the prelude to world-wide commotion in the final 3½ years, described in Chapters 11-19, when terrific disasters will fall upon the earth ... *such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time* [Daniel 12:1]. The Tribulation will involve the Jewish people who will have returned to Israel in unbelief, and will also be connected with catastrophic judgments upon the gentile nations (it will be worldwide) for their wickedness and anti-Semitism.

The conclusion of Daniel's prophecy in verse 27 describes the main personage of the Tribulation, the antichrist. This is the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8 and the "ruler who will come" of 9:26. This "man of lawlessness" will become a world conqueror for 42 months (the first half of the tribulation period vv. 5-7. At the beginning of this 70th week this world ruler will make a peace treaty with Israel that will allow them to offer sacrifices in the (then) rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

"... he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week ..."

The specific time or duration of the tribulation is given here; the signing of this covenant is the event that commences the "seventieth week of Daniel." But then this world leader will break the covenant at the midpoint of the 70th week:

.. but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering, and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate [Daniel 9:27].

Note: those who interpret Scripture literally all agree that Revelation calls for seven years of tribulation on earth, but they have differing opinions as to whether believers will be on earth for any or all of this terrible period. "Pretribulationists" hold that when Christ returns to rapture the church, all believers will be taken with Him. They base this assumption on Scripture ... *"I will keep you from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the whole world"* ... (Revelation 3:10); ... *"Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come"* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). On the other hand, "Posttribulationists" hold that the Church will have to suffer through the Tribulation, however, they maintain that God will protect them throughout this terrible time. Also, some think that the church will go through the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation before they are raptured, based upon the thought that the last three and a half years will be the most severe. These are called "midtribulationists."

□□□ Christ's Second Coming: At the end of this incredibly terrifying and destructive Tribulation, the 70th week, Christ will return to the earth to the

earth with His saints, defeat the armies of the antichrist at Armageddon, judge the nations, and establish His kingdom on earth,

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and wages war, and his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems; and he has a name written upon him which no one knows except himself. And he is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in white robes, were following him on white horses [Revelation 19:11-14].

“... but immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the air with power and great glory [Matthew 24:29ff.]

... behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints [Jude 14].

□□□ The millennial reign of Christ begins. (Revelation 20:1-6). After the Revelation of Christ (His Second Coming), the Lord will remove all unbelievers and rule on the throne of David in Jerusalem for 1,000 years, instituting the Kingdom promised to David.

*And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a **thousand** years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the **thousand** years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a **thousand** years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the **thousand** years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, and they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a **thousand** years [Revelation 20:1-6].*

□□□ The restoration of Israel during the millennium: when Christ comes, Israel will be regathered in the land promised to them in the covenants made to Abraham. There is a definite distinction in Scripture between God's program with Israel and His program with the church. There are literally scores of Scripture texts that address this phase of the end times:

Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more, neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime ... and when thy days be fulfilled ... I will set up thy seed before thee ... and I will establish his kingdom ... He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever ... and thy house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established forever (2 Samuel 7:10-15).

Christ's Second Coming in power and great glory will not be followed immediately by the eternal state. Instead, the 1,000 year earthly rule of Christ will begin at that time.

And it will come about in the last days that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and the people will stream to it. And many nations will come and say, "come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty distant nations ... [Micah 1:1-4].

And the Lord said to Abram ... now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are ... for all the land you see I will give it to you and to your descendants forever [Genesis 13:14-15].

... your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles, and the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, go far from the Lord, this land has been given us as a possession ... therefore say, thus saith the Lord, this land has been given us as a possession ... though I had removed them far away among the nations, and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone. Therefore say, thus saith the Lord God, I shall gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I shall give you the land of Israel ... when they come there, they will remove all the detestable things ... and I shall give them a new heart, and shall put a new spirit in them ... [Ezekiel 11:14-19].

In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew, saying, "let us go up with you, for we have heard that God is with you" [Zechariah 8:23].

... days are coming ... as the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land ... where he had banished them ... I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their father [Jeremiah 16:15].

Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people [Isaiah 11:11].

And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east ... [Zechariah 14:4a].

Given the considerable number of verses throughout Scripture (Genesis, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Hosea, Jeremiah etc.) that describe the restoration of Israel in the land, there is really no plausible reason for not thinking anything other than God will restore His people in the end time event, the Millennium.

□□□ The Great White Throne judgment occurs at which all the unsaved of all the ages appear and are afterward cast into the Lake of Fire.
And I saw a great white throne and Him that sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and small standing before the throne, and another book was

opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things that were written in the books according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire [Revelation 20:11-15].

□□□ Destruction of the present heavens and earth

... the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up [2 Peter 3:10]

□□□ Creation of a new heaven and a new earth

... nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness [2 Peter 3:13].

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away ... [Revelation 21:1].

□□□ Eternity (Revelation 21:9-22:5)

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall no longer be any curse, and the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond servants shall serve Him and they shall see his face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall no longer be any night, and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illuminate them; and they shall reign forever and ever [Revelation 22:1-6].

A conclusion

Ah well. Shadrach has his view of the end times that he is comfortable with; but and far be it from him to argue about it. As mentioned above, there are other views of the end times, and everyone has reasons for their own opinions. The primary - and critical - issue here is that one puts ones faith in Christ, believes that He died and rose again, and gains eternal life.

Shadrach thinks we all ought to remember that all believers are headed in one direction ... eventually ...

UP!

Shadrach would like to close his thoughts with one of
his favorite hymns ...⁶⁷

*Praise the Savior, ye who know him! Who can tell how much we
owe Him? Gladly let us render to Him All we have and are.*

*Jesus is the Name that charms us; He for conflict fits and arms
us: Nothing moves and nothing harms us While we trust in Him.*

*Trust in Him, ye saints forever; He is faithful, changing never;
Neither force nor guile can sever Those he loves from Him.*

*Keep us Lord, O keep us cleaving To Thyself and still believing.
Till the hour of our receiving, Promised joys with thee.*

*Then we shall be where we would be, Then we shall be what we
should be; Things that are not now, nor could be, Soon shall be
our own.*

⁶⁷ Thomas Kelly, 1769-1854, Traditional German Melody

